

‘WHAT IS DONE AND WHAT IS
DECLARED’: ORIGIN AND ELLIPSIS IN
THE WRITING OF HILARY MANTEL

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents, Donald, Georgina, Leslie and Eileen

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the scarcity of critical material on Hilary Mantel's writing in the academy. It questions the suitability of the 'origin' paradigm within the criticism that is available, which closes off the *excess* of Mantel's texts through attempts to 'unite' her corpus. The ambiguity of her writing, and its suspicions, suggest Jacques Derrida's thought as a pertinent means to read the differences in her work *differently*. The proximity of Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy with Derrida's thought allows the significance of ellipsis to surface as a liberating catalyst for weaving the implications of Derrida's thinking through the writing of Mantel. This synthesis constitutes my original contribution to knowledge because Mantel's corpus has not been closely studied, Derrida's notion of ellipsis has been eclipsed by philosophy, and the combination of these two 'invisibilities' is seminal.

The structure of the first four chapters is closely informed by Nancy's claim for elliptical description of Derrida's thought. Each approaches an 'origin', undermining it through its paradoxical parallels with an aspect of Derridean thinking in order to demonstrate the in-excess of the Mantel text under scrutiny. First, the 'origin' behind the criticism is exploded, primarily that of the gothic/historic, via Derrida's notion of play. Then the 'gothic' in *Fludd* is undermined in terms of space because it cannot be 'placed'. The bodies in *Beyond Black* echo Derrida's *revenant*, a connection that challenges bodily solidity as 'arrival'. Finally, the 'I' of *Giving Up the Ghost* is read in terms of *khōra*, which allows autobiography, or auto-biography, to emerge as a nonplace that receives all properties while in itself possessing nothing.

Chapters five and six describe a matrix of inquiry informed by Derrida's thought, so as to understand the 'frame' of silence within Mantel's work and its implications. The writing of this effacement gestures towards the 'gift' of the ex-centric centre, which constitutes the *adestination* of this thesis.

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1990)

... and a lot is done in the form of ellipsis even though the ellipsis may not be present on the page, it's still... *it goes on in the reader's mind.*

Hilary Mantel, 'In Conversation', 3 September 2012

"Mind what gap?"

Hilary Mantel, *Guardian*, 24 March 2007

Introduction ‘We are truly missing something, probably many things’: The burst full stop as the differing origin of differences

The ‘invisibility’ of Hilary Mantel’s writing in the academy is the starting point for this thesis.¹ Moreover, the texts available on her work offer readings primarily in terms of establishing an unassailable ‘origin’ for meaning in her corpus. The complex ambiguities of her writings call for the more nuanced approach that this thesis proposes to initiate. The pervasive suspicion of ‘totalities’ across Mantel’s texts suggests the pertinence of Jacques Derrida’s thought to underpin the methodology of this project. Jean-Luc Nancy’s sense that Derrida’s essay ‘Ellipsis’ (2008) describes *elliptically* ‘the entire orbit of [Derrida’s] thought’ will help structure the thesis and introduce ellipsis as a means to breach the ‘origin’ paradigm currently applied to Mantel’s work.² The principles of Catherine Belsey’s ‘Textual Analysis as a Research Method’ (2005) will be used implicitly to emphasise the position of Mantel’s writing, and my provisional responses to it, as *the* catalyst for this thesis, thus avoiding any rigid application of ‘theory’ to explain the fiction/memoir under discussion. Belsey’s article was written as a guide for researchers in English and suggests ‘that, while research entails unearthing information, it is the textual analysis that poses the questions which research sets out to answer’.³

Put simply, this thesis considers the ways Mantel’s work has been read, finds them wanting, and proposes an alternative – it is the nature of her corpus and the methodology behind *my* alternative that complicate the thesis and open its originality. The proximity of the writings of the two continental philosophers I incorporate will outline ellipsis – neither a *word* nor a *concept* – as a critical practice. The reader is an *implication* of the text, hence the term ‘implied’ reader; however, this thesis will demonstrate that any ‘reality’ of the reader is a fantasy, offering a dangerous solidity falsely used to support arguments about what the text ‘means’. The reader (in this argument) is an *effect* of the text that the text points towards, a ‘place’ of ex-change, the space of the signifier, not a place, not a ‘real’ place, but a *come*. ‘I’ am the reader of Mantel’s work in this thesis, but this ‘I’ is not me, Eileen Pollard, the author; this ‘I’ instead receives properties yet cannot possess them, the ‘power’ resides NOT in the

¹ Anna Vaux, ‘A Form of Showing Off’, *London Review of Books*, 28 April 1994, p. 13. Eighteen years before Mantel’s historic second Booker prize win in 2012, Vaux described her as a ‘curiously invisible author’ in a review of *A Change of Climate*.

² Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Connor, trans., ‘Elliptical Sense’, *Research in Phenomenology*, 18 (1988), 175-190 (pp. 175-176). Also, please note the dates in round brackets for the first-mentions of texts; all such dates refer to the edition I used to conduct my research and *not* the first published edition. This distinction is necessary because of the numerous texts in translation upon which this thesis relies, in these cases the first editions were not published in English.

³ Catherine Belsey, ‘Textual Analysis as a Research Method’, in *Research Methods for English Studies*, ed. by Gabriele Griffin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 157-174 (p. 167).

‘I’ of me, but in the writing of *the text*. As Belsey’s method suggests, ‘once again the text itself poses the questions that scholarship may be able to answer, and not the other way round’.⁴

The danger of the ‘single’ story, the lure of the singular, the fetish of the ONE, the original and the ‘origin’, as an elusive yet, ultimately, obtainable truth – such is the hubris this thesis proposes to challenge by demonstrating how and why it offers a counter-intuitive way of reading Mantel’s work. The thesis explores Mantel’s fiction and memoir, with limited reference to her journalism, since the journalism itself offers a separate avenue for future research, as signposted in my conclusion.⁵ Hilary Mantel’s writing is ambiguous, darkly humorous, layered and elliptical. There is a paradoxical tension across her corpus between such uncertainty and the *tight* sense of control that pervades the writing. It is as if ‘Mantel’ is *omnipresent*, yet as Roland Barthes has already famously observed: ‘To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing’.⁶ Moreover, media representations suggest how *different* Mantel’s texts are, one to the next; this poses a problem for scholars, who push to account for these departures – often by making them *the same* – for example, by labelling all her novels as ‘Gothic’.⁷ Instead it would be easier and perhaps more productive to acknowledge their breadth and tentatively suggest that it is the nature of the writing of these *differences* that is provisionally ‘unifying’. This thesis gestures towards a thread or *trace* of silence as uniting Mantel’s corpus, which also helps to ‘shut up’ the autobiographical account. The thesis plays with the notion of ex-centricity, eccentricity and a sense of *double* focus in order to explore the duplicity of Mantel’s narratives in terms of laughter, omniscience and effacement. The complex development of this play means that this introduction merely gestures towards or outlines the chapters, rather than attempting to ‘explain’ their content in any detailed way. However, part of the overall playfulness concerns my use of capitals: the gothic, the bible and the west are not authorised

⁴ Belsey, p. 169.

⁵ I also consider secondary journalism on Mantel’s writing because there is scarce little academic material. Moreover, since her extraordinary fame, ignoring the impact of media representations on her work would present a rather startling omission.

⁶ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-148 (p. 147).

⁷ Victoria Nelson’s brief discussion of *Fludd* in her study *Gothicka* suggests that the sexual union of Fludd and Sister Philomena is alchemical. This argument is positioned as a departure from analysis of Mantel’s ‘other arguably literary Gothick novels *The Giant, O’Brien* (1998), and *Beyond Black* (2005)’. However, I have not discovered any material that describes *The Giant, O’Brien* as a ‘Gothic’ novel or, in fact, any critical material at all concerning this text. For further discussion see Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 110-115.

in this way, although the ‘Other’ of chapters five and six is capitalised. This decision is designed to both highlight the intention of such legitimising, positioning and posturing, while also undermining it. There is a similar contradiction at work in the ‘placing’ of my-own-interview-with-Mantel; this transcript is extensively quoted, included as appendices, and yet *itself* deconstructed in chapter four, in order to further problematise the process of my own authorising ‘I’ as well as that of Mantel.

Rather than *applying* ellipsis to Mantel’s work, which heralds the potential problem of rigidity, this thesis merely wishes to tentatively trace its *effects* in her writing. The dynamic here implies that the ambiguity of Mantel’s writing prompts a comparison with the infamy of Derrida’s work. Such prompting in turn allows for the interruption of Nancy, whose cheeky article ‘Elliptical Sense’ (1988) suggests a *minute* description for the whole of Derrida’s uncontainable, impossible corpus. The thesis will apply the work of Derrida and Nancy translated into English with an acknowledgment of this problematic, particularly the slipperiness of the translation of the *word* ellipsis from the French. The title ‘Ellipsis’ translates the French noun ellipse into English; it signifies the plurality of the ellipses in the essay. In French the plural of ellipse is ellipses and in English the plural of ellipsis is ellipses, yet in the English edition of *Writing and Difference* the last essay is named ‘Ellipsis’, even though this translates back into French as *des points de suspension*. The deferral of meaning from French ‘Ellipse’ to English ‘Ellipsis’, offering a return to the French of *des points de suspension* yields the lost in translation of *khōra*. This elliptical moment of meaning marks the beginning of the possibility of this thesis, though it will remain more situating than situated.

Within the English academy the dot, dot, dot of ellipsis has been primarily explored in the field of linguistics, which offers much scope for the potential of this thesis.⁸ ‘Derrida’ and deconstruction do not provide a framework or schema that can be lifted and applied to writing; neither is the writing of Derrida himself immune from a process of ex-centricity, or defamiliarisation. As a philosopher, he advocated that deconstruction is always at-work-within-the-work, even the work he wrote, *even* the work he wrote to make that statement. This slippage allows for an acknowledgement of the tense position of his thought as ethnocentric in a thesis that works towards challenging the west as a privileged site in the

⁸ For further discussion see *Sluicing: Cross-Linguistic Perspectives*, ed. by Jason Merchant and Andrew Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

work of a white British writer. Mantel's representations offer *a place of greater silence* in terms of the west, understood here as an ellipsis. The thesis will introduce the duplicity of ellipsis in order to explode any notion of centred-ness or singular explanation for meaning, since even the most notionally solid concept can be shown to inwardly rely on the difference and deferral of ellipsis in order to 'make sense'. This introduction begins to unpack the complexities of the 'terms' of such theory. It initiates a theoretic of insistence and reiteration, hence the reading and rereading of relatively few passages from Derrida's texts throughout the thesis, such as, for example: '[A] trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun'.⁹ To steal a march on doubts that Mantel's writing is an inappropriate bedfellow for this 'style' of thinking, consider this passage from *A Place of Greater Safety* (2010): 'Adultery is an ugly word. Time to end it, Annette thought; time to end what has never begun'.¹⁰ This doubling up of closing the non-origin, or ending 'what has never begun', justifies the parameters and title of this thesis: 'Origin and Ellipsis in the Writing of Hilary Mantel'.

'Ellipsis is the ellipsis of the centre': The elliptical outlining of cultural symptoms

There are two responses to the gap of the *ellipsis* and the ellipse as a geometric shape that provide theoretical mainstays for this oscillating thesis. The essay 'Ellipsis' by Derrida that 'closes' *Writing and Difference* and Nancy's *supplementary* paper 'Elliptical Sense', which responds to the brevity of Derrida's text. The ellipse is a mathematical figure while ellipsis (in English) is the signifier of the dot, dot, dot. Understanding the ellipsis of the dot, dot, dot as a signifier emphasises an overlooked meaning of the word 'ellipsis', as translated from the French, and consequently characterises an aspect of the originality of this thesis.¹¹ This translational gap is reminiscent of what Derrida describes as 'the eluded center', which Nancy responds to with the following:¹²

⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Ellipsis', in *Writing and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 371-378 (p. 372).

¹⁰ Hilary Mantel, *A Place of Greater Safety* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 86.

¹¹ The ellipsis marks, or points, have been analysed in terms of the role of punctuation in writing, particularly as contributing to aspects of narrative theory. There is also scholarship available on the *material* development of the ellipsis in the history of printed books. However, opening the potential of the ellipsis [...] as a signifier through the ambiguity of Derrida's 'Ellipsis' constitutes a critical departure. For further discussion on existing *elliptical* contributions see E. L. Thorndike, 'The Psychology of Punctuation', *American Journal of Psychology*, 61 (1948), 222-228 and Anne C. Henry, 'The Re-mark-able Rise of "...": Reading Ellipsis Marks in Literary Texts', in *Mar(k)ing the Text: The Presentation of Meaning on the Literary Page*, ed. by Joe Bray, Miriam Handley and Anne C. Henry (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 120-142.

¹² 'Ellipsis', p. 377.

Ellipsis is the ellipsis of the centre, its lack, its fault, and the exposing of its ‘dangerous hole’ into which ‘the anxious desire of the book’ tries to ‘insinuate itself’ (in the text).¹³

Derrida’s seminal *Writing and Difference* was published in French in 1967, along with *Of Grammatology* and *Speech and Writing*, the texts that established Derrida’s reputation as a philosopher. Although ‘Ellipsis’ is only a few pages long and has not received the critical attention of the other more famous chapters in the book, such as ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ (2008), Nancy wrote of it effusively in his response ‘Elliptical Sense’:

Then I realized that this very brief text, no doubt the briefest of Derrida’s texts which we might call ‘properly theoretical’, *describes elliptically the entire orbit of his thought*. It does not however close it off; it describes the *doubling* and the *displacement* of the ring by means of which this orbit, like that of the earth and of all thought, *does not remain identical to itself*.¹⁴

Nancy originally delivered this paper to the Collegium Phenomenologicum in Perugia, Italy in 1987 in the ‘presence’ of Derrida, therefore *orbiting* both his body and his thought: ‘I realized that writing on ellipsis would not exactly require me to write “on Derrida”’.¹⁵ Nancy identifies facets of ‘Ellipsis’ that are also helpful for my reading of Mantel’s writing, especially the notions of doubling, displacement, and repetition as *necessary* for both sign and thought. Yet there is no hierarchy of texts within this thesis, Mantel’s writing is not ‘privileged’, neither is Derrida’s work an authoriser for *meaning*. His essay considers the closure of the *book* in opposition to the opening of the *text*, and it is within this ‘nonsymmetrical division’ that ‘we have discerned writing’ – an idea more fully developed in my first chapter.¹⁶ The book is a complete, and therefore *mastered* object with a purpose, trying to insinuate itself, anxiously, into the dangerous hole created by the text. This is the nature of texts within Derrida’s thought, skirting around, playing, but never arriving (or dying). However, this movement traces anxiety; for example, the *Wolf Hall* (2010) ‘Booker Prize winning *book*’ makes finite the unaccountable play of its dangerous hole through subscription to a ‘historical’ category. It is between these two, this *double* focus, the anxious book and the playful text, that writing is discerned – ‘Here’ being the first word of Derrida’s

¹³ Nancy, p. 188.

¹⁴ Nancy, pp. 175-176, my emphases.

¹⁵ Nancy, p. 176.

¹⁶ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 371.

essay, as Nancy notes in his riposte. In fact, ‘Ellipsis’ goes further still: ‘The question of writing could be opened only if the book was closed’.¹⁷

‘Ellipsis’ also *touches* the trace as a means of breaching preoccupation with the origin paradigm. ‘The writing of the origin, the writing that retraces the origin’ is not disposing of the origin but ‘that which takes its place’.¹⁸

It is not absence instead of presence, but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun.¹⁹

Nancy suggests that the writing of ‘Ellipsis’ orbits the entirety of Derrida’s thought because these profound yet tacit ideas recur throughout his work. The trace underlies ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’, which will help unpack gothic/historical approaches to Mantel’s work in chapter one. Such thinking of *trace* can challenge the notion of Freud’s work as ‘thematic’, or superficial, which marks and mars its appropriation within the gothic criticism under scrutiny in this thesis. In this ‘other’ essay from *Writing and Difference*, Freud’s theories are both harder to grasp and also more pertinent to deconstruction. The text considers the psychoanalyst ‘obstinately substituting trace for trace and machine for machine’ and concludes, ‘we have been wondering *just what Freud was doing*’.²⁰ Derrida concludes that Freud is actually performing *the scene of writing* in terms of this preoccupation with the trace:

The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one’s own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance.²¹

Trace, or ellipsis as trace, offers a means of undermining full presence – the full presence of selfhood, memory, *origin* – or, in fact, any centre for meaning that is placed beyond ‘play’. This (common) sense is repeated in Ken McMullen’s film *Ghost Dance* (1983), in which Derrida plays the ‘ghost’ of himself. He considers, or presents, the ghost as a memory of something that was never present.²² This pressure is helpful for working through the thematic

¹⁷ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 371.

¹⁸ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 372.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’, in *Writing and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 246-291 (p. 288), original emphasis.

²¹ ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’, p. 289.

²² *Ghost Dance*, dir. by Ken McMullen (Cornerstone Media, 1983).

insistence on ghosts and ghostliness within gothic criticism, since fixing ‘ghost’ to an object or *presence*, stabilises its meaning, but also necessarily limits it too. For Derrida, ghosts never merely present in the ‘obvious’ sense, as recognised by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott in their introduction to *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (1999):

We have suggested that ghosts themselves have fallen into this kind of cultural obsolescence. Or at least the familiar chain-clanking, hair-raising, bump-in-the-night ghost has had its day for now [...] if we want to find today’s ghosts, we should look to the workings of telecommunications, the activities of the media, that omniscient absence-presence, in which our ‘contemporary’ spectrality is to be found.²³

The trace of the ghost is outlined by ‘Ellipsis’, here it is the fetish of metaphysics for mastery and arrival, the privileged point of *origin*: ‘Lure of the origin, the end, the line, the ring, the volume, the center’.²⁴ Nancy writes of ‘Ellipsis’, as an essay, in terms of ‘its *abysmal* speculation [...] the text says or it writes or it ellipses something else as well, something we cannot know’.²⁵ There is also a significant tension in ‘Ellipsis’ between the origin as *writing* and the ‘origin’ within a system that institutionalises such writing: ‘The inscription of the origin is doubtless its Being-as-writing, but it is also its Being-as-inscribed in a system in which it is only a function and a locus’.²⁶ Moreover, Derrida’s essay then proceeds to acknowledge that the return-to-the-book that this duplicity initiates is of an ‘*elliptical* essence’, which offers an understanding of the origin as being-inscribed in the system, skirted around or being-as-writing, though never graspable in any *final* sense.²⁷

The return to the book *is* of an elliptical essence, however:

Something invisible is missing in the grammar of this repetition. As this lack is invisible and undeterminable [...] nothing has budged. And yet all meaning is altered by this lack.²⁸

Derrida’s essay does not explicitly consider ellipsis as the dot, dot, dot signifier – the metaphor and metonymy, difference and deferral the writing of this pause inscribes, this gap that signifies *excess*. As already clarified, the dot, dot, dot, is not described as ‘ellipsis’ in

²³ *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 17.

²⁴ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 372.

²⁵ Nancy, p. 186, my emphasis.

²⁶ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 373.

²⁷ *Ibid*, original emphasis.

²⁸ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 373.

French, but instead referred to as *des points de suspension*.²⁹ Yet ‘Elliptical Sense’ notes how Derrida’s text does not draw boundaries around concepts, ‘Ellipsis’ never offers to define terms: ‘For Derrida has omitted, following the stylistic or rhetorical use of the word “ellipsis,” to make explicit the meaning of this word’.³⁰ This thesis explores the relationship between ellipsis, the dot, dot, dot, and ellipse as an ‘imperfect’ circle, through the difference of Derrida’s thinking. It initiates this movement by first using ellipsis to reclaim what gothicism considers its own – repression and return. The dot, dot, dot *represses* words in the text while the ellipse traces the mathematical figure of unexpected *return*, which explodes any ‘ownership’ of these terms and forces an alternative reading of how they are worked through in Mantel’s texts. Derrida wrote of the ex-centricity of the ellipse, which opens up the potential of theorising the *resistance* of Mantel’s writing to any conceptual solidity. Exploring different instances where her texts expose the ‘centre’ as a place of exchange rather than a grounded, mastered space, generates the momentum of this project. Its challenge involves using Derrida’s work to expose the limitations of current readings of her work, particularly the striking silence over representations of the west, and such *friction* will inevitably highlight the contemporary process for categorising subversiveness in texts.³¹ The ellipsis decentres systems of understanding, knowledge and control, it satirises any notion of The Original.

Ellipsis is positioned here in terms of Nancy’s response to the metaphor as *so* expansive that it describes elliptically an *impossible*, impassable, thinking trajectory.³² His commentary applies specifically to the mathematical figure of the ellipse. However, it is my contention that the grand claim of ‘Elliptical Sense’ also describes the work of *ellipsis* as another exploding signifier, written on the page as a burst full stop. Analysing Mantel’s fiction and memoir will reveal both meanings of ellipsis as un-inscribing the orbit of Derrida’s thinking via play, space, *revenant*, *khōra*, trace and difference; these infamously Derridean thoughts are also pertinent to the chosen Mantel texts. The thesis considers *Fludd*, *Beyond Black*, *Giving Up the Ghost* (2004), *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1989) and *A Change of Climate* (2010) as its primary material. I have excluded the larger historical novels because introducing the political contexts of *A Place of Greater Safety*, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the*

²⁹ A collection of interviews with Derrida (perhaps consciously) play with this link: *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, ed. by Elisabeth Weber (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995)

³⁰ Nancy, p. 185.

³¹ For further discussion see Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

³² Nancy, pp. 175-176.

Bodies (2012), respectively, would distract from the work of this thesis. I offer my work as the opening of a field of inquiry, not its *close*, I therefore cannot and should not attempt to comment on everything Mantel has written. The relationship between questionable conceptual solidity in her writing and elliptical descriptions of Derrida's thinking creates the dynamic of this thesis and informs its structure. The first four chapters explore the two-fold interaction between a 'solid' concept, or origin for meaning, in a Mantel text and a corresponding thought in Derrida's writing. Chapters five and six combine to outline a provisional alternative to the origin-model for reading Mantel's work while engaging two further Derridean thoughts in order to do so.

The processes that such a composite *ellipsis* describe in writing are expansive; these I will briefly set down here and then develop through this introduction. First, there is the double focus, or repetition, of the *two* centres. Second, the limit, or outline, of the ellipse as not consistently equidistant from the centre(s) and therefore enacting an *altering*, unlike the 'perfect' circle. Third, the necessity of *lack* to allow for meaning, or lack understood as deferral and the notional return it delivers as *difference*, or 'what falls short of being identical'. Fourth, non-identity, the 'imperfect' geometry of the ellipse defined as a shape through not-being-identical to a circle; the non-identical and the repression of the dot, dot, dot signify the return of the-always-yet-to-come by promising and facilitating variation and exchange.³³ To return, perfected, would be to return as identical, indistinguishable, and therefore meaningless. The ellipsis is a deconstructive gem because the execution of the *graphein* of the geometric shape or the dot, dot, dot – challenge any notion of centred-ness. The imperfect circle does not emanate out from one fixed and certain point (the *impassioned* origin) but two foci; plus, ellipse as a shape also fundamentally questions the possibility of the 'identical'. Geometry both establishes and privileges the identical and the ellipse was 'traditionally' and mathematically defined via its *lack* of identity. The *two* centres places the status of the original under considerable strain and pits it against the equally privileged notion of the identical. These 'positions' are mutually exclusive, mutually *effacing*; thus, either one 'centre' is origin and one repetition, or they are both identical, but if they *were*

³³ Nancy, p. 175.

identical they would be indistinguishable. There is no fixed and certain point, *only a repetition* with the first time, which is why Derrida champions the ex-centric ellipse.³⁴

Nancy writes explicitly of the double focus at the beginning of his essay ‘Elliptical Sense’ when explaining why he has never previously written on Derrida’s thought, or his body. The ‘origin’ of this inhibition will return towards the end of this thesis via the thoughts of both philosophers on the gift:

there is too great a proximity between us, and I have often written in the space of this proximity, and by means of it. This does not mean that our thinking always converges or that there is only a complicity between us. There is something of an *ellipsis* in our proximity – or rather our proximity resides in this very ellipsis. This ellipsis is, in fact, and we will come back to this, what falls short of being identical, and more precisely, what falls short of being circular. This lack of circularity, this gap which postpones the infinite return of the identical to itself³⁵

Despite the problems of translation, the word here reads as ‘ellipsis’ and *ellipsis* is the word I use to describe the theoretical push of this thesis. The suggestion that their ‘proximity resides in this very ellipsis’ implies that the double focus of the *figure* is, in fact, Nancy and Derrida themselves, which will prove a useful paradigm for reading representations of ‘duplicity’ in Mantel’s work, particularly in terms of character.

The altered outline of ellipsis offers an imperfect circle. For a ‘perfect’ circle, the distance between the origin or centre, and the line or *limit* remains consistent at all points, but this is not the case with an ellipse. The altering this affects (or creates) is further elucidated through reading the relationship between lack and meaning for *ellipse*. In ‘Elliptical Sense’, for example, lack is understood as not inhibiting meaning, but rather enabling it, which also helps introduce the ellipsis as the dot, dot, dot:

Meaning is lacking to itself; it misses itself; and this is why “all meaning is altered by this lack.” Writing is the outline of this altering. This outline is “in essence elliptical” because it does not come back full circle to the same.³⁶

³⁴ ‘Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost’. For further discussion see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge Classics, 2006), p. 10.

³⁵ Nancy, p. 175, original emphasis. This sense of falling short outlines the ellipse. However, Henry’s etymology of the ellipsis also allows such imperfection to inscribe the dot, dot, dot: ‘The term “ellipsis” derives from the Greek ἐλλείειν “to come short” and throughout its history it has been used alongside, or interchangeably with “eclipsis” ἐχλείειν “to leave out”. Henry, p. 124.

³⁶ Nancy, p. 177.

Heavily quoting ‘Ellipsis’ here, Nancy’s essay suggests such lack *affects* an outlining that is always *altering*. If narrative is read as an outline and meaning as lacking unto itself then both are facilitated by ellipsis. Firstly the unexpected path of the ellipse, which does not remain consistently equidistant to the centre and secondly the ellipsis (as repressive [...]) representing the operation of meaning, and return. For example, consider the return of the *grapheme* in a text. It ‘means’ because it is different or imperfect and, like the ellipse, it lacks ‘circularity’. Yet such imperfection is also a deferral, like the ellipsis – dot, dot, dot – postponing the infinite return of the identical to itself. ‘Elliptical Sense’ considers such imperfection and postponement, described elsewhere in Derrida’s thought as *differance*, as ‘what governs the rapport between Derrida’s text entitled “Ellipsis” and [the book] “on” which, it *appears*, it is written’.³⁷ This relationship governs the rapport in and between all texts. However, the dependency of meaning on lack in all writing does not make all writing ‘the same’; in fact, the process of alteration such outlining constitutes does exactly that, it alters. This is how I allow for the elliptical sense of lack and meaning in writing to continue describing *different* cultural symptoms. My contribution to this ‘elliptical sense’ is that the dot, dot, dot (im)perfectly illustrates Nancy’s thought – ‘Meaning is lacking to itself; it misses itself’ – because it is a gap that represents the *thirst* of meaning after itself and the *altering* effect of this thirst. More simply, it is a deferral – it illustrates the operation of the deferral of meaning, which is a promise, or emptiness, within all signifiers – it opens the possibility of the gift. It does not mean that there-is-no-meaning, but that meaning does not definitively *arrive* – there is always the possibility for another exchange or substitution, a continuation. This is what writing as the outline of such altering *means* within this thesis. Moreover, ellipsis, the word in English and the dot, dot, dot, are signifiers under which the suggestion of a *sliding signified* is almost perceptible. The dot, dot, dot can be used to articulate meaning as inherently thirsty because it cannot be understood as *quenchable*; it alters the meaning of a sentence, what it *means* alters, and it is itself an *alterity*, or Other.

Ellipsis signifies difference while also illustrating difference as repetition because it is represented graphically by three dots, each apparently a repetition of the previous dot, yet simultaneously a departure too. One dot is a full stop. Both the full stop and the dot, dot, dot exemplify repetition *with* the first time since there is no referent, no original (though there is

³⁷ Nancy, p. 175, my emphasis.

passion) – the *first* full stop cannot ever be ‘traced’.³⁸ Thus, the first dot is a full stop [.] the *graphein* ‘wandering without return’, it cannot be original, it is a reiteration, a full stop.³⁹ Yet here it occupies the impossible position of being first, the beginning of the subsequent dots, though already a deconstructed origin. The second dot [...] is a repetition, yet entering for a second time it is different. It is no longer a full stop, it falls short of being identical to the first ‘full stop’ dot, though it is only understood in terms of that first dot. The third dot [...] creates the ellipsis, an arrival that also signifies deferral. It is a dot with two originals (or centres) that answers the outline of the mathematical figure. If ever deconstruction can be understood as at work within the work *it is within the work of ellipsis*. It offers a palindrome, a *graphein* that reads the ‘same’ backwards as it does forwards.

Ellipse marks a return that lacks identity because it is imperfect. However, the ellipsis [...] represses a word or sentence in order to *make meaning*, and introducing an ellipsis can alter meaning, within censored quotations, or work to defer meaning; it is a tease. It is partially governed by academic rules including containment within square brackets, which this thesis adopts. Yet the extent of its excess cannot be legitimised or institutionalised; it still returns the ‘reader’ to the beginning of the sentence, and challenges the notional agency of reading writing. It also signifies a return of the threat of indeterminacy, which both bolsters systems and undermines them. It is the wandering sign, repressed, since its origin. There is always something missing, absent, so that *return* is its function, but only imperfectly, not the return of the identical to itself, which is both unexpected and unknowable. Such lack, such unquenchable thirst for the origin, which cannot be mastered, is an ex-centricity (and an eccentricity) that facilitates difference and exchange; meaning is merely an *effect* of such repetition.

The methodology of this thesis, then, relies on the geometric definition of the ellipse *as a shape*, yet Derrida’s essay is entitled ‘Ellipsis’, not ‘Ellipse’ or even ‘The Ellipsis’. Thus, it ‘is neither a *word* nor a *concept*’, it is simply ‘Ellipsis’ with no preposition or implied stability.⁴⁰ This despite the fact that, metaphorically at least, the essays of both Derrida and Nancy draw most explicitly on the discourse of geometry, even though the translation of the

³⁸ This is a reference to ‘passion’ as the origin of writing, which is a notion that Derrida’s ‘Ellipsis’ problematises (p. 372).

³⁹ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 371.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, ‘Differance’, in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. by David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 129-160 (p. 130).

title into English means ‘something else’ *entirely* – the dot, dot, dot. This ‘mistake’ opens the possibility of this thesis, but also bears problems for terminology. Such a difficulty is alleviated to an extent by the ‘marked difference’ in vowels that creates the promise of difference.⁴¹ My understanding of ellipsis, informed by Derrida’s thought, is a combination of the characteristics of both the geometric shape and the dot, dot, dot signifier. This might perhaps yield the term *ellipses* as a potential compromise; yet this choice departs too clearly from Derrida’s translated title and also seems too much like an attempt to ‘fix’ the problem. Therefore, I propose the *i* instead of the *e*, and again this exchange ‘is written or read, but it is [barely] heard’.⁴² By exercising an exchange of vowels that could be written and read but not heard, Derrida presented one of the most challenging and difficult of his thoughts about writing, difference, which seems like a good ‘place’ to start with *ellipsis*.

‘Never take other people’s word for it’: Elliptical critical practice⁴³

There is no moment of ‘origin’, but only breaks with what went before. In that sense, every iteration is always a reiteration. Research involves tracing these intertexts, and reading them attentively too, to establish the difference of the text in question.⁴⁴

This thesis presents the burst full stop of the dot, dot, dot, as the differing origin of differences in order to explode a series of perceived origins for meaning in Mantel’s texts. Its justification as an original contribution to knowledge is two-fold; the thesis initiates sustained inquiry into the ambiguity of Mantel’s writing *and* works to ascertain the validity of Nancy’s statement about the ellipsis of Derrida’s thinking. This synthesis powerfully informs the structure of the thesis for the first four chapters, so that each describes a double focus, the ‘origin’ under scrutiny and an elliptical outlining of a Derridean thought, so as to undermine the stability of such an *originality* in a Mantel text. These duplicities unravel as follows; chapter one concerns criticism and play, chapter two the gothic and space, chapter three the body and *revenant*, chapter four autobiography and *khōra*. Chapters five and six depart from this challenge to the ‘origin’ paradigm and instead suggest a different method of reading Mantel’s writing, with an emphasis on the silences her texts both evoke and rely upon. This second part of the thesis interrogates representations of the west in her corpus. In particular,

⁴¹ ‘Difference’, p. 132.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Belsey, p. 160.

⁴⁴ Belsey, p. 164.

how the silence and silencing of race reveals the workings of 'frame', perspective and point of view in Mantel's texts. This re-focus gestures again towards the ex-centric centre of ellipsis, which pervades the thesis, and forms the 'gift' of its conclusion.

Chapter One 'She is no writer of the Gothic': Exploding the criticism as origin

The chapter epigraph is a quotation from Sara L. Knox's 2010 article 'Giving Flesh to the "Wraiths of Violence"'. This text informs the discussion of autobiography as origin in chapter four, yet is useful here to explode the more established gothic criticism available as offering 'too small a handle for Mantel's work'.⁴⁵ In this first chapter, I will highlight how sparse the academic material is on Mantel's writing and then illustrate that what has been produced is always attempting to reduce the many meanings at play in her texts. I will then introduce the ellipsis as a means to escape reading her work in terms of one 'origin' for signification. Explicitly, the focus here is on 'Gothic' and historical (mis)readings of Mantel's writing because this is the only tangible academic commentary that exists. The geometric representation of the ellipse is not traced in the texts in a literal sense, and therefore the dot, dot, dot, although a signifier, will not be read in terms of dogged examples either. This chapter will also emphasise the point summarised in the introduction that writing is the elliptical outlining of cultural symptoms. The symptom I have chosen to explore in Mantel's corpus is an anxiety linked to a compensatory western move towards conceptual stabilising or solidifying through an implied *centre*. This chapter also *lightly traces* Derrida's thoughts on play.⁴⁶

The criticism offers an 'origin' for this thesis. An origin seething with differing origins, or, as Derrida writes of differance, his most famous thought characterises the differing origin of differences.⁴⁷ This thesis constitutes a principally Derridean study of Mantel's writing and all the terminology reflects this debt. Having outlined the utility of the ellipsis in response to contemporary attempts to conceptually solidify a centre for meaning beyond play, this chapter approaches the conceptual centre within the 'Gothic' and the gothic as a centre. I will deconstruct the implied stability of the gothic criticism available on Mantel's writing using the *sense* of the ellipsis as an ex-centric eccentric response to current readings. The ellipsis is an alternative and more extreme means than gothicism by which to account for the unaccountable in Mantel's writing. As Nancy argues of Derrida's essay: 'In being called

⁴⁵ Sara L. Knox, 'Giving Flesh to the "Wraiths of Violence"', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 25 (2010), 313-323 (p. 313).

⁴⁶ This first chapter offers the prototype for those that follow and also stands as my first 'perception' of what the thesis could perform, which is why it does not, and cannot, express the control of the later chapters and is *itself* a differing origin of differences. It outlines the 'beginning' of how to effectively combine the thought of Jacques Derrida and the writing of Hilary Mantel in order to reveal 'something else' about the work of both. The collateral damage of this theoretical *explosion* is the broadbrush approach that at times creeps in so as to maintain the momentum of the argument and its process. The undoubted faults of such generalisations are mainly recuperated by the detail of subsequent chapters.

⁴⁷ 'Differance', p. 141.

“Ellipsis” [...] the text says or it writes or it ellipses something else as well, something we cannot know. *It lets us know we are truly missing something, probably many things*’.⁴⁸ This allows the porous quality of texts to be read as enabling rather than inhibiting, and helps draw out that which remains resistant to categorising as both necessary and liberating, rather than meaningless. In this context, and according to Derrida’s *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, what remains resistant to categorising is also spectral, yet not ‘Gothic’.

“Releasing Spirit from Matter”: The ‘eluded’ centre and play

In *Hilary Mantel: A Culture Show Special* broadcast on BBC2 in 2011, Hilary Mantel considers the uncertainty of her work as the legacy of a Roman Catholic childhood. She responds to James Runcie’s question about whether she is deliberately seeking instability for the reader by suggesting an origin for her worldview:

It’s very much the way I view the world. I don’t trust it tremendously. I always feel that if I put my hand on the wall, my hand might go through it. I think as a child you see, I was always listening hard. I was always trying to get some *purchase* on what was going on, and work out what was happening in the next room. You really do need to know for your self-preservation whether the devil is behind that door.⁴⁹

Runcie calmly replies ‘Not everyone thinks that’ to which Mantel simply retorts ‘Fools!’.⁵⁰ Leading on from this statement, this chapter will speculate on *how* and *why* such instability in Mantel’s writing has been mainly co-opted by gothic criticism. It will then unleash the concept of ‘ellipsis’, as utilised by Derrida and Nancy, in order to interrupt this trend. This approach challenges the notion of the ‘origin’ of a text as the centre or locus for its meaning. The primary aim of reading Mantel’s texts as elliptical rather than gothic is to redress these (perhaps unintentionally) prescriptive responses to her work, which exist as much in the academy as in the field of journalism. This chapter will argue that although the uncertainty of repression and manifestations of return in Mantel’s writing suggest the suitability of a gothic reading, this framework (as a framework) cannot avoid trying to ‘master’ what continues to remain elusive here.

⁴⁸ Nancy, p. 186, my emphasis.

⁴⁹ *Hilary Mantel: A Culture Show Special*, dir. by James Runcie (BBC, 2011), my emphasis.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

A recurring problem with gothic readings of Mantel's writing is the restrictive authority placed on the figure of the writer. If the text is gothic, then it must tick certain boxes in order to conform and contribute to the 'long tradition' of the genre. The systematic feel to this membership suggests, and often strongly implies, a degree of awareness on the part of the author. For example, mandates such as – 'Mantel ultimately presents [...] ignore and also inhibit the potential of the text to produce many meanings through the reading process.'⁵¹ These meanings are autonomous from the idea of 'Hilary Mantel' as an author, which is a notion I will consider very carefully in chapter four. Thus, in discussing the inability of the ghosts to cross thresholds in *Beyond Black*, Catherine Spooner's chapter on this novel states: 'This appears to be a deliberate inversion on Mantel's part', which suggests knowingness, understanding and a taking-up-of-a-position.⁵² This draws boundaries around the text, and has the two-fold effect of *making* the argument – that is, a person made these decisions, it is therefore coherent, while also authorising it, since who knows better than the author what the text 'means'?⁵³

Through deconstructing what is already available on Mantel's texts within the academy, this chapter will highlight two established gothic terms – repression and return, or the return of the repressed – as also characteristic of the ellipsis as applied and understood by Derrida and Nancy. This revelation will inform my own application and understanding of the ellipsis within Mantel's writing, a combination that facilitates the following research outcomes. First it contributes to and diversifies the academic material available on Mantel's corpus. Second it promotes the ellipsis as not only a useful philosophical concept but also a deconstructive tool pertinent to English studies in terms of critical theory. Third this chapter will establish the ellipsis as a signifier, that is, the dot, dot, dot, as a very important, yet ignored, meaning of the word 'ellipsis' translated from French philosophy.⁵⁴ This will involve understanding the reasons for such an omission and illustrating that this aspect of my work on ellipsis is

⁵¹ Catherine Spooner, "[T]hat Eventless Realm": Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* and the Ghosts of the M25', in *London Gothic: Place, Space and the Gothic Imagination*, ed. by Lawrence Phillips and Anne Witchard (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), pp. 80-90 (p. 81).

⁵² Spooner, p. 86.

⁵³ For further discussion see Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', pp. 142-148 and Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 103-124.

⁵⁴ The introduction to the thesis explains my application of the work of Derrida and Nancy translated into English, and an acknowledgment of this problematic.

original. It is also crucial for pushing a reading of Mantel's writing at the 'limits' of the text.⁵⁵

Derrida's essay on 'Ellipsis' is not widely acknowledged or discussed within philosophical discourse; moreover, it has not ever been applied to the reading of literary texts in the manner initiated in chapter two of this thesis. Since Derrida's term fundamentally resists secure anchoring points, it seems unlikely that the excursion of the ellipsis into Mantel's texts will affirm gothic or even *post*-gothic positions, or contribute to their work. My use of ellipsis interrupts the gothic, coffin-like 'boxing' of Mantel's writing, but more generally is a contribution to the field of critical theory. Ellipsis cannot advance on the post-gothic because it marks too great a challenge to this kind of criticism (that is, centred) to merely add to it. The notion of the ellipsis undermines the stability of any such framework, which emphasises its pertinence within a poststructuralist discourse.

This chapter will offer a close reading of three prominent pieces published on Mantel's work that emphasise certain characteristics of her writing as gothic, or historical, in origin. First "Releasing Spirit from Matter" by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, which was published in *Gothic Studies* in 2000 and considers Mantel's *Fludd* (1990) alongside works by Muriel Spark and John Updike.⁵⁶ Second Victoria Stewart's 'A Word in Your Ear: Mediumship and Subjectivity in Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black*', which appeared in *Critique* in 2009. Third, already cited above, "[T]hat Eventless Realm": Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* and the Ghosts of the M25' by Catherine Spooner, which was published in an edited collection entitled *London Gothic: Place, Space and the Gothic Imagination* in 2010. Although all these critics have established academic affiliations and profiles, none of them list Mantel's writing as amongst their own primary research interests. My suggestion here is that they have an academic orientation that the uncertainty in Mantel's fiction and memoir can and has been used to bolster. In the case of Horner, Zlosnik and Spooner this is the contemporary gothic, to which Stewart proves an interesting exception since her essay is grounded in sociocultural research. It is important to include it though because it pits one reading against another, though neither wins outright. 'A Word in Your Ear' explores spiritualism, yet arrests its

⁵⁵ Nancy, pp. 175-190.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, although Horner and Zlosnik dedicate the smallest word count to *Fludd*, their title is a quotation from Mantel's novel rather than those of either Spark or Updike, the more established of the three writers. This suggests a discrepancy between the lesser importance of *Fludd* for their argument and its implicit significance, an anxiety Horner and Zlosnik do not resolve.

slipperiness through historical engagement, so the popularity of spiritualism can be explained in terms of quantifiable historical events and trends. This chapter will explore such an approach as potentially reductive while highlighting the similarities between Stewart's historicism and the gothicism of the others. This will illustrate the paradox that although these gothic critics *relish* the unexplained, they are often still trying to explain it. There is also a discrepancy between what (gothic) texts do with boundaries, which is playful, and how gothic criticism responds to it. Although these critics comment on the questioning of boundaries within texts, the language they adopt to articulate this movement, words such as 'destabilize,' 'dissolve,' 'dissolution,' illustrates an anxiety concerning their removal. These are commentaries, therefore, that rely to an extent on the boundaries remaining in place.

In line with my approach to this criticism, the thesis maintains a suspicion of The Author and instead invests in the authority of the text itself. This means emphasising the operative-ness of this material as *text* rather than privileging the position of authorial intention as the origin for meaning. For example, this thesis will suggest that 'Horner and Zlosnik's article establishes...' rather than presuming that any statement is made personally, embodied by Horner and Zlosnik themselves. It is pertinent to de-personalise the argument in this way because it is not only critical of the position(s) these texts occupy, the methodology for this thesis rests on a suspicion of origins (up to and including the author's brain) and a delight in textual play with or without authorial blessing. This approach also tries to avoid limiting the text in any way. Moreover, this chapter will discuss the categorisation of all the novels in Horner and Zlosnik's article because the appropriation of *Fludd* is significantly different to that of *Ballad* or *Eastwick*. This distinction and its implications can only be established through considering the article as a whole and all the texts it explores.

““Releasing Spirit from Matter”” was published in *Gothic Studies*, which places its ideas in a clear academic category. However, the article occupies a tense position, as established by the first paragraph, since it admits that within the novels under scrutiny – Spark's *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick*, Mantel's *Fludd* – ‘much of what we might call the architecture of Gothic is missing’. This gap is reminiscent of what Derrida describes as ‘the eluded center’, which Nancy responds to with the following:⁵⁷

⁵⁷ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 377.

Ellipsis is the ellipsis of the centre, its lack, its fault, and the exposing of its ‘dangerous hole’ into which ‘the anxious desire of the book’ tries to ‘insinuate itself’ (in the text).⁵⁸

So it is perhaps significant that despite acknowledging the missing architecture, Horner and Zlosnik’s article establishes by the end of this first paragraph that each of the novels boasts a ‘mysterious demonic male figure [...] *at its centre*’.⁵⁹ ‘Ellipsis is the ellipsis’ is also a curious phrase that underlines the missing ‘the’ from the title of Derrida’s essay while suggesting something about the application of this thought. Both Derrida and Nancy are responding to the assumption within western post-Enlightenment thinking that the centre of a system (and a text is understood as a ‘system’ within this discourse) is the origin and locus of its meaning, and vice versa. Nancy then argues that ellipsis skirts around the lack or fault of the centre, thereby exposing it as a ‘dangerous hole’. The anxious desire of Horner and Zlosnik’s article is to insinuate itself back into the gap created by the missing gothic architecture – ‘the ruined castle and the sinister monk’ assumed at the *centre* of ‘Gothic’.⁶⁰ Moreover, my exposure of the tension here between liberating and categorising these novels will further decentre the article, and represent what it describes as ‘comic’, as potentially elliptical too. I refer specifically to the menacing implications of the ‘dissolution’ of boundaries for difference and meaning. These points are elliptical in a *double* sense, for example, as Nancy writes:

There is a joy, a gaiety even, which has always stood at the limit of philosophy. It is not comedy or irony or the grotesque or humour [...] No theory of comedy or of the joke has been able to master it.⁶¹

Doubling is important in terms of Derrida’s understanding of the sign *as* repetition. These problems with boundaries, the comic and the centre as dubious anchors will recur throughout my chapter, and the whole thesis. However, the early suggestion in Horner and Zlosnik’s article that these novels ‘breach the boundary between the supernatural and everyday normality with effects that tend to be *liberating* rather than *destructive*’ is a movement undermined by the pervasive application of categories in the text in order to establish meaning.⁶² This is most obviously expressed by the attachment of a capitalised ‘Gothic’ to

⁵⁸ Nancy, p.188.

⁵⁹ Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, ““Releasing Spirit from Matter”: Comic Alchemy in Spark’s *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, Updike’s *The Witches of Eastwick* and Mantel’s *Fludd*”, *Gothic Studies*, 2 (2000), 136-147 (p.136), my emphasis.

⁶⁰ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 136.

⁶¹ Nancy, pp. 180-181.

⁶² *Ibid.*

aspects of each of the novels so as to ascertain their position as ‘Gothic tropes’.⁶³ For example, Dougal Douglas, apparently the demonic male figure at the centre of Spark’s novel, is described as both a ‘Gothic body’ and a ‘Gothic victim’, the Lenox Mansion in *The Witches of Eastwick* is a ‘Gothic pile’ and Darryl Van Horne, its new resident is a man ‘in true Gothic tradition’.⁶⁴ Fludd’s initial appearance in Fetherhoughton is termed of ‘Gothic aspect’, but interestingly little else in Mantel’s novel is explicitly affixed with this label. There is already a sense here that if everything is ‘Gothic’ then ‘the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down’.⁶⁵

Considering the context of the article and its implied readership, it is understandable that the characteristics of the Gothic body, Gothic victim or Gothic aspect are assumed, or eclipsed, other than that they are understood to be ‘in true Gothic tradition’. What remains problematic though is the way the text utilises ‘comic Gothic’ versus ‘the *serious* Gothic’, which is neither explained nor convincingly sustained. The second paragraph introduces the concept: ‘*The Ballad*’s Dougal, *Eastwick*’s Darryl, and the *eponymous* Fludd are incarnations of what we choose to call “comic Gothic”, this constitutes a mixture of ‘the magical and the sinister’, the lightly drawn and the parodic, or playful.⁶⁶ Derrida writes in ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ of the field of language:

instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions [...] this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin.⁶⁷

Yet Horner and Zlosnik’s article is not comfortable with such play; the comic gothic is juxtaposed with the serious gothic, an opposition represented for example by Van Horne, a ‘character through whom those boundaries which the serious Gothic text attempts to shore up are dissolved’.⁶⁸ However, “‘Releasing Spirit from Matter”” responds to this movement towards *dissolution*, initiated by the play of the comic gothic, with *systematic categorisation*,

⁶³ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 139.

⁶⁴ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 138, p. 139, and p. 140 respectively.

⁶⁵ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 144 and Jacques Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, in *Writing and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2008), pp. 351-370 (p. 361).

⁶⁶ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 136, my emphasis. It is important to note here the significance of Fludd *giving* his name to the novel, like a gift, because such gestures link Mantel’s texts together, as articulated in the conclusion of my thesis.

⁶⁷ ‘Structure, Sign and Play’, p. 365.

⁶⁸ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 141.

a process of centring, or what Stuart Hall might describe as ‘tucking in’.⁶⁹ In terms of Derrida’s ‘Ellipsis’ though, the article is functioning in a particular way as a text, which is related to how its centre is both established and perceived within it.

The first paragraph presents the mysterious demonic male figure as the centre of each of the novels. As these characters are represented as humorous, they work to spearhead the comic gothic, which then becomes the centre of the article itself. This is significant in relation to Derrida’s commentary on the sign, the centre and play in ‘Ellipsis’:

As soon as a sign emerges, it begins by repeating itself [...] The grapheme, repeating itself in this fashion, thus has neither natural site nor natural center. But did it ever lose them? [...] Can one not affirm the nonreferral to the center, rather than bemoan the absence of the center? Why would one mourn for the center? Is not the center, the absence of play and difference, another name for death? The death which reassures and appeases, but also, with its hole, creates anguish and puts at stake?⁷⁰

Reading Horner and Zlosnik’s article elliptically, in order to both deconstruct it and promote the possibilities of this approach, suggests that it orbits the comic gothic as a lack or fault, unable to ‘master’ it. This exposes it as a dangerous hole and, as established by Nancy’s response, it is the anxious desire of the *book* to try and insinuate itself into this hole in the *text*. Derrida draws a distinction between ‘book’ and ‘text’ in the first paragraph of ‘Ellipsis’ – ‘on the one hand the closure of the book, and on the other the opening of the text’. He writes of discerning writing in this division and it is my understanding that the *book* signifies mastery, whereas the *text* lacks any centre guarded from play and offers instead an opening rather than a closure. In terms of “‘Releasing Spirit from Matter””, it is an ‘article’ in that it appears in an academic journal written by established authors with an argument, that is, a perceived *centre*. However, it functions as a text, opening up the possibilities of the secrets of its own dangerous hole.

Derrida’s point concerning the ‘grapheme’ is that the sign only refers to other signs. There is no knowable referent that exists outside of this relationship, ‘neither natural site nor natural centre’ that is not subject to play. He advocates that this should be affirmed rather than bemoaned because to arrest the centre is ‘another name for death’. This is two-fold since to

⁶⁹ Stuart Hall, ‘Race: The Floating Signifier’, Media Education Foundation, 1996. The work of Hall shadows the thesis, emerging into the light of chapters five and six on the representation of race in Mantel’s corpus.

⁷⁰ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 374.

elevate the centre as the origin or locus of meaning can only disappoint because any centre collapses under such scrutiny, leading to a mourning for that which has never been present. Understanding the centre within any structure is fundamentally paradoxical. As Derrida writes in ‘Structure, Sign and Play’, at the centre of a structure the substitution of contents is forbidden: ‘Thus it has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality’.⁷¹ The mourning I refer to is expressed as a grief for the dead centre, which being dead is now ‘mastered’ and as Derrida suggests, this status ‘reassures and appeases, but also, with its hole, creates anguish’. The *dangerous* hole is ultimately the tease or temptation of the text, which so long as it remains a text will also remain elusive, an idea that will be explored in later chapters of this thesis in terms of Derrida’s thoughts in ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ (2004).

Consequently, this is how the grief unfolds in Horner and Zlosnik’s article: first the comic gothic is both established, and perceived, as the centre of the article in response to the problematic ‘missing’ gothic architecture. Yet it is understood primarily in opposition to serious gothic, which it playfully undermines. This leads to instability – what *is* comic gothic? Thus, the anxious desire of the article is to try and insinuate itself into this hole in the text, to remove play and difference from the centre, to master it, and, as Derrida writes, however reassuring this movement is – it ultimately ‘creates anguish’. This results in what I have already described as ‘systematic categorisation’. For example, during the analysis of *Eastwick*, the following insinuation occurs: ‘In person, Darryl carries many of the marks of a demonic identity (hairy hands, an icy touch, cold semen and, in the movie, a remarkable resemblance to Jack Nicholson)’.⁷² The flippancy here masks an anxiety to control Darryl – as the centre of the novel, and therefore ‘natural site’ of the comic gothic – by listing the ‘demonic’ features that bolster this approach while omitting those that might challenge it. He is a demon, a trickster and an alchemist, but the article limits the potential of these signs by establishing and applying them as categories with clear boundaries and ‘a long tradition’ behind each.⁷³ Significantly, Derrida omits the long tradition of ellipsis, even failing ‘to make explicit the meaning of this word’. As Nancy then continues – ‘this, together with a whole

⁷¹ This parallels Derrida’s thoughts in the film *Ghost Dance* (1983) that a ghost is the memory of something that has never been present. I will discuss this connection further in terms of *Beyond Black*, the body and the *revenant* in the third chapter of the thesis.

⁷² Horner and Zlosnik, p. 140.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

structural, historical, rhetorical, and literary analogy of ellipsis and ellipses, has itself been subject to an ellipsis'.⁷⁴ Derrida does not seek meaning through categories, but the argument is not so easy-going in Horner and Zlosnik's article and its definitions bar play.

Alchemy in particular is historically and temporally located 'in the late middle ages' in "Releasing Spirit from Matter" and then categorically applied to the novels:⁷⁵

Alchemists sought transmutation of various kinds: chemical transformations (most famously base metal into gold); physiological changes (for the better); reversal of the ageing process; or even *the substitution of a supernatural existence for an earthly one*.⁷⁶

This historical lens may work thematically for *Ballad* and *Eastwick*, perhaps; however, the alchemy in *Fludd* works more obliquely. The text openly resists categorisation or any model of systematised expression, thereby enacting a pre-Enlightenment process of understanding *reached outside of reason*. From this point of view, the alchemical process in *Fludd* is not a comment on the novel's themes, but on its writing, its tone, and deconstruction as an on-going renewal – that is, as truly liberating rather than destructive, never merely signifying the completion implied by *dissolved* boundaries. Moreover, all Mantel's texts experiment with substitution, which allows for a reading that emphasises Derrida's understanding of language as a finite field with the possibility for infinite substitutions (play). These substitutions also parallel the idea that alchemy in *Fludd* presents a challenge to philosophical theories of immanence, or that objects possess an *essence* emanating outwards that is both definite and defining.⁷⁷ There is also a sense here that the text is doing one thing and saying something quite different. Derrida writes in 'Khōra' (the thought orbited by chapters three and four) of the play between text and theme, or 'between what is done and what is declared'.⁷⁸ This will help this chapter to expose the possibilities for the apparently 'Gothic' themes of repression and return as textual tones – or what is *done*. The implications of which will be followed up

⁷⁴ Nancy, pp. 185-186.

⁷⁵ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 140.

⁷⁶ Ibid, my emphasis.

⁷⁷ I will discuss this aspect of *Fludd* in more detail in chapter two. This is not, however, the only one of Mantel's novels that experiments with substitution. *Every day is mother's day* (1985) suggests substitutions are infinite and understood as unpredictable, reached outside or beyond reason. The exchange of Muriel's 'changeling' at the canal, for example, and the implications of the unexpected nature of the baby's return along with the notion of intruded upon chronology lend a pervasive uncertainty to this first novel and its sequel *Vacant Possession* (1986).

⁷⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'Khōra', in *On the Name*, trans. by David Wood, John P. Leavey, JR. and Ian McLeod and ed. by Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 89-127 (p. 119).

in chapter two where I will explode the distinction between content and tone in order to further unpack the gothic problematic. However, all these threads concerning differentiability, whether in terms of content, tone, or even silence, are always in fact manifestations of the ellipsis. I cite the third thesis epigraph taken from my interview with Mantel to ‘confirm’ that ‘even though the ellipsis may not be present on the page, it’s still... *it goes on in the reader’s mind*’.⁷⁹

Horner and Zlosnik’s article has already presented breached boundaries as ‘liberating rather than destructive’, however this contradicts its subsequent exploration of compromised binaries, which in terms of *Eastwick* are described as ‘irreverent and anarchic dissolution’.⁸⁰ Van Horne as ‘quasi-parodic’ facilitator works to dissolve the boundaries between masculine and feminine, good and evil, life and death, devil and God.⁸¹ It is this view of play as complete dissolution that drives the need for categorisation. Play emerges as a result, or effect, of the eluded centre, but Horner and Zlosnik’s article attempts to finalise and ground such exchange in terms of dissolution – death, absence or mastery. Moreover, identifying the trace of the other in the self-same does not actually *dissolve* the binary at all. If anything the dissolution would lead to the meaninglessness often associated with deconstruction as it is popularly understood outside the field of critical theory. It is not dissolving the binary that is necessary, but instead questioning what it by necessity assumes and what is communicated within that assumption. As mentioned earlier, the use of dissolution is also problematic because if the boundary between devil and God is removed, leaving only one category, then the idea of devil/God becomes ‘menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down’.⁸² The naïvety of the article is the result of a misunderstanding of Derrida’s thought. This is illustrated by the rather surprising combination of his position (as advocator of ontotheology) with the theologian Don Cupitt (who wrote *After God: The Future of Religion*):

⁷⁹ Hilary Mantel and Eileen J. Pollard, ‘In Conversation’, 3 September 2012, Burleigh Salterton, UK. Please see Epigraph, p. 7 and Appendix Two, p. 226. I will thoroughly explore (and explode) the problematic of such an *authorial* confirmation in chapter four.

⁸⁰ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 142. This dissolution is reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of carnival, which I will develop in chapter three through exploring the problematic body in *Beyond Black*. For further discussion see ‘The Grotesque Image of the Body and Its Sources’, in *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 303-367.

⁸¹ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 141.

⁸² ‘Structure, Sign and Play’, p. 361.

Taking up the Derridean position that there is nothing outside language, Cupitt concludes that the word 'God' has no objective referent. Similarly, at the heart of Updike's novel is an engagement with the nature of The Word and the word (it is no coincidence that the paper Sukie writes for is entitled *The Word* and that Clyde Gabriel thinks of language as 'the curse, that took us out of Eden'). Arguing that orthodox religious belief remains trapped within the social conditions of the past and (inevitably) within language⁸³

God has no objective referent. God (capitalised) is a sign that begins by repeating itself and in terms of ellipsis has neither natural site nor natural centre. Presented as central to religion, God provides a means to deconstruct religious structures because God simultaneously occupies the centre while also transcending it. This combination of immanence, or an essence emanating outwards, alongside transcendence, creates a paradox. However, deconstruction does not resolve or *dissolve* the paradox of the position of God. It is a process not a conclusion, working to highlight the 'eccentricity' of the centre, any centre, God being the most contentious. For example, the statement – 'The God in whom you do not believe does not exist' – still places God at the centre, or rather the denial affirms the denied idea as in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche.⁸⁴ Derrida writes that the ellipsis marks a return to the book that 'announces the form of the eternal return'.⁸⁵ This notion of eternal recurrence underlies Derrida's *revenant* in both *Specters of Marx* and *Ghost Dance* (1983) and is indebted to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1896).

Yet there is a detectable emphasis on meaningful return in Horner and Zlosnik's article. "Releasing Spirit from Matter" describes Dougal Douglas in *Ballad* as 'forcing [other characters] by his anarchic presence to look again at themselves and their lives'. This suggestion 'to look again' is not merely a *theme* in Mantel's writing though, which seems to be the primary emphasis within this gothic criticism. Instead 'to look again' in *Fludd*, for example, is a means of exposing the play of the text. Horner and Zlosnik's article considers the tragedies of *Ballad* as 'narrated with a detachment that denies pity or fear to the reader', yet does not follow this observation up. In both *Fludd* and *Beyond Black* (2005), Mantel's most 'gothic' novels, the detached narrators work to alienate because sentences like – 'Pity Colette, who had to transcribe all this' – return the reader to the moment prior to reading the

⁸³ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 143.

⁸⁴ 'I love him who chastises his God because he loves his God: for he must perish by the anger of his God', see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 45.

⁸⁵ 'Ellipsis', p. 373.

line forcing a re-evaluation of the narrator's position, and what their intent effaces.⁸⁶ It is my contention that such analysis can be understood in terms of ellipsis, which I will now explore in terms of the *return* enacted by the narrative of the article.

Despite acknowledging that God has no referent, the article then privileges The Word (capitalised, presumably referring to theology) over the word, which cannot account for Derrida's position that no word has natural site, centre, grounding or privilege. The comments in brackets about *The Word* and Clyde Gabriel trivialise the subsequent point about language because these points remain undeveloped, lying paralysed in the text. This suggests that the earlier statement that Updike's 'comic treatment of the dissolution of boundaries in this novel does not have the effect of invoking deep anxiety in the way that serious Gothic does', fails to explain the anxious movement of the article to limit its play.⁸⁷ Why is *The Word* important? Why does Clyde Gabriel think of language as a curse, and why is this significant in terms of a word understood as without objective referent? Horner and Zlosnik's article proceeds with caution into deconstruction, which is why it ultimately misappropriates it through attempting to 'master' its utility. Thus, the most problematic sentence in the above quotation is the assertion that orthodox religious belief (or anything) remains trapped within language. The trap could be more accurately described as the article's anxiety to absent the centre (namely, comic gothic) from difference and play in order to reassure and appease through making it immobile. This tension will be developed in chapter two through understanding Derrida's thoughts on the friction between content and tone as a way to read ambiguity in *Fludd*. Again, Derrida's work considers the importance of considering the difference 'between what is done and what is declared' in any text.

Unlike with either the novels of Spark or Updike, the article goes on to ground *Fludd* immediately both in terms of Mantel's biography and her perceived geography. This '1950s world [...] is an only slightly caricatured version of Hilary Mantel's childhood home in that part of the Peak District in North West England which looks towards Manchester rather than Sheffield'.⁸⁸ However, this introduction limits the play between fact and fiction that *Fludd* initiates through early engagement of the reader's expectations of it as a text. For example, Horner and Zlosnik's article fails to interrogate the disjunction created by the reference to

⁸⁶ Hilary Mantel, *Beyond Black* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 128.

⁸⁷ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 142.

⁸⁸ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 143.

‘notorious murders in the vicinity’.⁸⁹ This is suggestive of the Moors Murders, which the article identifies as a factual mainstay. Yet ‘the vicinity’ is Fetherhoughton, which according to the ‘Note’ is a place ‘not to be found on a map’.⁹⁰ The text forges an ellipsis from both history and geography here; it orbits (as centre) the infamous British criminal case and the village in the Peak District, but commits to neither as a locus of meaning. Again, gothic criticism acknowledges the power of ‘unseen forces’, which I would argue parallels the ellipsis and Nancy’s recognition that ‘we are truly missing something, probably many things’.⁹¹ However, “‘Releasing Spirit from Matter”” and Spooner’s “‘[T]hat Eventless Realm””, which I will consider shortly, both attempt to master what is missing. These critical responses to Mantel’s work establish rivets (such as childhood, location and event) to build the fence of the known ever closer around the unknown – so as to fetishize it: ‘Quasi-Gothic bodies, *they are monstrous only around the edges*’ works to illustrate the creation of such a vacuum.⁹² Horner and Zlosnik’s article considers ‘older forms of belief and writing which blur the boundary between the world of the everyday senses and *the realm that lies beyond it*’.⁹³ This positions such a realm as transcendent and therefore ‘beyond’ the exchange of play and difference. It carves out yet another implied centre that directs and structures the argument by privileging the unseen as outside play when actually it *is* play; as Nancy writes ‘we might say, an ellipsis of meaning is *what makes the meaning*, and the *excess* of meaning’.⁹⁴

“‘Releasing Spirit from Matter”” trusts that *Fludd* is a book to be read superficially as operating to insinuate itself back into the dangerous hole of the text. The possibilities of the new curate identified as ‘Fludd’, for example, are reassured and appeased by ‘the note at the beginning of the novel’.⁹⁵ This is according to the article, which highlights the discrepancies between the historical Fludd and Mantel’s character only in order to ground discussion again through ‘the Gothic aspect of his initial appearance one dark stormy night’.⁹⁶ However, though the note *opens* the text it does not close its meaning. Although Horner and Zlosnik’s article describes this *appearance* as gothic, Fludd is actually *returning* because of the note

⁸⁹ Hilary Mantel, *Fludd* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 12.

⁹⁰ *Fludd*, n. p.

⁹¹ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 137 and Nancy, p. 186.

⁹² Horner and Zlosnik, p. 146.

⁹³ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 137.

⁹⁴ Nancy, p. 178.

⁹⁵ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 144.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

and his historical resonances. ‘Fludd’, as a signifier, harbours a precedent, an alchemist, and this meaning though not exclusive is interesting because of Derrida’s suggestion in *Ghost Dance* that ghosts always *return* rather than *appear*. This is also significant in terms of the preoccupation in this gothic criticism with apparition and the fetishized, yet appeased, realm that lies beyond. Chapter two of this thesis will read Fludd’s return alongside the opening of *Specters of Marx* in order to exceed the parameters of this framework. This exegesis will also illustrate that although Derrida does impose an agenda, his emphasis on play privileges no single reading of any text. The basis of such gothic-centred criticism upon an apparently grounded site (although these contemporary readings acknowledge such a ‘centre’ as missing) cannot allow for such freedom. Instead, as Derrida writes in ‘*Khōra*’, ‘such would be, then, the structure of an overprinting without a base’.⁹⁷ Analysing the novel will help develop how Horner and Zlosnik’s article describes Sister Philomena’s escape as Fludd ‘transform[ing] her *back* into her former self, Roisin O’Halloran’.⁹⁸ This is an elliptical rather than linear movement, as is Fludd’s ultimate disappearance since, according to Derrida, disappearing is fundamental to entering for a second time, and therefore to return.

‘A Word in Your Ear’: Voice and silence in the text

I will now consider the sociocultural construction of mediumship in Victoria Stewart’s analysis of *Beyond Black* as potentially trying to establish an origin or locus of control within Mantel’s novel in a different way. Unlike Horner and Zlosnik’s tripartite article, *Beyond Black* forms the core of Stewart’s discussion of ‘realist narrative aesthetics’ in contemporary novels about mediumship.⁹⁹ It considers many of the same themes as “‘Releasing Spirit from Matter’” but never once mentions ‘Gothicism’. A further departure is the framing of scrutinised boundaries within these texts as ‘under interrogation’ as opposed to in a process of dissolution.¹⁰⁰ Stewart’s essay questions the status and power of ‘the underlying assumptions of traditional narrative voice and narrative form’ and these ideas will help my elliptical reading of Mantel’s work.¹⁰¹ Although ‘A Word in Your Ear’ does not explicitly deconstruct the centre as a notional point of understanding or stability, the text skilfully discusses both the catalyst and implications of anxiety in terms of spiritualism, technology

⁹⁷ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 104.

⁹⁸ Horner and Zlosnik, p. 145.

⁹⁹ Victoria Stewart, ‘A Word in Your Ear: Mediumship and Subjectivity in Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black*’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 50 (2009), 293-312 (p. 294).

¹⁰⁰ Stewart, p. 299.

¹⁰¹ Stewart, p. 295.

and narrative. For example, through considering disorientating aspects of Liz Jensen's *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* (2004), Stewart's essay reflects on switches-in-perspective as having the following effect – 'it denies the reader *the traditional reliance* on a single or authoritative narrative voice and forces the reader to question *the origin of this reliance*'.¹⁰² Her essay, initially at least, resists such traditional reliance by interrogating it and raising a number of questions about subjectivity, technology and anxiety.

It is possible to read spiritualism as elliptical in Stewart's essay because it cannot be centred and even the medium only offers a point of exchange rather than stability. Moreover, the writing emphasises the untenable position of spiritualism next to science (a privileged and 'legitimate' discourse) and its fraught relationship with belief.¹⁰³ The whole essay resists mastering spiritualism; although clearly socially and historically informed it does not categorise or list characteristics in the manner of Horner and Zlosnik's article:

The war was a historical catastrophe for which few could have prepared themselves, and the turn to spiritualism identified by [Jay] Winter is testament to spiritualism's ability *to provide a point of coherence for fractured and traumatized communities*.¹⁰⁴

Stewart's essay identifies the desire for coherence, but never suggests spiritualism actually achieves it. It makes a connection between the rise of spiritualism/widespread social anxiety post-World War One and similar practices becoming popular *now* 'as ways of making sense of the social changes that seemed to obviate them in the first place'.¹⁰⁵ The essay is very resistant to authorised categories, and cautious in applying its own. For example, it demonstrates the initial suggestion of a crossover between "'deviant" phenomena' and science, as ultimately established by the parameters of 'legitimate' sciences, such as physics and psychology.¹⁰⁶

An agenda does begin to emerge further into the essay concerning voice, and the possibility that the current problem with narrative aesthetics is that they are too obviously informed by a film studies discourse. For example, 'A Word in Your Ear' challenges the adoption of the word 'focalization' (through citing Nicholas Royle's *The Uncanny*, published 2003) since it

¹⁰² Stewart, p. 301, my emphases.

¹⁰³ Stewart, p. 296.

¹⁰⁴ Stewart, p. 293, my emphasis.

¹⁰⁵ Stewart, p. 294.

¹⁰⁶ Stewart, p. 296.

harbours primarily visual associations and implies an ‘omniscient viewpoint from which everything can be seen’.¹⁰⁷ ‘A Word in Your Ear’ argues that the novels under discussion present ‘an auditory rather than visual model’ that ‘disturbs this omniscience’ and the essay thus presents itself as a challenge to the established narrative paradigm.¹⁰⁸ However, I would argue that it is the privileging of a centre, or notional arrival, within traditional understandings of narrative – what the essay describes elsewhere as the implied reader’s desire ‘to hear a narrative completed’ – that is the problem within ‘narratology’, rather than the misappropriation of a films studies discourse.¹⁰⁹ I approach this tension differently because exchanging the auditory for the visual does not address the difficulty; the only way to do that is to consider these novels as *texts*.¹¹⁰

Stewart’s essay tends to privilege ‘historically focused accounts’ of telepathy and mediumship as a way to *explain* the fictional texts under scrutiny.¹¹¹ Thus, there is a grouping of these novels in terms of the historical moment of their production as a potential loci for meanings – ‘the turn of the millennium saw a small but significant cluster of novels engaging with spiritualism in often complex ways’.¹¹² Although historically located, the suggestion that these practices – mediumship, telepathy, the occult – ‘have again been seized on as ways of making sense of the social changes that seemed to obviate them in the first place’ – obscures what, if anything, is ‘seized’ while highlighting the action, the *seizure*, or ellipsis.¹¹³ And it is this emphasis on how the text *operates* rather than establishing definitively what it *means* that makes Stewart’s essay so useful, and open. For example, it also introduces the relationship between spiritualism and technology, particularly communications technology, in a way that questions any intuitive distinction:

Throughout its history, mediumship has been compared with contemporary auditory and communications technology [...] In the case of mediumship, technologies like the gramophone and the telephone provide paradigms for the separation of the voice from

¹⁰⁷ Stewart, p. 301.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Stewart, p. 298.

¹¹⁰ For further discussion of auditory sense see: Jacques Derrida, ‘Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name’, in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, transference, translation*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 1-38 and Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Listening’, in *Listening*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), pp. 1-43.

¹¹¹ Stewart, p. 294.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Stewart, p. 294.

the body, and they illustrate ways in which communication can happen in the absence of the other party.¹¹⁴

It is ironic then that, following on from such uncertainty, the next point in Stewart's essay highlights, and perhaps even champions, Steven Connor's exploration of voice in the nineteenth century:

[t]he voice becomes simultaneously the sign of a person's self-belonging, as that which cleaves most closely to and emanates most unfalsifiably from the self, and, in its detachability from the person, the sign of the self's new mediation through objects¹¹⁵

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida famously deconstructs the speech/writing opposition.¹¹⁶ In particular, the privileging of speech, or the implied immediacy and 'full presence' of speech, throughout the western philosophical tradition. Stewart's essay appears to embrace the possibilities of the nineteenth-century contradiction that the voice is *immanent* yet detachable, and interpret voice in terms of writing, specifically narrative voice. However, it fails to resolve an underlying preoccupation with the aural, as demonstrated by this sentence:

These more recent technologies, like the telephone, seem to allow disembodied communication, albeit in textual rather than aural form [...] The voices transcribed in these dialogues [in *Beyond Black*] are bodiless, as all voices are once articulation occurs.¹¹⁷

This quotation concerns the use of transcripts in *Beyond Black*, which provide a very interesting example of the relationship between ghosts and technology in the novel that I will explore in my third chapter. My difficulty is that this is a *text* and everything is necessarily disembodied, or eclipsed – the meaning arising from the (flawed) place of exchange, the ex-centric and eccentric centre, which is playful. Thus, the body itself is also a questionable site

¹¹⁴ Stewart, p. 299. This quotation is reminiscent of a clip from Ken McMullen's film *Ghost Dance*. It stars Derrida playing 'Jacques Derrida', as whom he articulates ideas concerning the art of cinema, in particular cinema as the 'art of allowing ghosts to come back' (Cornerstone Media, 1983). He considers the *certainty* that underlies contemporary developments in technology and telecommunication (which have continued even more rapidly since Derrida's death) actually *enhances* the power of ghosts and 'their ability to haunt us'. In the film, Derrida suggests that ghosts return through the exchange between the art of cinema and psychoanalysis because of the importance of images to evoke phantoms. This connects with the operation of the *trace* in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' and is underlined by Derrida's own equation: Cinema plus psychoanalysis equals the Science of Ghosts.

¹¹⁵ Cited Stewart, p. 299.

¹¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Linguistics and Grammatology', in *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 27-73.

¹¹⁷ Stewart, pp. 299-300.

in the above quotation; though presented as a point of origin for the voice, Stewart's essay seems to unsettle this dynamic by presenting all voices as 'bodiless'. This has the effect of reversing the typical privilege and placing *presence* in the voice instead of the body.

Derrida thinks of the body as a ruptured site and it is worth exploring the complexity of the embodied/disembodied relationship in *Beyond Black* a little further.¹¹⁸ This is a novel that constantly interrogates the body as a secure foothold, which is also what the transcripts are working to challenge in part. However, there is another dimension to the problematic body; in *Ghost Dance* Derrida describes a ghost as the memory of something that has never been present. This is significant in terms of Alison's position as medium, or mouthpiece, and her attempts to gain some 'purchase' on the events of her childhood. These ghosts constitute a (re)membering of the (dis)embodied; characters are quite literally dismembered/disembodied in this novel, and the ghosts signify a memory of something never present, since neither the bodied nor the disembodied can ever be understood as full presence. The explanation – 'Alison's deprived childhood, hinting at an originary trauma for which her "gift" cannot compensate her' – itself exorcises something ghostly since the gift is an act of giving up, orbiting the originary trauma.¹¹⁹ Significantly, Alison cannot remember this origin, which also helps undermine its determinacy because it never occupies even a notional position of full presence in the text. It is a skirted centre, or ellipsis:

The details of what was done to her are never made explicit [...] Although Alison receives information about the lives of many individuals, this trauma in her own childhood remains veiled and obscure, revealed not by an effort of memory on her part but by figures from her past who are now "on the other side"¹²⁰

Moreover, it is my contention that by defining voice in this way and conflating the diverse uses of 'voice' in *Beyond Black* – medium as ventriloquist, transcripts as recorded 'voice', suppressed voices – Stewart's essay is failing to explore this playfulness as an effect of *writing*, rather than speech. And by highlighting the aspects of these novels about mediumship that 'defamiliarize' through using voice, the essay concludes by promoting an auditory rather than a textual reading practice.¹²¹ Again, it seems significant that Derrida

¹¹⁸ For further discussion see 'The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 9-32 (p. 15).

¹¹⁹ Stewart, p. 294.

¹²⁰ Stewart, p. 303.

¹²¹ Stewart, p. 301.

questioned the position of speech as ‘full presence’ because if it is understood in those terms it represents a totality that is immovable, which is something no criticism should strive for.

Stewart’s essay considers the medium as placing narrative omniscience under scrutiny, which will be explored in chapter three through narrative voice, detachment and the effect or movement this prompts in *Beyond Black*. I appreciate this interrogative approach or scrutiny rather than a dissolution (or homogenisation) of categories, which erodes meaning. However, ‘A Word in Your Ear’ frames its analysis either in terms of a historically informed questioning of authority and authenticity (or a postmodern engagement with it) rather than considering such authorisation as a discursive process. Moreover, although the word ‘postmodern’ appears more than once in the essay, its application remains unclear. The questions raised about the privileged body, speech and writing seem more pertinent to Derrida’s philosophy of deconstruction, though Stewart’s work remains both more hesitant and more grounded. As stated in the introduction, I include this essay sandwiched between two pieces of gothic criticism for several reasons. Primarily the comparison illustrates that what I have called ‘uncertainty’ in Mantel’s writing does not merely conform to a prescriptive gothicism. Stewart’s essay, for example, discusses the uncanny without linking it to one specific genre. And although this uncertainty does generate some anxiety within ‘A Word in Your Ear’, the playfulness of the fiction, if not delighted in, is definitely reiterated.

Yet there is a reliance (I use the word deliberately because the text highlights a *reliance* on ‘traditional’ narrative forms) on history, or a notion of history, as a touchstone or ‘guarantee’ for meaning. Thus, Stewart’s essay considers the inclusion in Mantel’s novel of the death of Princess Diana in 1997. It immediately explores the problem of comparing the social impact of this event with World War One, which is how the essay introduces the initial rise of spiritualism – a focal point. Then ‘A Word in Your Ear’ refers to Ross McKibbin’s ‘Mass-Observation in the Mall’, which appears in *After Diana: Irreverent Elegies* (1998). Stewart’s text argues that McKibbin’s work ‘makes sense of the public response to Diana’s death’ so that her essay can then move on to process representations of Diana, grief and mourning in *Beyond Black*.¹²²

Placing the reaction to Diana’s death in this framework means that, although it can still be dismissed as sentimental or retrogressive, the public response is given a

¹²² Stewart, p. 305.

historical aspect. It did not come from nowhere; rather, it can be seen as the latest expression of a feeling of helplessness that persists despite improvements in material prosperity.¹²³

This quotation encapsulates both the essay's anxiety and its attempts to combat it. The text presents an understanding of the reaction to Diana's death via its precedents, that is, 'It did not come from nowhere.' And, to an extent, this is also how the text reads *Beyond Black*; it 'is given a historical aspect'.¹²⁴ The historical aspect is a stabiliser in this context, yet despite this 'framework', the essay returns to 'a feeling of helplessness' and the sense that these mediums 'reassert the fact that the individual is at the mercy of *ineluctable historical forces*'.¹²⁵ Describing this (potentially decentred, ineluctable) force as historical is still attempting to ground it. More interesting though, when the essay then returns to a final point about the voice, the medium as ventriloquist and preoccupation with speech, it offers only this conclusion, or ellipsis: 'But although the medium might appear to make authoritative pronouncements, he or she is always spoken *through*, never completely mastering the utterance'.¹²⁶ This is more a statement about textual operation, the text as an *opening* not a closing, which is why the historically informed 'A Word in Your Ear' is less prescriptive than "'Releasing Spirit from Matter'". I would argue that this is because history has less to prove (as an established 'origin' for meaning) than gothicism. This concludes my analysis of Stewart's essay. However, I will utilise its flexibility to assist my reading of *Beyond Black* in the third chapter of this thesis.

“[T]hat Eventless Realm”’: What you see was *never* what you got

The final current piece of secondary material available on Mantel's writing is also an exploration of *Beyond Black*. Like Horner and Zlosnik's article, Spooner's "'[T]hat Eventless Realm'" is similarly situated within 'Gothicism' appearing as a chapter in *London Gothic: Place, Space and the Gothic Imagination*. It is perhaps worth considering whether such repetition (of the word 'Gothic') is symptomatic of anxiety in the same way as the classification of the 'Gothic body', 'Gothic victim' and 'Gothic pile' in "'Releasing Spirit from Matter'". Moreover, I will level another and potentially more damaging criticism at

¹²³ Stewart, p. 306.

¹²⁴ This is not necessarily how Mantel's own writing presents history, for example, in the preface to *A Place of Greater Safety* as cited later in this chapter.

¹²⁵ Stewart, p. 306.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, original emphasis.

such posturing, which concerns its apparent challenge to positions of privilege as actually *supporting* the status quo. Having come from a position of being marginalised, the ‘Gothic’ is now a mainstream recognised genre and ‘mode’ of critical analysis, able to justify postgraduate courses dedicated solely to the study of *gothic* texts. It is a field dominated by the work of white academics that either exoticise or simply ignore questions of race.¹²⁷ I introduce this point because of the way Spooner’s chapter in *London Gothic* approaches the problematic representation of race in *Beyond Black*; an absence with broader implications that I will return to in chapters five and six:

This spiritual malaise linked to loss of historical narratives is specifically that of the *white middle classes*; Alison doesn’t work the inner cities, partly because the number of spirits becomes too much to bear and partly because *the convoluted spirit beliefs of the multicultural populations give her a headache*.¹²⁸

“‘[T]hat Eventless Realm’” is authored by a white woman, as is ‘A Word in Your Ear’, which likewise avoids *any* engagement with questions of race in *Beyond Black*. These silences in Mantel’s novel are interesting representations to unpack, and the ellipsis will prove a pertinent tool to do this because of what *persists* through omission or ignorance in the text.

The opening of Spooner’s chapter is reminiscent of early justifications in Horner and Zlosnik’s article: ‘The M25, the orbital motorway surrounding Greater London, may not seem a likely site for the Gothic’.¹²⁹ Thus, this first paragraph is one of concern since the motorway does not locate either the gothic or the novel. *Beyond Black* begins and ends with the M25, negotiates it, orbits it, though never *masters* it: ‘The car flees across the junctions, and the space the road encloses is the space inside her: the arena of combat, the wasteland, the place of civil strife behind her ribs’.¹³⁰ This quotation from the brief, disorienting first chapter of *Beyond Black* is apparently from Alison’s perspective although the two figures described within the enclosed space of the car remain nameless. It is perhaps a tarot reading, which is an interpretation I shall return to as part of my analysis of the novel in chapter three.

¹²⁷ There is material available on representations of race within gothicism, for example in Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, ‘Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic: The Caribbean’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 229-257. However, my point is that there is a general quietness concerning non-white representation within the (Eurocentric) gothic field and a *marked silence* in the explored criticism when it comes to any discussion of race in Mantel’s work.

¹²⁸ Spooner, p. 84, my emphases.

¹²⁹ Spooner, p. 80. Gothicism insists on relocating ‘Gothic’ in non-gothic spaces, which again leads to questions about the specificities of the genre.

¹³⁰ *Beyond Black*, p. 2.

The movement of the car traces the figure of the ellipse, marking a space for exchange, or substitution.¹³¹ So the M25 is an unlikely site for the gothic, yet “[T]hat Eventless Realm” works to ground the motorway historically and geographically – ‘117 miles long and spanning twelve lanes [...]’.¹³² Significantly, this iconic London motorway is defined by the constant exchange within its ‘centre’, which is also displaced as a centre since it is only ‘central’ because the M25 consistently does not engage with it (or is distanced from it through constant expansion). Moreover, the movement of the cars enact an orbit of this centre in which there is ‘nothing’ except endless exchange; it is *ellipsis*. It is important then that Spooner’s first paragraph ends very similarly to the first paragraph of Horner and Zlosnik’s article, by establishing a centre as a reference point and making a clear connection between this focus and a more stabilised idea of the ‘Gothic’. Thus, in Spooner’s text, the M25 is ‘an enormous bypass, directing an incessant stream of congested traffic away from the historically layered, labyrinthine urban centre and its more conventionally Gothic geographies’.¹³³

“[T]hat Eventless Realm” briefly introduces Iain Sinclair’s psycho-geographical exploration of the M25 in *London Orbital: A Walk Around the M25* (2003) (notably, orbit is necessarily elliptical rather than circular). Spooner’s writing considers ‘his deconstruction of the masculine architecture of the city’s hinterlands’; however, it is easier to deconstruct (in Derrida’s application of the term) her argument’s representation of Sinclair’s seeming deconstruction, which is, perhaps deliberately, incoherent:¹³⁴

Sinclair captures the M25’s ambivalence: the point where London stops being London is the point where the city’s ghostliness is exhausted, comes to an end; but also the point where ghosts are made visible, are released.¹³⁵

There seems to be some confusion here over boundaries and the attempts to dispense with them are thwarted. I would argue this is the anxious *book* trying to fill the dangerous hole created by the *text*. The point where London stops being London is the dangerous hole,

¹³¹ This is reminiscent of the flux represented by Jacques Lacan’s ‘graphe complet’, or understanding desire as elliptical. For further details see *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 817. At first glance it might seem reductive to read Lacan’s ‘Complete Graph’ of desire as a motorway; ultimately though there are few clearer ways of approaching this bizarre metaphorical diagram.

¹³² Spooner, p. 80.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Spooner, p. 81.

¹³⁵ Spooner, p. 80.

anything could occur or be substituted within this void, so what does the book place there? The visible ghost, which is released, fails to *fill* the hole – according to Derrida’s thought the text itself constitutes a skirting of this gap so without the hole the text could not operate – but there is an attempt to master it, and this is important in terms of the way Spooner’s chapter reads *Beyond Black*. Again, similarly to Horner and Zlosnik’s article, *Beyond Black* is immediately lassoed here by ‘Gothicism’ (capital ‘g’) under the guise that the text itself ‘draws most overtly’ on a conventional gothic vocabulary.¹³⁶ Yet there is uncertainty as this nonplace remains an unlikely *site* for the gothic, so it is difficult to (violently) establish this beyond all doubt. Consequently, the uncertainty, the anxiety, the play within the text is quickly categorised (and dismissed) as satire: ‘Mantel ultimately presents a very different vision of the M25; a comic and partially affirmative one that accommodates the domestic, interior and private’.¹³⁷ Of course, Mantel’s writing addresses feminine concerns – the body, the inside, domesticity – whereas Sinclair’s book explores ‘the world outside’, at least according to “[T]hat Eventless Realm”.¹³⁸ This is another way of carving up the novel into manageable chunks; however, *Beyond Black* is not a divisible text.

Spooner’s chapter raises some very interesting points about history that recur in several of Mantel’s texts – history as unstable, partial, constructed yet also necessary, impossible to ignore and fascinating. For example, Mantel obsessively researched *Wolf Hall*, as evidenced by her pride on the *Culture Show*, which reveals folders and folders of notes about life during Henry VIII’s reign; yet this is not where the enquiry ends. The preface to *A Place of Greater Safety*, Mantel’s first historical (and completed) novel suggests a healthy scepticism: ‘I purvey my own version of events, but facts change according to your viewpoint’.¹³⁹ Spooner’s chapter quotes Mantel on history in ‘Revering the Gone-before’, a short essay published at the back of the Harper Perennial paperback edition of *Beyond Black* (amongst others):

The thing that frightens me most is the confiscation of history. If you don’t own the past, and you can’t speak up for it, your past can be stolen and falsified, it can be changed behind you.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Spooner, p. 80.

¹³⁷ Spooner, p. 81.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ *A Place of Greater Safety*, p. ix.

¹⁴⁰ Cited Spooner, p. 84. This ‘confiscation’ offers an economic metaphor that echoes and reflects Mantel’s use of the word ‘purchase’ to question the problematic past in the Runcie interview.

There seems little fear of such theft of history in her texts though, merely delight – writing is *the* medium of this uncertainty after all and it is, and always will be, ‘changed behind you’. Spooner’s chapter suggests, however, that the key question posed by *Beyond Black* is about *contemporary* ‘historylessness’ just prior to the death of Princess Diana. ‘Historylessness’ is a word I coin in response to Stewart’s essay, though it remains useful here.¹⁴¹ ‘If society has no interest in its personal and collective past, then in what form can that past return?’¹⁴² It is my contention that Spooner’s work is unable to fully interrogate this question, which turns on an accepted (western) notion of history, or time, as linear and sequential, mainly because it is inhibited by a gothic framework. It is preoccupied with *locating* ghosts, which have ‘traditionally’ (meaning within gothic criticism) ‘been associated with locations with a dense historical charge’ – castles, abbeys, stately homes, again this is about mastery, and origin.¹⁴³ Spooner’s text acknowledges that ghosts ‘return’ rather than appear, but I argue that coming back is not ‘the same thing’. Entering for a second time is *necessarily* different. It does not matter whether the past is carefully catalogued or not, in this case, since the ghost of a person is *not the same* as the person, their return, or repetition, is *always* going to be different. Thus, there is no absolute necessity to grasp the ‘first time’ or origin, in fact, it is impossible anyway.

This is why Derrida’s description of a ghost as the memory of something that has never been present is so useful in terms of *Beyond Black*, and also makes sense. The ghost is like a memory, of course, because it is intangible, fragile, yet personal. It is uncannily evocative of something that was apparently present once, but it is *not the same*, because that thing never occupied a position of full presence in the first place – it was *always* ruptured, or eroded. Derrida and Nancy both deconstruct the body as a privileged and apparent site of wholeness. However, the ghost is also different because it is a repetition, which by definition is different from any perceived first appearance. It is the sign, it *begins* by repeating itself, and each repetition though relative marks a departure. However, it becomes apparent further into “[T]hat Eventless Realm” why locating ghosts, in terms of both historical and geographical discourse, is so important for the argument, demonstrating a distinct lack of transparency to the chapter. The text identifies the ghost story ‘as a specific literary form’ coinciding with the

¹⁴¹ ‘Nature is being ravaged to build the new houses’, she writes ‘and the community that forms there is inorganic and historyless – the estate has nautical motifs and street names, although it is situated miles inland’ (Stewart, p. 297). Thus, it is decentred.

¹⁴² Spooner, p. 81.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

rise of spiritualism and the development of folklore studies.¹⁴⁴ Then via an emphasis on location it makes the ghost story synonymous with the gothic:

The ghost story was marked by a tendency to relocate the exotic European settings of earlier Gothic novels to a British landscape characterized as remotely rural, or to historic urban centres such as London, Edinburgh and Dublin¹⁴⁵

The agenda here seems to be foregrounding what Marc Augé has termed ‘non-places’.¹⁴⁶ With reference to Augé’s work, Spooner’s chapter suggests that representations of these spaces in *Beyond Black* challenge the long tradition of gothicism, yet also advance and therefore *belong* to it:

By relocating the historically rooted urban and rural ghosts of folklore and Gothic narrative into the suggestive non-place of the outer suburbs, Mantel blocks, or reverses, the traditional function of hauntings.¹⁴⁷

However, these ‘rooted’ ghosts, like Augé’s ‘non-places’, presume a point of departure or origin – the ghost, the place – that is beyond reproach, discussion, or play. It is my contention that *Beyond Black* is a text that experiments with the notion of full presence; so, for example, it questions the stability of a linear idea of history though does not necessarily endorse its complete ‘erasure’.¹⁴⁸ “[T]hat Eventless Realm” also argues – ‘Non-places are liberating to Alison; they enable her to escape the weight of histories not her own’ – which indicates a tension (or anxiety) in the chapter between history as erased and history as *heavy*, emerging as a potential double focus.¹⁴⁹

Moreover, *Beyond Black* emphasises both the agency and the physicality of ghosts, which prompts this reaction in Spooner’s chapter – ‘the spirits of the dead she encounters have an all too material presence’.¹⁵⁰ The anxiety of the chapter to arrive at ‘the answer’ limits its potential to draw out the promising contradictions in Mantel’s novel, which like all her writing resists categorisation. Spooner’s text then considers:

¹⁴⁴ Spooner, p. 82.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ For further discussion see Marc Augé, ‘The Near and the Elsewhere’, in *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super-modernity*, trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 7-41.

¹⁴⁷ Spooner, p. 83.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Spooner, p. 85.

¹⁵⁰ Spooner, p. 83.

The territory of Middle England is turned inside-out so that it is no longer middle as in central, or even as in average, but rather as in in-between – a kind of liminal zone or place of passage.¹⁵¹

This has the same effect as the process of ‘dissolution’ in Horner and Zlosnik’s article; it engenders the very meaninglessness it seeks to avoid. Middle England is exposed as vulnerable, it is not central, it has collapsed under the strain; however, presenting it as a so-called ‘liminal zone’ is again privileging it and placing it beyond play. It is a position of paralysis rather than exchange, unlike the ellipsis that skirts the edge though ignores any attempt to contain or hold. Instead of these ‘liminal’ zones or nonplaces becoming somewhere where anything is possible, anything can happen, they are positions *where nothing happens at all* in order to engineer a feeling of safety – and to stabilise Spooner’s chapter. Her work also entertains the idea that geographical and historical *origins* ‘might once have delivered identity’.¹⁵² In a way, this might be what Derrida is suggesting when he argues in *Ghost Dance* that modern technology and communication actually *enhance* the power of ghosts and their ability to haunt us. Thus, for example, Augé’s ‘non-places’ of supermodernity and constructing them as *non-place*, works to undermine and unsettle the determinacy of *place* itself, as a by-product. Thus, in order to present nonplace as problematic, alienating, unfamiliar – place itself is privileged as safe, comforting, and familiar; it becomes a resting point, or centre, and unable to sustain this responsibility, collapses.

There is no ‘natural’ origin or point of reference, and Spooner’s chapter quotes a section of *Beyond Black* that highlights this modern cynicism for explanations:

It was not uncommon to find family memory so short, in these towns where nobody comes from, these south-eastern towns with their floating populations and their car parks where the centre should be. Nobody has roots here; and maybe they don’t want to acknowledge roots, or recall their grimy places of origin and their illiterate foremothers up north.¹⁵³

There is much at work in this quotation. First ‘these towns where nobody comes from’ signals an existence without origin, and places that are de-centred anyway – ‘their car parks

¹⁵¹ Spooner, p. 84.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *Beyond Black*, pp. 16-17.

where the centre should be'. It is a centre, but it is not fully present, it is in flux, or signifies a place of exchange. This is significant because of the status of the M25 in the novel as elliptical and mobile; again these implied cars, although parked are only temporarily so, they are not fixed or determined, in the way 'the centre *should be*'. Spooner's chapter suggests the importance of origin to 'deliver' identity and yet the above quotation is not hopeful in its representation of the 'grimy places' up north – centres of illiteracy and therefore uncertainty. There is never the suggestion in *Beyond Black* that once everything made perfect sense and then the modern world arrived and now it does not. It is much more along the lines that nothing ever made sense in the way people (post-Enlightenment) believed and the questions raised by modernity (the gaps exposed) illustrate that *it always was this way*, origins were always problematic and only worked if they were not pressurised.¹⁵⁴

In terms of Derrida's suggestion in *Ghost Dance* that our contemporary actually facilitates haunting, it is important to consider the use of Owen Davies' work on *The Haunted* (2009) in Spooner's chapter. The citation reads:

Owen Davies demonstrates how the historical knowledge of any given community determines the ghosts that it sees, with nineteenth and early twentieth-century ghosts, for example, almost always reflecting 'the popular histories that made up the Victorian school curriculum'.¹⁵⁵

What then do our contemporary ghosts 'look like'? For Derrida, it is all about the questioning of full presence, and the suspicion that what you see is not what you get. Telephonic communication for example and the processing of messages, in any number of senses, challenges notions of full presence through nonpresence (English translations of Derrida run the word non-presence *together*). Or rather, the ghost in the machine: 'For the majority of Alison's punters seeking ghostly communications, to be haunted is a solipsistic activity, a means of seeing their own lives reflected and confirmed'.¹⁵⁶ So this implied 'community' is seeking confirmation in uncertainty; the contemporary ghost therefore manifests as what maintains (un)stable binaries and that is what the technology of iPods, iPhones and

¹⁵⁴ There are numerous references in Mantel's writing to 'looking askance' or seeing from the tail of a character's eye, especially in *A Change of Climate* (1994). The shape of the eye itself is elliptical, plus it has *two* centres, the pupil (a dangerous hole) and the iris. This links to my exploration of perspective in chapters five and six in terms of Slavoj Žižek's *The Parallax View* (2006) that I also believe to be elliptically informed.

¹⁵⁵ Cited Spooner, p. 85.

¹⁵⁶ Spooner, p. 87.

telecommunication messages *exhibit* and are *based* upon.¹⁵⁷ There is the sense that there is no external referent and what maintains these relationships (between signs) is the ghost in the machine; for example, in *Beyond Black* the people in one audience ‘made faces for the camera even though there wasn’t one’.¹⁵⁸ These points will be developed in my analysis of *Beyond Black* and the problematic body as origin, read via Derrida’s thoughts on the *revenant* in chapter three.

‘[S]he is no writer of the Gothic’

One characteristic unites these three pieces of criticism, the lack of explicit commentary on Mantel’s writing. The nature of *Fludd* and *Beyond Black* as texts is something repeatedly eclipsed in the available material in a manner reminiscent of how punters react to Alison’s gifts as medium: ‘They could believe in AI, and not believe in her, both at once. Faced with the impossible, their minds like Colette’s, simply scuttled off in another direction’.¹⁵⁹ My conclusion here in light of these analyses is to endorse the Knox statement, cited as the epigraph to this chapter, Mantel is no writer of the ‘Gothic’; however, I will briefly consider this quotation’s fraught origins as a lead into my next chapter. Although ‘Giving Flesh to the “Wraiths of Violence”’ rejects the ‘Gothic’ commentary on Mantel’s writing, the text still occupies a tense position. I highlight this citation because the phrasing is so odd, ‘she is no [...]’ is reminiscent of Derrida’s desire for the affirmation that is not positive.¹⁶⁰ Yet this sense of negativity, perhaps inevitably, yields anxiety and having admonished one origin Knox’s work disappointingly resorts to seeking another – the author’s autobiography. Another point of contradiction is the persistence of the capital ‘g’, which suggests power even at the moment of redundancy. Worse still, unlike this chapter, ‘Giving Flesh to the “Wraiths of Violence”’ does not directly engage with the existing discourse on Mantel’s work that it deems so inadequate. There is a friction between the content and the tone – what is done and what is declared – which I will address in general terms through chapter two in order to continue my problematising of the gothic mandate on Mantel’s corpus.

¹⁵⁷ For further details see ‘Right of Inspection’, in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. by Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), pp. 31-40.

¹⁵⁸ *Beyond Black*, p. 320.

¹⁵⁹ *Beyond Black*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁰ ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 26.

Chapter Two 'That boring and exhausted paradigm, the gothic': Exploding the gothic as origin

The chapter epigraph is a quotation from Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1993).¹⁶¹ Though the context is a discussion of film, such boredom and exhaustion with the gothic paradigm are relevant to my reading of Mantel's fourth novel *Fludd*. My discussion of *Fludd* seeks to highlight the instabilities of critical 'Gothicism', as applied in the work of Horner, Zlosnik and Spooner, in order to demonstrate how its production of a safe reading of this text is not only 'boring', but potentially reductive. Leading on from the problems in the criticism exposed in the first chapter, I will employ these same troubled theoretical tools. I want to *practise* the inadequacies of a 'centred' reading; particularly one reliant on a stable notion of the gothic, itself reliant in turn on a centred or stable notion of history. This knock-on effect will push the significance of viewing history as a discursive process, which was tentatively suggested in Stewart's 'A Word in Your Ear'. Relinquishing the centre and instead allowing for discourses that co-exist will produce an *incoherent*, or rather elliptical, reading of Mantel's text.

The key to the contemporary 'Gothic' criticism available on Mantel's work is the process of initially locating a 'natural' site for the gothic, which is also simultaneously an unnatural one, or non-site. In order to explore the scope of this paradox, I will consider Derrida's thoughts on space and by illustrating how they can be elliptically described I will 'explode' the gothic as an origin for meaning in *Fludd*. I will identify parts of the novel where the text begins to vibrate, pull apart or allow 'something else' to slip in. From the example set by the analyses of Horner, Zlosnik and Spooner, these 'holes' or vulnerabilities (of words, in words) are the very articulation of the contemporary 'Gothic'. It is where it can be problematically 'localised' even with the acknowledgement of it being somehow unprecedented. These moments point towards the ex-centric centre, enabling the existence of the text while at the same time always already threatening its undoing. Working to introduce and then expose these many and implied gothic centres in *Fludd* will dictate the structure of this chapter.

The first vibration is the self-referential theme of alchemy, which is grounded so violently in Horner and Zlosnik's article in terms of its lengthy (and therefore trustworthy) historical tradition. This, despite the prevailing sense that *Fludd* is not a text that trusts history, or rather representations of history, as either 'true' or stable. Moreover, alchemy bursts free from this thematic framework because its characteristics also point at the uncertain processes of textual

¹⁶¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 288-289.

operation. I will develop the potential of alchemical discourse by demonstrating how it overlaps with the scientific and therefore ‘legitimate’ work of quantum theory. Of course this too is a discourse, however the aim of this chapter is to offer a non-hierarchical combination of discursive processes in order to present a sense of narrative that is elliptical. The second vibration is the place of Fetherhoughton, which is also a nonplace, surely making it an ideal candidate for locating the contemporary gothic, or perhaps not. The third vibration is the character of Fludd, who is positioned as alchemist, *revenant* and curate, while occupying none of these identities fully, or in terms of full presence. The fourth and final vibration is the mouldering of the buried statues, which are repressed and then return in a delightfully gothic manner, yet also point to a place of exchange and uncertainty that could hardly be considered stable, or singular.

I want to emphasise here that this reading is not a slave to identifying ‘characteristics’ of the ellipsis. For example, although noticing a double focus within a text is important, viewing these observations as boxes on a checklist is not the point. Recording the presence of a double focus is not slavish (a ‘thematic’ I wish to avoid) it is suggestive of an ex-centric (or eccentric) centre *not at the centre*, which is neither bored nor exhausted, but explosive. Thus, I will demonstrate that these moments of ‘neuralgia’ are not simply ‘Gothic’ (in fact they are not *simply* anything) but that they work to affirm the process of simultaneous discourses *at play*. Plus, following on from Stewart’s work, this chapter pits the discourse of history against that of humour, which offers another ghostly recurrence throughout the novel. It is involved in the alchemy, the place and the characters of *Fludd*; it pervades both the content and the tone, it *is* the nonplace and it proves that the origin, whether historical or gothic, is always laughing, probably at you.

‘It’s not a place’: Deconstruction as an affirmation that is not positive

Published in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts* is the full text of Peter Brunette and David Wills’ interview with Derrida entitled ‘The Spatial Arts’. Towards the end, Brunette asks Derrida if the affirmative place he points to through deconstructive work can be named. This is his response:

It’s not a place; it’s not a place that really exists. It’s a “come” [*viens*]; it is what I call an affirmation that is not positive. It doesn’t exist, it isn’t present [...] Thus it is an

affirmation that is very risky, uncertain, improbable; it entirely escapes the space of certainty.¹⁶²

I have already illustrated to an extent how the ellipse shape describes *difference* and the ellipsis, dot, dot, dot, *deferral*; both also entirely escape this space of certainty that Derrida cannot and will not name. They involve spacing, both geometric and grammatical, yet remain elusive, never occupying a ‘place’ in the text. The ellipse is displaced because it is a mathematical figure, understood metaphorically, the ellipsis because as a grapheme it is more page than graphite. Risky, they both signify a ‘come’, an affirmation that is not a place, or space, understood as certainty, but rather outlined or elliptically described. It is the inscription of the locus as represented in Nancy’s essay: ‘Thus the text proclaims itself, or the general orbit around which it gravitates, to be nothing less than a “system”, the system in which the origin itself “is only a function and a locus”’.¹⁶³ The locus is a place in which something is perhaps momentarily situated, though this situation never achieves full presence.

My thesis also entirely escapes the space of certainty, but it affirms such risk. Outlining this ‘come’ within *Fludd* and Mantel’s other texts, I concede that this place that ‘is not a place’ signifies the exchange of an infinite number of possible meanings since it evades mastery. However, this chapter will read the burial of the statues in the novel, especially the transformation from sweet to sly, as an enabling imperfection. Derrida’s ‘to come’ is imperfect because it is unknowable, and if to perfect is to master, *to come* is to not. So I will choose to read the facilitating flaws of Mantel’s characters as indicative of an affirmation that is not positive, which unites her corpus. The best metaphor for such elusiveness is that of curved sight; for example, Julian in *A Change of Climate* sees ‘from the tail of his eye’, which is not an uncommon view of narrative in Mantel’s texts.¹⁶⁴ This curling uncertainty will also be explored via the sense of Fludd’s spectral semen: ‘Every possession is a loss, Fludd said. But equally, every loss is a possession’, an imperfect quality returned to in my conclusion to the thesis.¹⁶⁵

Spatial analogies surface all the time in the discourses of poststructuralism, in particular the notion of ‘beyond’, since, like the ellipsis, the distracting *beyond* also points towards

¹⁶² ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 26.

¹⁶³ Nancy, p. 178.

¹⁶⁴ Hilary Mantel, *A Change of Climate* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 133. Such partial viewing is described by Slavoj Žižek as ‘looking awry’, for further discussion see *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

¹⁶⁵ *Fludd*, p. 166.

something that cannot be pointed at and makes promises (it cannot keep). This chapter, although informed by ideas from across Derrida's corpus, is primarily illustrating how the ellipsis describes the orbit of his thoughts on space. This demarcation is, of course, problematic because this chapter also extensively utilises the *revenant*. Yet although borrowed from *Specters of Marx* (2006), and clearly informed by *Hamlet*, its utility is also shaped by 'The Spatial Arts', which essentially details the thoughts on space I contend are elliptically described. So the *revenant* signifies the return of the always yet to come, but also introduces an idea of space to contemporary understanding of the body; this connection foregrounds my analysis of *Beyond Black* and *Giving Up the Ghost* in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis. The *revenant* is also significant to my conception of both space, and the ellipsis as spatial, in terms of a *to come*; a combination I will return to in order to conclude this chapter.

Importantly this chapter will continue to present the 'Gothic' centre(s) to gothic criticism as a smokescreen. While referring to the analyses of the first chapter, specifically those working to gothicise Mantel's writing, I will also develop the theories of Nancy Armstrong and Jodey Castricano. Their approaches to the 'Gothic' inform my elliptical reading of *Fludd* and strengthen my argument against the limitations gothicism places on understanding, not just Mantel's work, but also Derrida's thought. To do this effectively I will engage a combination of different discourses; the first is quantum theory, as already mentioned, which is connected to attempts to run to ground the ellipsis in Nancy's essay, and also aspects of Slavoj Žižek's visually elliptical *The Parallax View* (2009). Nancy's response to 'Ellipsis' does assume one definition, while recognising that the thirsty, laughing and drunken Derrida would never tether the ellipsis to any origin:

The geometric term "ellipse" was first of all the name given to figures which lacked *identity*, before being used [...] *in the sense familiar to us* as that which is missing in a circle and as that which doubles the property of the constant radius of the circle into the constancy of the sum of two distances which constantly vary.¹⁶⁶

It is not 'familiar' to English speakers, perhaps, but then there is no original to translation. I will return to 'that which doubles the property' through reading *Fludd* alongside quantum theory, particularly the notion of superposition. This raises the spectre of the conscious observer, which plagues physicists, and the idea that electrons 'decide' their positions only

¹⁶⁶ Nancy, p. 185, my emphases.

momentarily and only when ‘looked’ at directly.¹⁶⁷ It seems a significant acknowledgement considering the potential of difference and the curved sight metaphor. One further justification for using quantum theory discourse is that the ellipse is a geometric term and therefore an aspect (or figure) of mathematics, and mathematics is the ‘natural’ language of quantum theory.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, such a vocabulary of particle/wave simultaneity will prove relevant to my undermining of any sense of conceptual solidity, or rather providing for constant inconstancy. It is also appropriate for interrogating Derrida’s notion of place/space as affirmed, but not positive. Adopting the *thinking* of quantum theory, which even resists the empiricism of classical physics, provokes a further challenge to the certainty of Mantel’s ‘Gothic’ critics.

The theoretical underpinning of this chapter concerns space, vision and lines of sight, in particular ‘the supreme insignia of power’ Derrida attributes to the *revenant* and the process of diversion described in *The Parallax View*. In *Specters of Marx*, the *revenant* can see without being seen while Žižek’s analysis considers that the success of hiding in plain sight is because ‘a thing is its own best mask’.¹⁶⁹ Such power, such diversion actually constitutes *the text* and this chapter will present such trickery as the operation of the elliptical narrative. To do this, I will utilise another discourse, that of the implied reader.¹⁷⁰ In line with my earlier analysis of an affirmation that entirely escapes the space of certainty, I contend that the reader too, as another potential origin for meaning, is also an unstable site. Thus, such a reader is not a certainty, does not occupy a place, but is instead a ‘come’, and only ever implied. This is related to the sense of Mantel’s corpus as a *palimpsest*, which creates a space for the implied reader.¹⁷¹ For example, this will become clearer in chapter four through my reading of *Giving Up the Ghost*, a text that creates space for an implied reader of *Fludd*. This is reminiscent of the palimpsest, and the severing of the signifier from any fixed signified, but it is also a process that teases the notion of an origin to writing and instead emphasises repetition.

¹⁶⁷ J. P. McEvoy and Oscar Zarate, *Quantum Theory: For Beginners* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1996), pp. 146-148.

¹⁶⁸ John Polkinghorne, *Quantum Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. i.

¹⁶⁹ For further discussion see *Specters of Marx*, p. 8 and Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 28.

¹⁷⁰ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979). I acknowledge the ‘baggage’ of this term; however, my evocation of the *implied* reader is merely to illustrate just how implicated it is within the strands of Derridean thought interrogated in this thesis – an implication that develops through the movement of my chapters.

¹⁷¹ ‘I’ve tried to deliver the satisfactions of story, but at the same time build something self-referential into each book’, ‘In Conversation’, 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 203.

Moreover, part of the uncertainty of such a reader is their implied return to an aspect of the text in order to question its stability. This movement prompts the reader to consider why they thought what they originally thought and whether that original is stable.¹⁷² These ideas clearly parallel Mantel's view of history as articulated in her *Culture Show* interview: 'I know this, but why do I *think* I know it?'.¹⁷³ And such a thought is necessarily an orbital rather than a linear, finalised or perfect movement. Thought is a process, like the dot, dot, dot, and it resists resolution; Žižek writes in *The Parallax View* about how '*from within the flat order of positive being, the very gap between thought and being, the negativity of thought emerges*'.¹⁷⁴ Identifying this gap, in a book that is and is not honouring Derrida's memory, seems both elliptical *and* reminiscent of the affirmation that is not positive.¹⁷⁵

Finally, the question of tone is adopted as a discursive process in this chapter, specifically in terms of the analysis of the burial of the statues in *Fludd*. However thematically creepy this interment of the inanimate is (or is not) it does not signify a coherent centre. In the gothic criticism already tackled, theme is used to stabilise meaning; yet in terms of Derrida's thought, theme is not privileged but instead understood as one possible 'tone'. Significantly, Derrida considers tonality in his interview about space: 'It isn't the content, it's the tone, and since the tone is never present to itself, it is always written differentially; the question is always this differentiability of tone'.¹⁷⁶ So the tone, as the differing origin of differences, betrays the work of differance, meaning that any straightforward notion of theme (in opposition to tone) becomes too coherent. Thus, to fight against the thematics of gothicism my examination of *Fludd* will emphasise not the singularity of content, but rather the differentiability of tone, in terms of theme, space and silence, as well as acknowledging how and why 'the tone is never present to itself'.

'I have come to transform you': The alchemical mask

Fludd is an eccentric novel detailing the lives of the inhabitants of a village called Fetherhoughton in the north of England. It primarily concerns the arrival of a new curate in the parish, though the origins of his identity are never resolved. The text strongly implies that

¹⁷² Also understood as Bertolt Brecht's 'alienation-effect', which Barthes coined for culture usage. For further discussion see: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2009).

¹⁷³ Hilary Mantel: *A Culture Show Special* (2011).

¹⁷⁴ Žižek, p. 6, original emphasis.

¹⁷⁵ For further discussion see Žižek, p. 11.

¹⁷⁶ 'The Spatial Arts', p. 21. Etymologically 'tone' means a stretching towards, it signifies *attention* and *tension*.

the character of Fludd is a historical rewriting of Robert Fludd, the alchemist, and the novel is certainly one concerned with the process of transformation. According to Horner and Zlosnik's article, the alchemy in *Fludd* is thematic. As a theme it is historically informed, despite the sense that the text is suspicious of history: 'Last Wednesday and the Battle of Bosworth are all one; the past is the past'.¹⁷⁷ I intend to demonstrate that alchemy is a dubious site for the gothic because it is not a site at all; it is not a place. It does not possess the stability implied by the word 'theme' because it incorporates aspects of historical and scientific discourses that result in an excess, or transformation, that is humorous and cannot be theorised. It is worth noting though that this chapter is merely introducing an alternative way of reading the text, which the text may not explicitly endorse; in particular, it should be acknowledged that Mantel's writing is not necessarily *more* elliptical than any other writing. Instead, I am merely highlighting 'spaces' within it as sites of exchange for conflicting discourses, giving rise to what I call 'tone'.

The alchemist-physicians of the Renaissance period argued that *prima materia* constituted the primitive formless base of all matter.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, by reducing lead to its *prima materia* base it would be possible to impose another form upon it, generally gold. This means that the premise of alchemy undermines the philosophical notion of immanence.¹⁷⁹ The idea is that an object possesses an essence that emanates *outwards*, which conforms to the model of the perfect circle, equidistant from the centre at all points. Although *prima materia* is a perceived centre, it is also an ex-centric one because it is formless, and therefore responsible for unravelling the objects it also makes possible. Unsurprisingly, this process of return to the *prima materia* also articulated apocalyptic visions of eternal return for the alchemists. This is best represented by the Ouroboros, the alchemical symbol *par excellence* of eternal recurrence, which depicts a snake devouring its own tail; an action that results in simultaneous birth and death, the greatest excess.¹⁸⁰ It also parallels the emphasis in Derrida's thought that meaning operates on the basis of repetition while *postponing* the infinite return of the identical to itself. The snake occupies this impossible, yet meaningful,

¹⁷⁷ *Fludd*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁸ E. J. Holmyard, *Alchemy* (New York: Dover, 1990). The baselessness of the 'base' also describes the work of deconstruction.

¹⁷⁹ 'This is what we have called "totalitarianism," but it might be better named "immanentism," as long as we do not restrict the term to designating certain types of societies or regimes but rather see in it the general horizon of our time, encompassing both democracies and their fragile juridical parapets'. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. by Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ For further discussion of the link between Ouroboros and alchemy see Carl Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, 20 vols, trans. by F. R. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), XIII: *Alchemical Studies*.

position of paralysis and is another imperfect circle. This is helpful for reading the spatialisation of Father Angwin's loss of faith. Angwin is the weary Catholic priest of the parish and has been threatened with a curate by the bishop. Despite fearing Fludd is a spy, he confides his secret the same evening Fludd arrives: 'Oh, the central premise was missing, but do you know, it didn't seem to matter all that much?'.¹⁸¹ This is certainly a transformation, but it could hardly be said to emanate outwards.

This sense of repetition with(out) the first time, which is described by the double focus of the ellipsis, also underlies the problems of quantum theory. In particular, the discovery in quantum physics concerning the role of the observer 'again, alchemy would seem to have come to these conclusions centuries earlier'.¹⁸² The simultaneity of the wave/particle paradigm undermines the certainty of classical physics and parallels the paradox of the alchemical process. This paradox, like the wave/particle dilemma, begins with the premise that a base metal like lead cannot identify with itself; there is no essence of lead. This means that whatever the process produces will only ever constitute another deferral; so, for example, there is no essence of gold either. Also, the process of alchemy does not 'work', so to speak, only in as much as it is a narrative without conclusion, much like representations of history. Thus, the outlining of alchemical transformation in *Fludd* describes the process of the ellipsis in terms of the operation of the double focus, non-identity and the lack/meaning relationship.

The 'Note' to the novel immediately introduces the proximity of *two* points of reference (or centres) within alchemy. These are historically informed and therefore potentially 'Gothic' while also offering a description of the ellipsis:

The real Fludd (1574-1637) was a physician, scholar and alchemist. In alchemy, everything has a literal and factual description, and in addition a description that is symbolic and fantastical.¹⁸³

The position of this original Fludd is immediately buried by the duplicity of alchemy, which does not privilege 'factual description'. The alchemical double focus, later termed the 'Alchymical Wedding' in the novel, masks a further doubling – another combining within a combination – since literal can also be read as departing from the factual while the symbolic

¹⁸¹ *Fludd*, p. 52.

¹⁸² Sean Martin, *Alchemy and Alchemists* (Harpender: Pocket Essentials, 2001), p. 13.

¹⁸³ *Fludd*, n. p.

is perhaps more grounded than the fantastical.¹⁸⁴ Both descriptions un-inscribe a perceived centre to accommodate the double focus of the ellipsis, which is understood in terms of repetition not origin. Alchemy articulates a challenge to the immanence of an object as identical to itself, and only to itself, because it instigates a transformation, or altering. It establishes difference through impossibility of becoming the ‘same’ and difference through sensing the trace of the other in the self-same:

Miss Dempsey sensed a slow movement, a tiny spiral shift of matter, as if, at the very moment the curate spoke, a change had occurred: a change so minute as to baffle description, but rippling out, in its effect, to infinity.¹⁸⁵

This describes other aspects of ellipsis, ‘what falls short of being identical’, or rather understanding return, and therefore meaning, in terms of difference. ‘This lack of circularity, this gap which postpones the infinite return of the identical to itself’ – is the operation of meaning, since if the identical *does* return to itself then the difference within which ‘identical’ (or any other word) took on its sense would collapse.¹⁸⁶ Derrida writes extensively about the return of the always yet to come and deconstruction as *at work* in the work. This parallels Nancy’s thoughts about postponing the infinite return because he also argues that what participates in the construction of any system is at the same time threatening its undoing. This is suggested in the quotation from Mantel’s novel in the ‘tiny spiral shift of matter’, which is ‘minute’, a play on space and time, and so small as ‘to baffle description’.

This transformation traces the return of the always-yet-to-come or the non-identity of ellipsis:

But everything that is going to be purified must first be corrupted; that is the principle of science and art. Everything that is to be put together must first be taken apart, everything that is to be made whole must first be broken into its constituent parts, its heat, its coldness, its dryness, its moisture. Base matter imprisons spirit, the gross fetters the subtle; every passion must be anatomized, every whim submit to mortar and pestle, every desire be ground and ground until its essence appears. After separation, drying out, moistening, dissolving, coagulating, fermenting, comes purification, re-combination: the creation of substances that the world has until now

¹⁸⁴ For further discussion of the symbolic, see Jacques Lacan, ‘The Signification of the Phallus’, in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), pp. 575-584. I will return to the significance of this essay in chapter three.

¹⁸⁵ *Fludd*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁶ Both Nancy, p. 175.

never beheld. This is the *opus contra naturam*, this is the spagyric art; this is the Alchemical Wedding.¹⁸⁷

Similar to the baseless phrase ‘the past is the past’, this quotation is characteristic of the dislocated narrator returning the implied reader to the question of narration, representation and the exchange of trust for uncertainty – ‘ground and ground until its essence appears’. This is not the first vibration of deconstruction, and its very condition as at work in the work, since just prior to this elliptical alchemy, a fragment of St Augustine’s *Confessions* ‘returns’ to the text. It describes darkness – ‘we have no sensation, only the privation of sensation’ – as a suggestive ex-centricity.¹⁸⁸ This ex-centricity is explained in *Derrida: A Documentary* (2002) as a centre, not at-the-centre, but which participates in the construction of what it always already threatens to deconstruct, an important touchstone for this thesis.¹⁸⁹ In this case, the ‘truth’ of darkness as nominally *present*, sensed, knowable, is undermined, since in *Confessions* darkness is defined not as sense but as *lack of sense*.¹⁹⁰ In the quotation from *Fludd*, such ex-centricity is detectable in the line – ‘Base matter imprisons spirit, the gross fetters the subtle’ – which suggests deconstruction since the means to corrupt is always already within the system. This echoes my earlier comment regarding the imperfection of the alchemical process because it assumes base matter to be *hybrid* rather than immanent, containing the possibility to be other than itself, or, ‘non-self-identity which regularly refers to the same’, which is the trace of differance.¹⁹¹ Significantly, this extract from *Fludd* offers the text commentating on the text; this tone of self-reflexivity is how I conclude that the alchemy of the novel exceeds theme since its textual commentary both in-scribes and de-scribes the Alchemical Wedding; this flaw, or imperfection, is actually the catalyst for (ex)change.

Such excess releases laughter; Nancy’s ‘Elliptical Sense’ compares humour to differance, and the parallel works because laughter is neither a theory nor can it be theorised: ‘*Differance* is neither a *word* nor a *concept*’.¹⁹² Consequently, I will expand on Nancy’s consideration of meaning as thirsty and that ‘Derrida is always laughing’ in order to consider laughter as a

¹⁸⁷ *Fludd*, p. 79.

¹⁸⁸ *Fludd*, p. 78.

¹⁸⁹ *Derrida: A Documentary*, dir. by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman (Drakes Avenue Pictures, 2002).

¹⁹⁰ St Augustine’s *Confessions* offers narrative return, returning to the always still to come of sin, which is never wholly able to identify with itself because of its position as imperfection. This was also a text that fascinated Derrida and he returned to it throughout his career.

¹⁹¹ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 374.

¹⁹² ‘Differance’, p. 130.

necessary excess of elliptical narratives that *violently* resist categorisation.¹⁹³ The following early part of *Fludd* is symptomatic of the slippage of humour in the novel:

For the rest of that evening Miss Dempsey went up and down stairs, providing as best she could for the curate's comfort. He said he would take a bath, which was not at all a usual thing on a week-night [...] There are those, it is said, who have entertained angels unawares; but Miss Dempsey would have liked notice.¹⁹⁴

This passage follows Fludd's anticipated, yet also unexpected arrival in the parish. Significantly, the laughter arises from the (duplicitous) notion of his origins. It constitutes an imperfection that does not come back full circle to the same, and therefore allows several meanings to escape. It is provocative because it introduces several clashing 'tones' – those of the bible, domesticity and class – without a hope of resolution, yielding an excess that is funny. And Mantel's writing is funny; 'Elliptical Sense' states – 'The origin is laughing' – and the comedy in *Fludd* provides a further link to alchemy because it parallels Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*.¹⁹⁵ In this Jacobean play Subtle and Face are also interested in transforming not metals but people, which constitutes fraud, yet the change (from which Subtle and Face intend to profit) is still enabled by imperfect 'return', including the monetary sense of the word. Fludd does transform people, but the possibilities of this connection run wider; Mantel once described her work as Jacobean and not at all Jamesian, and she was pleased when I acknowledged the similarity.¹⁹⁶ It allowed us to discuss laughter and the sense that the implied reader has no 'agency' over their laughter, which in many respects means there is also no origin to 'it'. Mantel confirmed this to an extent in terms of herself as a reader:

But I often find that what it is, is that you put something on the screen and then you do the equivalent of a double take and it's only then that you realise it's funny, it's... so it has a previous existence as... it has a moment where you haven't perceived its nature. And then it's as if, it holds up a mirror and there you are... and I sometimes actually cover my mouth, so transgressive does it feel at times, but it's a look what I *said*, without meaning to.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Nancy, p. 181.

¹⁹⁴ *Fludd*, p. 44.

¹⁹⁵ Nancy, p. 180.

¹⁹⁶ 'In Conversation', 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 226.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

‘Fetherhoughton is not to be found on a map’: The village mask

There is a sense of rottenness to the ‘consideration’ of Fetherhoughton in *Fludd*, it both describes the rotten and is rotten in itself:

‘We have perfectly good statues, mouldering under the ground.’
He looked up. ‘Do you think they are mouldering? You too?’
‘Oh, you frighten me.’ She touched the black cross that hung on a cord around her neck. ‘It was just an expression I used.’
‘But *something* is rotten here.’
‘Yes. Have you come to help it?’
‘I don’t know. I think it is beyond me.’¹⁹⁸

This quotation introduces all the centres together – the alchemical process of rotting, the ‘here’ of place, the character of Fludd situated ‘beyond’ and the tastelessly gothic statues – while simultaneously preventing any singular privileging of these sites. The state of rottenness is pertinent to deconstruction because it offers a site of instability and like the *prima materia* of the alchemist-physicians it is not whole: ‘Something is missing that would make the circle perfect’.¹⁹⁹ And it is this lack within meaning that, as Nancy commentates, pushes meaning after itself (like laughter) and forces a repetition or alteration: ‘Repeated, the same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has exactly the same centre, *the origin has played*’.²⁰⁰ It is ‘beyond’ Fludd; it cannot be mastered, made perfect, centred or deadened – it resists. This beyond marks a limit and an imperfection; it is the ellipsis or an affirmation of writing/narrative that is not positive. However, I want to demonstrate that the links between alchemy and rottenness are not just tactile – ‘to touch the ellipsis itself’ – they are not merely thematic, but rather are theoretically underpinned in terms of the relationship between space and lines of sight.²⁰¹ This suggestion is already in play via the *revenant* and/or a thing as its own best mask as non-sites situating power. This sense of tact, or tactility, evokes the ‘stroke’ of the either/or and the and/or; it is a site of contamination, oscillation (between oscillating types), it *rots*.

The ‘Alchemical Wedding’ in *Fludd* hints at deconstruction as a renewing rather than destructive process and this transformation connects to Derrida’s thoughts on space.

¹⁹⁸ *Fludd*, p. 82, original emphasis.

¹⁹⁹ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 373.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Nancy, p. 188.

Brunette's question about the affirmative place in his work occurs because the former wants 'to ask something concerning the so-called negativity of deconstruction'. He continues: 'At the end of the "Fifty-two Aphorisms" you make a call for not destroying things, for finding something affirmative'.²⁰² This sentiment provides a means of pushing the possibilities of rottenness outside, or beyond, the genre of tragedy. I will begin by comparing *Fludd* to *Hamlet* using the first chapter of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*. The parallels, or repetitions, from Shakespeare's play extend beyond images and citations – the famous subtext to Fludd's exclamation that something is rotten in Fetherhoughton is of course a reiteration of Marcellus' line 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark'.²⁰³ There is also Father Angwin's confession that 'you can pray but the thoughts run under the prayers, like wires under the ground', which is unnatural, electric and also echoes the moment when Hamlet spares Claudius, as he is 'praying'.²⁰⁴ Both lines encapsulate the operation of the sliding of the signified under the signifier, its slippage, and the frictions of the two texts. Yet if the signified has rotted away from the signifier, being neither here nor there, this is again a visually inscribed metaphor rather than a tactile one.

There is also a connection between the rotten as tragic and Derrida's affirmation that is not positive, which I will emphasise by exploring his notion of the virus. This is expounded extremely efficiently in 'The Spatial Arts', but provides a connection not only with A. C. Bradley's famous emphasis on disease in his seminal *Shakespearean Tragedy* (2007), it is also understood by Derrida as deconstructively enabling. It offers another way of reading the rotten as an ex-centric centre not at the centre, questioning whether or not the figure of the rotten, or the rotten figure, is negative? Pierre Macherey writes that the *speech* of literary production 'comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure'; an analysis of figure, ground and text that seems important for reading the statues.²⁰⁵ The rottenness Fludd identifies in the village of Fetherhoughton is beyond him, which suggests a limit, or certainly a within and without of any mastery or centre. This is the argument of 'Elliptical Sense' that *to write* is to outline an altering, though *something* always remains beyond, evasive, eclipsed. *Fludd* perhaps orbits such a limit: 'We have traced the limit of writing as limit [...] it is written, it is traced and consequently effaced

²⁰² 'The Spatial Arts', p. 26.

²⁰³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 162-419. I. 4. 90.

²⁰⁴ *Fludd*, p. 121. 'My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go', *Hamlet*, III. 3. 97-98.

²⁰⁵ Pierre Macherey, 'The Spoken and the Unspoken', *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. by Geoffrey Wall (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 95-100 (p. 95).

before the eyes of him who would try to look. But its effacement is its repetition'.²⁰⁶ This describes and implicates both the ellipsis, and the character of the *revenant* and any *revenant* character. In Bradley's book of lectures on Shakespearean tragic plays, he introduces *Hamlet* with the following: 'If we like to use the word "disease" loosely, Hamlet's condition may truly be called diseased. No exertion of will could have dispelled it'.²⁰⁷ By the end of his analysis, this force, impossible to dispel, has pervaded the play though simultaneously become harder to definitively identify:

For – in conclusion to the action of the play – in all that happens or is done we seem to apprehend some vaster power. We do not define it, or even name it, or perhaps even say to ourselves that it is there; but our imagination is haunted by the sense of it, as it works its way through the deeds or the delays of men to its inevitable end.²⁰⁸

This disease is powerful. So is the rotten, both in *Hamlet* and *Fludd*, harbouring a sense of an originary lack that pushes meaning after itself towards an affirmation that is not positive. The ellipse suggests a need for an orbital movement because planetary orbits are elliptical; so if Fludd orbits Fetherhoughton like a planet then the limit is only ever an implied path. A planet occupies a position in space and time, though the rest of its orbit is mapped out or traced, perhaps by a dotted line, which is another ellipse.²⁰⁹ Derrida represents the *revenant*, using the ghost of King Hamlet, as a figure who sees without being seen, which also parallels writing as 'effaced before the eyes of him who would try to look'. This suggests, therefore, that it is possible for the *revenant* to orbit implied centres to texts – in the case of Fludd, Fetherhoughton is the clearest example – because they signify an ex-centric centre themselves. Not simply because they force time out of joint, but because to see without being seen is also to occupy a centre, not-at-the-centre – because it remains unseen, unmastered – but a 'centre' that can facilitate any number of exchanges of meaning, or play. The main question in 'Ellipsis' reads – 'Can one not affirm the nonreferral to the center, rather than bemoan the absence of the center?' – and the answer is, yes, and one way is through utilising the *revenant*, as omniscience, effacement and writing.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Nancy, p. 187.

²⁰⁷ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 4th edition, intro by Robert Shaughnessy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 88.

²⁰⁸ Bradley, pp. 126-127.

²⁰⁹ Mantel's writing repeatedly traces such a limit; for example, in *Beyond Black*, the medium Alison Hart orbits the dead – 'they are *beyond* geography and history' (p. 44, my emphasis).

²¹⁰ 'Ellipsis', p. 374.

Understanding the role of Fludd helps unpack the ambiguous description and ‘origin’ of Fetherhoughton, which from the opening ‘Note’ defies location in writing, or other *than in writing*: ‘The village of Fetherhoughton is not to be found on a map’ – though from this statement writing perhaps outlines it.²¹¹ It is an estranging start because the narrator is directing the implied reader *not to* – which suggests an elliptical sense more strongly than if the sentence read decisively ‘*cannot be found* on a map’, and also evokes Hamlet’s ‘to be or not to be’. There is perhaps a negative atheology (Derrida’s thought) in *cannot*, which entirely rejects any located-ness (that is not *absolute* located-ness) via the map.²¹² On the other hand, *not to be found* is perhaps indicative of a tracing, a movement of seeking but not finding. This initial sense of alienation continues with this early ‘interruption’ about the uncertain locale of the village:

*At this early point, the topography of the village of Fetherhoughton may repay consideration [...] The village lay in moorland, which ringed it on three sides. The surrounding hills, from the village streets, looked like the hunched and bristling back of a sleeping dog. Let sleeping dogs lie, was the attitude of the people; for they hated nature [...] They were not townspeople; they had none of their curiosity. They were not country people; they could tell a cow from a sheep, but it was not their business.*²¹³

There is a double or oscillating focus in neither townspeople nor country people that could lead to the negative ex-centricity outlined in ‘Ellipsis’. Negative ex-centricity is an aspect of what Derrida describes as atheology: ‘The passage through negative ex-centricity is doubtless necessary; but only liminary’.²¹⁴ I understand this argument in ‘Ellipsis’ as an implied negative response to the deconstructed centre, which ‘still pronounces the absence of a centre, when it is play that should be affirmed’. However, there is also an implied *maintenant* or ‘centre’ in-between townspeople and country people in *Fludd*. This *maintenant* provides one way of understanding the trace as written *around* by Derrida in ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’. In this essay, the trace ‘is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance’ – like sight from the tail of the eye, or what slides momentarily beneath the signifier.²¹⁵ It is grounded on ground-less-ness, it is only partially visible, buried, the trace inscribes the paradox of the ‘here’ and ‘there’ of writing. For example, the ‘real bodies’ that refer to the notorious Moors Murders over the

²¹¹ *Fludd*, n. p.

²¹² Meaning the privileging of *full* absence, explained in several of Derrida’s texts, including ‘Ellipsis’, p. 374.

²¹³ *Fludd*, p. 11, my emphases.

²¹⁴ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 374.

²¹⁵ ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’, p. 289.

page from this description of Fetherhoughton, introduce historical ‘fact’ dislocated within a fictional place *not to be found* on a map.²¹⁶ Also the latent sarcasm of the line, ‘but it was not their business’, illustrates humour and a space for the reader of *Giving Up the Ghost*, which describes the working-class male of Hadfield with similar irony.²¹⁷ There is a sense of vice versa to this ‘embedded’ reader, which I introduce to underline *what I am not doing* in this thesis. I am not wholly dismissing the presence of an ‘autobiographical’ discourse in Mantel’s writing – I am merely arguing that it is not the only ‘tone’ at work; the friction of these different emotional registers *is* the writing. However difficult this may be to prove, it is an argument that is accepted in terms of James Joyce’s work and I intend to make it stand up here, increasingly in terms of the mirroring of epiphany in ellipsis, as a moment of revelation *and* mystery.²¹⁸

‘At this early point, the topography of the village of Fetherhoughton may repay consideration’. It is a village imperfectly ‘ringed on three sides’, so it is not fully encircled, only partially orbited. This movement is emphasised by the impossibility of tracing a definite ‘origin’ to the place, and like the problematic map it evokes a process of seeking but *not finding*. It provides another version of history, and this effect is partly achieved by the knowing authority of the narrator. There is an implication to the lines: ‘Cotton was their business, and had been for nearly a century. There were three mills, but there were no clogs and shawls; there was nothing picturesque’.²¹⁹ It implies thwarted expectation, agriculture did not spawn the community, though industrialisation did not straightforwardly either: ‘They turned their faces in *the fourth direction*, to the road and the railway that led them to the black heart of the industrial north: to Manchester, to Wigan, to Liverpool’.²²⁰ However, they remain alienated from this expansive, re-defining process, always already on-the-limit. The traditional historical view of industrialisation is in terms of a re-orientation of the ‘origin’ as mechanical; it was progressive but also rigidly systematised and exploitative. Yet it is a

²¹⁶ *Fludd*, p. 12.

²¹⁷ ‘In Hadfield, men had no form of farewell that I could remember. If they were going out, why should they mention it? It wasn’t your business’, Hilary Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost: A Memoir* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p. 123.

²¹⁸ In his introduction to Edmund Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry* Derrida writes that Joyce works a writing that emphasises and celebrates ‘the greatest potential for buried, accumulated, and interwoven intentions within each linguistic atom [it] circulates through all languages at once, accumulates their energies, actualizes their most secret constances’. For further discussion see Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. by John P. Leavey JR. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 102 and Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 128.

²¹⁹ *Fludd*, p. 11.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, my emphasis. This quotation echoes E. M. Forster’s description of Chandrapore in the opening of *A Passage to India*.

mistake to resort to the ‘clogs and shawls’ notion of history as any less harshly constructed. In the villagers’ rejection of both, there is a conclusion of similarity – agriculture and industrialisation are grand, *passionate* narratives of the perfect origin. Jean Baudrillard famously plays on the notion of the Enchanted Village in *Simulacra and Simulation*, which Žižek develops by analysing the positioning of a North Korean Potemkin close to a South Korean viewing station: ‘Nothing substantially changes here – it is merely that viewed through the frame, reality turns into its *own appearance*’.²²¹ The mask is both an inverted frame, and simply a frame, dictating what aspects of ‘reality’ are and are not seen.

The ‘reality’ of history is similarly destabilised in *Fludd*, and this is achieved most effectively by using laughter as *frame*. Although the narrator represents this misunderstanding of chronology as mere stupidity, again the knowing tone actually articulates a decisive challenge. This is the description of the Church in Fetherhoughton:

The Church was in fact less than a hundred years old [...] But someone had briefed its architect to make it look as if it had always stood there [...] the architect had a sense of history; it was a Shakespearian sense of history, with a grand contempt of the pitfalls of anachronism. Last Wednesday and the Battle of Bosworth are all one; the past is the past, and Mrs O’Toole, buried last Wednesday, is neck and neck with King Richard in the hurtle to eternity.²²²

There is a distinctly Jacobean feel to this laughter, which I will develop when reading *Beyond Black*. However, such informed ridicule masks, and also highlights, the point that despite the inappropriate appearance of the Church of Saint Thomas Aquinas, no one has access to a conceptually solid version of the past. In ‘The Spatial Arts’ Derrida summarises the necessity of the inaccessible through theorising the virus:

The virus is in part a parasite that destroys, that introduces disorder into communication [...] On the other hand, it is something that is neither living nor nonliving; the virus is not a microbe. And if you follow these two threads, that of a *parasite which disrupts destination* from the communicative point of view – disrupting writing, inscription, and the coding and decoding of inscription – and which on the other hand is neither alive nor dead, you have the *matrix* of all that I have done since I began writing.²²³

²²¹ Žižek, p. 28. ‘Disneyland is not the only one, however. Enchanted Village, Magic Mountain, Marine World: Los Angeles is surrounded by these imaginary stations that feed reality’, Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 13.

²²² *Fludd*, p. 16.

²²³ ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 12, my emphases.

The combined representation of Fetherhoughton as both rotten and elliptically ringed on three sides, parallels this evocation of the virus in Derrida's thought; the rotten characterises the deconstructed centre as an implied presence also riven by nonpresence. As Fludd quickly realises after arriving in the parish, 'the quarrels of this community were ancient and impenetrable', specifically, he is wondering 'what exactly was the origin of the bad blood between the nun and Father Angwin'.²²⁴ Such an origin forms the impenetrable centre around which the quarrels oscillate; yet the 'bad blood' or rottenness both protects and distances it.

Like the virus, this rot is destructive but it cannot be treated, hurried or removed; neither living nor nonliving, it simply *remains* – the dangerous supplement. This complex relationship between the rotten, ellipsis and the virus in *Fludd* is what inhibits any linear 'tragic' reading of the text, as applied by Bradley to *Hamlet*. The novel does not reflect such a movement from disease to renewal, but rather traces a virus that catalyses disease as beyond purging. The story, or content, of *Fludd* ends with possibility and the central tone of pervasive rottenness is actually enabling because it can never be eradicated at source; it *is* the source – difference, or the differing origin of differences. Thus, the narrative, both in terms of content and tonality, is writing that *affirms* what is not positive, which is often extremely funny, but never tragic. Narrative shares the incomplete, troubling, unknown qualities of a disease and dis-ease – that overworked metaphor that is also always already suggesting itself. It breeds excess, ellipsis, the burst full stop; Mantel said that the ellipsis is not necessarily present on the page, but it goes on in the reader's mind. If it goes on in the reader's mind, it goes on in their *thoughts* and the work of laughter offers an insight into that process. Yet this raises the question of whether the ellipsis is ever present to itself, or is it always differing, a differentiability of tone?

'Cleanly erased from her mind': The curate mask

The representation of agricultural/industrial origins as unstable suggests an alternative, or altered, version of history. This questioning of historical certainty also underlies Fludd as a character because he is introduced in the 'Note' as 'real'. However, neither the historical Fludd nor the fictional Fludd produce a privileged site, which implies both a double focus and a sense of non-identity. I have already introduced this idea of the non-identical as

²²⁴ *Fludd*, p. 73.

harbouring what Derrida describes as the return of the always yet to come; however, Fludd works as an example on another level too. In the *Derrida* film, Derrida's voiceover makes a distinction between an anticipated or predictable future and a 'to come' that always remains unexpected and unknown. Fludd illustrates this split because he arrives seemingly as the anticipated curate, yet he also remains a 'to come' because his identity is never confirmed and, as a historical *revenant*, he returns, but cannot in terms of 'full' presence. Across all the different tones of the novel, Fludd is tantalisingly evocative of the 'yet to come' because, as stated in the introduction, he is curate, ghost *and* alchemist while never fully occupying any of these contradictory positions. Chapter three will explore the relationship between the body and the *revenant*, and presence shot through by nonpresence as elliptical; however, this questioning of bodily instability also pervades *Fludd*. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida attacks the punctuality of the *revenant*: 'The *revenant* is going to come. It won't be long. But how long it is taking'.²²⁵ This is reminiscent of Fludd's riposte to Father Angwin's criticism of the presences in the presbytery prior to the curate's arrival: "Well, I entered," Fludd said, "Did I not? Eventually".²²⁶

This is not the only suggestion of Fludd's lateness, or nonarrival; he is 'riven by nonpresence' or ruptured, lacking, which forges a connection between the *revenant* and the ellipsis, the dot, dot, dot, blows on the page.²²⁷ Fludd cannot be bodily, carnally or historically 'fixed' and his characteristics are only ever elliptically described. There is something unassailable within these implied centres of body/history and Fludd traces the limit or outline of such inaccessibility. Consider how the pattern of Fludd's features are 'cleanly erased' from any other mind, including that of the implied reader.²²⁸ To see without being seen is *the* insignia of power because it implies the occupation of an unreachable 'centre'. Yet Fludd is also part of the operation of a double focus maintained between himself and Judd McEvoy, the village taboocanist Father Angwin believes to be the devil. This sense of each character repeating the other without any established original is most explicit towards the end of the novel when Sister Philomena is awaiting the train that will enable her escape. A man arrives on the platform:

²²⁵ *Specters of Marx*, p. 2.

²²⁶ *Fludd*, p. 126.

²²⁷ 'The Spatial Arts', p. 15.

²²⁸ *Fludd*, p. 49.

He stood behind her, a little distance away [...] The skin of her neck crawled; almost as if the man were Fludd. She began to turn her head; slowly but inexorably, as if it were subject to a magnetic attraction [...] And yes, of course he was staring at her [...] As the man was Mr McEvoy, he could hardly have failed to recognise her; but he did not speak.²²⁹

This seems to challenge the *immanence* of the individual, which is an aspect of Nancy Armstrong's analyses in *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (2005). In particular, 'The Necessary Gothic', the concluding chapter to her book, is perhaps pertinent for reading the Fludd/Judd dynamic. It is a good example of how gothic criticism queries, then stabilises, the paradoxes in the relationship between the individual and the social order. The chapter establishes that early novel protagonists were identified by a lack, which they then overcame in order to improve their position in life and renew the community: 'The novel, I have argued, was born as authors gave narrative form to this wish for a social order sufficiently elastic to accommodate individualism'.²³⁰ The problem for emerging Victorian fiction was 'expanding the means for self-expression without simultaneously limiting those possibilities'.²³¹ It is this paradox of boundaries that the chapter then assimilates into an argument about the need to maintain the stability of nation, family and the individual.

Moving swiftly from representations of Victorian novels into so-called gothic ones, the paradox and 'the double' is proved to demonstrate an essentially gothic operation:

Emily Brontë's incestuously similar Catherine and Heathcliff, Mary Shelley's parthenogenetic monster, and Robert Louis Stevenson's Jekyll internally split into Jekyll and Hyde. This is indeed the job of the nineteenth-century gothic: to turn any formation that challenges the nuclear family into a form of degeneracy so hostile to modern selfhood as to negate emphatically its very being.²³²

This clear novelistic precedent for the doubling of Fludd and Judd fails to seal the argument for *Fludd* as a textual gothic descendent because the logic stutters. Whether it is family, faith or the future, *Fludd* does not work towards solidifying, privileging or protecting any concept

²²⁹ *Fludd*, p. 161.

²³⁰ Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 139.

²³¹ Armstrong, p. 138.

²³² Armstrong, p. 146.

that informs identity.²³³ This is already apparent from the non-identification of the villagers with the town/country divide. Furthermore, it is ambiguous whether the importance of the family is historically grounded or if there is subjective investment in Armstrong's chapter. It is certainly emphasised as a centre in 'The Necessary Gothic', and consequently placed under considerable strain. Again it is my contention that the 'excess' gothic critics revel in – paradox, doubling, contradiction – are characteristics not of the gothic, but rather of the text. Thus, another way of reading the provocation of the Fludd/Judd *déjà vu* is in terms of the trace of the other in the self-same, or differance: 'We provisionally give the name *differance* to this *sameness* which is not *identical*'.²³⁴ It is again a question of content and tone, or differentiability. For Fred Botting, the gothic signifies *excess*, but this statement immediately limits the meaning of excess to content, by which I mean gothic descriptions of degeneracy, decay and death.²³⁵ This is not how excess operates in Derrida's thought, where it is really understood as an effect of play. As a textual operation, therefore, it cannot be pinned to a specific example but rather pervades the writing, which is how the repetition without the first time of Fludd and Judd can be said to articulate the duplicity of *alchemical* tone.

This is partially because Fludd's historical traces allow comparison between 1950-esque Fetherhoughton and the pre-Enlightenment days of alchemy, the latter is definitely represented as less comfortable with identifying a singular origin for meaning. There is little sense of conceptual solidity: "There was a time when the air was packed with spirits, like flies on an August day. Now I find that the air is empty. There is only man and his concerns".²³⁶ The contemporary evokes a vacuity, an absence that occupies full presence, or death. This quotation follows a discussion between Fludd and Father Angwin about devils and the modern imagination. The priest argues that there were once numerous devils with special characteristics, as many as to rival the saints: "But now people just say 'Satan', or 'Lucifer'. It is the curse of the present century, this rage for oversimplification".²³⁷ This perhaps interrogates contemporary banishment of the unknown in order to fetishize the apparently knowable; yet simultaneously the pressure of the unknown returns within this need for simplification, which is the lure of the origin or a conceptually solid past. Moreover,

²³³ Spooner's analysis of *Beyond Black* also concludes that the novel works against any notion of identity as informed by so-called stable concepts, since both the living and the dead are 'cut loose from the origins that once might have delivered identity' (p. 84).

²³⁴ 'Differance', p. 129.

²³⁵ Fred Botting, *The Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 1.

²³⁶ *Fludd*, p. 127. These 'spirits' also evoke those in *The Tempest*.

²³⁷ *Fludd*, p. 126.

as I will develop in the later chapters of this thesis, Hall argues that the excluded will always return to haunt the comfortable.²³⁸

However, ‘Fludd’ is also elliptical because of the exchange of meaning this signifier initiates: *Fludd* (novel), Fludd (character and *name*), Fludd (*revenant*) and flood (homonym) suggests multiplicity of meaning, and a menaced site for certainty. Again, like the outlining of his body, such signification does not evoke consistent equidistance from the centre in the process of a word. There is not a unified centre, though it is not absent either; there is no formula, only play. Most significant perhaps though is Fludd’s carnal nonpresence, which can be linked to the *revenant* as unpacking the certainty of biologically understood origins.²³⁹ The novel climaxes with the sexual consummation of Fludd and Sister Philomena’s relationship. Yet despite Fludd’s early claim that he entered eventually, this remains unclear, as does the suggestion of his *coming*:

When she reached out, and folded her arms around his body, she felt that she was closing them on air. Her eyes opened wide, her lips pressed together in fear of pain, she fell back against the pillows, her neck outstretched. She turned her head and watched the wall, the curtain, their shadows moving across the wall. Every possession is a loss, Fludd said. But equally, every loss is a possession.²⁴⁰

It is the sense of repetition that is emphasised because Fludd has a shadow but no body; plus, the sexual potency of ghosts recurs in Mantel’s writing. For example, in *Every day is mother’s day* (1986) there is the suggestion that Muriel’s baby has been fathered by a ghost.²⁴¹ This uncertain origin is further eroded in the sequel, *Vacant Possession* (1987); however, the earlier book helps illustrate the sexual meaning of Derrida’s line – ‘The *revenant* is going to come’. This potent spectre is perhaps best summarised as an interrogation of arrival and origins – rather than a convenient non-site to relocate the gothic, through evoking a tired ‘bump in the night’ sense of the ghost, which has decidedly limited possibilities – though I have written elsewhere about the trope of the ejaculating *revenant* in both Mantel’s writing and that of other contemporary women writers.²⁴² In particular, I have made the point that the writing of ghostly paternity implies the *revenant*’s ‘presence’ at the

²³⁸ ‘Race: The Floating Signifier’ (1996).

²³⁹ Derrida plays on the word ‘come’, which is derived from the work of Maurice Blanchot and works better in French because *revenant* extends *venir*, to come; this can also be linked to tone as existing only differentially.

²⁴⁰ *Fludd*, p. 166.

²⁴¹ Hilary Mantel, *Every day is mother’s day* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 39.

²⁴² For further details see: Eileen Pollard, “‘The revenant is going to come’: Sex and rottenness in the communities of Hilary Mantel and Nicola Barker”, in *The Evil Body*, ed. by April Anson (Ebook: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2011), pp. 143-151.

moment of insemination, but positions them at a remove afterwards. This represents coming not as an arrival but rather a disappearance, plus the paternal ghost having come, then disappeared, remains as an always a *to come*.

In ‘The Spatial Arts’ though, the sexuality of this come does not elude Derrida:

I say “come,” but I mean an event that is not to be confused with the word “come” as it is said in language. It is something that can be replaced by a sign, by an “Ah,” by a cry, that means “come.” It is not itself a full presence; it is differential, that is to say, it is relayed through the tone and the gradations or gaps of tonality.²⁴³

So perhaps, some contemporary sexual representations of coming also articulate these aspects of *to come*. The means for this is the *revenant*, but the process of its coming is elliptically described – neither the *revenant* nor the coming can be considered in terms of full presence, but that the *revenant’s* coming is differential evokes the repetition of the double focus.²⁴⁴ However, the relay through gradations or gaps constitutes an imperfection that also characterises the ellipsis, the lack within the tonality is meaning and this coming constitutes ‘what falls short of being identical’. In the work of the contemporary women writers I have considered alongside Mantel’s texts, particularly the work of Nicola Barker, this *coming* combines the oscillation of the ellipsis – return, difference, imperfection – not merely through the problematic of the ejaculation of a man, but also that of a ghost.²⁴⁵

‘This interval, this suspension’: The saintly mask

The saintly mask is created through the interment and exhumation of the inanimate statues. However, it is prefigured by the relationship between the notion of ‘the forerunner’ and Father Angwin’s faith as characterising both a double focus and an inaccessible centre. The movement between the forerunner (for Father Angwin) and doubling, which recurs in Derrida’s writing on both ellipsis and difference, is relevant to representations of faith in the text. Fludd responds to a perceived criticism from Father Angwin regarding his late arrival. Yet the connection between Father Angwin’s early acknowledgement of the presences in the presbytery and Fludd’s subsequent appearance remains oblique:

²⁴³ ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 21.

²⁴⁴ Interestingly, sex and the sexual act are fairly consistently eclipsed in Mantel’s writing. A partial exception is the description in *An Experiment in Love* of recently ejaculated fluid: ‘I was aware that a teardrop of semen was creeping down the inside of my left thigh’. Though this moment, however intimate, is obviously very much ‘after-the-fact’ too. Hilary Mantel, *An Experiment in Love* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 178.

²⁴⁵ In particular, the composite character of Dory in Nicola Barker’s *Darkmans* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011).

‘But there’s another thing, Father – I must alert you. I can hear a person walking about upstairs, when nobody is there.’
 Nervously, she put her hand up to her mouth, and touched the pale flat wart.
 ‘Yes, it happens,’ Father Angwin said. He sat on a hard chair at the dining table, huddled into himself, his rust-coloured head bowed. ‘I often think it is myself.’
 ‘But you are here.’
 ‘At this moment, yes. Perhaps it is a forerunner. Someone who is to come.’
 ‘The Lord?’ Miss Dempsey asked wildly.
 ‘The curate. I am threatened with a curate. What a very extraordinary curate that would be ... a walker without feet, a melter through walls. But no. Probably not.’²⁴⁶

The paradoxical doubling of – “I often think it is myself” – also evokes the return of the always yet to come because Father Angwin’s musings unsettle any accepted understanding of chronology. He believes the presence to be himself (understood as already present by Miss Dempsey, though ‘presence’ in writing is impossible) yet he also suggests that the presence is a forerunner of someone yet to come. If the forerunner is Father Angwin, then he is both present and yet ‘to come’ simultaneously, which parallels how Derrida’s writing challenges the notion of full presence. Fetishizing an origin as the centre or locus of meaning relies on a view of chronology *that cannot be intruded upon*. Moreover, with reference to the earlier point about Fludd and man’s identity, understanding an individual’s origins rests on a sense of the *unique*, which is another inaccessible yet transcendent centre. The suggestion of the inexplicable autonomy of ghosts – ‘a walker without feet’ – is also a tone, or conceit, within the representations of the fiends in *Beyond Black*.

However, Father Angwin’s loss of faith does not prevent him continuing as a priest and the sense of ritual he develops to protect him also describes the ellipsis:

‘I thought to myself,’ he said, ‘a priest must believe in God, or at least pretend to; and who knows, if I pretend for thirty years, for forty years, perhaps *the belief will grow back in again*, the *mask will grow into flesh* [...] And with that as my philosophy, it somehow seemed possible to go on, *enclosed in ritual*, safe as houses, as they say. Oh, *the central premise was missing*, but do you know, it didn’t seem to matter all that much?’²⁴⁷

There is much elliptical description here. For example, with “the belief will grow back in again” – *will* signifies the always yet to come, but also the dislocating ‘rotteness’ of the novel. Again there is the potential for gothic readings of Father Angwin and the presbytery as

²⁴⁶ Fludd, p. 26.

²⁴⁷ Fludd, p. 52, my emphases.

a *gothic* centre, but these analyses are notably absent from Horner and Zlosnik's article. This is perhaps because the Father's loss of faith understood either as a gothic or rotten centre cannot be isolated as a singular example of such play. Thus, the topography of the village, its history and the hybrid character of its inhabitants all trace a similar movement, or excess. Father Angwin's faith is merely elliptical, like everything else that *means*, containing a centre – that will grow back *in* – but which is ultimately not accessible or controllable.

Yet this reference to flesh is also interesting because Mantel's writing does not privilege flesh, but only flesh understood as *mask*. For Derrida, the mask is key to the *revenant's* insignia of power – the power to see without being seen – which, as demonstrated, is another metaphor for the unknowable, yet necessary, and ultimately enabling ex-centric 'centre'. There is a centre, perhaps even a space, but not as it is understood or stabilised post-Enlightenment, via reason. Moreover, growth – “grow into flesh” – also facilitates deconstruction as at work in the work, since growth is biologically (and therefore, as the work of Stewart suggests, 'grounded' in the higher authority of science) understood as division, the dividing and multiplying of cells, or rather a breaking down. This dynamic will inform my examination of the body as an origin read through Derrida's thoughts on the *revenant* in the next chapter.

Understanding the repetition of the double focus and the simultaneously inaccessible centre helps unlock the interment and exhumation of the statues in *Fludd*. I will consider the arguments of Castricano in *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* (2001) in order to illustrate how gothicism co-opts repression and return as tropes, thereby limiting any wider significance of these terms. This most 'obviously' gothic example from Mantel's novel works particularly well with Castricano's analyses because *Cryptomimesis* highlights the recurrence of the tomb, the crypt and the burial in Derrida's thought in order to categorise him as a 'Gothic' writer too: 'The *a* of difference, therefore, is not heard; it remains silent, secret, and discreet, like a tomb'.²⁴⁸ In *Fludd*, though inanimate, 'the statues lie in their shallow graves' and Castricano's book approaches a similar idea of a treasure or secret to texts: 'Approach can be terrifying, but this is the place where the other begins: where death enters the picture. Why else would Derrida say, writing's case is "grave"?'²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ 'Difference', p. 132.

²⁴⁹ *Fludd*, p. 78 and Jodey Castricano, *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 4.

The hidden, the inaccessible, the buried, is necessary for meaning, and, the sense that this secret remains beyond grasp, is not the entrance of death but an emblem of life; this is part of the embedding of the statues in the novel, the hollow nature of signification, which is not merely gothic. *Cryptomimesis* questions the recurrence of haunting in Derrida's writing, and makes a case for his debt to the 'Gothic'. However, his work of haunting, as an affect of writing, actually inscribes the trace: 'It is not absence instead of presence, but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun'.²⁵⁰ The *trace* is not a concept, just as difference is not a theory. This means understanding, and therefore, limiting Derrida's ghosts within a tradition as grounded and institutionalised as gothicism is, at the very least, problematic.

At the beginning of the novel, the bishop visits Father Angwin and insists that the statues be removed from the church: "I cannot have this idolatry" he proclaims.²⁵¹ Father Angwin does not agree: 'But they are not idols. They are just statues. They are just representations'.²⁵² This parallels Derrida's notion of the sign as repetition and suggests that these signs, if not hollow, are definitely silent, since Father Angwin protests (retelling the conversation to Fludd): "If saints, I said, will not come to Fetherhoughton, may I not have their *mute* representatives?"²⁵³ Derrida deconstructs mutism in 'The Spatial Arts' as that 'which produces an effect of full presence' because it 'can always be interpreted in a contradictory fashion':

That is to say, these silent works are in fact already talkative, full of virtual discourses, and from that point of view the silent work becomes an even more authoritarian discourse – *it becomes the very place of a word that is all the more powerful because it is silent.*²⁵⁴

It is important to distinguish between the empty and the merely silent. This talkative silence characterises the meaningful lack that constitutes the ellipsis. Unlike idolatry, which suggests a mute essence, or immanence, a centre beyond reach and play, Father Angwin's emphasis on them as "just statues [...] just representations" does not privilege *the first time*. This approach places the power and meaning on return. The statues are signs, they are writing, and as sites of exchange without clear parameters, they are then repressed. This menaced centre in

²⁵⁰ 'Ellipsis', p. 372.

²⁵¹ *Fludd*, p. 21.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Fludd*, p. 84, my emphasis.

²⁵⁴ 'The Spatial Arts', pp. 12-13, my emphasis.

Fludd – a centre by means of which nothing emanates out – is necessarily elliptical. The statues are buried prior to Fludd’s arrival in the parish; they are interred, and then later exhumed. This problematic exposes them as hollow signs, as Fludd argues: ““They are symbols, Miss Dempsey. Symbols are powerful things””.²⁵⁵ However, the ‘Note’ considers the *symbolic* as part of a double anchor within alchemy that both differs from and defers the arrival of the literal and factual. Interestingly, Fludd’s warning about symbolism introduces the essential, and irresolvable, hybridity of the Alchymical Wedding. And this suggestion of instability within symbolism forces a return to Derrida’s understanding of the sign: ‘As soon as a sign emerges, it begins by repeating itself [...] The grapheme, repeating itself in this fashion, thus has *neither natural site nor natural center*’.²⁵⁶ Such emphasis on repetition rather than origin characterises both the statues and the double focus of the ellipsis.

Surely the return of the repressed is quintessentially ‘Gothic’ with a capital ‘g’? Yet Horner and Zlosnik’s article does not consider the burial of the statues in *Fludd* as a gothic trope or metaphor, in fact, it does not consider it at all, it forms a writing of the buried outline, an eclipse. Perhaps this is because the burial provides a fluctuating and therefore problematic centre; for example, the castle, or more recently the asylum, are visible ‘gothic’ centres, and to an extent conceptually solid. The burial of the statues, however *thematically* creepy, is not a stabilising moment, neither is their exhumation. Moreover, although the ‘castle’ is certainly a site of exchange, it facilitates an accessible and understood process, what happens to the statues underground is represented as unknown, invisible and also ‘absent’ from the novel:

‘Shine your torch, Father Angwin,’ she said. She wanted to see the face; and as soon as she did so, *she knew that this interval, this suspension, this burial had brought about a change*. She did not mention this change to the others; she realized that it might be something only she could see. *But the virgin’s expression had altered. Blankly sweet, she had become sly; unyielding virtue had yielded, she gazed up, with a conspiratorial smile, into Heaven’s icy vault.*²⁵⁷

This interval or suspension elliptically describes the process of burial and exhumation. In particular, it signifies the outlining of an alteration because on-the-limit of the virgin’s expression there is a change, or rather an ex-change since what was blankly sweet is now sly. It is an imperfection, ‘what falls short of being identical’, but an enabling flaw because the statues though different have returned. This interval, this suspension is further effaced

²⁵⁵ *Fludd*, p. 79.

²⁵⁶ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 374, my emphasis.

²⁵⁷ *Fludd*, p. 137, my emphases.

because of Sister Philomena's silence in recognising such alteration as potentially 'something only she could see'.

'It's not a place [...] It's a "come"': Pointing to the *revenant*

The *revenant* is the thought for the next chapter, simultaneously pointing forwards and back since the untitled preface to *Fludd* contains the story of Lazarus: 'Christ points to the *revenant*'.²⁵⁸ It is coming, it will not be long, however long it has taken, but this shift requires some concluding remarks on the significance of the rotten, the ellipsis and the virus in *Fludd*, since all three inscribe the remainder. In the case of the ellipsis, via Nancy's 'Elliptical Sense', there is the argument that this figure describes the orbit of Derrida's thought. Then again, in his interview about the spatial arts, Derrida commits himself to his work on the virus as 'all that I have done since I began writing'.²⁵⁹ The rotten is of my own coinage, but is also used to articulate a tension between two irresolvable positions, rotting but not gone as addressed through *Hamlet* and *Specters of Marx*. The ellipsis shares this origin as *doubled*, and, like the virus, it occupies a nonplace of disruption as neither living nor dead.²⁶⁰ Only the *tension* is what remains, which underlies my analysis of the body in *Beyond Black* as an 'origin' pervaded by the nonpresence of Derrida's *revenant*.

²⁵⁸ *Fludd*, n. p.

²⁵⁹ 'The Spatial Arts', p. 12.

²⁶⁰ The 'rotten' is an important figure in the work of Georges Bataille. For further discussion see Jacques Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelian without Reserve', in *Writing and Difference*, trans by. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 317-350.

Chapter Three ‘The empty space within’: Exploding the body as origin

‘The empty space within’ is Mantel’s description of the body, perhaps *her* body, in her essay ‘Clinical Waste’ (2003). Exploding the body, as a transcendental signifier, poses the most challenging work this thesis proposes to undertake, for several reasons.²⁶¹ First, as Mantel has written extensively (including in the epigraph to this chapter) on the secrets of her own troubling endometriotic body, the ‘bodily’ traces in her writing are necessarily riven by the apparently fixed point of the author’s anatomy. Second, it is impossible to confront the paradox of the female body in writing without engaging with feminism, though such an interruption posits further difficulties. There is an unsettling sense of cause and effect to this impasse, ergo a female-authored text requires a feminist reading, which jars with the resistance of this thesis to frameworks, agendas and theoretical coherency. This is not to suggest that feminism is a coherent field (which is *itself* a problem); rather that the leap from female author to feminist reading is short sighted and possibly even blinkered. It is a tethering that has the two-fold effect of demarcating the ‘edge’ of the text, while also diverting the thesis away from its intended work. As stated in my introductory chapter, this research combines the thought of Derrida with the writing of Mantel in order to point towards ‘something else’ about both; these parameters signify the limit *and* the operation at-the-limit of this thesis. The third challenge, not unrelated to the first two, is the sheer difficulty of writing *clearly* about writing-on-the-body with all its biological certainty and metaphorical dynamism. I intend to overcome this problem by combining the discourses of Mantel’s body, her writing as a ‘body’, or corpus, and the bodily traces in her fiction, in order to *absent* certainty and instead embrace the play of this unwieldy signifier, which offers yet another differing origin of differences in Mantel’s work.

This chapter is divided into several sections, though, broadly speaking, it serves just two functions. The first is a disgruntled homage to feminism, which is necessary due to the following combinations. Mantel has a well-known diagnosis of endometriosis, which is a rare medical condition that both affects and is *an effect of* the womb. I will read the body in *Beyond Black* through Derrida’s thoughts not only on the *revenant*, but also *khōra*, which harbours the meaning ‘womb’, amongst several others. As a result, I will foreground my analysis of Mantel’s novel by engaging with the work of two key feminist thinkers who have

²⁶¹ Yet however challenging this task, it is important for the work of later sections of this thesis to succeed. It especially foregrounds the significance of Stuart Hall’s arguments concerning race (as a language) as utilised in chapters five and six. Reading ‘the body as the ultimate Transcendental Signifier beyond language and culture’ creates a falsehood that it is *crucial* to tackle now. For further discussion see Stuart Hall, ‘Race: The Floating Signifier’ (1996).

written on *khōra* (or the womb) – Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. However, this informed dismissal marks the beginning and end of my exploration of feminist discourse for the already stated reason of thesis parameters and also, perhaps more significantly, because there is no contemporary feminist critique of Mantel’s work available with which to enter into dialogue. I cite this absence as the justification, along with the need to consider previous ‘applications’ of *khōra*, for my returning to the work of Irigaray and Kristeva, which in many respects has been overtaken. Furthermore, there is ambivalence regarding feminism in the narrative of Mantel’s career, as supported by her *Woman’s Hour* interview of 1995 when Jenni Murray quoted the author’s own words back at her concerning its politics – ‘it’s not that it hasn’t worked, it hasn’t been tried’.²⁶² This negation parallels what this thesis also wishes to rebuff; instead I wish to ‘try’ feminism, both in the legal sense of the word and also in terms of an attempt, or perhaps, an affirmation that is not positive.

Though there is no doubt of the utility of a feminist reading, it is my hubris to suggest that this should happen in the wake of the work of this thesis, since it needs first to be established which ‘text’ is being read. In order for this distinction to take place, the sense that there are *different* texts, always provisional of course, needs to be proposed first. And again, this is why this chapter is so pivotal; as the body is such a fraught (non)site of exchange it offers a particularly fluid point of contact for all these clashing discourses and the notion that it is the ‘originator’ of them. So, for example, when Mantel won the Booker Prize for the second time in 2012 for *Bring Up the Bodies*, many newspapers played on the ‘bodies’ of the title and in the text itself. Yet the *Guardian* front-page headline, which provided the tag for a photograph of Mantel, read ‘Body Double’.²⁶³ Considering the fraught position of Mantel’s body in the media, the text of this image and headline are inescapably barbed. First however, comes this chapter, which opens up the ‘empty’ space of the body in Mantel’s writing as a beginning for future different, yet necessarily, simultaneous readings of such an interval, or ellipsis. Importantly, I still consider the ‘Body Double’ example to occur under the heading of ‘Mantel’s writing’, although the agency of authorship cannot be perceived as *present*. This is also why I lay down the work of this thesis, in terms of the deconstruction of the artificial demarcation of the text, as necessary before any really powerful feminist reading can take place.

²⁶² ‘Modern Writers: Interviews with remarkable authors’, *Woman’s Hour*, 11 September 1995 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/writers/12247.shtml>> [accessed 31 January 2013].

²⁶³ *Guardian*, 17 October 2012, p. 1.

The second function of this chapter is to question the position of the body in *Beyond Black* by reading it in terms of Derrida's thoughts on the *revenant*. This synthesis will focus primarily on representations of the voice and the unstable 'bodily' origins of flesh, children and technology in Mantel's novel. These analyses will prompt a return to Stewart's reading of *Beyond Black*, expounded in chapter one, which argues that the figure of the medium places narrative *omniscience* under scrutiny in the novel. Identifying these pressure points will prove particularly important for exploring the tension between voice, narrative and detachment in the text. Reading these vibrations through the body/*revenant* paradox, which has to an extent been foregrounded by Fludd in the previous chapter, will also help illustrate how Derrida's thoughts here can be considered as *elliptically* described.

'Obviously a gendered position': Entering the sterile quarrel

So-called Feminist "Theory," generally associated with developments in France of the last thirty years, is perceived as unrealistic and elitist [...] I do not wish to enter that sterile quarrel.²⁶⁴

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern' (1987) reads Mahasweta Devi's 'Stanadayini', or 'Breast-Giver', in order to problematise subject-positions within, amongst others, French feminist discourses. Its arguments support my reading of 'womb' in Derrida's '*Khōra*' and, also Mantel's corpus more generally, in several ways. For a start, I agree with Spivak's sentiments regarding French feminism: I do not wish to enter that sterile quarrel either. However, I also agree with her analysis of Lacan's phallus, which though repeatedly justified as merely a signifier rather than the actual male member, 'is still obviously a gendered position' with *an agenda*.²⁶⁵ Therefore, by default, though I similarly intend the womb as a signifier, it remains highly gendered. Consequently, I will explore two iconic descriptions of the womb in French feminist theory from the last thirty years. Firstly, Irigaray's reading of Plato's 'cave' in her infamous *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985). This is where Spivak's essay again becomes important since, unlike Irigaray, Spivak clearly relates her ideas through history and culture and, most importantly, a specific text, which is what I will do in chapter four with my own theories of the womb and *Giving*

²⁶⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World', in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 241-268 (p. 258).

²⁶⁵ Spivak, p. 259.

Up the Ghost: A Memoir.²⁶⁶ Also, Spivak's explicit engagement with Lacan's work, particularly *jouissance*, helps forge a way out of this 'sterile quarrel' through female orgasmic pleasure and the theorising of this *excess* will then assist my own exploding of the womb problematic.

The womb is understood culturally as a universal point of 'origin' for being. Even the infamous Macduff, who was not of woman *born*, had known origins since he was 'from his mother's womb untimely ripped'.²⁶⁷ However, this is not how the womb surfaces in Mantel's writing, which means an altogether *different* framework is needed to read it, particularly to sidestep the thorny distraction of fecundity. I refer again to the rationale of this thesis as outlined in the introduction that this is a strictly Derridean reading of Mantel's writing, and that this informs all its terminology. The space of the womb is the space of the signifier; it offers an uncertain 'place' for the possibility of infinite exchange. For example, as already touched upon in chapter two, the question of paternity, if not ghostly, is often far from 'arrival' in Mantel's writing. Thus, in *A Change of Climate* Sandra Glasse's father remains unnamed and unknown, though he was certainly not the man her mother married. The possibilities for the meaning/identity of what occupies, or intrudes upon, the signifier/womb are therefore excessive.

The second 'feminist' text I will consider is Julia Kristeva's theory of language in terms of the symbolic and the semiotic. Specifically, I will highlight the problematic position of what she calls '*chora*', pulsating with an energy (possibly a *bodily* energy) through the semiotic, in order to discharge said energy into the symbolic.²⁶⁸ Even with reference to Plato, Kristeva's notion of *chora* in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) remains rather hazy, though it is 'often translated as womb or receptacle [...] Kristeva doesn't seem to mean that it is just a space'.²⁶⁹ This reading will inform my approach to Derrida's essay '*Khōra*' in *On the Name* (1995), which is also drawing on Plato's use of the term. My intention with this strongly

²⁶⁶ For further discussion of the criticisms levelled at the work of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous see *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (London: Macmillan, 1989): 'Common to both theorists is the absence of any sustained attention to history and culture. Language is viewed by implication as a universal structure that oppresses all women in the same way. It is difficult, therefore, to see how womanspeak and *écriture féminine*, which are theories of language based on sex, are able to escape their separatist implications and, correspondingly, provide feminism with a theory of social change', pp. 14-15.

²⁶⁷ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by Kenneth Muir (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-163. V. 8. 15-16.

²⁶⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

²⁶⁹ Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 18.

theoretical section of the thesis is to highlight Derrida's description of 'Khōra' – a sense of empty radical otherness that paradoxically gives place to being while at the same time offering a place without meaning or essence – as not only elliptical but simultaneously characterising the operation of the womb in Mantel's corpus.²⁷⁰ Thus, the womb offers an off-centre focus across many of her novels and the memoir, but is never represented as a unified point of origin.²⁷¹ I do not intend to apply my theories of the womb as an inflexible schema through which to master the 'meaning' of Mantel's texts. I merely propose to illustrate that my paradoxical understanding of the womb, as informed by Derrida, traces the content of Mantel's work – abortion, the paternal *revenant*, ghostly children – as further evidence of the double focus, or duplicitous tone, of her writing that is always differential, never present to itself, inscribing the ellipsis. It cannot avoid a gendered position, but, for the purposes of this thesis, the womb is also the ellipsis.

This both is and is not the case for the womb in Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*. For a start, there is an implied stability to the point of departure, the theoretical 'origin' to the work, and this is a contrast to Mantel's oscillating narratives.²⁷²

We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine." When she submits to (such a) theory, woman fails to realize that she is renouncing the specificity of her own relationship to the imaginary.²⁷³

Irigaray's 'solution' has led to accusations of essentialism. For example, Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore have written of her work: 'Language is viewed by implication as a universal structure that oppresses all women in the same way'.²⁷⁴ This is perhaps an important criticism to remember when reading Irigaray's representation of the womb. Moreover, the above statement about the 'specificity' of the woman's relationship with the imaginary, and therefore language, is laid down in the section entitled 'Speculum', which precedes her most

²⁷⁰ 'Khōra', pp. 90-91.

²⁷¹ *Every day is mother's day*, *Vacant Possession*, *An Experiment in Love* and *Giving Up the Ghost* are all texts where the paradoxical womb emerges explicitly in the content. It emerges differently in her other works too, including *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, the latter of which Mark Lawson described as a 'tragedy of fertility' in a 2012 *Front Row* interview with Mantel. 'Womb' in the Tudor trilogy is the harbinger of uncertainty *par excellence*; it repeatedly suggests a *process* not an arrival: 'A woman's body will it deliver...?' *Front Row*, BBC Radio 4, 5 June 2012 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01jhb3v>> [accessed 3 May 2013].

²⁷² For further discussion see Rachel Cusk, 'All her flesh was as glass', *The Times*, 2 March 1995, p. 39, which reviews the text of *An Experiment in Love* as 'a desire to get things clear beneath which [Mantel's] prose resonates with complex and mysterious life'. This contradictory coherency oddly parallels Kristeva's description of the fraught dependency of the symbolic on the semiotic.

²⁷³ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 133.

²⁷⁴ Belsey and Moore, pp. 14-15.

sustained engagement with the womb, in response to Plato's *Hystera*. This later engagement begins with the following explication of the cave/womb relationship:

The myth of the cave, for example, or as an example, is a good place to start. Read it this time as a metaphor of the inner space, of the den, the womb or *hystera*, sometimes of the earth – though we shall see that the text inscribes the metaphor as, strictly speaking, impossible. Here is an attempt at making metaphor, at trying out detours, which not only is a silent prescription for Western metaphysics but also, more explicitly, proclaims (itself as) everything publicly designated as metaphysics, its fulfillment [*sic*], and its interpretation.²⁷⁵

However, it is not merely Plato's metaphor, potentially, of the womb, which is impossible. If we assume that in psychoanalysis it is generally understood that a subject becomes a subject through the acquisition of language, and any theory, or discourse, of the subject is inherently *masculine*, how is it possible for the specificity of woman's relationship with the imaginary to ever arise? Despite the decisiveness of the text – '*Read it this time as a metaphor of the inner space, of the den, the womb or hystera*' – Irigaray's work cannot 'master' the metaphor any more than Plato's can, although his perceived attempt seems, ironically, to be the basis of her criticism. It is only 'a silent prescription' that is possible, and this *talkative* silence will become strangely useful for describing the eccentric centre, which denies the text while simultaneously making it possible, whether this be called *khōra*, womb or ellipsis.

It is partly these frustrations that lead Spivak to a sense of stalemate about French feminism and prompts her to utilise female orgasm in order to break free of its bonds. She argues as well that Western Liberal feminism 'identifies Woman with the reproductive or copulative body', which Irigaray's text avoids, though it does link femininity with yet another obscure specificity.²⁷⁶ Neither of these feminist identifications assists reading the womb in Mantel's writing, but Spivak's emphasis on orgasmic pleasure does, through theorising excess. There is more than a suggestion of the ellipsis to Spivak's orgasm; it cannot be contained, 'taking place in excess', it is an outline.²⁷⁷ As Irigaray writes of the womb/cave metaphor, it too is like 'trying out detours', particularly female orgasm that lacks the notional arrival of male ejaculation (note the fascination of male philosophers, including Derrida, with 'coming'). Such characteristics of excess, detours and non-arrival, or what Derrida describes as 'the unavailability of adestation', all inscribe the womb of Mantel's texts, especially *Giving Up*

²⁷⁵ Irigaray, p. 243.

²⁷⁶ Spivak, p. 258.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

the Ghost.²⁷⁸ The memoir details ‘Hilary’s’ catastrophically late diagnosis with endometriosis, the narrative construction of which will be explored in chapter four in terms of unstable (auto)biographical origins. However, the elliptical description of both the womb and the illness, and how the processes invert and parallel ‘health’, are also important here. This quotation details the revelations of the ultrasonic scan Hilary (the ‘I’ of the memoir) underwent two days after being admitted to hospital in a crisis of pain (another excess) and fatigue:

The technician loomed above me and rolled me with a roller. Lifting my head, I saw the pictures on the screen [...] He showed me the blossoming growths around my ovaries. For the first and last time, I saw my womb, with two black strokes, like skilled calligraphy, marking it out: a neat diacritical mark in a language I would never learn to speak.²⁷⁹

Resonating ‘beneath’ the prose is the process of ultrasound during pregnancy. This odd word *ultrasound* will return in chapters five and six when the writing of such curves, or strokes, of calligraphy are considered in terms of tone, and silence. First though, in *Giving Up the Ghost*, the womb is evoked as writing – ‘two black strokes, like skilled calligraphy’ – *in writing* and, again, like in *Beyond Black* this writing is privileged above speech, denoting ‘a language I would never learn to speak’. Yet similarly to Derrida’s elliptical understanding of writing in ‘Ellipsis’, here too the writing is only ‘marking [...] out’ or offering an outline of the womb. Moreover, the word ‘diacritical’ seems to reinforce this implicit connection to the sense of evasion, or eclipse. The ‘neat diacritical mark’ suggests a capacity to distinguish or discern. This move is not only immediately undermined, but is also what Derrida attempts to identify about writing without ever attempting to master it: ‘Here or there we have *discerned* writing’ being his slippery opening mandate.²⁸⁰

Now I have briefly discerned the womb *as writing*, in the Derridean sense, in Mantel’s text, Spivak’s theorising of excess really helps it break free of any notional specificity whatsoever: ‘I will keep myself restricted to the question of *jouissance* as orgasmic pleasure’.²⁸¹ However, I have a slightly different application in mind for such a ‘beyond’, though with a similar view to celebrating rather than containing that which exceeds representation. It is unfortunately

²⁷⁸ ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 11.

²⁷⁹ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 201.

²⁸⁰ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 371.

²⁸¹ Spivak, p. 258. ‘Womb’ is understood as written here, but this act of writing also inscribes the very processes of evasion of *writing itself*.

necessary to exercise the tired pleasure/pain binary here, not merely because of the endometriosis of the memoir, but since it offers an outlining of excess that threads Mantel's whole corpus.²⁸² So, Anna's reaction in *A Change of Climate* the night her infant twins are abducted, provides an important talisman – 'she knew the essence of fear, which is like a kind of orgasm'.²⁸³ In other texts by Mantel, evocation of 'essence' is suspicious and masks a sense of uncertainty, as, for example, the essence of pain is only understood through pointing to its opposite. Thus, even here at this moment of absolute terror, there is no *essence*, no centre, only a skirting round of excess. Yet this gesturing perhaps connects to what Spivak describes as 'taming', a signifying process that she uses to challenge Lacan's problematic view of female pleasure:²⁸⁴

I cannot agree with Lacan that woman's *jouissance* in the narrow sense, "the opposition between [so-called] vaginal satisfaction and clitoral orgasm," is "fairly trivial." We cannot compute the line where *jouissance* in the general sense shifts into *jouissance* in the narrow sense. But we can propose that, because *jouissance* is where an unexchangeable excess is tamed into exchange, where "what is this" slides into "what is this worth" slides into "what does this mean?" *it* (rather than castration) is where signification emerges.²⁸⁵

It is my contention that this '*it*' of signification, emphasised in Spivak's original, will come to represent 'womb', as read in the writing of both Mantel and Derrida. In particular, that this figure of the womb traced on the *ground* of the text inscribes 'an unexchangeable excess [...] tamed into exchange'; a relationship I will push further in chapter five using the work of Macherey. These questions, regarding the womb – what is *it*/is it *worth*/does it *mean* – repeat in Mantel's work and receive different answers each time and in a way are always projections or fantasies of the ellipsis, merely going on in the (implied) reader's mind.²⁸⁶

²⁸² 'The pain, which in the early stages invades you when you menstruate, begins to take over your whole month' (*Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 192). The whole body in pain is beyond representation, it lacks the differential that allows for a meaning, so there is not a meaning, only excessive meaning. Menstruation is also (imperfectly) cyclical and endometriosis, as a condition, is reminiscent of what Derrida outlines as *khōra*, since it problematises the biological stability of the womb.

²⁸³ *A Change of Climate*, p. 239.

²⁸⁴ Spivak, p. 259.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Spivak states of the *jouissance* in Mahasweta's 'Stanadayini', that to argue that this is *writing like a man* 'is to reduce a complex position to the trivialising simplicity of a hegemonic gendering' (p. 259). I suggest that to read the content of Mantel's womb – endometriosis, abortion, child ghosts – in terms of French feminism, or any feminism *wholesale*, is to perform a similar reduction. Spivak also forges the following commentary about the problem of opposites: 'Literary language, as it is historically defined, allows us no more than to take a persistent distance from the rationalist project, shared by the social sciences, radical or otherwise. This distancing is a supplement to the project. It could never have the positive role of an opposition' (p. 260). In this way, Spivak describes Derrida's affirmation that is not positive as the only option for acts of critique.

In ‘*Khōra*’, Derrida is ostensibly describing the inadequacy of the *logos/mythos* opposition in philosophy, but what emerges is an uncertainty reminiscent of Mantel’s ambiguous tone(s). So, the essay traces the conceits, which recur frequently in Mantel’s work – the gift, the missing defining what remains, narrative as inside and outside, the sense of discourse as a palimpsest, the place of children, location in *text* and the play between text and theme, or ‘between what is done and what is declared’.²⁸⁷ Most importantly though, Derrida’s reading of *khōra* in Plato’s *Timaeus* is suspicious of stable origins and describes the duplicity of the ellipsis: ‘When they explicitly touch on myth, the propositions of the *Timaeus* all seem ordered by a *double motif*’.²⁸⁸ The emphasis belongs to the original and works to highlight the double focus of Plato’s text that Derrida goes on to explain. First, that myth derives from play, so within philosophy ‘it will not be taken seriously’.²⁸⁹ Secondly, and paradoxically, ‘when one must make do with the probable, then myth is the done thing [*de rigueur*]; it is rigor’.²⁹⁰ Consequently, it is worth asking whether *khōra* (it/she) is elliptically described or if, in fact, the ellipsis itself is better understood as *khōra*?²⁹¹ It is for the purpose of this thesis that one is privileged – ellipsis – not merely as a thought, but, because Nancy argues it is a thought that describes *all* Derrida’s other thoughts. For example, Derrida’s initial attempt to locate *khōra* in the *logos/mythos* binary is very reminiscent of the operation of the ghost, as described at the beginning of *Specters of Marx*:

Beyond the retarded or Johnny-come-lately opposition of *logos* and *mythos*, how is one to think the necessity of that which, while *giving place* to that opposition as to so many others, seems sometimes to be itself no longer subject to the law of the very thing which it *situates*? What of this *place*? It is nameable?²⁹²

Derrida (temporarily) situates the ghost between life and death, arguing that what happens in-between all the ‘two’s’ one likes is maintained by some ghost, including perhaps the seemingly indifferent binaries of computer binary.²⁹³ Moreover, Derrida’s question above

²⁸⁷ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 119. There is a sense that the ‘difference’ here emerges from in-between Mantel’s research process and her subsequent writing process. However, I contend that both these processes are in fact *writing* and that the gap ‘between what is done and what is declared’ concerns tone, understood as arising from the friction of conflicting discourses.

²⁸⁸ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 112. Plato’s *Timaeus*, according to Derrida: ‘A tale about the possibility of the tale, a proposition about origin, memory, and writing’ (p. 115). This is an essay that is both playful in its excess and excessively playful.

²⁸⁹ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 112.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ I refer briefly to the it/she problematic via the following editorial note – ‘[the translation of the French pronoun *elle*, referring to *khōra*, includes both “her” and “it,” in order to stress that *elle* could also be understood as a personal feminine pronoun – Ed.]’ (‘*Khōra*’, p. 98).

²⁹² ‘*Khōra*’, pp. 90-91.

²⁹³ *Specters of Marx*, p. xvii.

‘What of this place?’ evokes his own answer in ‘The Spatial Arts’ about his work merely *pointing* (like Mantel’s work ‘gesturing’) to a place of deconstruction that cannot be finally grasped. And it is these parallels that justify my privileging of ellipsis as a process of description that connects these thoughts, while avoiding the temptation to master them.

In a manner that echoes Spivak’s frustration with French feminism, Derrida approaches the question of ‘gender’ and *khōra* with similar reserve. He writes of Plato’s two poles of description, with regard to *khōra* as both ‘mother’ and ‘nurse’, arguing that this happens ‘in a mode which we shall not be in a hurry to name’.²⁹⁴ Importantly, Derrida goes on to clarify the problem with the acknowledged commentaries on *khōra*, of which there are many, Kristeva’s probably being the most famous:

They ask themselves no questions about this tradition of rhetoric which places at their disposal a reserve of concepts which are very useful but which are all built upon this distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, which is precisely what the thought of *khōra* can no longer get along with.²⁹⁵

So, this exposes a problem with Plato, Kristeva, or whoever, ascribing feminine characteristics to *khōra* (or ‘womb’) since these terms are built upon the very distinctions that *khōra* works to both undermine and trouble. And this is how I wish to approach ‘womb’ in Mantel’s writing; as a possible translation for *khōra*, womb merely articulates another deferral rather than any real arrival of meaning. I will go on to demonstrate in chapter four that, just as Derrida writes of *khōra*, the womb in *Giving Up the Ghost* ‘is more situating than situated’.²⁹⁶ And this sense also applies more broadly across Mantel’s work: “‘It’s what’s missing that shapes everything we do’”, says Ralph in *A Change of Climate*, meaning that the ‘absent’ always already defines what remains.²⁹⁷ More specifically, Derrida clarifies of *khōra*:

It is perhaps because its scope goes beyond or falls short of the polarity of metaphorical sense that the thought of the *khōra* exceeds the polarity, no doubt analogous, of the *mythos* and the *logos*.²⁹⁸

This is how I work Spivak’s notion of *jouissance* and excess, to burst the paradigm by revealing that the thought of *khōra* both operates ‘beyond’ and simultaneously *falls short!*

²⁹⁴ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 92.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 92.

²⁹⁷ *A Change of Climate*, p. 258.

²⁹⁸ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 92.

This will only be heightened through reading Mantel's memoir since the pain of endometriosis exceeds any polar representation and *Giving Up the Ghost* is the text that most explicitly presents the difficulty of thinking womb and conception. This is what Derrida writes of *khōra* in terms of receipt and gift: 'Khōra is not, is above all not, is anything but a support or a subject which would give place by receiving or conceiving, or indeed by letting itself be conceived' and such problematic notions of conception are very important for this chapter and chapter four.²⁹⁹ Thus, Mantel's essay 'Clinical Waste', which is crucial for tentatively exploring the more nuanced points of correspondence between *khōra* and 'womb', appears in a collection entitled *Inconceivable Conceptions*. This emphasises the reproductive meaning of conception, with a further link to 'thinking', and thought. Thought, in Derrida's work, *is* writing, *is* elliptical, and *is*, in understanding thought, about taming excess, as Spivak also argues. Conception offers a place of reception or gift, which foregrounds the conclusion of this thesis, where giving will be considered as an act of *giving up*.

The position of the womb as a problematised origin rejects the specificities of the maternal body and is instead both symbolically and subjectively informed. I aim to trouble the impossible status of the womb as an origin by reading it as an example of the 'place' of deconstruction Derrida's work points to. The womb here is understood as an empty radical otherness that paradoxically gives 'place' to being, while simultaneously providing a place without meaning or essence; it defies immanence. In this sense, just as the phallus is understood within Lacan's work as articulating the operation of the symbolic order and *not* the male sex organ, the womb in my writing inscribes the work of lack within meaning rather than just 'biology'.

'The time is out of joint': The point is that the point should be *willingly* missed³⁰⁰

This chapter challenges existing readings of Mantel's ninth novel *Beyond Black*. This text has been primarily read in terms of 'bodily' origins as a singular cipher for meaning. Such readings have been constructed through media and journalistic representation of 'Hilary Mantel' as an authorial figure, a process with which she cannot help but be complicit. My objective here is to advance the potential of the ellipsis by using it to undermine the current cultural *solidification* of the body. Writing offers an elliptical outlining of cultural symptoms

²⁹⁹ 'Khōra', p. 92.

³⁰⁰ *Hamlet*, I. 5. 196.

and the very contentiousness of the subject of the body will emphasise the significance of the ellipsis. I will explode the stability of the body through considering the representations of flesh, technology and children in *Beyond Black* – all stalked by the figure of Derrida’s *revenant*. And this is the thought that these analyses propose to elliptically describe; the question of the *revenant* as elucidated by the philosopher in *Specters of Marx* and the film *Ghost Dance*. These texts involve an engagement with the parallels between the ‘given’ of the body, the ghost and unconventional notions of ‘the past’ and time.

The enigmatic *Ghost Dance* helps ‘ground’ the writings of both Nancy and Mantel on narrative. To reiterate Nancy in ‘Elliptical Sense’: ‘Meaning is lacking to itself: it misses itself; and this is why “all meaning is altered by this lack.” Writing is the outline of this altering’. This sense of meaning escaping like a ghost, signifying the return of the always yet to come, is echoed in this extract from Mantel’s memoir:

I know, too, that once a family has acquired a habit of secrecy, memories begin to distort, because its members confabulate to cover the gaps in the facts; you have to make some sort of sense of what’s going on around you, so you cobble together a narrative as best you can. You add to it, and reason about it, and the distortions breed distortions.³⁰¹

This passage could equally well describe the fractured, imperfect and *elliptical* narrative process of McMullen’s film. The thrust of the story is the attempt of female student, Pascale – played by Pascale Ogier – initially studying in Paris, then London, ‘to make some sort of sense’ of both her ideas and what is going on around her. There is an alienating quality to it, again echoing Nancy’s thoughts on Derrida’s ‘Ellipsis’ that ‘the text [...] lets us know that we are truly missing something, probably many things’.³⁰² This aspect of constructed instability also strengthens the film’s aptitude for comparison with Mantel’s writing. *Ghost Dance* provokes sustained discussion of myth, the relationship between stories and ‘truth’, and the status of history and ghosts. Notable *revenants* include Marx, Kafka, Freud and Derrida himself, who ‘participated’ in the making of the film.

Although *Ghost Dance* is divided into seven ‘signed’ sections it makes little sense read chronologically, in fact to enact such a reading would perhaps do violence to it and would

³⁰¹ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 24.

³⁰² Nancy, p. 186.

certainly miss the point.³⁰³ And the point is that the point should be *willingly* missed, as illustrated by Pascale's first meeting with Derrida, which is, in a way, the philosopher's initial appearance in the film, although his ideas infiltrate the script, like ghosts.³⁰⁴ Pascale's unnamed tutor and friend of Derrida, asks Derrida to listen to his favourite student's ideas:

DERRIDA: Of course. But we don't have much time now. Briefly, Pascale, what's the idea behind your idea?

PASCALE: [*Pause*] The idea behind my idea... is that I have no idea.

DERRIDA: I see. We'll talk about it tomorrow.³⁰⁵

Derrida further allows for the postponement of the ellipsis, which actually appears 'spatially' on screen, connecting the English subtitles, rather than forcefully formalising Pascale's idea or applying a framework to it. He simply defers its arrival: 'We'll talk about it *tomorrow*'. And this is the elliptical approach I choose to adopt in order to trace aspects of Derrida's *revenant* in *Ghost Dance* and use them to destabilise readings of bodily original meaning in Mantel's writing. To do this I will focus on the three sections of the film that explicitly articulate Derrida's thought: 1. Rituals of Rage, Rituals of Desire (Pascale's first meeting with Derrida). 2. Myth, Voice of Destruction, Voice of Deliverance (Pascale's interview with Derrida). 3. Trial, Power through Absence (Derrida on Kafka's ghost).

Ghost Dance is a product of the 1980s. Derrida's questioning of the extent to which technology has banished the ghosts of the feudal age desires a rejection of Descartes' rationalist project. However, science remains the dominant discourse of explanation and direction in our contemporary, as already witnessed through my reading of Stewart's article on mediumship in chapter one.³⁰⁶ Such dominance partially explains the sidelining of Mantel's texts, which do not conform to scientific precepts or any singular authority. And this is exactly my justification for utilising this text from the 1980s, in order to draw out what undermines the Enlightenment model in Mantel's writing. As Nancy writes of meaning as *missing* itself, and Mantel considers in *Giving Up the Ghost*, the process of storytelling is one

³⁰³ In Derrida's second appearance (or perhaps his return) in the film, he describes *Ghost Dance* as 'more or less improvised'. For further discussion see *Ghost Dance*, dir. by Ken McMullen (Cornerstone Media, 1983).

³⁰⁴ At the start of the film, a disembodied voice explains the genesis of the 'contemporary' ghost. It implies that our (collective) memory screened ghosts out, so they slipped into language. This signals both a departure from the materialism of the 'Gothic' ghost and an evocation of the hauntology Derrida's thoughts also offer by surfacing through the form of the film.

³⁰⁵ *Ghost Dance* (1983). Quoted from the *English* subtitles, though the 'original' script is in French.

³⁰⁶ This is not to discount the challenges posed by poststructuralism and postmodernism; however, in twenty-first century Britain where Mantel's work is mainly produced and read, public policy is still primarily dictated by the arguments and findings of scientists.

underlain with anxiety. This chapter aims to illustrate that the body in *Beyond Black* – whether it be woman’s, man’s, child’s or author’s – is a state riven by both presence and nonpresence. Paralleling what I celebrate in the writings of Nancy and Mantel, the only *origin* to narrative (and therefore anything) is lack, difference and anxiety, while the only result is alteration and distortion. This is the methodology of the ‘ellipsis’ of Derrida and Nancy, which is actually an ellipse as well, combined with my application of the ellipsis [...] as signifier. This sense of ever threatening hysteria evokes another ellipse, like the womb and its implied cycle (the movement at the root of ‘hysteria’) the demon, or curse, or period, is never entirely expressed or repressed, it is always threatening return. I reject any *given* ‘bodiliness’, but not the figure it describes, or its operation in such a ‘super-masculinized’ discourse.³⁰⁷ In ignoring fleshiness, I embrace the play of the signifier ‘period’. For example, taking to task Judith Butler’s misreading (in his view) of Lacan, Antony Easthope has this to say of the period, the *point de capiton*, the English full stop: ‘What works as an anchoring point is determined both by the structuring of the symbolic order and by the process of the subject’. The full stop is made as unstable as menstruation via the same word, period.³⁰⁸

The significance of narrative and narrative processes to specific historical moments is foregrounded early in *Ghost Dance* when a voiceover suggests that social decay spawns myths in order to make some sort of sense of the chaos. This partially links to the enabling play of rottenness in *Fludd*, especially the notion in the film that the creation of myth obscures something, alongside Pascale’s argument that as things break-up people will believe anything. These ideas will help the work of the thesis and introduce the unique position of the memoir in its argument. It is noteworthy that *Ghost Dance* positions ‘chaos’, specifically, as the catalyst for narrative, so as to make some sort of sense of events. And if there is a groundswell of rejection of science that has been building since the 1980s, will such withdrawal precipitate a new anxiety, a new chaos, and therefore a new narrative? Could this narrative be, temporarily at least, that of the memoir? It seeks an origin, but does not confirm one; according to the thought of Derrida, this is an affirmation that is not positive. Although the proliferation of memoir now could be perceived as articulating a desire for the renewal of

³⁰⁷ Susan R. Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany: State University of New York, 1987), p. 8.

³⁰⁸ Antony Easthope, *Privileging Difference* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 97. One period refers to the arresting of syntactic flow, the other alluding to temporal monthly flow, or the spatial/temporal *frisson* of difference.

a stable origin, the complexity of the form suggests a push towards something less coherent.³⁰⁹

There is the flesh, but there is also the spectre, the second focus of this elliptical description of the body as ‘origin’, or rather the ‘bodily’ body versus the *revenant* body. The *revenant* also defies immanence, so unpacking the ellipsis of Derrida’s *revenant* in *Specters of Marx*, alongside *Ghost Dance*, will help facilitate my exploration of the dangerous hole(s) of the body, the womb and the book. According to the ‘Note on the text’ in the most recent Routledge edition of *Specters of Marx*, the ‘origin’ for Derrida’s thoughts here were two lectures he delivered in 1993 at the University of California. Ten years after the making of *Ghost Dance*, there is a trace of mourning as well as haunting in his ‘Exordium’. Even though this title suggests an introduction, it can also be read as a *return* to understanding an earlier displacement, or grief.³¹⁰ Although this text primarily concerns spectres, Derrida begins by discussing life:

To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border, it is a heterodidactics between life and death.³¹¹

According to another French philosopher, Bernard Stiegler, such learning on the *edge* of life parallels Derrida’s own experience.³¹² Stiegler believes that the most important line Derrida ‘ventriloquises’ in *Ghost Dance* is that ‘the future belongs to ghosts’.³¹³ Derrida announces this during the scene when Pascale is interviewing him, and Stiegler emphasises the significance of this line by telling his own ‘ghost story’. A year after *Ghost Dance* was shot, Pascale Ogier died of a heart attack caused by a drug overdose, just before her twenty-sixth birthday. Stiegler cites Derrida from their collaborative work *Echographies of Television*

³⁰⁹ To name a few within the arena of contemporary women’s writing – *A Life’s Work: On Becoming a Mother* (2001) by Rachel Cusk, and her more recent memoir *Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation* (2012), *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood* (2004) by Anne Enright, *Red Dust Road* (2010) by Jackie Kay and *Why be happy when you could be normal?* (2011) by Jeanette Winterson. For further discussion see Eileen Pollard, “‘Trust me, I’m telling you my life story’: Queer return in the memoirs of Jeanette Winterson and Jackie Kay’, *Forum: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts*, 15 (2012) <<http://www.forumjournal.org/site/issue/15/eileen-pollard>> [accessed 23 January 2013].

³¹⁰ The ‘Exordium’ of *Specters of Marx* famously opens with the line – ‘Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: *I would like to learn to live finally*’ (p. xvi).

³¹¹ *Specters of Marx*, p. xvii.

³¹² Bernard Stiegler, ‘Reflections on *Ghost Dance*’ (2006), dir. by Ken McMullen <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXQB7RFzoFM>> [accessed 8 March 2012].

³¹³ Derrida plays ‘his own role’ in *Ghost Dance* according to Stiegler, which perhaps compares to the ‘Mantel’ in the *Culture Show* interview; already haunted by the ghost of her extraordinary fame after winning the Booker prize for a second time in 2012.

where the latter considers his watching of a woman listening to him say that ‘the future belongs to ghosts’, and now she is dead; *she* is the ghost.³¹⁴ So, Stiegler concludes that Pascale is the future of what Derrida said, therefore legitimising his choice of ‘the future belongs to ghosts’ as the most important line in the film.

However, Stiegler’s analysis, quite literally, sucks the life out of the ghosts that surface in Derrida’s thought. The former’s single-minded pessimism that the future belonging to ghosts means the future belonging to terrorism, ignores the sense of possibility within Derrida’s elliptical description of ghosts in the film. For example, the catalyst for Pascale and Derrida’s discussion is Pascale’s question ‘Do you believe in ghosts?’ and Derrida’s concluding statement is the acclamation – ‘Long live ghosts!’.³¹⁵ It is the *promise* of this thought that links Derrida’s articulation of ghosts in *Ghost Dance* to his exploration of the *revenant* in *Specters of Marx*, while also possibly inscribing the above indented quotation from the book with a sense of mourning for Pascale Ogier.³¹⁶ It tentatively suggests that if living is something learned, and this is by no means definite, then ‘it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death’. And it is such a trace that is learned from the story of Derrida’s repeated encounter with Pascale after her death, since she is not merely the ghost, the future of what Derrida said, she is also ‘the other at the *edge* of life’.

The significance of this border, this hesitation between life and death is reflected in the film’s form as well. Having exclaimed ‘Long live ghosts!’ Derrida then asks Pascale whether she herself believes in them, he looks away rather shyly when she answers immediately, also in French, ‘Yes certainly’. The camera then switches to a close-up of Pascale’s face and she repeats, ‘Yes absolutely’. Then this shot fades into a more distant one of her head and shoulders and she finally confirms, ‘Now, I do absolutely’.³¹⁷ Both this scene in *Ghost Dance* and the early section of *Specters of Marx*, are elliptical because they do not and cannot resolve into a single focus, or ‘centre’. It is never life *or* death, or even life *and* death, since living, or rather *learning* to live, is only possible at ‘the internal border or the external border,

³¹⁴ For further discussion see *Echographies of Television* (2002).

³¹⁵ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

³¹⁶ Derrida discusses mourning explicitly in *Ghost Dance* in terms of the work of Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham. He outlines their arguments concerning successful mourning as the bereaved taking the ghost of the dead loved one into themselves; however, when mourning goes wrong, the dead are not fully absorbed, and so continue to speak with their own voice. For further discussion see Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

³¹⁷ All references here are to *Ghost Dance* (1983).

it is a heterodidactics between life and death'. We – you, Mantel, Derrida – as we read, learn to live from the impossibility of Pascale's statement 'Now, I do absolutely'. 'Now' she is dead, but within that scene, already becoming a ghost, at the threshold, neither dead nor alive, she communicates something – as 'the other and by death' – about life (marriage, absolution). Something in the writing also communicates between Pascale as the character we 'see' and the knowledge of the actress's death, just at the moment that the camera puts her at a distance. This communicant is the ghost; the trace of her own death in the line 'Now, I do absolutely', believe in ghosts. Moreover, Pascale's position as medium, as space for exchange (imperfect yet enabling) is a 'place' reflected in Mantel's writing. The narrative of *Beyond Black* articulates a comparable hauntology to that elliptically described in Derrida's thought. In a departure from the pessimism of Stiegler, I find that the writings of both Derrida and Mantel inscribe a learning to live, which in neither case is positive, but is in both an affirmation.

'Too too sullied flesh would melt': Realising that there is not a body³¹⁸

Beyond Black is a novel where many of the ideas introduced so far combine, particularly this estranging sense of affirmation. Unpacking such a parallel with Derrida's work helps expose the instability of 'bodily' origins to flesh, technology and children in Mantel's novel. These aspects of *Beyond Black* evoke the oscillations of the ellipsis rather than 'embodying' a single, mastered genesis. The problematic 'bodies' in Mantel's texts betray a duality that is ghostly, neither here nor there, and using the ellipsis to highlight Derrida's notion of spectrality also has the effect of proving the *revenant* to be elliptically described.³¹⁹ Thus, Derrida writes in *Specters of Marx* that 'this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations'.³²⁰ And it is such a politics that Alison's 'place' as medium (both as a being *among* spectres and as a being carrying spectres *within* her) inscribes in *Beyond Black*.

The novel primarily traces Alison's attempts to understand her past. The non-linear form of the text forges another link with *Specters of Marx*, which reads ghosts through a different understanding of temporality. Derrida writes of a spectral moment as 'a moment that no

³¹⁸ *Hamlet*, I. 2. 129.

³¹⁹ This is a reference to the first line of Derrida's 'Ellipsis' – 'Here or there we have discerned writing' (p. 371) – highlighting the deictic phrasing.

³²⁰ *Specters of Marx*, p. xviii, original emphasis.

longer belongs to time’, repeating the significance of the ‘now’ dead Pascale coupled with her statement ‘*Now*, I do absolutely’ (believe in ghosts).³²¹ The modalised present of ‘now’ is placed under so much strain in this moment and context, that it stops making any ordinary sense; it has broken away and ‘no longer belongs to time’. This synthesis between life, time and ghosts is elucidated in this quotation from *Specters of Marx*:

The time of the ‘learning to live,’ a time without tutelary present, would amount to this, to which the exordium is leading us: to learn to live *with* ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts.³²²

And *Beyond Black* provides another link in this way with *Ghost Dance*, since Alison Hart both lives with and is haunted by ghosts. In the film – ‘To be haunted by a ghost... is to remember something you’ve never lived through. For memory is the past that has never taken the form of the present’.³²³ So, to re-member an event departs from the event itself, and memory is only ever an ellipsis that cannot be finally *bought* – not ‘in the commerce without commerce of ghosts’. This is the dangerous hole, traced by the figure of the womb amongst others, in Mantel’s writing beginning with flesh, technology and children in *Beyond Black* read through Derrida’s thoughts on the *revenant*.

These representations work to problematise full presence. The ellipsis is a pertinent critique to adopt because it emphasises repetition as meaningful, not the search for origins, and carries the implication that such searching is ultimately pointless anyway. This fruitlessness is echoed by Colette’s thoughts in the novel: “‘Occult’, she discovered, meant hidden. She was beginning to feel that everything of interest was hidden’.³²⁴ This sense of an eclipsed ‘centre’ informs my readings of the dislocated first chapter of *Beyond Black*. It is very brief and the narrative is disorientating since neither of the main characters are explicitly present, though the text yields something of them both. There are references to becoming a medium that seem to be from Alison’s perspective, yet her name is not mentioned, and the implied reader can only attach this information to her character *after* having read the novel. This narrative evocation of elliptical return, not quite starting and finishing in the same place, is significant and is a technique used frequently in contemporary memoir, including Mantel’s own. The short initial chapter to *Beyond Black*, which is almost a preface, also introduces a series of

³²¹ *Specters of Marx*, p. xix and *Ghost Dance* (1983).

³²² *Specters of Marx*, p. xvii-xviii, original emphasis.

³²³ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

³²⁴ *Beyond Black*, p. 57. The word ‘occult’ is ‘jumping out’ between the similar letters of Colette’s name.

important metaphorical ellipses, notably the Hanged Man; the card turns over in the text just as it would in a tarot reading. It is a signifier, filled yet simultaneously ‘empty’:

Night and winter: but in the rotten nests and empty setts, she can feel the signs of growth, intimations of spring. This is the time of Le Pendu, the Hanged Man, swinging by his foot from the living tree. It is a time of suspension, of hesitation, of the indrawn breath. It is a time to let go of expectation, yet not abandon hope; to anticipate the turn of the Wheel of Fortune. This is our life and we have to lead it. Think of the alternative.³²⁵

The Hanged Man is not the only card to appear, which suggests that the text of a tarot reading is surfacing here, palimpsest-like, through T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.³²⁶ This is significant in terms of the importance *Beyond Black* places on reading the writing of signs, which forms the duplicitous ‘origin’ to Alison and Colette’s relationship. Yet I contend that the Hanged Man is more elliptically imbued than even the Wheel of Fortune because it occupies a space that is neither living nor dead, offering instead a pause and an outline.³²⁷ It also signifies flesh, both that of the living man and the living tree. However, the ‘time of suspension’ and the sense of the ‘indrawn breath’ that the text describes in relation to this tarot card are also reminiscent of Derrida’s *revenant*. In *Specters of Marx*, he writes that the between of life and death ‘can only *maintain* itself with some ghost, can only *talk with or about some ghost*’.³²⁸ I propose that life and death in Derrida’s statement suggest a double focus, which the ghost potentially outlines, and this is one way in which the *revenant* can be provisionally understood as elliptical. The suspension of the indrawn breath then, represents these two states simultaneously, since ‘we’ both live and die in the space between breaths. The Hanged Man, therefore, characterises several aspects of the ellipsis, as the ghostly outline of the double focus of life and death and also as enforced hiatus, or reflection. Furthermore, this figure does return, *inverted* (which is significant in terms of reading tarot), in the fate of Mart, Alison’s waif and stray, who is found hanged, dead, from the dead wood of her garden shed. The outline of responsibility for Mart’s death is ghostly as it is implied that the *revenant* fiends, who are understood as ‘dead’, drove him to it. Far from being an organising feature of *Beyond Black*, the Hanged Man surfaces unexpectedly, imperfectly, and elliptically.

³²⁵ ‘This is our life and we have to lead it’ (*Beyond Black*, p. 2): This narrative tone, or differentiability of tone, is reminiscent of *Wolf Hall*, particularly the disorientation of a single perspective displaced *through* third person narrative – Mantel is famous ‘now’, but it is a recent and ‘sudden’ fame, with *limits* around the Cromwell books.

³²⁶ ‘April is the cruellest month, breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land’, for further discussion see: T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 23 (lines 1-2).

³²⁷ The characteristics of the ellipsis (pause) and the ellipse (outline) respectively.

³²⁸ *Specters of Marx*, p. xvii, original emphasis.

The seemingly straightforward fleshiness of the medium's 'unfeasible' body is not privileged either, but also represented as an outline that is constantly altering.³²⁹ The descriptions of Alison's body in *Beyond Black* make it very difficult to believe it is really *Alison* who is located there, in a manner reminiscent of Muriel Axon as shape-shifter, or 'empty vessel' in *Vacant Possession*.³³⁰ During an account of one of Alison's performances, early on in the novel, this is what follows from Colette's perspective:

You'll pay for it later, Colette thought, and so she will; she'll have to regurgitate or else digest all the distress that she's sucked in from the carpet and the walls. By the end of the evening she'll be sick to her stomach from other people's chemotherapy, feverish and short of breath; or twitching and cold, full of their torsions and strains.³³¹

Alison Hart is a medium; perhaps *the* medium of writing, raising numerous questions concerning the position of the 'original' for such a story told through an intermediary or text. This fraught sense of a 'pre-existing' narrative of course continues in the Cromwell trilogy, like a supplement from *Beyond Black*. And Alison's flesh is certainly an outline, since 'to regurgitate' suggests the repetition necessary for meaning. Moreover, the lack, or imperfection, that underlies the geometry of the ellipse, also helps unpack descriptions of Alison's body, particularly in terms of space. For example, again in chapter one of *Beyond Black*, the disconnected third person, apparently occupying Alison's perspective, makes this link between the M25 and her own body.³³²

The car flees across the junctions, and the space the road encloses is the space inside her: the arena of combat, the wasteland, the place of civil strife behind her ribs.³³³

This is not an isolated means of defining the body in Mantel's writing; the body as eclipsing an inaccessible yet crucial 'inner space' is also operative in 'Clinical Waste'.³³⁴ Both these

³²⁹ *Beyond Black*, p. 3.

³³⁰ 'I was fascinated by the idea of the self as empty vessel, you know, into which Muriel can pour... well she thieves the identities of the people around her', 'In Conversation', 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 206.

³³¹ *Beyond Black*, p. 29.

³³² The ghostliness of this preface also serves to highlight the significance of 'three', as a conceit in Mantel's writing; in this instance 'Alison', 'Colette' and the 'third' person. Such 'threes' are evocative of a triangle, comprised of three points or dots, like the ellipsis.

³³³ *Beyond Black*, p. 2.

³³⁴ 'I was conscious of a picture forming – of a hollow person stalking the world, holding open a door in its solar plexus so that everyone could see the empty space within. And it occurred to me that, at whatever age it was created, there is such a gap, always waiting to open, wider and wider still, a black hole into which all the accomplishments of the years might vanish'. Hilary Mantel, 'Clinical Waste', in *Inconceivable Conceptions*:

quotations from *Beyond Black* illustrate that Alison's body is not read by either 'herself' or Colette as 'centred', or emanating from a centre, but instead as a space facilitating exchange. Thus, the movement of distress through Alison's body parallels the traffic of the orbital M25, and the two simultaneously operate at the limit, or on the periphery, of an enabling gap or silence. The suffering Alison experiences is spatial, visible on the surface – 'twitching and cold, full of their torsions and strains' – however this is not the surface *of* her body, rather the surface *is* her body. This superficial representation of flesh, as hollowed-out, problematises full presence because it contradicts any immanence emanating outwards. Such undermining of flesh, as an absolute and impenetrable site for meaning, is further undermined in *Beyond Black* as the text threads Alison's corporeality with traces of the machine. Her role as medium, for example, is compared to the processes of a telephone answering machine, this despite the fact that Alison's psychic disposition make her and technology completely incompatible. This juxtaposition of flesh and technology in *Beyond Black* describes Derrida's thoughts on differance, or the tracing of the other in the self-same. It means the text works to undermine the essentialising of either site and also to challenge the contemporary 'myth' that computer-based technology is a *grounded* epistemological tool, along with the perception of it as wholly enabling. Introducing the thoughts of differance, and trace, will throw the reading of the double focus into relief against the self/other relationship; talking of *myself* is always to talk of the *other*, to talk of the *other* is always to talk of *myself*, utters the self-same proximity of elliptical duplicity.

The fiends of Aldershot form a crucial part of this problematic relationship via the body and bodily *processes*. They are ghosts, or rather the manifestation of the memories of Alison's childhood, the past of abusive men returning in a way that never 'originally' took that form in the present. The fiends neither occupy full presence as men, nor as ghosts; this is the thought of Derrida, which the text of *Beyond Black* elliptically describes, though never resolves. For example, the fiends are represented as very bodily because they are always 'belching' and 'farting' and 'spitting' or making sexual advances. Morris, Alison's repugnant spirit guide, even tries to be 'born-again' by infiltrating the body of another psychic: 'In Mandy's mind the solution was straightforward; she had it done away with. So that was the end of Morris and his hundred pounds'.³³⁵ Though he does not entirely disappear, proving that there is no

Psychological Aspects of Infertility and Reproductive Technology, ed. by Jane Hayes and Juliet Miller (Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003), pp. 19-26 (p. 19).

³³⁵ *Beyond Black*, p. 206.

complete point of arrival for the fiends, whether present or absent, they are always riven through with ‘something else’. As already noted in the previous chapter, there is the suggestion of a paternal ghost worked through *Every day is mother’s day* via the eclipse of the father of Muriel Axon’s child, though this self-same omission is orbited slightly differently in the sequel *Vacant Possession*. However, *Beyond Black* offers a further departure with Morris, since he is his *own* paternal *revenant* and then an aborted ghost. This is a text that delights in doubling and paradox, so comparing the fiends with Alison’s troubled body only provides further evidence of such twists. Whereas Alison’s flesh offers a space for multiple spectral processes to occur, the fiends, as spectres, only enable the operation of *individual* bodily works. Belching, farting, siring, and birthing are all singular actions of the body and though they all concern ‘escape’, they do not open up the duplicity of the ellipsis.

Beyond Black is in part a novel about violence. This is mainly significant in terms of the specific acts of violence that are performed in the text. For example, there is the implication that during Alison’s childhood her mother’s friend, Gloria, was murdered and dismembered by the fiends, when they were still ‘men’. However, the victim of this crime could also have been Morris, and Alison is certainly haunted by both. On the very day she witnesses the mysterious goings-on with the cardboard boxes the men are moving, Morris, her soon-to-be spirit guide, momentarily *becomes* her reflection in the mirror: ‘She didn’t recognise the person she saw there. It was a man, with a check-jacket on and a tie skew-whiff’.³³⁶ Yet Alison sees Gloria quite differently, not within mirrors, but in ‘reality’, or bits of her at least:

Another day, as she was coming in at the front door, she had glanced down into the bath, and didn’t she see the red-haired lady looking up at her, with her eyelashes half pulled off, and no body attached to her neck?³³⁷

The negativity of this questioning tone – ‘and didn’t she’ – problematises any stable notion of memory, but there is also more at work here in relation to the body and ghosts. The ghosts in *Beyond Black* are a re-membering (memory) of the dis-embodied (the living), also leading to a sense of the dis-embodied living in the characters of the fiends, and also Gavin, Colette’s lacklustre ex-husband. A memory of a living body is ghostly because it constitutes the past that has never taken the form of the present, on several levels, as suggested in *Ghost Dance*. Remembering the living body does not *make* it present, and the memory is a departure

³³⁶ *Beyond Black*, p. 109.

³³⁷ *Beyond Black*, p. 119.

anyway since it is necessarily different, the differing origin of differences, or, as Mantel writes in *Wolf Hall* – ‘You cannot return to the moment you were in before’.³³⁸ Moreover, the living body never *takes* the form of the present, even in the ‘present’, because it can only ever offer (gift) a site of presence riven by nonpresence. This is why the living are always already the dis-embodied and to be haunted by a ghost is to remember that the body never is, or was, grounded.

This is how ghosts ‘follow’ the living in *Beyond Black*, which is a primary concern of McMullen’s film too. I will utilise Derrida’s story about the ghost of Kafka in order to illustrate how Princess Diana operates as a *revenant* in Mantel’s novel. Derrida’s ‘anecdote’ concerning Kafka towards the end of the film details his visit to Prague to take part in a private seminar with some dissident Czech philosophers who had been banned from the universities. He explains that he was followed by the Czech secret police who, he says, ‘made no secret about it’.³³⁹ After the seminar, Derrida walks elliptically around Kafka’s hometown to visit the *two* houses he lived in as well as his grave, ‘as if in pursuit of Kafka’s ghost... who was, in fact, himself pursuing me’.³⁴⁰ He says this partly because he discovers the next day, when he has been arrested apparently for drug smuggling, that at the very moment the police planted the drugs in his room, he was at Kafka’s grave, ‘preoccupied’ to some extent with his ghost. The sense of haunting then heightens when Derrida is interrogated about his reasons for being in Prague. He tells the police the ‘truth’, that he is preparing a paper on Kafka, specifically on an extract from *The Trial*, ‘Before the Court’. As a result Derrida argues that throughout his interrogation, Kafka’s ghost was effectively present and his ‘script was manipulating the whole scene’.³⁴¹ It hardly matters whether or not Derrida is ‘making the whole thing up’, this would in fact help my ‘point’ that meaning always *escapes*. Lies or ‘truth’, this narrative is how Derrida unpacks the pursuit of ghosts as always already *a being pursued by them*; a dynamic represented by the hysteria following Princess Diana’s death in *Beyond Black*.

Upon returning from a psychic fayre, accommodating Diana’s mourners, Colette cannot find anything to watch on the television except for funeral coverage. She is exasperated: “‘For God’s sake. I wish they’d give it a rest. They’ve buried her now. She’s not going to get up

³³⁸ Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 205.

³³⁹ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

again””.³⁴² Read in terms of Derrida’s Kafkaesque ‘ghost story’, there is a sense that the public obsession with Diana is to an extent controlled and manipulated by the spectre of the Princess herself. So, like with Derrida and Kafka, *Beyond Black* suggests that the living watch the dead, tracing the progress of the coffin across the screen. Yet something remains elusive; the coffin signifies Princess Diana, though she is not ‘present’, both unseen and dead, something escapes, a ghost, or expectation, directing a mass public mourning that instead *pursues* the living. The coffin is a synecdoche, the concealment of display of the *trace*. Moreover, Diana’s *revenant* does ‘eventually’ return to the text, and she seems partly to ‘come’ for information, she definitely *wants* something:

‘Give my love to my boys,’ Diana says. ‘My boys, I’m sure you know who I mean.’ Al wouldn’t prompt her: you must never, in that fashion, give way to the dead. They will tease you and urge you, they will suggest and flatter; you mustn’t take their bait. If they want to speak, let them speak for themselves.³⁴³

This representation of the Princess not only emphasises the power of ghosts, but that such power cannot and should not be assisted by the living. Rather those alive should be unconsciously or passively part of this play, as with the Czech secret police and Derrida.

Princess Diana in *Beyond Black* also works to undermine the position of the ‘origin’ as a hallowed and irreproachable locus for meaning. Her unexpected and unexplained death (as well as her infamous personage) form a perceived centre orbited by life post-millennium. Yet she is never represented as ‘whole’ in Mantel’s novel; she is notably incoherent as a ghost, but then how could she be anything other as the ‘Queen of Hearts’, a playing card without referent or original?³⁴⁴ Royalty in general is decentred, both troubled and troubling in *Beyond Black*, as illustrated from the beginning by the novel’s epigraph:

‘There are powers at work in this country about which we have no knowledge.’
H. M. the Queen (attributed)³⁴⁵

³⁴² *Beyond Black*, p. 202.

³⁴³ *Beyond Black*, pp. 213-214.

³⁴⁴ This ‘mask’ is reminiscent of Roland Barthes’ famous description of Greta Garbo – ‘how many actresses have consented to let the crowd see the ominous maturing of their beauty. Not she, however; the essence was not to be degraded, her face was not to have any reality except that of its perfection, which was intellectual even more than formal. The Essence became gradually obscured, progressively veiled with dark glasses, broad hats and exiles: but it never deteriorated’. Roland Barthes, ‘The Face of Garbo’, in *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2009), pp. 61-63 (p. 62).

³⁴⁵ *Beyond Black*, n. p.

Consequently, an odd parallel develops between Princess Diana and the Queen because both are traced via a signifier without original. The first via a playing card (though this is not explicit in the novel, who can deny its presence?) the second through the signifying chain of an *attributed* remark. The two are shown as writing, and even though the Queen's signifier is understood as a speech act (in brackets) it is always already written. Such an opening launches *Beyond Black* as a novel that explores 'voice' in terms of what Derrida describes as differentiality of tone, rather than straightforward speech.³⁴⁶

'He do the police in different voices': Realising that there is a voice³⁴⁷

Alison herself is a similarly ex-centric (and eccentric) centre represented through the writing of tarot cards. Such ex-centricity concerns not just her body, but her position as medium too; Alison's status as both authentic and unrestricted receiver of spirit world simultaneously forms an ellipsis, or orbit, of whiteness, while working to eclipse non-whiteness.³⁴⁸ There is also the outlining of Alison as an elliptical double focus with Colette, which undermines the notion of the medium, or protagonist, as single point of departure for the narrative. This is what happens after she reads tarot for her soon-to-be assistant, Colette:

Colette's eyes followed the trail of brown sugar curling across the table; like an initial, trying to form itself.
'You seem to know a lot about me.'
'I laid out a spread for you. After you'd gone.'
'A spread?'
'The tarot cards.'
'I know. Which spread?'
'Basic Romany.'
'Why that?'
'I was in a hurry.'
'And what did you see?'
'I saw myself.'³⁴⁹

Reading the trace of the other in the self-same describes the double focus of the ellipsis that recurs throughout Mantel's work, it is often combined with a lack of clarity over who says what. This happens, for example, in *Vacant Possession* when Sylvia Sidney sees herself in

³⁴⁶ For further discussion see 'Linguistics and Grammatology', in *Of Grammatology* (1997).

³⁴⁷ This quotation is the well-known working title of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

³⁴⁸ I will return to the implications of Alison's whiteness in chapter five as a 'silence' in *Beyond Black*, an exegesis primarily concerned with notions of the west. For further explicit critical discussion of the construction of 'whiteness', please see Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

³⁴⁹ *Beyond Black*, p. 92.

the characteristics of her charwoman Lizzie Blank, who is actually incognita (a further displacement or deferral) and therefore merely a simulation, or copy pointing to another copy. As noted in chapter two, this dynamic is also triggered in *Fludd*; like Alison reading the tarot, Father Angwin's sense of the presence in the presbytery is not grounded, but is excessive. To an extent these vibrations of differance facilitate the narratives of all three novels. Importantly though, such couplings cannot resolve into a single locus, for example, in *Beyond Black*, Alison also sees Morris' face in the mirror, rather than her own or that of Colette.

Beyond Black frames 'voice' as a differentiability of tone in writing, the most contentious examples of which are the transcripts. These are 'interviews' that Colette is conducting with Alison for a book about her life and background. The fraughtness of these representations illustrates that technology is not a privileged site, that time is always problematic, and, ultimately, that machines do not banish ghosts but rather assist them. Again in *Ghost Dance*, Derrida makes the following observation, leading on from Kafka's thoughts about writing letters:

I believe that modern developments in technology and telecommunication instead of diminishing the realm of ghosts [...] enhances the power of ghosts and their ability to haunt us.³⁵⁰

This is apparently so important that it prompted Derrida to take part in the film to try 'to tempt the ghosts out' in order to prove himself right, and he did.³⁵¹ It also very closely parallels how corrupt the recordings are in *Beyond Black*, whether this is represented directly through the transcripts or indirectly suggested in the third person. It is stated at the end of chapter three that 'when they played the tapes back, they found that, just as Al had foreseen, other items had intruded'.³⁵² There is the sense that technology facilitates this powerful and intrusive return and enacting such imperfection describes the ellipsis. Following on from Derrida, it is the apparent completeness of technology, as flawless totality, that distances the ghosts of the feudal age by providing every means to reason away the unexplained. Yet this taunting ideology of perfection is false and enables a more powerful haunting, evoking what you least expect, when you least expect it, or as Hall has commented, the inevitable return of the excluded to trouble the comfortable. The representation of such a technology of

³⁵⁰ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *Beyond Black*, p. 96.

perfection is of course itself imperfect – the differences (of binary) on which the system rests rely upon imperfection, or lack of identity, in order to mean. Thus, the attempt to master Alison’s childhood using technology actually *creates* the space for the intrusion that follows; the recordings miss something, probably many things. Alison’s memory cannot be ‘fixed’ and failing to see this is the flaw, imperfection or gap where something else – something unaccounted for – can slip in. This ‘something unaccounted for’, whether it is the ex-centric centre (not at-the-centre) of deconstruction, or a Nancean *intrusion* or interruption, is always necessarily repressed in the representations of the recordings in writing. However, this repression can be traced by the recurrence of the ellipsis, surfacing through the text in several ways.

Although there are dialogues transcribed between the fiends, who elsewhere intrude upon the recordings, it remains ambiguous who has transcribed them. Further instability is signalled through prior knowledge of these intrusions, which undermines the accuracy of what is transcribed between Alison and Colette and raises the question: What else is at work here? The deliberative spacing of the transcripts literally opens up gaps on the page where the voices of the ghosts might be perceived to play. This is elliptical, since these omissions keep returning to the text, characterising presence riven by nonpresence. The demarcation of the text is like that of a machine, absolute, but also, what is *there* works to define the edges (the edge of life as death in *Specters of Marx*) of what is not; or rather, what remains is always already an effect of what is missing. This operation is reiterated in-between two Alison/Colette transcriptions, where there is the suggestion that ‘something’ has been eclipsed.³⁵³

Click.

COLETTE: This is Colette, resuming the session at twelve thirty. Alison, you were telling us about your reunion with your grandmother.

ALISON: Yes, but it wasn’t like that, good God, it wasn’t like *This is Your Life* and your gran walks in smiling through her bloody tears. I don’t know why you put these questions on the tape, Colette. I’ve just told you how it was.

COLETTE: Oh, for the fifteenth bloody time, it’s to have a record –³⁵⁴

The omission – ‘I don’t know why you put these questions on the tape’ – forms an ellipsis alongside the implication that the answers are positioned in the space preceding the ‘*Click*’.

³⁵³ For further discussion of ‘iteration’ see Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature, Event, Context’, in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 307-330.

³⁵⁴ *Beyond Black*, p. 134.

Yet there is also an elliptical shape to the narrative, or rather an *imperfect* one, because of the sense of deferral – ‘resuming the session’, ‘Yes, but it wasn’t like that’, ‘I’ve just told you how it was’. Colette is desperate for a record, but the two women never seem to get to the point, and this aspect of the novel parallels Nancy’s argument about any text: ‘It lets us know that we are truly missing something, probably many things’.³⁵⁵ Both the demarcation and the deferral have a ghostly agency (perhaps agency is always ghostly), the decisive italicised ‘*Click*’ that begins and ends the transcripts lends a control to the action of stopping the tape that is misleading, since it often starts of its own accord.

In this way the tape recorder is the intrusive ghost in *Beyond Black* in the same manner as the telephone during Pascale’s interview with Derrida in *Ghost Dance*. Derrida has already identified ‘himself’ as a ghost by this point, answering Pascale’s first question with the riposte – ‘you’re asking a ghost whether he believes in ghosts’. Later when his ringing telephone interrupts them he says, smiling – ‘Now the telephone is the ghost...’ – before answering it.³⁵⁶ Telephones have an interesting relationship with ghosts in *Beyond Black* too, particularly in terms of Alison’s performance.³⁵⁷ She resists technology for her act because she emphasises the importance of ‘roots’ and remembering where you started: ‘In my case, that’s the village hall at Brookwood. So when you’re thinking of special effects, ask yourself, can you reproduce it in the village hall?’³⁵⁸ This is addressed to Colette yet the contradictions are two-fold since Alison has very limited memory of her origins *and* technology becomes a metaphorical mainstay for her on stage. Again during the novel’s first description of a psychic performance, Alison has this encounter with a ‘punter’:

‘Never been to one of these,’ he said. ‘But I’m getting on a bit myself, now, so...’ He wanted to know about his dad, who’d had an amputation before he died. Would he be reunited with his leg, in spirit world? [...] The old man didn’t sit down; he clung, as if he were at sea, to the back of the chair in the row ahead. He was hoping his dad would come through, he said, with a message. Al smiled. ‘I wish I could get him for you, sir. But again it’s like the telephone, isn’t it? I can’t call them, they have to call me. They have to want to come through.’³⁵⁹

There is a sense in *Beyond Black* that the dead have greater agency than the living. Alison has already compared herself to an answering machine and then Colette wants to use technology

³⁵⁵ Nancy, p. 186.

³⁵⁶ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

³⁵⁷ For further discussion of the uncanniness of the telephone see Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989).

³⁵⁸ *Beyond Black*, p. 9.

³⁵⁹ *Beyond Black*, pp. 34-35.

to solve the problem of ghostly bombardment: '[Alison] needed a spam-filter for her brain, to screen out unwanted messages from the dead'.³⁶⁰ All this technology offers a vehicle for voice, differentiability of voice, via tone. Although the telephone and the answering machine provide a medium for speech whereas spam suggests writing, it is my contention that they all facilitate 'the phantom voice of someone I don't know', as Derrida says of his telephone interlocutor in *Ghost Dance*.³⁶¹ As with the Queen's attributed speech act, *Beyond Black* does not privilege speech as more immediate or closer to full presence. In fact, this sense that writing *precedes* speech again echoes Derrida's seminal *Of Grammatology*:

'Don't say that,' Al begged. 'Don't say you'd like to see Morris.' She had never been able to teach [Colette] the art of self-censorship [...] You had to guard the words that came out of your mouth and even the words as they formed up in your mind. Wasn't that simple enough?³⁶²

Unspoken words, or writing, come before both the body and speech in the novel. This means that another framework is necessary to understand the *voice* of these phantoms. This is why 'The Spatial Arts' presents itself again as useful; in particular Derrida's thoughts on voice – 'contrary to the nonsense that circulates in this regard, nothing interests me more than the voice'.³⁶³ He describes several key points that I believe help unpack the operation of *voice* during a central telephone call in *Beyond Black*. Derrida considers voice as a 'to come', a deliberative spacing, and also as his idea of beauty. The call in Mantel's novel is between Colette, who is the most psychically sceptical of the characters, and her husband Gavin's seemingly dead mother, Renee. First though, Derrida's thoughts on a 'to come', following on from the introduction of 'the voice' in his interview:

I say "come," but I mean an event that is not to be confused with the word "come" as it is said in language. It is something that can be replaced by a sign, by an "Ah," by a cry, that means "come." It is not itself a full presence; it is differential, that is to say, it is relayed through the tone and the gradations or gaps of tonality. So, these gaps, this tonal differential, is evidently there, and that is what interests me [...] It isn't the content, it's the tone, and since the tone is never present to itself, it is always written differentially; the question is always this differentiability of tone.³⁶⁴

These gaps, this tonal differential, form another ellipsis. And I make extensive use of this interview because of these very 'holes', as notably revealing; however, a more established

³⁶⁰ *Beyond Black*, p. 151.

³⁶¹ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

³⁶² *Beyond Black*, p. 321.

³⁶³ 'The Spatial Arts', p. 21.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

collection of Derrida's interviews, entitled *Points de Suspension*, actually translates as 'ellipsis' from the French. It is significant considering the transcripts in *Beyond Black* that Derrida also makes the following comment – 'I have written many texts with several voices, and in them the spacing is visible'.³⁶⁵ This immediately suggests that spacing forms a key part of the differentiability identified above. Moreover, as if to confirm this preoccupation with voice, Derrida links it to desire, beauty and a notion of deferral, so that spacing *becomes* 'frame':

The voice separates. And thus it is a matter of whatever there is in the voice that provokes desire; it is a differential vibration that at the same time interrupts, hinders, prevents access, maintains a distance. For me, that is beauty.³⁶⁶

This is perhaps what Terry Eagleton means by the 'neuralgia' he traces in Macherey's work, a term developed very carefully in chapter five of this thesis.³⁶⁷ Plus, such differentiability connects ghosts with *voice*, while also inscribing the ellipsis. For this reason my reading of Colette's telephone call remains closely elliptically informed. Like Princess Diana calling on Alison, Colette rings 'Renee', Gavin's mother, for information, but she does not realise she is asking it of the dead. This reversal signals an inversion, or something returning in a different form:

'Renee, is that you?' she said.
Renee said, 'How did you get my name?'
'It's me,' she said, and Renee replied, 'I've got replacement windows, and replacement doors. I've got a conservatory and the loft conversion's coming next week. I never give to charity, thank you, and I've planned my holiday for this year, and I had a new kitchen when you were last in my area.'
'It's about Gavin,' she said. 'It's me, Colette. I need to know when he was born.'
'Take my name off your list,' her mother-in-law said.³⁶⁸

Of course, Derrida's thought is that 'voice' can *only* be represented in writing, and is distinguished from speech. And there is differentiability of tone here, since Colette seeks a specific point of reference whereas Renee orbits around Colette's question with surplus information, seeming not to have heard her daughter-in-law. The sense of spacing to the voices here leads on from the telephone format. For example, the first two elliptically threaded questions – "Renee, is that you?" she said. [Line break] Renee said, "How did you

³⁶⁵ 'The Spatial Arts', p. 22. The most notable example of 'visible spacing' in Derrida's writing is of course *Glas*, trans. by John P. Leavey JR. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

³⁶⁶ 'The Spatial Arts', p. 23.

³⁶⁷ *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. x.

³⁶⁸ *Beyond Black*, pp. 59-60.

get my name?” – but there is also an evocation of a different vibration to Renee’s response, ‘that at the same time interrupts, hinders, prevents access, *maintains* a distance’. Renee herself is unassailable because of her rejection of Colette’s perceived intrusion, but perhaps more significantly, the details of Gavin’s birth are completely eclipsed.

Colette then discovers after the telephone call, in a brief argument with Gavin, that his mother died that morning, meaning the words she heard were those of a ‘phantom voice’. This, however, like *The Body*, is an example that demonstrates the ghostliness of telephony in general and that ‘stable’ technology is a widespread contemporary myth. Similarly to the implied reader of *Beyond Black*, Colette cannot resolve her elliptical encounter:

She had not told Gavin that in the days after she walked out, she had twice dialled Renee’s home number, just to see what would happen. What happened was nothing, of course [...] It put a dent in her belief in her psychic powers. She knew, of course – her recollection was sharp if Gavin’s wasn’t – that the woman on the phone had at no point actually identified herself. She hadn’t said she wasn’t Renee, but she hadn’t agreed that she was, either.³⁶⁹

The process of the ellipsis is at work within the exchange between Colette and Renee. Firstly, the double focus of the two women, and specifically the repetition and departure within the figure of Gavin’s mother: ‘She hadn’t said she wasn’t Renee, but she hadn’t agreed that she was either’. There is a limit, or outline, to the telephone conversation, which is not consistently equidistant from the centre, since it does not have one. It oscillates – “‘I’ve got [...] I’ve got’” – changes direction – “‘I never give to charity’” – and alters – “‘Take my name off your list’”. There is a lack, an imperfection, which defers arrival; hence Colette’s question about Gavin’s birth is never answered. As Derrida argues, tone is never present to itself, and Renee presents a striking synthesis of his thoughts on the phantom voice. She falls short of being identical, her return is different – “‘How did you get my name?’” instead takes the place of her (perhaps forgotten) name, which *means* ‘reborn’. Such a complex relationship between memory and meaning can only offer further ellipses. Moreover, Renee is never present to herself, conveyed over the telephone, a medium of voice and tone, which similarly can only be differential. This means Renee as interlocutor enacts a double challenge to the notion of full presence, and goes some way towards highlighting Derrida’s thoughts on both ghosts and the voice as elliptically described.

³⁶⁹ *Beyond Black*, pp. 73-74.

The voices of Alison and Colette are equally evasive, which again suggests the text missing the point and also informs a necessary taking to task of a contemporary review of *Beyond Black*. Fay Weldon wrote of *Beyond Black* in 2005:

Hilary Mantel has done something extraordinary. She has taken the ethereal halfway house between heaven and hell, between the living and the dead and nailed it on the page [...] She persuades, she convinces, she offers an alternative universe, she uses the extraordinary descriptive skills that are her trademark – Mantel does ‘seedy’ as no one else.³⁷⁰

Beyond Black is much more elliptical than this reading can allow. The text is double, it is duplicitous; just as Nancy writes of Derrida’s essay ‘Ellipsis’, Mantel’s novel forms a display or speculation while at the same time ‘the text says or it writes or it ellipses [...] something we cannot know’.³⁷¹ What the writing delights in, or rather ‘nails’, is an outlining of what cannot be ‘nailed’ on the page, or perhaps anywhere. It is this very fluidity that enables the ‘extraordinary’ descriptions, not the fixity, or full presence, or actual death, strongly implied by ‘nailing’. The process of the ellipsis is description, or the writing around of something evasive – it is never finally ‘caught’ – so it is de-scribed, or un-inscribed, which is quite different from the mastery Weldon’s review desires. Both *Beyond Black* and *Ghost Dance* lend agency to words; they do not stay put, and neither do the spaces in-between. For example, when first discussing the tapes with Colette, Alison explains that she interferes with modern technology more than any of her psychic colleagues: “‘I suppose I’ve just got more active entities than other people. So the problem would be, with the tapes, could you make the words out?’”³⁷² Uncertainty about words is established very early in *Ghost Dance*. A voiceover implies that when our contemporary memory screened ghosts out, they moved into language – ‘hiding between the letters [...] jumping out between the words’.³⁷³ The motif of fluidity becomes explicitly elliptical later in *Beyond Black* when Alison describes how a man psychically broke through during her algebra examination at school. He is bound and in awful pain:

In spirit, even now, he had a terrible pain where the bones of his feet used to be, and that’s what he relied on her to pass on to his cousin, the knowledge of his pain [...] she had let the letters freely mingle on the page, so that when Miss Adshead came to

³⁷⁰ Fay Weldon, ‘Enfield, where the dead go to live’, *Guardian*, 30 April 2005, Review section, p. 26.

³⁷¹ Nancy, p. 186.

³⁷² *Beyond Black*, p. 50.

³⁷³ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

flick her paper into the pile there was nothing on it but thin pen scrawls, like the traces and loops of the wire with which the hands of this total stranger had been bound.³⁷⁴

The ghost of the presumably murdered man jumps out from between the algebraic equations and he is traced through the writing – ‘thin pen scrawls’ – or outline of the ellipsis. The significance of such ‘curves’ in Mantel’s writing will recur in chapters five and six of this thesis. And thus I conclude that *Beyond Black* is a novel that nails nothing to the page, and to insist that it *does* is again to miss the point that the point should be willingly missed.

The text offers several promising ‘keys’ to meaning – tarot cards, telephones, global events – but none of them solidify into the hard, impenetrable and singular centre implied by a nail. Once more it is Nancy’s reading of ‘Ellipsis’ that assists my reading of *Beyond Black*, in particular his comment on the first line of Derrida’s essay – ‘Here or there we have discerned writing’:³⁷⁵

But let us take another example, and the first one, “here or there”: an ellipsis of place, the ellipsis of two foci neither of which can center the text or localize the writing which has been discerned. In the “here or there,” it is the suspension, the hesitation, the beating of the *or* which really counts: this *or* which never says *where* writing is or when or wherefore.³⁷⁶

Such is the suspension or held breath that began my analysis of Mantel’s novel. Nancy’s ‘Elliptical Sense’ illustrates that whichever double focus is under scrutiny in *Beyond Black* – be it Alison and Colette, Colette and Renee, or the contentious life and death of Weldon’s example – they cannot resolve into a singular centre, to pin down, nail, or otherwise ‘localize the writing’. There is no reducing the messiness or ‘bombardment’ of the text and nor should there be, as this is what constitutes its *sense*. These doublings are in no way absolute, merely lending themselves momentarily to one another.

‘What I do with words is make them explode’: Giving up the ghost³⁷⁷

The difficulty of attempting to ‘make the words out’ on the recordings alongside the ghosts surfacing through the writing of algebra, provide echoes in Mantel’s memoir too. In *Giving*

³⁷⁴ *Beyond Black*, p. 182.

³⁷⁵ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 371.

³⁷⁶ Nancy, p. 186, original emphasis.

³⁷⁷ ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 20.

Up the Ghost, spectres are again ‘hiding between the letters [...] jumping out between the words’:

I am writing in order to take charge of the story of my childhood and my childlessness; and in order to locate myself, if not within a body, then in the narrow space between one letter and the next, between the lines where the ghosts of meaning are [...] You need to find yourself, in the maze of social expectation, the thickets of memory [...] sometimes I feel that each morning it is necessary to write myself into being³⁷⁸

There are crossovers between Alison and this ‘I’ of Mantel’s memoir. For example, both are presented as the ‘child’ of the narrative while simultaneously child-less. Yet I will avoid reading *Giving Up the Ghost* as privileged or rather as the autobiographical ‘origin’ for meaning in Mantel’s corpus. The way it operates as a palimpsest for her writing, offering up fragments (or gifts) from *Beyond Black*, *Fludd* and *An Experiment in Love* (2010) explicitly (as well as others implicitly) is much more interrogative of any stable notion of an implied ‘original’ – it is a perpetual tease. Chapter four will sidestep the positioning of the ‘I’ of Mantel’s memoir *before* (both chronologically and conceptually) the encounter of Alison in *Beyond Black*. A dynamic that becomes problematic in Knox’s already cited article on the ‘gift’ of flesh in the two texts – ‘Giving Flesh to the “Wraiths of Violence”’.³⁷⁹ The ‘event’ of Alison’s childhood is another perceived centre to *Beyond Black* that the narrative outlines. Yet it never surfaces beyond doubt in the text and consequently the notion of a childhood origin as present, or as a *presence*, is constantly menaced. This works alongside the representation of childhood and childlessness as ultimately defined by a ‘missing piece’. In writing, this operates as an orbiting of an inaccessible and yet enabling lack, the relationship between lack and meaning, or deferral, which constitutes the ellipsis of both the body and autobiography. Thus, the ‘Transcendental Signifier’ of the body contains the means of its own undoing, which paradoxically is also what makes it possible at all. Not only has Mantel’s work been read in terms of ‘origin’, one further tone to her writing is its capacity to teasingly present an origin *itself* by which it wishes to be read; the narrative of autobiography is perhaps another such tantalising gift.

³⁷⁸ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 222.

³⁷⁹ Knox’s article was briefly introduced in chapter one of this thesis to further undermine the origin-paradigm for reading Mantel’s work. Although ‘Giving Flesh to the “Wraiths of Violence”’ rejects the gothic as a ‘centre’ for meaning, it then disappointingly resorts to another one, the author’s autobiography. For this reason, I propose reading *Giving Up the Ghost* in terms of *Beyond Black*, rather than using the memoir to ‘explain’ the novel.

Chapter Four 'Between the lines where the ghosts of meaning are': Exploding the autobiography as origin

The epigraph is a quotation from Mantel's memoir *Giving Up the Ghost*. It is positioned here to challenge stable notions of autobiography and as a spur to the 'autobiographical' problematic within this thesis. How might I, on the one hand, dismiss the implied hegemony of autobiographical readings of Mantel's work while, on the other, infiltrating these very arguments with traces of my interview with the author 'herself'? This troubling of the 'origin' – whether bodily or autobiographical – is not designed to banish all trace of these ever 'present' discourses; that would be impossible. Rather the aim is to affirm 'play', or the competing, conflicting and meaningful effect of such combined discursive exchange; there is no one single story, but that is not to say that there is no story at all. To suggest that there is no 'origin' (however strained or problematised) under *any* circumstances would be to replace it with full absence, an act tantamount to total mastery. This is how the thesis can read interviews with Mantel meaningfully, as with the novels or any text written by her, without straightforwardly recouring to 'The Author'. It is an agent in the very writing of the interview text, the trace of autobiography 'going on in the reader's mind', or the origin understood as a discursive process.

In the manner of *A Room of One's Own* (1945):

“‘I’ is only a convenient term for someone who has no real being. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping’.³⁸⁰

This 'I' is Mantel, who partially occupies the position Woolf's text points to, if she can be perceived to take any position at all. This is important because Mantel's extraordinary and continuing fame has been a 'game changer' for the work of this thesis and one consequence of this is that her 'invisibility' in the academy will, of necessity, itself vanish.³⁸¹ If the autobiographical trace is always already persisting in the reader's mind – then *what* readers there are now, and *what* minds! The prizes have also impacted on both the weight and proliferation of her autobiographies, the stories of her life, the sheer pressure on her to *enact* the role of the writer.³⁸² There are so many 'Mantels' circulating 'now', it is the perfect time

³⁸⁰ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945), p. 6.

³⁸¹ Alison Flood, 'The Game Changers: How Women Dominated Publishing this Year', *Guardian*, 1 December 2012, Review section, pp. 1-4.

³⁸² 'There's so much pressure at the moment to enact the role of "the writer" but no time to be one', Hilary Mantel, 'your Jacobean friend' [mailto:ejpollard@googlemail.com] 10 January 2013. However unsettling this reference to an email with 'the writer' might prove to traditional modes of academic scholarship, it also

to problematise the stability of *any* of them and instead highlight that ‘stable’ is ‘only a convenient term’, best understood as fleeting.³⁸³ This chapter will lever open this clamp, in part, by offering Mantel’s reading of the ‘autobiographical’ pinning of another writer, Janet Frame, using Mantel’s introduction to the latter’s republished novel, *Faces in the Water* (2009). It will also promote the uncertainty of autobiographical origins for meaning in *Giving Up the Ghost* via a return to Runcie’s *Culture Show Special*. Derrida’s thoughts in *On the Name*, working through names as ‘unlike’ other signifiers, presents a link to the problematic status of ‘ilary, Hilary and Hilary Mantel in both *Giving Up the Ghost* and Mantel’s wider writing. For example, the ‘Hilary Mantel’ of the *Culture Show* interview *herself* relies on a stable notion of a ‘Mantel biography’ in order to ‘explain’ the texts, while simultaneously resisting the common sense of history as singular. This echoes the exploration of ‘space’ in chapter two of my thesis, triggered by Derrida’s statement about the ‘place’ of deconstruction in his work: ‘It’s not a place; it’s not a place that really exists. It’s a “come” [*viens*]; it is what I call an affirmation that is not positive’.³⁸⁴ All the thesis chapters concern such a nonplace – *revenant*, *khōra*, differance – as a thought that is elliptically described. Like ‘womb’ in the previous chapter, each can be read as an ex-centric centre, assuring solid concentration, participating in the construction of what it, at the same time, threatens to deconstruct. Furthermore, autobiography is necessarily self-referential, which allows for the escape of laughter, a crucial aspect for elliptical understanding of the ‘origin’.

The autobiographical account of Mantel’s endometriosis and the loss of her womb in *Giving Up the Ghost* gives rise to a sense of authorial anxiety as another potentially dangerous hole in the text.³⁸⁵ The construction of the memoir form is different from autobiography because of the former’s often self-consciously *fluid* relationship with the ‘truth’. It gives a retrospective on memories as an already uncertain site rather than offering the pretence of tracking a linear, ‘legitimised’ chronology.³⁸⁶ There is displacement within memoir; Derrida

highlights that the most effective way to trouble this autobiographical problematic is to use the very tools of its construction *against* it.

³⁸³ Hilary Mantel, ‘You Have to Experience it to Know What Fat is Like’, *Guardian*, 2 February 2012, pp. 34-35. This carefully ‘framed’ repetition of an extract from *Giving Up the Ghost*, accompanied by photographs of Mantel throughout her life, is in one sense a riposte to on-going commentary about her appearance and, more significantly, another interruption to the narrativising of her life as a writer.

³⁸⁴ ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 26.

³⁸⁵ This chapter will explore such ‘anxiety’ primarily through Mantel’s memoir while hinting at her journalism and the recent autobiographical ebook *Ink in the Blood: A Hospital Diary* (Kindle edition, 2010).

³⁸⁶ For further discussion see James Olney, ‘Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction’, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 3-27.

describes a ghost as a memory of something that has never been present, and memoir presents a version of events re-membered in a conceptualised ‘now’, though neither the version nor the now can be understood in terms of full presence. The form offers a palimpsest whereby the past is erased while remaining partially legible in an entirely untrustworthy form; the trace, ‘which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun’.³⁸⁷ This is elliptically described, yielding the sense of an irresolvable question yet also *giving* something of the ‘truth’. This fraught relationship between the body, the ‘truth’ and memoir will be further exposed by touching on Nancy’s essay ‘The Intruder’, which describes the philosopher’s heart transplant. This ‘memoir’ has not been read merely in terms of the apparent autobiographical original, suggesting a possible way into Mantel’s *Giving Up the Ghost* that would escape a singular circularity, or single focus, and instead offer elliptical multiplicity, or double focus. The doubling of and within these texts necessarily constitutes difference and departure and this opens a discussion about the complex contemporary construction of autobiographical/life writing and memoir. Reading these two examples of the form together will introduce a notion of ‘the past’, whether in personal or grand terms, as one that is constantly changing: ‘If you don’t own the past, you can’t speak up for it, your past can be stolen and falsified, it can be changed behind you’.³⁸⁸ Memoir is therefore not *the* origin, since history alters depending on where you stand though it does offer *an* origin, one whereby nothing began.³⁸⁹ My exposé begins with a reversal of the emphasis in Knox’s ‘Giving Flesh to the “Wraiths of Violence”’, insisting instead on a reading of *Giving Up the Ghost* through *Beyond Black* rather than the other way around. It also utilises the many ‘faces’ of Paul de Man in his understanding of autho-biographical *face* in ‘Autobiography as de-facement’. His essay problematises autobiography as a genre and from there I can question the position(s) and agency of ‘Hilary Mantel’. This will culminate in a reading of *Giving Up the Ghost* that privileges the elliptical *slippage* of autobiography via *khōra* (as more situating than situated) in order to relinquish the lure of chronology as transcendental truth. This chapter also introduces my own term ‘autho-biography’ as both distinct from and operating within autobiographical discourses; this insertion is designed to interrupt the hegemony that the *edifice* autobiography has come to represent.

³⁸⁷ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 372.

³⁸⁸ Hilary Mantel, ‘Revering the Gone-before’, in *Beyond Black*, P. S. section (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 10-13 (p. 13). An example of *exposure* of the pitfalls of grand narrative is the rise and fall of Anne Boleyn, subject of *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel’s unexpected sequel to *Wolf Hall*.

³⁸⁹ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

‘Bursting open like a mouth’: The *hysterical* origin

The staging unfolds according to an embedding of discourses of a narrative type, reported or not, of which the origin or the first enunciation appears to be always relayed, appearing to disappear even where it appears.³⁹⁰

This reading of the autobiographical ‘original’ within and without Mantel’s memoir will combine Paul de Man’s notion of autobiography as a mask with Derrida’s understanding of *khōra* as situating not situated; again *khōra* is the thought being elliptically described. The essay ‘*Khōra*’ forms part of the work of *On the Name* because it skirts the difficulty of both ‘placing’/naming. This emphasis was helpful for ‘womb’ and the body in the previous chapter and continues to be pertinent here within the relationship between ‘name’ and autobiography. The aim of this synthesis is to reconsider ‘womb’, transcendental original, as a figure in the memoir that is both explicit and implicit to the narrative. There is a shared sense of duplicity to the interrogations of autobiography and *khōra*, respectively, in the work of de Man and Derrida that makes their writing appropriate for reading *Giving Up the Ghost*, and a good theoretical match. To push this ambiguity, I will also disturb Knox’s priorities in ‘Giving Flesh’. This text seeks to explain the horrible events of Alison’s childhood in *Beyond Black* in terms of Mantel’s ‘own’ experiences, or at least a perception of them, lifted straight from *Giving Up the Ghost*. There is no gap between Mantel’s memoir and her ‘reality’ in Knox’s argument: ‘The world of Mantel’s fiction is not so very far from the world of her life’.³⁹¹ It secures the origin by connecting the young Hilary’s encounter with the devil in the memoir with Alison as witness to the men carrying boxes from the garages in the novel. ‘Giving Flesh’ points out that ‘Mantel’ felt her feet weigh heavy during the breach in the garden with the spiral, ‘a lazy buzzing swirl, like flies’.³⁹² This is apparently *repeated* in the novel as ‘[Alison] took one plodding step toward the house. Then another. Air thick as mud clotted around her ankles’.³⁹³ There is no suspicion of this link in the article, although, as de Man suggests of autobiographies generally, it is difficult, if not impossible, to ever ‘catch’ the original referent. This is not a problem in itself, yet the sense of ‘Giving Flesh’ relies on a correct identification in order to justify this seemingly linear writing trajectory.

³⁹⁰ ‘*Khōra*’, pp. 111-112.

³⁹¹ Knox, p. 319.

³⁹² Cited Knox, p. 319.

³⁹³ Knox, p. 320.

I want to switch the emphasis to the ‘fiction’, if not as original, then definitely as starting point. I began my reversal in the previous chapter with *Beyond Black* in order to read *Giving Up the Ghost* second; it is only by highlighting this change to the traditional method of autobiographical explanation that the departure of my technique can be understood. The main advantage is that this approach broadens the potential of the ‘palimpsest’ metaphor in Mantel’s writing, both her style and her form. The suggestion in Knox’s work limits this most pertinent of metaphors by positioning *Giving Up the Ghost* as *the* palimpsest, stitched together out of fictional slippages, but stable overall. Although interesting, this merely offers a disguised ‘centring’ of Mantel’s corpus because the memoir, the autobiography, is still situated as the *key* to Mantel’s writing, the whole corpus being re-written within it. Through pushing the memoir problematic against Derrida’s thoughts on *khōra*, *Giving Up the Ghost* is revealed as no more the palimpsest than any of the other texts. None of Mantel’s novels, short stories or life writings possesses such clearly established limits or boundaries. Thus, reading *Giving Up the Ghost* merely prompts the conclusion that Mantel’s corpus is itself the palimpsest and that no text is privileged, or as Derrida writes of the discourse on *khōra*, ‘such would be, then, the structure of an overprinting without a base’.³⁹⁴

This is very serious, but the subtext here is laughter. The laugh is pertinent because of the ambiguities of autobiography as a ‘genre’ and *khōra* as *without* situation, or ‘place’. My analysis speaks generally to the ellipsis in Derrida’s work, but I skirt most deliberately around his laughter, which is echoed in Mantel’s writing. Writing of ‘Ellipsis’ as a text, Nancy argues – ‘The origin is laughing’:

A laugh breaks out here, the laughter of the ellipse bursting open like a mouth around its double foci [...] There is a transcendental laugh, and at several points the text insists on a certain “joy” of writing. What is a transcendental laugh? [...] It is knowledge of a condition of possibility which gives nothing to know. There is nothing comic about it: it is neither nonsense nor irony.³⁹⁵

Not only does Derrida explore the position of *khōra* in terms of the serious/comic opposition of the logos versus mythos binary, the ‘knowledge of a condition of possibility which gives nothing to know’, revealed by laughter, is also an approximation of Derrida’s thoughts on the very condition of *khōra*. This offers a way into the laughter of Mantel’s work, which is both elliptically displaced and rife throughout her writing. For example, in her 2012 reading at the

³⁹⁴ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 104.

³⁹⁵ Nancy, p. 180.

Southbank Centre to launch *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel linked the process of ‘chortling’ to the ambiguity of the Tudor court. Explaining her own reading of the narrative as unresolved, she suggested that it is impossible to draw a moral because the people of this court are ‘walking in the dark’.³⁹⁶ Alongside such decentring, she proffered the ‘space’ of her reader as *against* Cromwell’s machinations and simultaneously laughing with satisfaction at his success.³⁹⁷ From this perspective, *Bring Up the Bodies* describes the movement of the court as elliptical while the laughter, or ‘bursting open like a mouth’, traces the figure of the ellipse.

‘Remain within this whirligig’: Autobiography as neither inside nor outside

The ‘story’ of Mantel’s life is not demarcated by her memoir, though *Giving Up the Ghost* provides an apparently self-contained chronology for autobiographical methods of reading, and even Mantel’s construction of ‘herself as reader’ relies on this approach. This authorial investment means that autobiographical explanation is at once privileged while the story of such a biography also *exceeds* the limits of the memoir. Thus, a potential marginal note to *Giving Up the Ghost* can be traced in Mantel’s Runcie interview. In answering the question about his ‘unsettling’ experience reading her work, Mantel suggests her childhood as the origin for such ambiguity. Though this does not stabilise the ‘original’, Runcie is necessarily implicated in trying to master the text, which parallels James Naughtie’s approach at the Southbank. It was the *certainty* of his line of questioning that prompted Mantel to emphasise the ambiguity of the Tudor court, cite the poetry of Thomas Wyatt and conclude that there is no moral to the trilogy. She also revealed that the last line of *The Mirror and the Light* will be a repetition of the opening of *Wolf Hall*: ‘Now get up’.³⁹⁸ This evokes another ellipsis, though such return necessarily constitutes difference too, strengthened by the asymmetrical form of the trilogy.

³⁹⁶ Hilary Mantel, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre, London, UK, 18 May 2012.

³⁹⁷ ‘The quintessential English story of poverty is that somebody’s trying to rise from it, a young man trying to get on in the world, the Joe Lamptons and all his predecessors. And the reader is at one remove, horrified and laughing at the absurd *gaffs* he makes, and at the same time indignant on his behalf, because how would he know which fork to use? But because it’s predicated, that kind of writing is predicated on someone, meeting a series of invisible trip wires and tripping over every one, and it inclines to comedy and absurdity’, ‘In Conversation’, 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 209.

³⁹⁸ Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre (2012). The third volume is going to come, but how long it is taking!

These dialogues are perhaps what de Man calls the ‘articulation between two patterns of figuration’.³⁹⁹ In his slow exposure of the mask of autobiography, de Man’s text utilises the arguments of Gérard Genette on Marcel Proust’s work, specifically the necessity for metaphors beginning both inside and outside the narrative in order to ‘work’. Using Genette’s arguments as springboard, ‘Autobiography as de-facement’ implies that inside is generally equated with fiction and outside autobiography:

For, says Genette, “it suffices to locate oneself [as reader] outside the text (*before* it) to be able to say that the timing has been manipulated in order to produce the *metaphor*. Only a situation supposed to have been forced upon the author from the outside, by history, or by the tradition, and thus (for him [sic]) not fictional... imposes upon the reader the hypothesis of a *genetic* causality in which the metonymy functions as cause and the metaphor as effect, and *not* the *teleological* causality in which the metaphor is the end [*fin*] and the metonymy the means towards this end, a structure which is always possible within a hypothetically pure fiction.”⁴⁰⁰

Genette’s analysis of reading Proust’s work as fiction or reading ‘the same novel’ as autobiography is also an exploration of the impossibility of establishing a clear external referent beyond play – the origin.⁴⁰¹ It is this impasse that Genette is outlining; however his means of explanation requires some unpacking. What does it mean for the reader to ‘locate oneself’ outside of the text? Genette is implying that through this distance such manipulation of the timing of metaphor production will become obvious. Thus, there is a boundary to the text, it *is* an entity in itself, as is the event identified by the omniscient reader, which has created the timing. It is straightforward cause and effect. This is the history or tradition ‘forced upon the author’, which the reader apparently understands as ‘not fictional’ – although this statement is followed by an uncertain ellipsis in Genette’s text. It is the ‘hypothesis’ of autobiography that is explained; so, the metonymy of, or difference between, the text (inside) and the world in which it is written (outside) – history and tradition – *causes* the metaphor, as effect. This differs from a ‘hypothetically pure’ fiction, where the metonymy, or difference, *enables* the metaphor – which also describes the deferral within what Derrida calls *differance*. Genette suggests that this process is imperfect: “‘We should perhaps remain within this whirligig’”.⁴⁰² And this is what de Man’s text proceeds to do – *whirligig* Genette’s analysis so as to establish *beyond all doubt* that autobiography cannot and

³⁹⁹ Paul de Man, ‘Autobiography as de-facement’, *MLN*, 94 (1979), 919-930 (p. 921).

⁴⁰⁰ Cited de Man, p. 921, original emphases.

⁴⁰¹ de Man, p. 921.

⁴⁰² Cited de Man, p. 921.

does not ‘belong to a simpler mode of referentiality, of representation, and of diegesis’.⁴⁰³ It is de Man’s use of Genette that effectively severs life from art because the initial point is argued so badly that the widening crack offers incredible scope for departure. Ultimately, de Man sets out to prove that autobiography is not only a means of reading (rather than specific to certain texts) but that as such it also constitutes its own ‘figure’. These statements are pertinent because this thesis is shot through with the implication that *none* of Mantel’s texts are ‘essentially’ anything, autobiographical or otherwise. Yet these ‘old’ labels still characterise the way contemporary texts are read – from the *outside* rather than the *inside* of writing itself. Furthermore, de Man’s use of the ‘figure’ to reverse this established dynamic parallels my elliptical emphasis on the outline of writing and the ‘centre’ as neither inside nor outside, but instead *exchange*.

‘Autobiography as de-facement’ continues to reinforce this reversal, which sheds light on the role of Runcie, Naughtie, or any interviewer, in solidifying a means for reading:

Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both *depend* on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject.⁴⁰⁴

Again, this evokes the autobiographical trace inside and outside my own interview.

Moreover, such ‘alignment between two subjects’ describes the relationship between Mantel and her implied reader while it is also the dynamic Runcie, Naughtie and Mantel cultivate as *themselves* readers of her work. Significantly, de Man’s text evokes this ‘figure’ of reading via a double focus, both when criticising Genette’s whirligig – ‘the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity’ – and here through the alignment of *two* subjects.⁴⁰⁵ Yet this thesis marks a further departure because I argue that ‘autobiography’ is not a passive ‘figure of reading’, as de Man suggests, it is instead a deliberate attempt to ‘fix’ the figure of writing. And this platform *is* on offer in ‘Autobiography as de-facement’, which is perhaps why it concludes that such an ‘understanding’ is something that ‘occurs, to some degree, in *all* texts’. When de Man writes – ‘The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject’ – he

⁴⁰³ de Man, p. 920.

⁴⁰⁴ de Man, p. 921, my emphasis.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

evokes an exchange between ‘two’ that is about the subject, but also necessarily about the text. This spurs on a point about French feminist discourse from the last chapter, that a subject only becomes a subject through entry into language. The reluctance to occupy Genette’s whirligig means that ‘Autobiography as de-facement’ cannot help but stabilise the position of the author to some extent. For example, de Man’s argument asks:

We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his [sic] medium?⁴⁰⁶

The intent of the question merely switches the emphasis onto autobiography (not life) as a coherent resting point. It interrogates the stability of the external referent, or, the events of the author’s life, and represents the figure of autobiography as determining these points of reference rather than the other way around; thus, the ‘illusion of the reference’ becomes ‘a correlation of the structure of the figure’.⁴⁰⁷ This places the power within the figure (of writing, I would argue) without any real interrogation of how this power might arise. In terms of *Giving Up the Ghost*, this reversal would mean that Mantel’s endometriosis did not *cause* the narrative of her memoir, which I am willing to entertain, but the follow through means instead that the memoir structures the elusive endometriosis, which seems equally problematic. Moreover, the sheer complexities of current autobiographies of ‘Hilary Mantel’ are partially signalled by the many dialogues both exploring and initiated by her fame. The openness and on-going nature of these discussions suggest the utility of *The Parallax View* and the nuanced articulation of the viewing position in Žižek’s text; thus, fame is always already about ‘frame’. To clarify, Mantel’s February 2012 article in the *Guardian*, ‘You have to experience it to know what fat is like’ prompts the potential reply, nobody said they *did* know – or did they?⁴⁰⁸ In the last chapter I briefly considered a problematic front page of *the same newspaper*, which ran ‘Body Double’ accompanied by a photograph of Mantel in order to ‘describe’ her 2012 Booker Prize win.⁴⁰⁹ Knowledge of this background forces open a gap in Mantel’s article where a silent interlocutor can be perceived to enter the exchange. It is a ‘place’ that receives the repetition of an extract from *Giving Up the Ghost* and its talkative ‘new’ photographs of pre-fame Mantels. It is this space, this silent ‘no body’, that constitutes

⁴⁰⁶ de Man, p. 920.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ ‘You Have to Experience it to Know What Fat is Like’ (2012).

⁴⁰⁹ *Guardian*, 17 October 2012.

the frame, this just-perceptible-absence that comes to define what remains, and it is these margins to Mantel's riposte that make 'reality turn into its *own appearance*'.⁴¹⁰ Mantel, 'The Author', is simultaneously interrupting *and* authorising the narrative(s) of her autobiography. In this proliferating field of discourse(s) it is hard to argue that the cause and effect relationship, whether reversed or not, is a theoretical match for annotating this dizzyingly contradictory and 'new' phenomenon of *living fame*.

It seems more likely that the narrative of endometriosis (always already writing) is an effect of the memoir and vice versa.⁴¹¹ However, in fairness to de Man's argument, it is this very oscillation that eventually develops, though in a way I do not recognise, or endorse:

Genette's metaphor of the revolving door helps us to understand why this is so: it aptly connotes the turning motion of tropes and confirms that the specular moment is not primarily a situation or an event that can be located in history, but that it is the manifestation, on the level of the referent, of a linguistic structure.⁴¹²

I agree with the content of de Man's argument, but not the form and my disagreement is closely informed by Derrida's thought, which is extremely suspicious of assumed 'structures'. This sense of 'the specular moment' dislocated from history is refined and effective for my reading of the encounter with the devil in *Giving Up the Ghost*: 'I cannot move. I am shaking; as if pinned to the *moment*, I cannot wrench my gaze away'.⁴¹³ However, although de Man's text emphasises 'the turning motion of tropes' and 'the impossibility of closure and of totalization' to all cognition (thought), it is articulated via a 'tropological structure' which apparently offers a *base* for thought.⁴¹⁴ It is a base of substitutions, so therefore reminiscent of *khōra*, though still appealing notionally to a structured stability. The thinking of the ellipsis is a different way to negotiate this philosophical double bind of the system, both our awareness of it and our inability to escape it.

⁴¹⁰ Žižek, p. 28.

⁴¹¹ 'But I myself I'm fascinated by the body as a site of story-telling, well as a site of intertextuality because of the interplay of the genetic story with the life-story, with the stories told about the body in a medical discourse... the medical history as a form of narrative fascinates me! Oliver Sacks is, needless to say, one of my inspirations. And because I... because I've had so much *illness* and it's the kind of illness that breeds metaphors, I'm fascinated by the repression of stories by muscle memory, by the body's memory, by buried trauma, which I actually believe *and know* has physical locations within the body, not just... it is not just a mental artefact. And, yes, these are some of the questions that go around and around I think, explored through the memoir but also through Alison's very uncomfortable body', 'In Conversation', 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 222-223.

⁴¹² de Man, p. 922.

⁴¹³ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 106, my emphasis.

⁴¹⁴ de Man, p. 922.

‘It oscillates between two types of oscillation’: Taking on the mantle of Mantel

‘*Khōra*’ forms the conclusion of *On the Name*. It is significant then that de Man’s writing also comments on the ‘thematic insistence’ of the proper name within autobiography.⁴¹⁵ This is a point first widely introduced in terms of the author’s name on the title page, indicating the subject. Thus, the specular structure of autobiography (that does not possess an external referent while requiring the illusion of one) is internalised within the text and is where the author ‘declares himself the subject of his own understanding’.⁴¹⁶ However, this aggressive authorship applies to any text with the name of the author attached: ‘Which amounts to saying that any book with a readable title-page is, to some extent, autobiographical’.⁴¹⁷ There is little allowance here for uncertainty surrounding this attachment, but is this how language works? Attach a word to a thing and all the meaning is coherently channelled and authorised? Such rigidity also raises the spectre of the *nom de plume*, which is partially, if not explicitly, relevant to the name of ‘Hilary Mantel’. Within Mantel’s ‘autobiography’ resides the question: Is Mantel her so-called ‘real’ name? It is the problematic memoir text that suggests most persuasively that the author’s life dictated her name; taking on the *mantle* of ‘Mantel’, the name of her stepfather, in order to further foster the false notion that he and Mantel’s mother were married. This author’s name is itself the *effect* of a narrative, which somewhat undermines its attachment to the texts as legitimising.

‘Autobiography as de-facement’ does acknowledge such difficulties, but through evoking another point of exchange, the signature, famously objectified by Derrida himself:

The name on the title page is not the proper name of a subject capable of self-knowledge and understanding, but the signature that gives the contract legal, though by no means epistemological, authority.⁴¹⁸

This analysis of the ‘work’ of the signature is both contradicted and supported by Derrida’s thought. Derrida argues that signing a piece of art (potentially) by any means, equates to power or even a ‘signature’ *per se*, and perhaps what de Man refers to here as ‘epistemological’ authority. The signature is not a solitary act for Derrida though; it must be

⁴¹⁵ de Man, p. 922.

⁴¹⁶ de Man, p. 921.

⁴¹⁷ de Man, p. 922.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

counter-signed through acknowledgement of the work (rather than hackneyed pen and ink) in order for it to *become a signature*. Therefore, the name on a published title page already offers an authorised, counter-signed signature by its very appearance in such a format. This undermines de Man's reduction that what is decided between author and reader (or author *of* the text and author *in* the text) has been 'replaced by the signature of a single subject'.⁴¹⁹ In Derrida's thought, the 'signature' cannot be understood as singular at any stage. However, de Man's text resists its own conclusion; folding back on itself, it stresses that the subject will not be conceptualised, although attempts to enact this lock down are inexhaustible – 'we reenter a system of tropes at the very moment we claim to escape from it'.⁴²⁰

This paradox is remarkably reminiscent of *khōra*: 'One cannot even say of it that it is neither this nor that or that it is both this and that'.⁴²¹ I will push this contradiction against *Giving Up the Ghost* in order to explore what occupies *khōra* in this text (on 'womb') and how de Man's assertions about 'the subject' open it up. Early on in the childhood section of the narrative, Mantel's writing evokes a child consciousness using neither/nor and 'both this and that':

'When I was young,' I said diffidently, 'I used to think that dog was a cow.' I was hoping to prompt the reply, 'Well actually, secretly, it is,' but the reply I got was, 'Don't be silly'.⁴²²

This dialogue is an uneasy interaction for several reasons. First, this 'I', this 'ilary', is young, so the uncertainty over the stability of the dog remains a problem. Second, the margins of the exchange are vague and fragmented, it is assumed that "'Don't be silly'" is the dismissal of an adult voice. Yet the sketchy outline of the encounter means that the *tone* complements the content because surface *and* depth both occupy the neither/nor, the this and that. Such ambiguity works towards the 'arrival' of a spaniel in the text, 'shapeless' and 'decrepit':

I knew it was a dog. But I couldn't help thinking that, in some way, and secretly, it was a cow. Deception seemed to be in the air. *The true nature of things was frequently hidden*. No one would say plainly what was what: not if they could help it.⁴²³

This implies an agency within the maintenance of such a secret: 'A text remains, moreover, forever imperceptible'.⁴²⁴ Derrida's thoughts on *khōra*, that one cannot even say, suggests

⁴¹⁹ de Man, p. 923.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ '*Khōra*', p. 89.

⁴²² *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 46.

⁴²³ Ibid, my emphasis.

inability, unlike the assertion – ‘No one would say plainly what was what: not if they could help it’. This example from *Giving Up the Ghost* is characteristic of a pervasive questioning of the facts that traces Mantel’s writing. Notice – ‘I knew it was a dog’, followed by a new sentence – ‘But I couldn’t help thinking’. The solidity of *knowledge* is immediately undermined by the orbit of ‘thought’, which, though not necessarily swaying under ‘the facts’, does continue to oscillate. The thinking is ‘that, in some way, and secretly, it was a cow’, is so *very* hedged; for example, are ‘in some way’ and ‘secretly’ possible simultaneous positions? This ‘I’, this whirligig subject, ‘knew’ it was a dog, so it cannot be a cow, secretly or otherwise, or can it? Mantel outlines the dangerous hole of textual anxiety that enables such a paradox – ‘I know this, but why do I think I know’, as she says in the Runcie interview. Again the emphasis is on ‘thinking’, or thought, and it is thought that challenges knowledge, not further knowledge.

Similarly to *khōra* and de Man’s notion of the specular structure of autobiography, which ‘has been displaced but not overcome’, this movement between thought and knowledge is no ordinary oscillation.⁴²⁵

The oscillation of which we have just spoken is not an oscillation among others, an oscillation between two poles. It oscillates between two types of oscillation: the double exclusion (neither/nor) and the participation (both this and that).⁴²⁶

The two poles of thought/knowledge are themselves ‘two types of oscillation’ and like the difference and deferral of difference they offer *two* differing origins of differences. This sense of oscillation ‘between two types of oscillation’ reveals something *else* about the double focus of the ellipsis. What could describe this double exclusion more daringly than the implied double focus of Mantel’s memoir – childhood and childlessness? Childhood is a displaced, inaccessible origin and childlessness is a presence inscribed by absence. The ‘I’ is neither child nor adult (it *outlines* childhood) while childlessness is an even more *emotive* neither/nor position; its emotion runs it closer to the wire, touching a particularly revealing edge. Yet these two poles require the participation of both, and, within each, the occupation of at least two other positions as well. The ‘I’ participates as both child and adult while the

⁴²⁴ ‘Its laws and its rules are not, however, harboured in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be booked, in the *present*, into anything that could rigorously be called a perception’. For further discussion see Jacques Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, in *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 69-186 (p. 69).

⁴²⁵ de Man, p. 923.

⁴²⁶ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 91.

childless 'I' is both mother and woman, while also neither. These differences within differences are significant in terms of Derrida's limited commentary on the mother/nurse translation of *khōra* and its use. He briefly considers the impossible binary of *khōra* as mother and the father as paradigm, within philosophical discourse:

The "mother" is supposedly apart. And since it's only a figure, a schema, therefore one of these determinations which *khōra* receives, *khōra* is not more of a mother than a nurse, is no more than a woman [...] In the couple outside of the couple, this strange mother who gives place without engendering can no longer be considered as an origin.⁴²⁷

'You're not its *mother*' is Mantel's assertion, giving place without engendering, a strange mother and no origin.⁴²⁸ Such analysis has implications for the position of Mantel as author. There is first the obstacle of the 'I' (not author) of the memoir as a 'strange mother'. However, if the 'I' is considered in this way for a moment then it undoes the predictable notion of authorial authority and something else can be perceived to have slipped in instead; this 'I' occupies the bizarre position of Woolf's 'I', it is merely a pointer. *Giving Up the Ghost* is a text that does give 'place' without *engendering* and if the 'I', or Mantel, or whoever, is not the strange mother, then who/what is? The problem with the strange mother (for Derrida) is not about straightforward dismissal, there is open acknowledgement that she/it does give place, the difficulty is that this gift cannot be 'considered as an origin'.

The force of *Giving Up the Ghost* itself addresses this problematic:

I am writing in order to take charge of the story of my childhood and my childlessness; and in order to locate myself, if not within a body, then in the narrow space between one letter and the next, between the lines where the ghosts of meaning are.⁴²⁹

This quotation is reminiscent of Derrida's sense of *first* enunciation cited earlier, where the stages unfold 'according to an embedding of discourses of a narrative type'. Memoir can be understood on one level as 'a narrative type', which, according to de Man, is so powerful it governs *everything* the writer writes. Yet Derrida goes on to note that this staging is both about narrative and about origin. During this process of unfolding – 'the origin or the first enunciation appears to be always relayed, appearing to disappear even where it appears'. This

⁴²⁷ 'Khōra', p. 124.

⁴²⁸ 'In Conversation', 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 227, original emphasis.

⁴²⁹ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 222. This spacing and temporalisation describes differance, the thought orbited by chapter six.

is the effect of writing ‘to take charge’, forcing an origin to appear during the very act of its disappearance. And this is symptomatic of Mantel’s writing generally even though it is imbued with a certain weight here because of the implied specificity of the memoir narrative, a specificity the text actually works to undermine. Such extracts from *Giving Up the Ghost* illustrate again that Derrida’s ‘*Khōra*’, as a rereading of ‘Womb’, is not limited to the biology of the word. Yet there is a link between the biology, the body and the pain of the memoir and my incorporation of *jouissance* and Spivakian excess in chapter three. This connection is forged via the strange mother ‘giving’ place alongside what is inscribed ‘on’ *khōra*, as Derrida explains:

Khōra receives, so as to give place to them, all the determinations, but she/it does not possess any of them as her/its own. She possesses them, she has them, since she receives them, but she does not possess them as properties, she does not possess anything as her own. She “is” nothing other than the sum or the process of what has just been inscribed “on” her, on the subject of her, on her subject, right up against her subject, but she is not the subject or the present support of all these interpretations, even though, nevertheless, she is not reducible to them. Simply this excess is nothing, nothing that may be and be said ontologically.⁴³⁰

The silence of *khōra* is very important for the theoretical push of chapters five and six of this thesis. However, before that reach is possible, I must state that I do not position this implied subject *as* Mantel, or ‘Hilary’, or even ‘I’, though these figures are all inscribed on this ‘place’ that *Giving Up the Ghost* points up. Such gesturing is best summarised by the question the text asks of itself: ‘How then create a narrative of your own life?’⁴³¹ This question surfaces towards the end of the memoir when the impossibility of the body as a location is so ‘heartily’ embraced. It becomes hard to unpack these movements because Mantel is understood as a subject, as a *real* ‘she’, while the signifier, ‘Mantel’, is also simultaneously *received* by the ‘she’ of the narrative. This second ‘she’, or *khōra*, receives these properties but cannot possess them, which means that the body, for example, is inscribed on this place in the text though it cannot be located there. Perhaps this is the most effective evocation of oscillation ‘between oscillating types’. It is easy to conflate the ‘I’ of the memoir with this (non)place – ‘the narrow space between one letter and the next’ – because this ‘place’, where Hilary Mantel as a subject can be *perceived*, cannot ‘be said ontologically’.

⁴³⁰ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 99.

⁴³¹ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 223.

Yet even *this* is further duplicity, since the ‘I’ located in ‘the narrow space’ remains locked into neither/nor and both this and that. This overshadowing of the narrow space by the authorial figure (just because the former cannot be ‘mastered’ does not mean it does not operate) is just one way of disabling the relationship. Another route is to *empty* the space, then fetishise it. Derrida explores this through the discourse of Socrates, specifically, an attempt to undermine people with no place whilst claiming allegiance with them:

If Socrates pretends to include himself among those whose genus is to have no place, he does not assimilate himself to them, he says he resembles them. Hence he holds himself in a third genus, in a way, neither that of the sophists, poets, and other imitators (of whom he speaks), nor that of the philosopher-politicians (to whom he speaks, proposing only to listen to them). His speech is neither his address nor what it addresses. His speech occurs in a third genus and in the neutral space or a place without place, a place where everything is marked but which would be “in itself” unmarked.⁴³²

Suspicion of this ‘third space’ in its various guises threads this thesis on Mantel’s writing. The legitimising of the ‘Gothic’, for example, or privileging the autobiographical narrative – both operate via an origin that occupies a ‘third space’ beyond play. Through Derrida’s thought, this sense of full presence (or an emptiness signifying *full* absence) can only mean death. Describing a place ‘where everything is marked but which would be “in itself” unmarked’ disables it; *khōra* is not essentially anything, it does not have an essence ‘in itself’ or anywhere else, but this is *not* absence – this is neither/nor. It is not unmarked; it is inscribed, it is marked, it is written all over, it is written. To unravel this contradiction in *Giving Up the Ghost*, I refer again to my analysis of the womb as ‘a neat diacritical mark’.⁴³³ The womb of the memoir is ‘two black strokes’, it is outlined *as writing*, ‘marking it out’, in a language the ‘I’ will ‘never learn to speak’.⁴³⁴ So, is this the third space? It is marked out, ringed, this is the first and last enunciation, it is a sign that makes no ‘sense’; it is an empty space, appearing to disappear as it appears. Yet inscribed ‘on’ this emptiness, this sign, are ‘all the determinations’ of the memoir, *giving* place to everything even while ‘in itself’ possessing nothing.⁴³⁵ Can it be claimed that such a ‘place’ is not marked? It depends on the notion of writing adopted; if writing is understood as permanent, fixed, absolute, then no, the place is clean. However, if writing is permeable, and its medium, whether parchment or stone, is finite, then this same place is revealed as a palimpsest – ‘such would be, then, the

⁴³² ‘*Khōra*’, p. 109.

⁴³³ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 201.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 99.

structure of an overprinting without a base'.⁴³⁶ It is reminiscent of the place of exchange offered by a signifier, any signifier. However, that it remains impossible to 'say' the place of *khōra* ontologically means its simple excess also *exceeds* the signifier. This is the ellipsis [...] the signifier *pièce de résistance* of previous chapters.

'She was more than herself': Autobiography and autho-biography

Another way to push the autobiography problematic is through the links between Mantel's work and that of New Zealand writer, Janet Frame (1924-2004). Following on from the question in *Giving Up the Ghost* – 'How then can you create a narrative of your own life?' – the text refers to Frame by *name*: 'Janet Frame compares [this] process to finding a bunch of old rags, and trying to make a dress'.⁴³⁷ Thus, the narrativising of autobiography is necessarily an imperfect practice. Moreover, this is not an isolated connection, Mantel evokes Frame's three-volume autobiography in a new introduction to the latter's *Faces in the Water*.⁴³⁸ The fractured chronology repays consideration here; Mantel's memoir was published in 2003, a year later Frame died. By 2009 the new introduction had appeared, the same year Mantel won the Booker Prize for *Wolf Hall*. In 2011, Virago reprinted *Faces in the Water* with Mantel's pretext. These dates reveal the collision within autobiographical work because, although it implies authorial agency, I suggest that it signifies a process that *involves* the author but cannot be contained by them. Consequently, the power of Mantel's autobiography exceeds the narrative of *Giving Up the Ghost* and continues to be unstoppably penned.⁴³⁹ Autobiography is an overlord that my notion of autho-biography begins to unpick from within by problematising what position the author can possibly 'occupy' within such a narrative. It is a double focus that blurs the answer by refocusing on the question: 'How then can you create a narrative of your own life?'. The previous obscurities of Mantel and Frame open up this discussion of the misleading nature of 'autobiography' and the categorising/decategorising of the two women as 'mad'. Mantel writes rather acerbically of

⁴³⁶ 'Khōra', p. 104.

⁴³⁷ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 223.

⁴³⁸ The three volumes of Frame's autobiography were published as follows: *To the Is-Land* (1982), *An Angel at My Table* (1984) and *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1984). A collected edition entitled *An Autobiography* was published in 1989, which was posthumously reprinted by Virago in 2008 as *An Angel at My Table*.

⁴³⁹ The media response to 'Kate Gate' in February 2013, following on from Mantel's 'Royal Bodies' in the *LRB*, labelled the author variously as both 'venomous' and a socialist. In her lecture and accompanying article, Mantel described *representations* of the Duchess of Cambridge as emphasising an image of a 'plastic princess' designed by a committee; her remarks were reframed to suggest a direct personal attack on Kate's character. For further details see Adam Sherwin, 'Prize Fight: The Author and the Princess', *Independent*, 19 February 2013, p. 3 and Francesca Infante, 'A Plastic Princess Designed to Breed', *Daily Mail*, 19 February 2013, p. 1.

the ideology behind such madness in *Giving Up the Ghost*, explaining that her first published novel ‘contained mad people, but no one suggested its author was mad. It’s different, somehow, when you’ve received money for your efforts; once you’ve got an agent, and professionalised the whole thing’.⁴⁴⁰ ‘Clinical Waste’ echoes this reinscription through a description of Mantel diagnosing *herself* with endometriosis using a book, noting the ‘great satisfaction in being a textbook case’ and that she has never been anything quite so definite since.⁴⁴¹ This statement helps highlight the consequences of being difficult to categorise as an author, which is partly due to the frustration of potentially ‘autobiographical’ readers, or, more specifically, general irritation that this manner of reading does not deliver what is expected. This is also an aspect of Mantel’s introduction to Frame’s work, an appropriate angle considering the way Frame has been *framed*: ‘The fate befalling the young woman who wanted “to be a poet” has been well documented’.⁴⁴² Out of all the attempts to ‘fix’ Mantel’s work, the autobiographical approach is definitely the one with most personal implications for the author and her introduction hints at familiarity with this besieged position:

When such a writer is at the height of her powers, everything seems significant [...] Meaning proliferates, so that to write a sentence is to touch on, allude to, all the possibilities of other sentences allied to it [...] But when the artist tries to explain herself – and there is always the demand – she may be able to do it only by evoking symbols.⁴⁴³

Such proliferation of meaning is reminiscent of Derrida’s thought, as well as psychosis. However, the emphasis here is on the ‘demand’ of the Other; the demand of the reader for the author, as indisputable origin, to make an account of their work and, by proxy, of themselves. The extraordinary pressure to deliver from such a position is inevitably crushing. And the *crush* is apparent in interviews with Mantel; Runcie wants an explanation of his feeling of instability, Naughtie needs a way to ‘master’ the ambiguity of the Tudor court, Nick Higham wants Mantel to consider why her success came so late.⁴⁴⁴ I, of course, in my turn want the ellipsis. These are all cloaking the same question, or demand. Yet there is no ‘point’ in seeking a moral, a key, an origin for Mantel’s writing and certainly not from a source of such

⁴⁴⁰ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 181.

⁴⁴¹ ‘Clinical Waste’, p. 21.

⁴⁴² Janet Frame, *Storms Will Tell: Selected Poems* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2008), pp. 11-12.

⁴⁴³ Janet Frame, *Faces in the Water*, intro. by Hilary Mantel (London: Virago, 2009), p. xiii.

⁴⁴⁴ *Meet the Author: Hilary Mantel* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-18018943>> [accessed 10 May 2012].

questionable conceptual stability as ‘the author’ herself.⁴⁴⁵ In ‘Circumfession’ (1993), Derrida considers: ‘*No one will ever know the secret from which I write and the fact that I say it changes nothing*’. The rest is merely the spectre of the Joycean ‘biografiend’.⁴⁴⁶

All the cited interviews are laced with an autobiographical thread and Mantel opens her introduction to Frame’s novel with an unhesitating swipe at the absurdity of this ‘tone’ of criticism:

Even more than Virginia Woolf, Janet Frame is the prisoner of her biography; or, to be specific, of the eight years in her life when she was stigmatised as mad, and held in psychiatric hospitals. Frame returned to this painful period in her life when she wrote *Faces in the Water*, but insisted that Istina Mavet, the novel’s central character, was not herself; she was more than herself [...] and her name is an amalgamation: Istina, Janet Frame said, ‘is Serbo-Croatian for truth, Mavet is Hebrew for Death’.⁴⁴⁷

This reading of Frame’s position as impossible, excessive, yet devoid of any individual agency helps introduce ‘Clinical Waste’. I will work through this text via the acknowledged whirligig of the ellipsis rather than the widely unacknowledged inadequacy of ‘autobiography’, in order to push this approach as both necessary and effective. Mantel’s introduction, which also powerfully authorises the novel, describes the name ‘Janet Frame’ as imprisoned and this sense of claustrophobia is strengthened by another name, Istina Mavet, offering a simultaneity of truth and death. The oscillation between these two oscillating poles in a character who is evoked through excess – Frame *insists* Istina is ‘more than herself’ – reveals that any sense of autobiography as demarcating ‘truth’ only works to deaden it. The introduction explicitly reiterates later that ‘Janet Frame remains subject to categorisation [...] An arid reductionism still haunts her’.⁴⁴⁸ Frame is subjected to her ‘own’ autobiography being read against her, so that the appearance of reality *becomes* ‘reality’. The problem remains that, although there is limited exchange – of one label for another – it is slow and absolute. It is also devoid of authorial agency because autobiographical discourse places the author as ‘centre’, thus rendering them entirely impotent.

⁴⁴⁵ Also note that all these interviewers are male, demanding a clear point of origin for the seemingly inexplicable trajectory of Mantel’s success.

⁴⁴⁶ For further discussion see ‘Circumfession’, in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), pp. 3-315 (pp. 207-208) and Gordon Bowker, *James Joyce: A New Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2011), pp. 5-10.

⁴⁴⁷ Frame, p. vii.

⁴⁴⁸ Frame, p. xii.

There are also notions of ‘illness’ at work in Mantel’s introduction, particularly mental illness, which is represented as elliptical, both medically and personally. Frame is saved from the void of lobotomy – the effects of which ‘induce passivity and diminish individuality’ a permanent ellipsis, or Möbius strip – by the return of her writing.⁴⁴⁹ Her short stories unexpectedly won a national prize, interrupting ‘what she would have been subject to’.⁴⁵⁰ Much later, it is discovered that, although diagnosed with schizophrenia, Frame ‘did not lie within the circumference of that extraordinarily elastic, perhaps nonsensical term’.⁴⁵¹ The word ‘circumference’ seems a curious choice here, an elastic figure outlining an uncertain centre of nonsense. It is reminiscent of geometric descriptions of the signifier, though such ambiguity does not render the diagnosis powerless, as seen from the fearful application of ‘schizophrenic’ to the *name* Janet Frame. Sieving this double focus of autobiography/illness from the text allows the ellipsis to surface in my reading of ‘Clinical Waste’. The sense of *something* missing, and that the reader is *missing* something, is clear from the opening paragraph:

A couple of months ago, I was reading a book called *The Therapeutic Purpose of Creative Writing*. In a section called ‘Healing Narratives’ I came across a sentence that must refer to me; it must, because my name is in it. ‘Hilary Mantel had half her insides, including her ovaries and her womb, removed when she was 19’.⁴⁵²

The insistence of the writing that ‘Hilary Mantel’ must refer to ‘me’ attempts to close a gap that the proper name springs open again. The reaction to this moment of reading links with the elastic circumference skirted around Frame: ‘The words on the page gave me a physical shock. I felt shaky, as if blood had drained from my head to the (allegedly) missing parts of me’.⁴⁵³ Aside from the implied ‘bodily’ hole, initiated into ‘Clinical Waste’ from another text, there are further imperfections to the cited quotation because this statement of *full* absence is not ‘true’. Yet like the elastically outlined ‘schizophrenic’, it is the words that are electric, ‘shaky’. This is not the ‘experience’ of the ‘I’ as Mantel, or whoever, rather this *frisson* is again the pulsating ‘narrow space’ of *Giving Up the Ghost*, or the inscribing of the ‘place’ of *khōra*.

⁴⁴⁹ Frame, p. xii.

⁴⁵⁰ Frame, p. vii.

⁴⁵¹ Frame, p. viii. ‘She lived first in Spain, and later in England, where eventually she was assessed by specialists and liberated from the misguided diagnosis of schizophrenia’ (*Storms Will Tell: Selected Poems*, pp. 11-12).

⁴⁵² ‘Clinical Waste’, p. 19.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

One way to negotiate this ‘dangerous hole’ opening up in ‘Clinical Waste’ is through *describing* the ellipsis. This movement does not close the gap, but merely acknowledges it, playing *through* it:

While I was puzzling over this misinformation, and wondering what I had said or written that had given rise to it, I was conscious of a picture forming – of a hollow person stalking the world, holding open a door in its solar plexus so that everyone could see the empty space within. And it occurred to me that, at whatever age it was created, there is such a gap, always waiting to open, wider and wider still, a black hole into which all the accomplishments of the years might vanish.⁴⁵⁴

This ‘empty space within’ is reading the Other (big ‘o’) as I shall explore in chapters five and six. The ‘solitary womb’, the ‘dead womb’, complicates analysis of *khōra* and ellipsis because it is such an emotive, gendered signifier.⁴⁵⁵ Yet this complication is important and necessary because this space, understood as giving place to being, is removed as ‘waste’, it ceases to *exist*.⁴⁵⁶ The womb is sacrificed to a disease that has ‘flourished’ but has no origin, cure or known cause, which forces an explanation, a location and an isolation of meaning that remains out-of-reach within such a pathology.⁴⁵⁷ In every sense, this ‘womb’, whether solitary or dead, signifies excess and there is only a shrinking and a skirting of its implications. One consequence is that, despite its removal, ‘womb’ continues to occupy a space in Mantel’s writing (though not possible to locate) that gives place to being, thus pointing to the (non)place of deconstruction:

Since 1979, the date of my evisceration, I have lived carefully and responsibly, as if I had children to answer to. I have lived in houses larger than I needed; in case, perhaps, children should arrive. I have kept the cupboards stocked with food and bought the household basics by the dozen. There is a sense in which I am not good at not being a mother.⁴⁵⁸

This thesis argues that ‘arrival’ in any perfect sense is impossible and that non-arrival does not prevent meaning, but rather enables it; so, do these children ‘arrive’? Something in this text (*not* something in Mantel’s body or autobiography) gives place to being. If I conclude that the sentence – ‘There is a sense in which I am not good at not being a mother’ – evokes *khōra* as the strange mother, I do not mean ‘Mantel’. I mean the sentence, its content and its

⁴⁵⁴ ‘Clinical Waste’, p. 19.

⁴⁵⁵ ‘Clinical Waste’, p. 19 and p. 21.

⁴⁵⁶ ‘Clinical Waste’, p. 21.

⁴⁵⁷ ‘Clinical Waste’, p. 20.

⁴⁵⁸ ‘Clinical Waste’, p. 25.

tone, but also its double negative, its duplicity and the word 'being'; it outlines what *khōra* will always work to eclipse, an affirmation that is not positive, on the edge of sense.

'They do not know whether to laugh or scream': Autobiography *off-balance*

Throughout Mantel's writing, laughter surfaces as both elliptical and without place. In 'Clinical Waste', for example, there is the account of Mantel's medical treatment after her operation. She visits a female doctor in Harley Street after the endometriosis recurred (something she was not prepared for) and it began 'eating me again'.⁴⁵⁹ The doctor prescribes a hormone treatment that causes Mantel to gain weight rapidly, a change in metabolism that is not reversed even when she stops taking the medication:

When I began the drug treatment I was a size ten: then a bulky sort of twelve: and then (within weeks) an eighteen. Very soon, I was a size twenty-two, and in a department store I could bypass 'Fashion' and go straight to 'Upholstery'.⁴⁶⁰

Something *is* laughing here, despite it not being 'funny'. The bypassing of fashion through to upholstery returns the sentence to the moment before the laugh, the rapid weight gain following hormone treatment. As Mantel attempts to qualify in her interview with Runcie, her writing delights in 'knocking' the reader off-balance, so they do not know whether to laugh or scream.⁴⁶¹ Having considered the uncertain position and agency of the author, is it accurate to think that it is 'Mantel' doing the provoking here, or is it something else? There is not that directive sense of agency, suggesting instead that the reader 'goes away' during these moments in the writing, in order to 'return' chastened. Laughter is also bursting out of the mouth of Nancy's 'The Intruder', an opening initiated by the philosopher's heart transplant: 'I am turning into something like a science-fiction android, or else, as my youngest son said to me one day, one of the living-dead'.⁴⁶² His body's acceptance of the gift of a heart from the Other entirely unsettles a certain origin to either the narratives of the body or autobiography. It also escapes any singular focus by introducing a shifting notion of the past. 'Autobiography as de-facement' suggests that autobiography is more passive, a 'figure of reading', though I have countered that, as a frame, it can shift into *fixing* the figure of writing. Thus, my sense of autho-biography combines acknowledgement of the constant inconstancy

⁴⁵⁹ 'Clinical Waste', p. 22.

⁴⁶⁰ 'Clinical Waste', pp. 23-24.

⁴⁶¹ Hilary Mantel: *A Culture Show Special* (2011). The laugh/scream that is both neither/nor *and* this and that offers again the imbalance of the ellipse.

⁴⁶² Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. by Richard A. Rand (Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 161-170 (p. 170).

of the autobiographical trace *with* recognition of the edifice of autobiography as an attempted totality.⁴⁶³ My misspelt term offers an oscillation between oscillating poles and, like the memoir genre, inscribed ‘on’ this emptiness, this sign, are ‘all the determinations’ *giving* place to everything even while ‘in itself’ possessing nothing.⁴⁶⁴ This chapter points to an awesome non-possession; *khōra* giving place without engendering, the *name* both anchoring autobiography while exceeding it, the frame of Mantel’s fame highlighting how appearance becomes ‘reality’ – all offer an origin, whereby nothing began. Playing through every one is the crucial desire for the author- as-centre, the ultimate insignia of power, and the best fetish to paralyse their authority.

⁴⁶³ Derek Attridge writes the following description of the simultaneity of the portmanteau word: ‘There is no escape from its insistence that meaning is an *effect* of language, not a presence within or behind language, and that the effect is unstable and uncontrollable’. For further details see ‘Unpacking the Portmanteau, or Who’s Afraid of *Finnegans Wake*?’, in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 140-155 (p. 145), original emphasis.

⁴⁶⁴ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 99.

Chapter Five ‘Words create silence’: Tracing the silence in Mantel’s corpus

This chapter reads representations of the west in Mantel's writing as both positioned and occupied by silence.⁴⁶⁵ It outlines a sense of textual 'neuralgia' in her short story 'Comma' (2010) in order to revisit western privilege in *Beyond Black* and then explore parallel points of anxiety in *A Change of Climate* and *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*. It will utilise several theoretical frames that prompt the significance of silence to surface, '[disappearing] even where it appears'.⁴⁶⁶ These readings simultaneously work to elliptically describe Derrida's thoughts on the *trace*, which 'replaces a presence which has never been present', just as Mantel's representations of the west become 'talkative' in the very moment of silence.⁴⁶⁷ This silence is understood as another possible *tone*, rather than the absence of one. As tone itself always offers a plurality, or friction, of different discourses, then silence too yields these differing differences. As Hall argues of race, as a silenced (and silent) yet never *mute* signifier, silence outlines a differentiability that 'floats in a sea of relational differences'.⁴⁶⁸ Like the 'empty' sign that is always already *full*, silence is always already talkative, signifying the trace of the other in the self-same that describes differance. Thus, silence comes 'full' (im)perfect circle to mark the differing origin of differences once again.

The chapter epigraph is a quotation from Gilles Deleuze's essay 'He Stuttered' (1998) and is closely proximate to Derrida's sense that the silent work 'becomes the very place of a word [...] all the more powerful because it is silent'.⁴⁶⁹ In 'The Spatial Arts', Derrida also explains that his analyses of discursive practices apparently 'outside' philosophy, such as the writing of architecture or sculpture, are permitted by 'a certain matrix of inquiry' that ironically escapes the space of certainty.⁴⁷⁰ It is an equivalent matrix that facilitates my departure from identifying and questioning another troubled 'origin' and culminates instead in working towards a possible alternative to this paradigm in chapter six. These last two chapters of the thesis offer a combination of theoretical discourses that point at the margin or frame of Mantel's corpus and what is perceived to *play* in this nonplace. First, this chapter combines Pierre Macherey's 'The Spoken and the Unspoken' from *A Theory of Literary Production* (2006) with Deleuze's 'He Stuttered' in order to theorise a sense of 'talkative' silence that exceeds speech. Chapter six then develops the frame of this silent exchange using Žižek's

⁴⁶⁵ As stated in the introduction to this thesis, 'west' along with 'gothic' and 'bible' remain deliberately uncapitalised.

⁴⁶⁶ 'Khōra', p. 112.

⁴⁶⁷ 'Ellipsis', p. 372.

⁴⁶⁸ 'Race: The Floating Signifier' (1996).

⁴⁶⁹ 'The Spatial Arts', p. 13.

⁴⁷⁰ 'The Spatial Arts', p. 9.

The Parallax View alongside the visual ambiguities of quantum theory, introduced in chapter two; this (re)focus *looks* at vision itself as a silent sense. The two-fold finale to this thesis juxtaposes the word as ‘silent’ with the ‘image’ as talkative, highlighting both as reliant on a notional ‘viewing platform’ that offers not a place, but a *come*. The platform yields a visually inscribed metaphor of differance that also outlines the double focus of the ellipsis, in linguistic and spatial terms. Writing, understood as temporal spacing, makes the trace a *just perceptible effect* of its evasiveness, underscoring its pertinence as the elliptically described thought in this chapter. The initiation of this movement will necessarily glean work from earlier chapters, particularly the autho-biography of the pulsating ‘narrow space’ in *Giving Up the Ghost*, as writing on the ‘place’ of *khōra*.

Silences recur in various guises throughout Mantel’s work, but none more powerfully than the elliptical descriptions of the west. The ‘talk’ of these silences will be provoked initially by the writings of Edward W. Said and Hall on the human *affirmation* involved within Eurocentric constructions of both the west and race. *Orientalism* (2003) and Hall’s ‘floating signifier’ will problematise western whiteness as a coherent point of departure in order to expel the implied ‘centre’ of Eurocentric discourse. This ex-centring will establish what frames the silence in Mantel’s corpus, leading to its *talk* and foregrounding the implications of its power for my final chapter and conclusion. ‘Comma’ opens the question of textual vibration through explicitly *worrying* the place of punctuation within writing, honing the analysis necessary for unpacking the silences in Mantel’s wider work. These vibrations offer the means to revisit fraught representation of the west in *Beyond Black* where Alison’s views as medium orbit a privileged self-same while working to eclipse a marginalised Other. This review will trigger a weaving through of silent writing *as* ellipsis in aspects *A Change of Climate* and introduce notions of western time and space in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*.

‘A silent mark’: The west as ellipsis

It is as if, having once settled on the Orient as a locale suitable for incarnating the infinite in a finite shape, Europe could not stop the practice; the Orient and the Oriental, Arab, Islamic, Indian, Chinese, or whatever, become repetitious pseudo-incarnations of some great original (Christ, Europe, the West) they were supposed to have been imitating.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 62.

Said's famous arguments in *Orientalism* help aggravate representations of the west in Mantel's corpus and reflect 'something else' about Derrida's thoughts on *trace*. Deeming the orient as a 'suitable' *locale* effaces it or exposes its condition in writing as effacement. Thus, Mantel's texts confirm the west as privileged origin while simultaneously undermining this impossible position. The west is neuralgic because it implicates itself as 'centre', a consolidation enabled by the lack of any discussion of its status in the available criticism.⁴⁷² Yet the contradictions of the writing, pulling and pushing for and against conceptual solidity, illustrate that the west is merely outlined, a 'place' of exchange that provokes an elliptical rather than centred reading process. Placing the west under scrutiny yields a fraught questioning of race that manifests as an ellipsis through the textual duplicity of the double focus. The pervasive suspicion in this thesis of any 'truth' as singular will safeguard against the categorisation of Mantel's work as 'racist'. Instead, the absence of critical material, the contentiousness of this *secondary* silence and the position of all such lacunae as *within* Eurocentric discourse, allows for an edgier analysis of these ambiguities and what they reveal as operating at-the-limit of writing and difference. The authority and intention of the text resides *in the text*. 'Hilary Mantel' is a distant, 'empty' sign and therefore, like *khōra*, more situating than situated. The figure of The Author is of course *implicated* in the writing, but this implication merely points, it does not 'arrive', which means that the narrative of Mantel's 'position' as a white woman offers a powerful place of exchange, never stasis.

Two observations about Eurocentric privilege support this nuanced outlining of the west. First, Said's 2003 'Preface' to *Orientalism* emphasises one of the key points of earlier editions:

Orientalism is very much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history. I emphasize in it accordingly that neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other.⁴⁷³

Said's argument confirms the ontological instability of the west by underlining its conceptual dependence on historical narrative in order to *mean*. This movement is 'partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other' and such duplicity describes an affirmation that is not

⁴⁷² 'This spiritual malaise linked to loss of historical narratives is specifically that of the white middle classes; Alison doesn't work the inner cities [...] partly because the convoluted spirit beliefs of the multicultural populations give her a headache'. For further (non)discussion of whiteness see Spooner, p. 84.

⁴⁷³ Said, p. xii. Said's famous thesis was republished with a new preface in 2003, the year of his death. His ghost stalks the text because of the haunting contradiction of a *final* 'first' word.

positive, paralleling the work of both Hall and Derrida. Moreover, Said's final preface also bears traces of Derrida's essay 'Differance' (1973), which is now synonymous with the *name* of Derrida. It is infamous partly due to its outlining of the trace, which closely mirrors Said's rejection of the west as ontologically stable:

Like differance, the trace is never presented as such. In presenting itself it becomes effaced; in being sounded it dies away, like the writing of the *a*, inscribing its pyramid in differance.⁴⁷⁴

This Eurocentric pyramid is first introduced to justify the 'a' in differAnce, both spatially and as a *graphiein*.⁴⁷⁵ Underlining Said's acknowledgement of the human *effort* required to ignore the constant conceptual shift of what is 'West', also describes the operation of the trace: 'In presenting itself it becomes effaced'. A connection sharpened through further interrogation of the pyramid metaphor, itself signifying the Other and therefore the workings of western orientalism; it becomes 'the infinite in a finite shape'. In writing the word difference as *differance*, with an 'a' and not an 'e', Derrida acknowledges that in French 'this marked difference between two apparently vocalic notations, between vowels, remains purely graphic':

It cannot be heard, and we shall see in what respects it is also beyond the order of understanding. It is put forward by a silent mark, by a tacit monument, or, one might even say, by a pyramid – keeping in mind not only the capital form of the printed letter but also that passage from Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* where he compares the body of the sign to an Egyptian pyramid. The *a* of differance, therefore, is not heard; it remains silent, secret, and discreet, like a tomb.⁴⁷⁶

The fetishised *Egyptian* pyramid is evoked by a capitalised 'a' in 'differance' and the (Eurocentric) body of the sign in *Encyclopaedia*. This stated *play* with the shape of the unexpected *graphiein* also suggests the curve and tail of the non-capitalised 'a' as an imperfect circle, or ellipsis, which layers my own term. Understanding ellipsis relies on Nancy's geometric definition of the ellipse *as a shape*, yet Derrida's essay is entitled 'Ellipsis' not 'Ellipse' or even 'The Ellipsis'. Like differance, it 'is neither a *word* nor a *concept*', without the stability of preposition.⁴⁷⁷ The essays of Derrida and Nancy both draw on geometric discourse; however, the translation of the title into English means 'something

⁴⁷⁴ 'Differance', p. 154.

⁴⁷⁵ Derrida's 'Ellipsis' describes the question of writing as opening *only* if the book is closed: 'The joyous wandering of the *graphiein* then became wandering without return' (p. 371). This sense of return outlines the impossibility of perfection that *allows* difference.

⁴⁷⁶ 'Differance', p. 132.

⁴⁷⁷ 'Differance', p. 130, original emphases.

else’ – the dot, dot, dot. This gap opens up the possibility that situates this thesis, since ellipsis as an omission or *silence*, offers a site of tension that betrays a differentiability of tone at play. Thus, the *i* of ellipsis instead of the *e* of ellipse is an exchange that ‘is written or read, but [barely] heard’.⁴⁷⁸ The *difference* of vowels, written and read but not heard, elliptically describes Derrida’s most promising thought about writing, *differance*; it surfaces here because it also ‘remains silent, secret, and discreet’ and like the tomb of the west in Mantel’s corpus, it is ready to release its ghosts.

In *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and *A Change of Climate*, the ghosts of these western representations create a ‘dangerous hole’ while offering a dubious site for racial exchange.⁴⁷⁹ In his lecture ‘Race: The Floating Signifier’ (1996), Hall argues that race is ‘more like a language’ than a biological constitution. He describes ‘race’ as a signifier, an empty sign, that ‘floats in a sea of relational differences’, like the differing differences within Derrida’s thinking of the origin. Hall’s emphasis on floating illustrates that ellipsis in Mantel’s texts can also be used to describe the *harsh realities* of racial difference. The lecture includes an animated diagram to outline the operation of the differential sea:



Stuart Hall, ‘Race: The Floating Signifier’, Media Education Foundation, 1996.

⁴⁷⁸ ‘Differance’, p. 132. Ellipses and ellipsis are not exact homonyms, though what is ‘exact’ about a human voice? The catalyst for my combination of ellipsis with the ellipse was a paper I gave at the 2011 International Virginia Woolf conference. I discussed the ellipsis [...] in the writings of Woolf and Mantel on illness, but afterwards some delegates thought I was describing the dot, dot, dot while others believed I meant the geometric shape. Eileen Pollard, “‘But at second sight the words seemed not so simple’ (Woolf 1929): Thickening and rotting hysteria in the writing of Hilary Mantel and Virginia Woolf” (paper presented at Contradictory Woolf: 21st Annual International Virginia Woolf Conference, Glasgow, Scotland, June 10, 2011).

⁴⁷⁹ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 375.

The illustration moves, so that each of the shapes, encircling the *central* bubble of ‘Signifiers Meaning’, grow then shrink. These shifts or differentialities demonstrate the changing significance of history, context, events, culture and stories for the ‘meaning’ of race in different situations. Hall’s diagram helps scrutinise representations of the west in Mantel’s work in two main ways. First, these round, yet imperfect shapes surrounding or outlining the meaning of the signifier, are both geometrically elliptical *and* reminiscent of ellipsis because they remain ambiguous, unfixed, *relational*. Within critical and philosophical discourse, spatial metaphors of explanation recur in order to (elliptically) describe the process of meaning. Žižek’s *The Parallax View*, for example, privileges the *space* of a frame, and even though Derrida’s thoughts are visually laced, he opts instead for the word ‘spatial’ – ‘if in fact I do say “spatial” more readily than “visual” [...] It is because I am not sure that space is essentially mastered by [*livré à*] the look’.⁴⁸⁰ The second intervention of Hall’s diagram is the shape named ‘Stories’, which is important for exploring race in Mantel’s writing. Stories as ellipsis, or narrative as elliptical, *talk* of both the power and wider significance of these ‘silent’ representations of the west and race.

Hall’s ‘The MEANING of Skin Colour CHANGES with the CONTEXT’ – also describes Derrida’s suspicion of the implied mastery of ‘the look’ and outlines the difference and deferral of difference.⁴⁸¹ ‘Race’ floats, or slides, and the instability of its foundation means that the Other, necessary for defining the self-same, is always already destined to return from its abject position outside the signifying field; it *comes* to trouble ‘the dreams of those who are comfortable inside’. This elliptical movement traces the Möbius strip narrative of *A Change of Climate*. It also mirrors the operation of (imperfect) return in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, which positions the Other in order to stabilise the west while simultaneously resisting the demarcation between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the language of race. Such aggravated return describes ‘what falls short of being identical’, another characteristic of the Derrida/Nancy ellipsis: ‘There is something of an *ellipsis* in our very proximity – or rather, our proximity resides in this very ellipsis’.⁴⁸² Hall (unwittingly) develops the spatial metaphor of the ellipsis through his adoption of a ‘third-way’ to account for differences in the world; the number three is significant for ellipsis since the three dots initiate yet another triangle, or pyramid. The way ‘Race: The Floating Signifier’ introduces the ‘Realist’ and

⁴⁸⁰ ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 24.

⁴⁸¹ All further citations of Hall’s work refer to the lecture – ‘Race: The Floating Signifier’ (1996).

⁴⁸² Nancy, p. 175.

‘Textual’ approaches offers a possible ‘double focus’. The first theory suggests that language reflects what is ‘really there’ while the second argues for differences as ‘created by humans in language and culture’. Then, Hall’s argument outlines the ‘Discursive’ as a perspective mediating between and facilitated by these two foci. Through this approach – ‘Differences exist in the world. But what matter are the systems of thought and language we use to make sense of those differences’. To an extent Derrida would reverse the emphasis, so that these very differences, though not *given*, do in fact allow such systems of thought and language to make sense at all. As Mantel writes of the *affect* of familial secrecy in *Giving Up the Ghost* – ‘you have to make some sort of sense of what’s going on around you, so you *cobble* together a narrative as best you can’.⁴⁸³ The gap, silence, or differentiability of tone, provide the catalytic ground from which the figure of the system, or narrative, emerges.

Hall’s description of race as an empty sign deconstructs any reliance on the various ‘guarantees’ that have changed over time with shifting definitions of race. ‘Race: The Floating Signifier’ defines the politics of anti-racism and racism as ‘founded on the notion of a biological guarantee’ and the effect of this foundation, rather than utilising historical and cultural discourse to discuss race, means a clinging to the biological trace; outlining Derrida’s own thoughts on the term. Hall forcefully takes ‘The Body’ to task, or, more particularly the false dawn of ‘[t]he body as the ultimate Transcendental Signifier beyond language and culture’. The body, along with the biological theories of race it culturally harbours, is invoked in the hope ‘it will bring the argument to a close’. It is a notional full stop, burst in chapter three of this thesis using ellipsis, itself an exploded full stop, and undermining any *permanent* conceptual arrival. Hall’s text acknowledges that it is such a sense of the sheer ‘reality’ of race that stands in the way of understanding it as a cultural system; as Frantz Fanon pointed out, beneath the schema of the body lies another schema.⁴⁸⁴ This reliance on anatomy and physiology constitutes that same trap of the surface, which ‘allows us to rest’ with the manifestly *obvious*. Hall uses his lecture to make ‘uncomfortable’ any inscribing of characteristics through race. He suggests that even the ‘anti-race’ politics available is mechanistic; black refers to a long history of oppression and discrimination, not genes, it is *beyond* ‘black’ as fact. Moreover, his argument very effectively illustrates that so-called ‘liberal’ thinking on race works just as hard to fix racial characteristics in terms of

⁴⁸³ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 24, my emphasis.

⁴⁸⁴ For further discussion of ‘The Body’ as *schema* see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2007).

genetic/biological definitions as any explicitly racist ideology. In fact, such counter-productive ‘liberations’ often prove more disabling because they are covert, so that applying these ‘common sense’ discourses actually works to admit racism via the back door. This theoretical interrogation of ‘liberal’ *duplicity* will be invaluable for exploring the two opposing directions Mantel’s novels take and the tension this creates between surface, or what Derrida calls ‘content’, and tone, or the difference between ‘what is done and what is declared’.⁴⁸⁵

The methodology of Hall’s approach is a suspicion of ‘origins’, or any *guarantee* of the arrival of meaning. In his case, the original is a biological ‘truth’ about race; however, Hall applies W. E. B. Du Bois’ work to indicate that there is nothing new in his rejection of this pretence, instead insisting that race has been understood as a badge, token, sign or signifier for centuries by those marginalised through life under such a banner.⁴⁸⁶ This *original* ‘truth’ actually points to a place of exchange, which has represented ‘science’ only latterly, inheriting from religion. Both offer systems of thought and language, and in this instance fulfil a cultural function of knowledge that constitutes a ‘tucking in’, a sleeping easier. Religion, anthropology, science all operate as pacifiers because they each confirm, beyond doubt, that there are two men in the world, two different types of men. It is a doubling that yields another focus, one Said wrote of in his preface by acknowledging that there are *two* men, but only one is privileged – the western white man occupying the position of ‘great original’.⁴⁸⁷ It is an unsustainable ‘centre’ and opens a duplicity where the theories of Hall and Derrida combine through Hall’s acknowledgment that there *are* differences in the world, wherever they ‘reside’, and Derrida’s emphasis on repetition *and* the first time. This double focus traces Mantel’s texts; it both makes sense of them and suggests a ‘place’ of neuralgia for reading of these self-same texts against themselves.

These texts by Derrida, Hall and Mantel are ‘beautifully’ written. Perhaps within the very writing these texts *acknowledge* that no writing is immune from ambiguity, producing a certain playfulness in recognition of impossible perfection – ‘the true speculative meaning emerges only through the *repeated* reading, as the after-effect (or by-product) of the first,

⁴⁸⁵ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 119.

⁴⁸⁶ For further discussion see W. E. B. Du Bois, *Of the Dawn of Freedom* (London: Penguin, 2009).

⁴⁸⁷ ‘The first critical move is to replace this topic of the polarity of opposites with the concept of the inherent “tension,” gap, noncoincidence, of the One itself. This book is based on a strategic politico-philosophical decision to designate this gap which separates the One from itself with the term *parallax*’. For further discussion see Žižek, p. 7.

“wrong” reading’.⁴⁸⁸ There is a vibration at work within this known ‘flaw’ that is neuralgic and, to clarify such neuralgia as an affirmation that is not positive, I will cite some of Macherey’s thoughts on ‘texts’ from *A Theory of Literary Production*. In his introduction to this famous exposition, Terry Eagleton writes the following:

Just as Freud takes the superficially coherent ‘text’ of the patient’s dream, and by homing in on its symptomatic silences, repetitions and displacements, deconstructs it into a much less coherent play of unconscious forces, so Macherey refuses to be gulled by the literary work’s apparent unity, probing it instead for those neuralgic points at which it betrays the shadowy presence within it of conflicting historical powers.⁴⁸⁹

This ‘shadowy presence’ could mask Eagleton’s ‘conflicting historical powers’, or *something else* entirely. The emphasis in chapter three on pain and worry as *within* the writing of Mantel’s texts, plus the tendency towards aggravating, troubling and a general ‘making uncomfortable’ of words until they do something surprising, makes *neuralgia* an appropriate addition; the more situating than situated ‘presence’ of *khōra*. Eagleton’s description helps outline three vibrations across *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* as neuralgic representations of the west – the questions behind elliptical narration, empty spaces and empty signs and unavoidable contradiction. First though, this edge of vibrating neuralgia must be drawn out of Mantel’s wider writing.

Coming from a *certain* silence: *Beyond Black*, ‘Comma’ and *A Change of Climate*

The playing through of representations of the west with vibrations of neuralgia is a question of tone, with silence as one tonal possibility. This ‘trace’ in Mantel’s writing is best described by two examples not apparently related to the west. First is the young Ralph Eldred’s discovery of a rare fossil called the ‘Devil’s toenail’ in *A Change of Climate*. It is the shape of a letter and like the ‘a’ of difference it ‘remains silent, secret, and discreet’ in Mantel’s text, ‘a tomb’ or ellipsis.⁴⁹⁰ Second is a character in ‘Comma’ represented as punctuation, or as writing *in writing*, even though at the moment of ‘revelation’, they are effaced. Again as outlined by Derrida’s thoughts on the trace, with both the toenail and the comma – ‘In presenting itself [the thing] becomes effaced’. This comparison alongside elliptical descriptions of the trace also marks Macherey’s ideas about silence in texts, which via

⁴⁸⁸ Žižek, p. 33, my emphasis.

⁴⁸⁹ *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. x.

⁴⁹⁰ ‘Difference’, p. 132.

Beyond Black have direct bearing on the interrogation of western representation in this chapter. Consider again the *writing* of this scene, following Alison and Colette's first meeting:

Colette's eyes followed the trail of brown sugar curling across the table; *like an initial, trying to form itself*. "You seem to know a lot about me."
'I laid out a spread for you. After you'd gone.'
'A spread?'
'The tarot cards.'
'I know. Which spread?'
'Basic Romany.'
'Why that?'
'I was in a hurry.'
'And what did you see?'
'I saw myself.'⁴⁹¹

This conversation inscribes a figure that *repeats* in Mantel's writing. It offers a reading of reflection, or repetition, which surfaces differently in *Fludd*, *Every day is mother's day* and *Vacant Possession*.⁴⁹² Moreover, there is a difference between this repetition *as* recognition – "And what did you see?", "I saw myself" – and the double focus in *A Change of Climate*. This *base* sense of 'Basic Romany' does not provide a 'centre' to the writing of the tarot spread, rather a doubling. Yet there is even greater resistance in *A Change of Climate* to this familiar figure, ultimately becoming fraught, contradictory and neuralgic. The double focus of the Eldred twins, for example, positions Matthew, the male twin, as microcosm white man; he is the great *original*, yet his kidnap means he cannot 'grow', and this emotive evasion vibrates with the trace of (nerve) pain. It is not a 'place' of greater safety, but one of greater *silence*.

In Macherey's thought such evasion, though impossible to 'master', can be theoretically *embraced*. In 'The Spoken and the Unspoken' of *A Theory of Literary Production*, the text presumes that:

The speech of the book *comes* from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure. Thus, the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it would not exist. A knowledge of the book must include a consideration of this absence.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹¹ *Beyond Black*, p. 92, my emphasis.

⁴⁹² 'Well I suppose the whole thing of mirrors gives me a kind of intellectual *frisson*, you know', 'In Conversation', 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 219.

⁴⁹³ 'The Spoken and the Unspoken', p. 95, my emphasis.

There is a trace of this ‘silence’, or this accompaniment within writing, in the quoted passage from *Beyond Black*, which offers a diversion. Both the toenail and the comma develop this silent endowment of a figure on the ‘ground’: ‘Colette’s eyes followed the trail of brown sugar curling across the table; like an initial, trying to form itself’. Colette’s eyes tracing the sugar trail describes an act of reading, the brown granules ‘trying to form’ like ink. The trail is written, but also implicates the process of writing; it is ‘like an initial’, outlining a means of *naming and owning* or *khōra*. Yet the curl, though *trying* to form ‘itself’, remains incomplete, like Macherey’s endowing yet evasive silence. The text bears an imperfection within the ‘curling’, which spatially evokes ellipsis. The writing of the sugar trail and the tarot spread stimulate texts suggestive of writing as *effacement*, or the trace of such an effacement.⁴⁹⁴

Developing Macherey’s argument that absence offers the paradoxical foundation for the figure of writing – the silence ‘which it endows with form’ – this silence not only traces these figures but can also be traced *through* them. The agency of the curl of sugar and the Devil’s toenail are both examples of this reversal. The fossil opens a neuralgia in *A Change of Climate* because it is invested with a proliferation of meaning and significance – original sin, original innocence, knowledge – that gradually collapses under the pressure to yield instead a facilitating, yet dangerous, hole in the text. Like a nerve overloaded with messages, it begins to vibrate with the strain and exaggerate the process of carrying such contentious information; it is pushing the Devil’s toenail as a site burdened with secrets that reveals ‘something else’ about Mantel’s writing. Ralph’s discovery takes place while he is staying with relatives in Yorkshire, *without* his devoutly Christian parents. He takes a bus ride to the east coast for the day and while on the beach he finds the fossil:

Ralph had not gone twenty yards towards the ocean. Its sound was subdued, congruous, a rustle not a roar. He bent down and plucked from the sand at his feet what he took to be some muddy stone. A sharp pang of delight took hold of him, a feeling that was for a moment indistinguishable from fear. He had picked up a fossil: a ridged, grey-green curl, glassy and damp like a descending wave. It lay in his palm: two inches across, an inch and a half at its crest.⁴⁹⁵

There is a differentiality of tone at work within this writing; the descriptions of ordinary details bear a hidden significance that creates a tension between the surface *content* of the text and the friction of tones at play beneath. *A Change of Climate* is an experiment with

⁴⁹⁴ For further discussion see Jacques Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud’, in *Écrits: The First Complete English Edition*, trans. by Bruce Fink (London: W. W. Norton, 2006), pp. 412-441. If the unconscious operates as a language, then perhaps ‘The Letter’ itself is *neuralgic* or neurotic.

⁴⁹⁵ *A Change of Climate*, pp. 36-37.

time, not merely the different ‘presents’ of the characters, but also of the (non)place of the reader. This implication, this *come*, is teasingly, perhaps explicitly, invited to ‘return’ from a later time in the text to an earlier one. Although, this *later* time is often only ‘secondary’ because of its position in the narrative rather than within the understated chronology of the novel, which remains in the background, like ‘the structure of an overprinting without a base’.⁴⁹⁶ Ralph’s delight ‘that was for a moment indistinguishable from fear’ is then *overprinted* with his wife Anna’s reaction to the abduction of their twins; thus, the two points offer a proximity, but without a base.

The toenail rips a hole in the text, but it is not a unique tear in the novel. Matthew, the missing child, offers another breach. Yet the fossil takes the form of a letter, highlighting the absences, holes and silences necessary for writing. The fossil’s Latin name is ‘*Gryphaea*’ which suggests Derrida’s *graphein*, another aspect of its expression as a letter.⁴⁹⁷ Matthew’s fate harbours an emotionality that fractures his position in the text, which chapter six will explore through remembrance and the work of mourning in writing. The toenail though is a curl, a clipping, inanimate; it has broken away with an agency reminiscent of the trail of sugar, it is a letter trying to form *itself* and an ‘outboard bit’ that troubles notional full presence.⁴⁹⁸ The text likens it to a ‘descending wave’, a significant paradox and reminiscent of quantum theory since the fossil is both particle *and* wave.⁴⁹⁹ The metaphor and the contradiction together suggest the doubling of a disorientating ellipsis: ‘All the way home in the bus [Ralph] forced himself to hold the object in his hand, his feelings seesawing between attraction and repulsion; wondering how he could have found it, when he was not looking at all’.⁵⁰⁰

Stumbling on the *Gryphaea* marks a fraught position in the text, signified by the emotional exchange of Ralph’s contradictory responses, an indecision then exaggerated by a further interruption. A number of enthusiasts are seeking fossils on the beach, yet only the oblivious Ralph makes a ‘discovery’. The beachcombers are obviously jealous and though Ralph

⁴⁹⁶ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 104.

⁴⁹⁷ *A Change of Climate*, p. 37.

⁴⁹⁸ Of the masculinity of the ‘male’ sock, Mantel considers: ‘Yes, and of course although you don’t have a dread of the man and his physicality, you don’t actually want to pick up this outboard bit. It’s something like, you know how hair is lovely when it’s on the head but disgusting when it’s detached from the body’, ‘In Conversation’, 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 224.

⁴⁹⁹ The wave/particle duality of quantum physics offers an example of the many ‘two’s’ that Žižek describes instead as One, ‘the One itself’ of the *parallax* gap (p. 7).

⁵⁰⁰ *A Change of Climate*, p. 39.

accepts their expert explanation of the *origins* of the toenail and its name, he does not relinquish the fossil even though he cannot master its significance. Pointing towards such desire, the text opens an inaccessible void best articulated by the man, partially hidden himself, within a balaclava: ‘He stabbed a woolly finger at the object he craved. “Do you know what they call them? Devil’s toenails.” He chuckled. “I reckon you can see why”’.⁵⁰¹ It is a letter, it is desired, and it catalyses a collision within Ralph’s thoughts about religious faith and his passion for ecology, an irresolvable doubling of focus. His repulsion describes a *horror* that his longing for ecological knowledge of the world is signified here by the Devil, negative fulcrum of (his parents’) Christianity. This recognition is repressed by the text; a repression outlined by Ralph’s hiding of the fossil, which begins the moment he returns to where he is staying, and continues throughout the novel. During this first eclipse it becomes simply ‘the toenail’, but the colloquialism cannot stop the return of either the ecological or Christian discourses it so uncomfortably combines. At times of crisis, the often unnameable and hideous curl of the fossil surfaces in Ralph’s consciousness, for example, when he is considering the paralysing ‘secret’ of Matthew’s disappearance and the death of his marriage to Anna. The *Gryphaea* forms an ellipsis, which actually ‘appears’ as a *graphein* immediately after the evocation of the devil’s ‘anatomy’: ‘Ralph looked down at the fossil and almost dropped it. Saw the thick, ridged, ogreish curve, that greenish, sinister, sheen...’.⁵⁰² It is a silent and silencing confusion that is always already talkative and will become even more so in chapter six of this thesis.

This oscillation between attraction and repulsion also surfaces in Mantel’s ‘Comma’, as well as the simultaneous excess and evasion of writing that Macherey’s text points towards. Yet the sense of a commentary on writing *in writing* is even more fraught within this short story because what creates the ‘hole’ is a punctuation *graphein*. The narrative is retrospective, following *two* young girls from different social classes, who discover a secret about the inhabitants of a house situated outside of their village.⁵⁰³ Mary Joplin, who is *not* the narrator and is therefore already ‘displaced’ in the writing, has been spying in the grounds of the house and has realised that there is something ‘wrong’ with the child who lives there:

⁵⁰¹ *A Change of Climate*, p. 39.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

⁵⁰³ ‘What happens between two, and between all the “two’s” one likes, such as between life and death, can only *maintain itself* with some ghost, can only *talk with or about* some ghost’. For further discussion see *Specters of Marx*, p. xvii.

‘Listen,’ she said, ‘I’ve been up here when a kid like you is in bed. I’ve seen what they’ve got in that house.’

I was awake now. ‘What have they?’

‘Something you couldn’t put a name to,’ Mary Joplin said.

‘What sort of thing?’

‘Wrapped in a blanket.’

‘Is it an animal?’

Mary jeered. ‘An animal,’ she says. ‘An animal, what’s wrapped in a blanket?’

‘You could wrap a dog in a blanket. If it were poorly.’

I felt the truth of this; I wanted to insist; my face grew hot. ‘It’s not a dog, no, no, no.’

Mary’s voice dawdled, keeping her secret from me. ‘For it’s got arms.’

‘Then it’s human.’

‘But it’s not a human shape.’

I felt desperate. ‘What shape is it?’

Mary thought. ‘A comma,’ she said slowly. ‘A comma, you know, what you see in a book?’⁵⁰⁴

It is a haunting story because Mary is secretive and so is the text; this is not an ‘inaccessible’ secret, it simply ‘can never be booked, in the *present*, into anything that could rigorously be called a perception’.⁵⁰⁵ The “‘Something you couldn’t put a name to’” is ultimately marked as punctuation and there is a self-referential playfulness to the meaning of the ‘comma’ – “‘what you see in a book’” – emphasised throughout the story. Its ambiguities compare to *A Change of Climate* because the novel also problematises the ‘centre’ as an eclipsed child; however, in the short story it is the child’s *presence* that is hidden from the world, not its ‘absence’. Both texts offer contradictory readings because neither provide a stable ‘viewing’ platform, or *frame*. This slippage of position is *described* by the return of the *Gryphaea* in *A Change of Climate* when the narrative the family have ‘cobbled’ together to account for themselves has unravelled and woven into a new story. Consequently, Ralph is preparing to leave the family home, the Red House:

His hand crept into the first drawer of his desk. Closed around stone: Gryphaea. He held it to his cheek, and then against his mouth. A child’s life; the salt and cold. He tasted it: Phylum: Mollusca. Class: Pelecypoda. Order: Pterioida. Such confidence, he’d felt as a child, about the order of the world. Family: Gryphaeidae. Genus: *Gryphaea*. Species: *arcuata*. The past doesn’t change, of course: it lies behind you, petrified, immutable. What changes it is the way you see it. *Perception is everything*. It turns villains into heroes and victims into collaborators. He held the object up between his fingers: took a sighting, and spun it across the room into the wastepaper basket.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ Hilary Mantel, ‘Comma’, *Guardian*, 14 August 2010, Weekend section, p. 14.

⁵⁰⁵ ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 69.

⁵⁰⁶ *A Change of Climate*, p. 337, my emphasis.

Ralph's confidence about order, science and reason has been *eroded* by the kidnap of his son; Matthew's disappearance cannot and does not *make sense*. If Ralph had studied ecology, he would not have become a missionary in Africa with his wife, the twins would not have been born there, and Matthew would not have been 'taken'; it is a powerful affirmation that 'the order of the world' is not as it seems and is *not* positive. 'Comma' and *A Change of Climate* both suggest that *perception* offers the only constant, it is 'everything', describing a shifting *surprised* from the writing, which can never be 'booked in the *present*'.

The ending of the short story renders the true impact of such surprise. It is a 'given' that the child is both disabled and disfigured, but it remains a *sensual* gift because the text eclipses final revelation.⁵⁰⁷ If the child was written 'visually', mastered with *a look* and no apparent hiding place, the different tones of the description would slip into the gaps between the letters and the words; these spaces would become 'talkative' with a *friction* of discourses and the totality of the child's appearance would be *effaced*. However, even the content or surface of 'Comma' highlights this process by marking the evasion and making the writing of the narrative so self-conscious. The grasping of the nettle of meaning is an illusion that 'Comma' plays out through investing ignored punctuation with the *excess* of words while emphasising these self-same signifiers, the comma, the full stop, as without essence. For example, when the two girls eventually witness the *look* of the child, the description is deliberately inadequate, outlining the appearance as disappearance:

Something nudged out into our sight: it was a long chair on wheels, a lady pushing it. It ran easily, lightly, over the stone flags, and it was the lady who drew my attention; what lay on the chair seemed just a dark, shrouded shape, and it was her crisp flowered frock that took my eye, the tight permed shape of her head; we were not near enough to smell her, but I imagined that she wore scent, eau de cologne.⁵⁰⁸

The emphasis on disconnected sensation is neuralgic, synaesthetic, Ralph *tasting* the dead curve of the *Gryphaea* or Kitty, the narrator of 'Comma', *smelling* an imagined scent – the sensuality is pressurised, and impossible. The child is not described and what 'slips in' instead is punctuation; it is an estranging name, offering an ellipsis, or silence. The 'comma's face' is a (non)place of description, the gentle outlining of *khōra*. The presumed mother/nurse figure remains ambiguous, but she does lift back the child's shawl:

⁵⁰⁷ Disfigurement is also a de Manian 'trope' for tropism.

⁵⁰⁸ 'Comma', p. 14.

And we saw – nothing; we saw something not yet become; we saw something, not a face but perhaps, I thought, when I thought about it later, perhaps a negotiating position for a face, perhaps a loosely imagined notion of a face, like God’s when he was trying to form us; we saw a blank, we saw a sphere, it was without feature, it was without meaning, and its flesh seemed to run from the bone.⁵⁰⁹

Inscribed *on* this ‘negotiating position for a face’ are ‘all the determinations’ of the text; this blank, this sphere, gives place to everything while ‘in itself’ possessing nothing, which parallels the elliptical description of Matthew as situating his family, while being impossible to situate himself.⁵¹⁰ ‘We saw something not yet *become*’ evokes the work of Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and prompts a return to Derrida’s thoughts on deconstruction as not a place but a *come*, an origin whereby *nothing* began.⁵¹¹ The narrative also suggests return, ‘I thought, when I thought about it later’, and repetition, since what is more repeated than punctuation? The position of the face is described not visually, but spatially, as a *negotiation*, not an arrival. It yields a horror that parallels the warped symbolism of the Devil’s toenail. Mary Joplin provokes the child by throwing a stone, which hits the chair prompting ‘a low cry, not like a human voice, like something else’.⁵¹² This points to the ‘something else’ of elliptical sense; the cry forces a vibration ‘without being confused with speech’ that yields instead a gesturing that is talkative – the writing is so *strained* ‘that it starts to stutter, or to murmur or stammer... *then language in its entirety reaches the limit* that marks its outside and makes it confront silence’.⁵¹³ The generic horror of the surface offers only a tame subversion; it is the slippage of ‘something else’ within the tones of the story that makes a promise genuinely scary in its scope. Chapter six will push the elliptically missing as a *tone* of silence in order to develop the implications of potentially ‘muted’ representations of the west in Mantel’s writing.

‘[I]t was without feature, it was without meaning, and its flesh seemed to run from the bone’ – despite the horror of the flesh of a featureless face running from the bone, it is actually the cosseted ‘without meaning’ that harbours *real* anxiety. It presents a contradiction because although the girls are confronted by *silence*, the position offers not *no* meaning, but rather too much – a terrifying excess of possibilities. This ‘nothing’ can only be described as a comma,

⁵⁰⁹ ‘Comma’, p. 14.

⁵¹⁰ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 99.

⁵¹¹ For further discussion see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁵¹² ‘Comma’, p. 14.

⁵¹³ Gilles Deleuze, ‘He Stuttered’, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London and New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 107-114 (p. 113), original emphasis.

which suggests that punctuation is similarly ‘without meaning’, or perhaps *exceeds* it. The irony of this parallel is that both the comma and this ‘nothing’ *are* meaningful. Common sense dictates that the comma enables meaning, but that words instead suggest something more *essential*. Yet the comma is like a word, offering the *just perceptible effect* of its evasiveness, because it outlines the same ‘empty’ space of any word, hollow and without feature. The text of ‘Comma’ describes this *strain* of the signifier as a fetishized ‘place’ of exchange throughout its narrative. Thus, the short story concludes with a sense that the face of the comma is not unique, since when the narrator meets Mary Joplin in later life, Mary herself is without feature, but not ‘without meaning’:

Her face, in early middle age, had become indefinite, like wax: waiting for a pinch and a twist to make its shape [...] Her skin seemed swagged, loose, and there was nothing much to read in Mary’s eyes. I expected, perhaps, a pause, a hyphen, a space where a question might follow... Is that you, Kitty? She stooped over her buggy, and settled her laundry with a pat, as if to reassure it. Then she turned back to me, and gave me a bare acknowledgment: a single nod, a full stop⁵¹⁴

‘Her face’ is followed by an *explicit* textual ‘comma’, yielding a promise of comparison and the overlapping of meaning; like the disfigured child, it is now Mary whose face cries out for violence to shape it with ‘a pinch and a twist’. It is a ‘nothing’, a silence already talkative, which defies the meaning garnered from the content for ‘there was nothing much to read in Mary’s eyes’. There is ‘a pause, a hyphen, a space’, all listed, all reminiscent of the comma, prompting an ellipsis to surface on the page of the text – ‘a space where a question might follow...’. Importantly, it is this ellipsis that produces the narrator’s *own* question – ‘Is that you, Kitty?’ – and also *bursts* the full stop that attempts to close this interaction and the story itself. It is Mary who stoops over a sorrowful buggy now, an ‘empty’ buggy that remains unexplained, meaning the ‘full stop’ does not *stop*, suggesting an intention situating the text but not situated in it. The ‘full stop’ forces a return to the comma, its ‘opposite’, signifying continuation or pause rather than arrival; ellipsis does not imply such agency, moreover any sense of a full stop as a comfortable resting place is exploded here because it is ‘missing’ from the punctuation of the final line. All these ‘marks’ of punctuation that are by necessity ‘fluid’ and pervasive, offer pauses, spaces, ellipsis, into which ‘something’, then ‘something else’, then *something else again* constantly intrudes. This is how a character as punctuation begins to hint at the processes within writing itself, which prove pertinent for unpacking the silence of the west in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*.

⁵¹⁴ ‘Comma’, p. 14.

‘The shadowy presence within’: Vacancy in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*

There are several vacancies of ‘shadowy’ presence across Mantel’s third novel, which suggest comparison with ‘Comma’. *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* is a text of two parts, structured according to the Hijra calendar so that each chapter corresponds to the ‘eight months’ of the title; describing the ellipsis of its narrative will help *release* the complexities of the shadows within. It is set in Saudi Arabia and time is both a structural surface and a means of privileging western perspective through dislocation – ‘not the least surprising aspect of life in the Kingdom is that time can appear to run backwards’ – is the ambiguous advice of the ‘Note’ to the novel.⁵¹⁵ The main characters are Andrew and Frances Shore, westerners who met and married in Africa and travel to the Kingdom when Andrew is offered a civil engineering job on a new Ministry building. They move into an apartment block with an empty flat above their own, a site of much speculation amongst the expatriate community. This (full) ‘emptiness’ is important for ontologically stabilising western representations of time and space, also echoed and reflected in *A Change of Climate*. Despite the ‘surface’ of both novels, the silences on which such viewpoints depend ‘says’ *something else* about race. There are many *silent* difficulties, for example, within the outlining of Saudi Arabian culture primarily from the perspective of a western white woman.⁵¹⁶ In particular, the sense of apparently ‘inherent’ racial characteristics is strengthened by a parallel inherency within understandings of gender; hence, the pervasive gender inequality in the Kingdom becomes a justification for the racial Othering of Saudi Arabian men. Western women must be ‘more cautious than usual’ during Ramadhan because the ‘religious police have cans of spray paint, with which they spray revealing garments, or exposed flesh – forearms for instance’.⁵¹⁷

Thus, Frances is immediately confined within the flat because women cannot work in the Kingdom and she is not *meant* to walk the streets without her husband.⁵¹⁸ She keeps a diary,

⁵¹⁵ Hilary Mantel, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (London: Penguin, 1989), n. p.

⁵¹⁶ Work has been conducted on the ‘centrality’ of effacement for perpetuating western notions of whiteness, in particular Dyer’s seminal 1997 study *White*: ‘[T]he position of speaking as a white person is one that white people now almost never acknowledge and this is part of the condition and power of whiteness: white people claim and achieve authority for what they say by not admitting, indeed not realising, that for much of the time they speak only for whiteness’ (p. xiv).

⁵¹⁷ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 224.

⁵¹⁸ ‘Yes, and of course, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, it was only long after I’d written it that I became conscious of how it fitted into the Gothic. One of the few conditions under which one could actually write a modern Gothic is the rare circumstance of living somewhere like Saudi Arabia, because those conditions are your life, the... the immurement, the... trying to construe the intentions of other women about you, who may or

writes letters home and tries to ‘make sense’ of life in Saudi Arabia, particularly through discussing public and private morality with her female neighbours – Yasmin, a married Pakistani woman, and Samira, a married Saudi Arabian woman. This ‘talk’ suggests a western double focus of public/private that is apparently ‘collapsed’ by Islamic culture: “‘In Islam there are no private vices’” claims Andrew, a white western man.⁵¹⁹ Frances soon hears footsteps in the empty flat upstairs and a woman crying. The trace of footsteps, appearing in disappearance, recurs throughout Mantel’s writing and is again reminiscent of Macherey’s description of the speech of the book *coming* ‘from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure’. In *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, the emptiness of the flat *endows* the woman, offering the ground necessary to trace the figure of her cries. A rumour circulates amongst the Khawwadjis (or westerners) that the flat is used by the Deputy Minister to facilitate a love tryst to commit adultery, an offence punishable by death in the Kingdom. The signifier ‘Khawwadjis’ *floats* – ‘The MEANING of Skin Colour CHANGES with the CONTEXT’ – forging a tension in the text in-between Frances’ (limited) realisation of ‘race’ as contextual, which the *tone* of the writing confirms and the surface of the narrative rejects. The content of Frances’ position and her positioning wages constantly to stabilise or ‘fix’ fluidity into demarcated racial characteristics, ‘guarantees’ and *certainties*. This unresolved oscillation offers a comparative point of neuralgia with ‘Comma’, the *Gryphaea* and the tarot reading in *Beyond Black*. Frances spends most of her time in the apartment block and quickly senses she is being lied to about the ‘empty’ flat because the story of infidelity panders to western prurience and prejudice. She begins to suspect Yasmin’s involvement when she meets her by chance on the roof of the apartments, apparently waiting for someone. Then on the way home from a New Year party, as Andrew is fumbling with the door keys, Frances spots a man in a thobe further down the street, standing very still and holding a rifle. She does not tell Andrew, which opens another silence in the text, as *distinct* from lack of speech.

Andrew becomes preoccupied with his work. The price of oil drops and the building project stalls. The pay cheques, once so regular, arrive later and later, undermining Andrew’s resolve, as his motivation for undertaking the contract was the sizeable wage packet. He dismisses Frances’ concerns about the empty flat as neurotic, a neurosis that suggests the

may not be your friend. The total dependence on a male figure, who, you know, as Frances suspects, may be in a sort of covert conspiracy with all other male figures. And the fact that the woman has to wonder if she’s going mad’, ‘In Conversation’, 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 205.

⁵¹⁹ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 85.

neuralgia or vibration of obsession: ‘Andrew says she has been obsessed with the empty flat ever since they moved in. It indicates some lack of balance in her nature’ – a detail offered in a dislocated third person section of narrative.⁵²⁰ Their relationship envelops a silence that prevents effective communication. Hence, when Frances challenges a veiled figure coming downstairs from the empty flat (who she believes is a man in disguise) she does not tell Andrew even though they are carrying a gun and violently throw her to one side. The veil is a silence that endows the figure, offering an Othering that is not the ‘reality’ of race but an *effect* of writing as a ‘mask’, or the trace as appearance within disappearance, perspective *implicating* effacement. Shortly after this incident, the Shores’ flat is burgled, yet Frances still does not mention her encounter with the armed ‘man’. The apartment block, named ‘Dunroamin’ by the Shores, then becomes the site of unaccountable exchange during a process of dubious building work. Frances ‘interacts’ with a *silent* Egyptian, witnesses a puzzling incident with a wooden crate and is forced to draw her blinds for several days while they are varnished – another silence that endows a (veiled) figure. The intrigue (anti)climaxes when an air conditioning salesman named Fairfax arrives in the Kingdom and has dinner at the Shore’s flat. They all have too much to drink and Fairfax is forced to stay the night since consuming alcohol is illegal in Saudi Arabia. Frances and Andrew wake to discover the door to their flat wide open and Fairfax sprawled on the stairs. He has seen something on the roof that has shocked him, but refuses to speak and has gone by the morning. At the office, Andrew receives a telephone message from Fairfax – a ‘ghostly’ warning for the Shores to leave Dunroamin because he saw two men removing a body from the apartment block the previous night. Fairfax is later found dead, apparently killed in a road traffic accident.

The novel culminates with the ‘unavoidability of a destination’ because it is almost impossible to establish a timeline of events, yielding instead a narrative of *ellipsis*.⁵²¹ A fiasco follows Fairfax’s death and the police close ranks. An assassination attempt is made on Yasmin’s husband, Raji, and Frances sees Samira’s husband, Abdul Nasr, in a car that is not his own accompanied by Yasmin and the silent (and silenced) Egyptian. Yasmin is later detained at the airport attempting to leave the country without her husband’s permission and Frances realises that she will never see her again – another silence. Ultimately, the Shores become increasingly ‘unsure’ and heed Fairfax’s belated warning and leave Dunroamin to move into a western company compound:

⁵²⁰ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 225.

⁵²¹ ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 11.

I go back into the house and put down the chair. I look out through the glass, on to the landscape, the distant prospect of travelling cars. Window one, the freeway: window two, the freeway. I turn away, cross the room to find a different view. Window three, the freeway: window four, the *freeway*.⁵²²

This finale is Frances' description of different viewpoints that are also the same. The freeway, like the orbital M25 in *Beyond Black*, is a site of tension and contradiction in the novel, offering a person simultaneous paralysis and exchange, if killed there: 'Then you would haunt the freeways, your dead compass swinging, searching for home'.⁵²³ The above quotation echoes the paradox because 'freeway' as final word signifies freedom in its 'content' and restriction in the repetition of its *tone* – although every window is accessible, there is only *one* 'view' – the 'one itself' of the parallax gap. This brief last chapter, 'Shaban', is the eighth month of the title; the adoption of this 'Other' calendar dislocates Frances from her western understanding of 'time', a representation that works to stabilise what is detached. *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* describes the imperfect circle of ellipsis, it outlines neither the 'full' Georgian calendar and 'falls short' of an implied nine-month gestation. Frances' remarked inability to conceive becomes a catalyst for gossip, which parallels the *empty* term of the title, meaning that like *A Change of Climate* and 'Comma', this novel also works to eclipse a child.

What Said has described as an implied ontological stability for the west begins on the aeroplane in *Eight Months*. The prefatory 'Note' to the novel, which privileges the Georgian calendar as the *given* of 'common sense', offers a silence that endows the figure of Frances' aeroplane traveling 'backwards' in time to interrupt the (air)*space* of the Hijra calendar. This 'spatiality' to ontological stability is reinforced when Frances requests a map from Andrew in order to 'locate' herself:

The man on the plane – Fairfax's colleague – had been quite wrong. There was a map of Jeddah. Andrew brought it home. 'Now I can begin to make sense of it,' Frances said.

She spread out the map on the dining-room table. Five minutes later she looked up, disappointed. 'It's useless. It's too old. The shape of the coastline is different now. This road appears to end in the sea. And look where they've put Jeddah Shops. They're five blocks out.' She traced the length of Medina Road. 'How old would you say these flats are?'
'Five years.'

⁵²² *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 299, my emphasis.

⁵²³ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 277.

‘On this map we’re a vacant lot.’
 ‘Sorry,’ Andrew said. ‘Only trying to help. Thought bad maps were better than no maps.’
 ‘That’s not so.’ She picked up her pen and wrote on the map ‘CARTOGRAPHY BY KAFKA’. ‘We don’t exist,’ she said.⁵²⁴

The map is written and points towards a ‘space’ – “‘we’re a vacant lot’” – and ‘time’ of five minutes disappointment. Like the silent endowment of the aeroplane, ‘CARTOGRAPHY BY KAFKA’ occupies a ‘place’ of neuralgia in the text, which pressurises the ontological stability of the western spacing of the temporal signifying chain. Instead, there is only a ‘between the lines’ of the ‘vacant lot’, a moment of appearance in disappearance – “‘bad maps were better than no maps’” – or the spacing and temporalisation of *differance*. This ‘vacancy’ does not contradict existence, despite Frances’ protestations, it merely defies notions of fixity, particularly the ‘guarantee’ of western time and space as privileged or *given*. It is a gift that yields a ‘giving up’, which is not mastery, but equality and only equality as an affirmation that is not positive, as signified by Frances’ reaction to Yasmin: ‘Of course she can’t break out of her culture, Frances thought. No more can I break out of mine. No more would I want to; no more does she’.⁵²⁵ This refusal elliptically describes a resistance in the text and the text itself *as* a resistance.

‘A mute and unknown minority’: Making the writing *itself* scream, stutter and murmur.⁵²⁶

The outlining of silence in this chapter opens further discussion of representations of both the west and race in chapter six. This exposure has combined an understanding of silence in terms of tone(s) and vibration, or neuralgia; it also returns to the body as Transcendental Signifier via the skin of ‘race’ as *visual* and mastered with a look, a notional full stop – silent yet *full* of discourse. The ‘now you see it, now you do not’ of the trace also mobilises the thought of silence, which is not a ‘now you *hear* it, now you do not’ privation of sensation but instead a spatially wrought one.⁵²⁷ Its space is brought about through the shifting double

⁵²⁴ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 81.

⁵²⁵ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 121.

⁵²⁶ ‘He Stuttered’, p. 109.

⁵²⁷ Quoting Saint Augustine, darkness is understood as ‘only the privation of sensation’ in *Fludd*, which suggests another outlining of ‘talkative’ silence: ‘What is, you know by what is not; for as Augustine says, “We have some knowledge of the darkness and *silence*, of the former only by the eyes, by the latter only through the ears; nevertheless we have no sensation, only privation of sensation”’ (*Fludd*, p. 78, my emphasis). A thought echoed in the first few pages of *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* when Frances Shore, flying to Saudi Arabia, is offered ‘non-diary creamer’ (p. 14).

focus of ellipsis; the improbable viewing platform that *allows* for perception of the silent trace but cannot ever ‘book it’ in the present. Thus, it offers a *just perceptible effect* from the tail of the eye, as partially represented by the ‘tail’ of the dot, dot, dot, and as elliptically described by Julian in *A Change of Climate*: ‘What [he] saw, from the tail of his eye, was a face set on placid lines’.⁵²⁸ Hence the explicit ‘visuality’, or rather spatiality, of the thought of the trace as means to unlock a *written* silence. The viewing platform – or the sense that history changes depending on where you stand – is also a *silent* ‘place’ that is always already talkative, it is the only *given* or ‘guarantee’. Chapter four of this thesis illustrates that the figure of The Author cannot avoid being implicated. However, this penultimate chapter harvests all earlier work to elliptically describe *khōra* as the receipt of properties without possession, alongside a tail-of-the-eye trace. These differing deferrals mean that chapter six can now outline such *excessive* silences in Mantel’s corpus using Derrida’s most famous thought – differance.

⁵²⁸ *A Change of Climate*, p. 133.

Chapter Six ‘These silent works [...] already talkative’: Differing implications of silence in Mantel’s corpus

The epigraph of this ‘last’ chapter is from ‘The Spatial Arts’ interview that has occupied the margins of this thesis from the beginning. It surfaces again in this penultimate chapter to help elliptically describe Derrida’s most infamous thought, *differance*. Ellipsis is a metaphor that is ‘visually’ inscribed, especially its *ex-centric* double *focus*, so this exploration of the implications of silence in Mantel’s corpus also regards its (paradoxically) visual privilege. Accounting for the silence as ‘talkative’ requires an understanding of how it emerges as ‘spatial’, as well as the effect of what it privileges as *visual*. The silence has edges, it occupies a position, which, viewed aslant, allows the silence to appear, in disappearance. The effect of the silence is effacement – a visually invested term – because appearing (in disappearance) it *refuses* to present itself to a direct line-of-sight. The silence ‘frames’ what is not silent, a privileging emphasis, that means although silence describes a deprivation of auditory sense it here involves a spatial and visual discourse too. The neither/nor of silent and not silent yields a double focus that parallels the relationship between Same and Other. The position of the Same – the viewpoint *seen from* – is consolidated by an effacement of the Other, so that the Same masters everything with a single look, there is no ‘place’ for the position or sight lines of the Other. The disconnected third person narrative of *Beyond Black* parodies such mastery, but does not entirely relinquish the attempt at it: ‘Pity Colette, who had to transcribe all this’.⁵²⁹ However, the Other is always already implicated in this attempted mastery; in fact, their very effacement is necessary for such ‘consolidation’ of singular perspective. The view of the Same is dependent upon the view of the Other because it is the *difference* between these viewpoints that establishes the integrity of each position. It is such dependency alongside the constantly thwarted desire for mastery that means the silence of the Other is always already ‘talkative’. It is this oscillation between oscillating points that suggests the pertinence of *differance* as the thought for this chapter. This desire to efface the Other will help unpack the implications of privileged representations of the west, but will also highlight the simultaneity of writing and the elliptical nature of Mantel’s narratives.

The silence within the ‘perception’ of racial difference forms part of adopting a ‘position’ and, although the position of the author is implicated within any text, it offers only one possible *tone*, discernible merely through friction with other tones. ‘Mantel’s’ silence is ‘already talkative’ because it articulates the complexities of race, perspective and writing; its

⁵²⁹ *Beyond Black*, p. 128.

notional ‘place’ in her corpus evokes Derrida’s description of an ‘affirmation that is not positive’. This chapter outlines the different implications of this silence using the affirmative trickery of differance. Moreover, the ‘frame’ of chapter four alongside a general emphasis on focus and point of view throughout this thesis, underscore how silence offers a *just perceptible trace* that is both ‘visual’ and spatial. These analyses facilitate a return to *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and *A Change of Climate* in order to consider the implications of the silence in these novels.

‘Constantly shifting perspective between two points’: The double focus of silence

There are spectres of Lacan, both his writing and his person, in the exclusions of this thesis. Hence, the M25 in *Beyond Black* described as the ‘graphe complet’ in chapter one, then Spivak’s deconstruction of Lacan’s notion of female *jouissance* in chapter three, and finally the *neuragic* letter of the unconscious in chapter five. These ghosts remain silent or at least marginal; however, in this chapter necessarily such silence begins to ‘talk’. Lacan’s understanding of the relationship between vision and the Other helps link the double focus of the ellipsis, via the duplicity of differance, to the posture of Othering.⁵³⁰ Easthope describes the significance of Lacan’s theorising of Quattrocento perspective in painting in a way that emphasises the importance of *control* for any sense of positioning: ‘Perspective seeks to ensure that I see the represented image while the possibility of the gaze, looking back, is controlled and effaced’.⁵³¹ This theory informs Žižek’s writing of the parallax and it also allows the double focus of the ellipsis to implicate the word as silent *and* the image as talkative – the duplicity of differance.

The sense of a silent ‘origin’ to and within Mantel’s work emerges and begins to undermine itself by being always already *aslant*, yielding an ex-centric centre not-at-the-centre. Having undermined any notion of a stable origin for meaning in her work, this chapter pushes an alternative to this paradigm (already initiated by chapter five). The double focus of this matrix allows the development of silent *talk* through an emphasis on vision itself as a silent sense and a *come*. This position relies upon the visual ambiguities of *The Parallax View*, including the paradox of the privileged discourse of quantum theory, and makes reference to

⁵³⁰ For further discussion of Lacan’s extended discussion of vision see Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth, 1977).

⁵³¹ Antony Easthope, *The Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 154.

Nicholas Royle's notion of duplicity in *The Uncanny*.⁵³² Furthermore, *A Change of Climate* bears a sense of the elliptical that aptly parallels such doubling. For example, Mantel has a 'view' of the novel as the most difficult of her books to write for *two* reasons:

The first is that its plot and structure are very formal, very like a Victorian novel. It is a form that seemed to suit the subject matter, but it didn't altogether suit me! The second is that the secret resisted being told. I found that I was going round and round the point, yet I couldn't put it on the page [...] Writing that book stands out as one of the most difficult times of my writing life.⁵³³

'It didn't altogether suit me!' introduces a tension, or differentiability of tone(s). The form suits the content, or surface, of the text, though beneath there is a friction; it is a text that occupies positions of both pleasure *and* bliss, pointing towards a 'place' for the reader that is so unsettling it 'brings to a crisis his relation with language'.⁵³⁴ This space and movement 'round and round the point' also signifies an absence, loss, or giving up that is both silent and elliptical. The helplessness, 'I couldn't put it on the page', articulates something about the corpus as a whole and is reminiscent of Weldon's 'fixing' of the ambiguities of *Beyond Black*, 'exploded' in chapter three. Writing cannot 'nail to the page' because it is *all* gaps and evasions, which is how the meaning slips in, and out again.⁵³⁵ The difficulty of writing this 'Victorian novel', like the unaccountable signifiers of the *Gryphaea* and the comma, suggests something about writing *in writing*. This effacement is reinforced by the final passages of *A Change of Climate* when 'writing' becomes painful for Emma Eldred, 'like a slow cut' and almost impossible.⁵³⁶

The silences outlined in chapter five between *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and *A Change of Climate* are again implicated here. These vibrations raise questions about elliptical narration, the 'narrative' ellipsis, *empty* spaces and contradiction. These analyses will refer to 'Differance' and the implications of depending upon notional 'full presence' and how this *presents* itself in writing:

⁵³² For further discussion of these 'privileged' contradictions see Brian Cox and Jeff Forshaw, *The Quantum Universe: Everything that can happen does happen* (London: Penguin, 2012).

⁵³³ Sarah O'Reilly, 'A Kind of Alchemy', in *A Change of Climate*, P. S. section (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), pp. 2-10 (p. 8).

⁵³⁴ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 14. Please note the epigraph to this thesis.

⁵³⁵ Fay Weldon, 'Enfield, where the dead go to live' (2005).

⁵³⁶ *A Change of Climate*, p. 342. Writing as a 'cut' is reminiscent of *Ink in the Blood* where 'the ink began to bleed'. For further discussion see *Ink in the Blood: A Hospital Diary*, loc. 342.

Thus we think through, without contradiction, or at least without granting any pertinence to such contradiction, what is perceptible and imperceptible about the trace. The “matinal trace” of difference is lost in an irretrievable invisibility, and yet even its loss is covered, preserved, regarded, and retarded. This happens in a text, in the form of presence.⁵³⁷

The west expresses such a ‘form of presence’ in both novels, which makes discussion difficult though this very resistance offers the trace of it – appearing in disappearance – and ‘neuralgia’ crosses three sections of these texts where this western trace is ‘simultaneously traced and effaced’. One such example is Melanie’s unexpected return to the Red House at the end of *A Change of Climate*, a troubled teenager I will introduce shortly. She occupies the position of catalyst throughout the novel, most especially in terms of her *name*. The initial ‘M’ signifies a textual agency and horror in uncertainty that parallels the emergence of the veiled figure in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*. The *doubling* across the texts describes the elliptical double focus while also embedding an anxiety in the writing. Likewise, the veiled figure in *Eight Months* yields ‘something else’, a *tone* of silence, or even the Signifier as itself veiled, and this effacement undermines the stability of racial categories and stereotypes in the novel. Eclipsing race is also about writing – language, trace, *race*, silence – as evasive of arrival. Despite the tone of *Eight Months*, the content or surface of the text does evoke boundaries and lay claim to mastery. The veiled figure illustrates the always already of this contradiction because it problematises any certain ‘ethical’ position, yielding instead an affirmation that swerves the false dawn of positivity. This ‘figure’ (of the veiled figure) is self-referential, as is the empty flat in the novel. These repeated conceits offer *stuttering* traces, from Mantel’s first published novel *Every day is mother’s day* to the neuralgic double of this empty space in the ‘something missing’ narrative of *A Change of Climate*. Race as the ‘empty’ sign of Hall’s lecture parallels the space of the empty flat since this silence endows meaning – a ‘constantly shifting perspective’ that opens a promising site for ex-centric exchange. However, it cannot be *booked* in the present as a ‘perception’, which parallels the powerful insignia of the secret of Matthew’s disappearance within the Eldred family, and the text itself. The children do not know what happened to their parents, even Kit, the surviving twin, remains ignorant although ‘sometimes the answer turn[s] up in dreams’, like Alison’s memories of trauma in *Beyond Black*.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁷ ‘Differance’, p. 157.

⁵³⁸ *Beyond Black*, p. 110.

Ralph, however, concedes that the secret, which he and Anna *alone* can acknowledge keeping, comes to define the family. It hides ‘from the first glance’ harbouring the neither/nor of neuralgic pain that cannot be emotionally contained, instead creating an obsession in each mind, especially Julian’s – the first child born after the Eldreds returned from Africa.⁵³⁹ These meanings born of obsession mirror the excessive process of Frances and the empty flat. The repetition *and* the first time of elliptical narrative is also the result of a constant shifting between two perspectives that prevents a single ‘perception’ from emerging, as theorised in *The Parallax View*. This oscillation underlies representations of time and space in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, which fail to stabilise the western view as ‘common sense’, and therefore beyond reproach. The form of *A Change of Climate* describes this constant shifting through a duplicitous emphasis on exile, which privileges the experience of the Eldreds’ abroad. This echoes the ‘talk’ of Frances’ position as an expatriate in *Eight Months* versus the silence of Mr Kowalski’s displacement in *Vacant Possession* – an example that offers humour as another potential implication, described towards the end of this chapter.

‘That on which I depend but [...] can never lay claim to’: Race, *the look* and the Other as implication⁵⁴⁰

Othring is an implication of silence in writing. Macherey’s emphasis on ‘what a text cannot say’ also describes the simultaneity of a tracing that is effaced, stalling discussion in the moment of (st)utterance. This elliptical description skirts within and around a thought that Derrida concedes is neither ‘a *word* nor a *concept*’.⁵⁴¹ Representations of time and space in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and *A Change of Climate* are important because these silences endow the effects of differance – difference and deferral – and describe ellipsis:

The verb “to differ” [*différer*] seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalizing* that puts off until “later” what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible.⁵⁴²

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street problematises time and space through Frances’ sardonic questioning. The edge of this mockery privileges common sense, but this is not the ‘whole’ since such uncertainty makes any privileged perception unsustainable – laughter in the dark

⁵³⁹ ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 69.

⁵⁴⁰ *The Unconscious*, p. 153.

⁵⁴¹ ‘Differance’, p. 130.

⁵⁴² ‘Differance’, p. 129, original emphasis.

ultimately yields to the dark. This characterises a stalled possibility, ‘presently impossible’, in Mantel’s novel since western time as the temporal spacing of the signifying chain is penetrated – both revealing and effacing an Other, an alterity that ‘sees’ time differently. The duplicity of this representation means that in *Eight Months* time seems to differ from itself. The complexity of this confusion describes a spacing that opens a gap between the ‘reality’ of western time and the *writing* of the Saudi Arabian calendar, which allows for the double focus, neither/nor original of *khōra* that cannot be resolved. Derrida’s text considers the verb ‘to differ’ and illustrates how it interposes a delay in and of itself that can be understood as simultaneously spatial and temporal.

Like time in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, outlining such contradiction as an affirmation-not-positive is *elliptical*. The spacing, the gap that tears the two timeframes is a delay that can be ‘viewed’ as a doubling of *focus* – a metaphor reliant on notional positioning for perspective or view and a double that negates any mastery within *the look*. Mantel’s writing suggests only the ‘tail’ of the eye, the partial partiality of revelation; ellipsis as a *tail* is also a temporalising ‘that puts off until “later” what is presently denied’ since the dot, dot, dot forces a delay. Derrida’s text asks – ‘How are difference as temporalizing and difference as spacing conjoined?’ – a hesitation that offers elliptical description since these dimensions are conjoined in ellipsis as a metaphor.⁵⁴³ Space is also reflected through the prism of time in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* through the dislocating map that Andrew brings home to Frances in the hope that it will help her to ‘locate’ herself. This evokes *khōra* and the ‘I’ of *Giving Up the Ghost* – ‘I am writing in order [...] to locate myself’ – yet the map is useless because it is out of date, highlighting a western fetish for the illusory specificity of the ‘present’.⁵⁴⁴ This overlap between representations of time and space describes the *differance* between two epistemologies, which undermines ontological stability for the either/or of western and Saudi Arabian ‘figures’ – ‘The one is the other in difference, the *one* is the difference from the other’.⁵⁴⁵ As demonstrated by the slippery ‘I’ of Mantel’s memoir, which receives properties without possession, there is no intention more powerful than that of the text – property minus possession is an agency that eludes mastery.

⁵⁴³ ‘Difference’, p. 137.

⁵⁴⁴ *Giving Up the Ghost*, p. 222.

⁵⁴⁵ ‘Difference’, p. 150, my emphasis.

Derrida also writes in ‘Differance’ – ‘We provisionally give the name differance to this sameness which is not identical’ – which is *visited* upon ‘Ellipsis’ through the emphasis on non-identity.⁵⁴⁶ Again this describes a conceptual fracturing of the identical, or rather, ‘some great original’, and reiterates Nancy’s sense of a ‘gap which postpones the infinite return of the identical to itself’.⁵⁴⁷ As remarked in my first chapter, any ‘first’ appearance of an entity, word or letter means its entering for a *second* time, though recognisable, is necessarily a departure since if it *were* identical the two appearances would merge and only one would be discernible. However, ‘Ellipsis’ suggests that the implication of identity is full presence, which would even efface the first appearance and inhibit exchange by establishing a deathly position of mastery. Differance is elliptical because it signifies an imperfection that stalls identical return. This detachment of any ‘sameness which is not identical’ mirrors Hall’s metaphor of the floating signifier, which negates the reliance of biological theories of race – conscious and unconscious – on an absolute ‘guarantee’ that *any* appearance of racial difference in *any* context is The Same. This certainty cannot and does not hold, as illustrated by representations of perspective in Mantel’s writing, which describe a differance between ‘what is done and what is declared’ through the friction of homogenous content and resistant tone – it yields the position that ‘positioning’ is incoherent. Both Frances and the Eldreds are removed and isolated from their culture, which is privileged as ‘common sense’. This sense surfaces as elliptical because it is oppositional and facilitated by a *just perceptible effect* of the blind spot – a scotomisation that effaces the Other through a pretence that the perspective adopted to enable this process is ‘total’, not partial. This blind spot is a silence that is not a given; instead its *becoming* requires a notional viewing platform from which it is ‘seen’, or detected. This ‘perception’ evokes a *double* rather than singular focus, because its privileged view relies upon and implicates the view of the Other, while simultaneously attempting to efface it. Again the ‘talk’ of this silent blind spot suggests the duplicity of the ellipsis, the impossible figure with two centres, affirming the eccentricity and ex-centricity of such a ‘centre’ *through* its negation.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ ‘Differance’, p. 129.

⁵⁴⁷ Said, p. 62 and Nancy, p. 175.

⁵⁴⁸ This effacement of the position of the Other, as necessary for stabilising the perspective of the Same, also surfaces in *Vacant Possession* and *An Experiment in Love* through the paranoia and anger of characters Mr Kowalski and Karina, respectively. These representations highlight the same process differently because these texts *acknowledge* the experience of these characters while the nature of this acknowledgement simultaneously works to distance them more effectively.

In *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, British expatriates discuss the arbitrary distinctions their community accepts about race:

‘Strange,’ Frances said, ‘how Indians are immigrant workers, but we’re professional expatriates.’

‘He said all the Indians who work here are shot to pieces mentally. Totally paranoid. They come here and they’re suddenly cut off from their families, they’ve got language problems, and they start to think everybody’s out to get them. Our Indians are like that, at Turadup. They think all the other Indians are after their jobs. They think people are talking about them behind their backs. And they’re always going up to Eric Parsons and asking him complicated questions about the labour law. They think he wants to cheat on the terms of their contract, do them out of their baggage allowances or something. They’re obsessed with their baggage allowances.’⁵⁴⁹

These ‘immigrant workers’ describe the ‘they’ of the Other – “‘They’re always... They think... They’re obsessed’” – and their *perspective* in the text is effaced, repeatedly spoken for, or subalternised, in the other words of *In Other Worlds* (1987). This eclipse contrasts with Frances’ position as protagonist and *partial* narrator of the story through her diary entries. The grudgingly mentioned European experience of cultural alienation is secondary to this discussion and implies a gradual ‘arrival’ of insanity; whereas the ‘Indians’ – presumably all of ‘them’, though certainly “‘*Our* Indians’” – land in Saudi Arabia and ‘totally’ lose control immediately. This distinction suggests that Europeans resist cultural difference bolstered by their knowledge of ‘the truth’. Yet the text itself escapes such mastery because these contradictions acknowledge race as a discursive process without guarantee, its writing emerges from differential tones problematically (double) bound together in play – “‘Strange,’” Frances said’ – and it is *strange*, ambiguous, differing and elliptical.

Differentiality in ‘Differance’ is described as ‘the nonfull, nonsimple “origin”; it is the structured and differing origin of differences’ – and within this space of the ‘differing origin of differences’ the sense of the identical in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* can be troubled.⁵⁵⁰ The repetition of the ‘Indians’ as ‘always...’ the same is surprised by Frances’ riposte that she expects all “‘Europeans *are the same*’” too, which generates a friction between differential tones.⁵⁵¹ The Europeans are the Same and simultaneously not-the-same as the Indians, neither in terms of position nor experience, this neither/nor of sameness (that is not identical) outlines a doubling differance. There is ‘something else’ of ellipsis in

⁵⁴⁹ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 141.

⁵⁵⁰ ‘Differance’, p. 141.

⁵⁵¹ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 141.

Frances' expectation – “I expect Europeans are the same” – that is a deferral, a gap where difference slips in instead of identity or sameness. This pause describes the tension in Frances' position; her argument here counters Andrew's Othering of the Indians, but remains uncertain and noncommittal. This effect parallels Frances' estranging observation of racial categories: ““Strange,” Frances said, “how Indians are immigrant workers, but we're professional expatriates””. This pertinent questioning cannot exceed the binary it undermines – “we're professional expatriates” – because it involves a silence, and silence is always ambiguous. In ‘The Spoken and the Unspoken’, Macherey's text releases the force of what silence can endow without trying to account for it. There remains a slippage of silence in writing about silence, which mirrors the process of difference as neither a word nor a concept and a structured yet *differing* origin of differences. This unaccountable silence (within writing silence) points towards a ‘place’ also skirted by ellipsis – the ex-centric centre not-at-the-centre – that participates in what it, at the same time, threatens to deconstruct.

‘We are truly missing something’: The elliptical narrative of *A Change of Climate* as implication

A Change of Climate is primarily set in Norfolk in the eighties and describes the unravelling of a secret within the Eldred family. Ralph and Anna Eldred have four children – Kit, Julian, Robin and Becky – and live in a large, rambling property called the Red House relatively near Ralph's sister Emma, a local GP. Ralph is an officer for a charitable trust that his uncle and father established and there are frequent needy visitors to the Red House, deemed by the family as either ‘good souls’ or ‘sad cases’ – describing the neither/nor of *khōra*.⁵⁵² The secret of Ralph and Anna's past life surfaces in the text (pointing towards the ‘place’ of the reader) more explicitly than in the minds of the family, who each make a (marginal) discovery over the course of one summer when Ralph has an affair. Ralph and Anna, both from very Christian backgrounds, marry young and, as Ralph does not wish to go into his father's printing business, move to Africa to become missionaries. In South Africa they are imprisoned for supposedly ‘political’ activities and then given the ultimatum to either leave the continent or go north.

⁵⁵² *A Change of Climate*, p. 1.

Having moved to Botswana, Anna gives birth to nonidentical twins, named Katherine and Matthew.⁵⁵³ Anna observes stealing in the mission house and, perhaps falsely, accuses the gardener, Enock – *neither* his guilt *nor* his innocence are ever ‘proved’. He leaves his position, insulted, and is then suspected of attempting to poison the Eldreds’ dog, Potluck. Enock later returns, with assistance, during a storm and abducts the twins. Kit is found by Anna the next day in a ditch, but Matthew is never *seen* again. There is the suggestion that he is dismembered alive for body parts, which remains unconfirmed. Back in the ‘present’, Anna eventually discovers Ralph’s affair with Amy Glasse, the mother of Julian’s girlfriend, Sandra, and seemingly wishes to end the marriage. However, Ralph is prevented from leaving the Red House by the dirty and *bloody* ‘arrival’ of Melanie, a particularly sad case, who the Eldreds move towards together to help and bring into their house.

In Royle’s chapter ‘The Double’ in his book on *The Uncanny*, ‘[w]riting is the double, writing is a double writing, from the beginning’, and there is such duplicity to the elliptical nature of narrative that the ambiguities of the ‘story’ of *A Change of Climate* help to describe.⁵⁵⁴ Like *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, this text poses more questions than it ‘intends’ to answer and that is the point. It is therefore significant that the close of *A Change of Climate* forms a repetition, an iteration – ‘writing is a double writing, from the beginning’ – *and* at-the-end. The Eldred family secret is (literally) outlined in writing by Emma, Ralph’s sister, when she ‘inscribes’ the name of Matthew Eldred in a book of prayer as a blank line, a silence:

In the porch was a vast book, well-thumbed, its pages ruled into columns. A notice promised ALL WHOSE NAMES ARE INSCRIBED IN THIS BOOK WILL BE PRAYED FOR AT THE SHRINE.

Emma took her pen out of her pocket, turned to a clean page and wrote down the date. She did not put Felix’s name in the book because she believed that energy should be directed towards the living, not the dead. She did not put her own name, because she believed she would manage well enough. But she wrote the names of her brother and his wife:

RALPH ELDRED

ANNA ELDRED

Beneath she wrote:

⁵⁵³ Botswana is a disputed territory, which offers another link to *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* through the writing of maps and spatiality as elliptical.

⁵⁵⁴ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 188.

KATHERINE ELDRED

then hesitated, and skipped a line, before

JULIAN ELDRED

ROBERT ELDRED

REBECCA ELDRED⁵⁵⁵

Emma is a marginal character in the novel, yet this gesture outlines *inscription*. It is characteristic of Mantel's writing that the narrative returns elliptically to the church porch to un-in-scribe Matthew Eldred's name. This first 'repetition' is framed by an ignorance of the Eldred family, at this point the narrative has only conceded that Emma is Ralph's sister and she is grieving for Felix Palmer, a married man she was mistress to for some years. By the end of the novel, Emma has revised her thoughts about directing energy towards the dead, although as with much in *A Change of Climate* this is neither explicit nor reconciled. Emma's decision to write Matthew's (inhuman) name, although attached to a human almost certainly dead, is an acceptance of paradox and ellipsis, rather than the desired mastery of 'arrival':

RALPH ELDRED

ANNA ELDRED

KATHERINE ELDRED

Then the missing line; then

JULIAN ELDRED

ROBERT ELDRED

REBECCA ELDRED

Why did I think God would recognize our real names, our formal and never-used names, instead of the names we are called by? [...] She plunged her hand into her coat pocket, and brought out a furred and leaking ballpoint, its plastic barrel cracked, its ink silted. She shook it, and tried a preliminary zigzag in a corner of the page [...] She began to write. Her pen moved over the vacant line. The ballpoint marked the paper, but nothing appeared: only white marks. She shook it once, slammed it on the wooden desk. At last, like a slow cut, the ink began to bleed. Laboriously – the pen faltering, blotting – she filled in the missing line:

⁵⁵⁵ *A Change of Climate*, pp. 26-27.

Matthew is not ‘called by’ *a name*, he is snatched before growing into a nickname – underlined by ‘Kit’ as shortening for Katherine – then later he is eclipsed and never referred to by name, which highlights the inhumanity of the name as frame.⁵⁵⁷ Though eventually the ink of the pen ‘filled in’ the missing line, the space, writing is neither solid nor certain; it is only an outline, a repetition, an ellipsis. It offers *an estranging repetition* that signifies a departure *just as much as a return*.

This thesis rejects the notion of a unifying ‘story’, yet the difference of silence does trace Mantel’s corpus. Such vibrating neuralgia in *A Change of Climate* opens from the silence of Ralph and Anna’s marriage, which starts to ‘scream, stutter, stammer, or murmur’ with the *coming* of Melanie whose appearance (in disappearance) describes the inevitability of the return of the excluded to haunt the comfortable, as outlined by Hall.⁵⁵⁸ Melanie is a young girl who has been mistreated and run away from home; she is another ‘sad case’ who Ralph has naïvely brought into his family to be healed. Melanie’s problems are complex and Ralph’s ‘rescuing’ fails, partly because he has embarked on an affair and is rarely at the Red House, and also because Melanie is already disturbed and has been thrown headlong into another family drama. Anna and Kit take Melanie on an impatient shopping trip to buy her some new clothes, she absconds and is later hospitalised after taking an overdose. Ralph visits her in hospital, but because he is distracted and Melanie is damaged and insecure, she begins to feel very unsafe in the hospital and runs away again. In the meantime, Ralph returns to the Red House to pack because Anna, having found out about his affair, is throwing him out. He is *on the threshold*, on the edge and ready to leave, when Melanie returns; the moment is uncanny since she is at once familiar and unfamiliar, hence her appearance staged within disappearance:

A creature moved into their view, at a distance. It came slowly over the rough ground, crawling. It was a human being: its face a mask of despair, its body half-clothed in a flapping gown, its hands and knees and feet bleeding; its strange head the colour of

⁵⁵⁶ *A Change of Climate*, pp. 341-342.

⁵⁵⁷ ‘A proper name does not name anything which is human, which belongs to a human body, a human spirit, an essence of man [...] He alone gives himself this inhuman name’. For further discussion see Jacques Derrida, ‘Aphorism Countertime’, trans. by Nicholas Royle, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 414-443 (p. 427).

⁵⁵⁸ ‘He Stuttered’, p. 110.

the sun. It progressed towards them; they saw the heaving ribs, the small transparent features, the dirt-ingrained skin.⁵⁵⁹

Like the vibrations of the ‘I’ in *Giving Up the Ghost* or the no-thing of ‘Comma’, this crawling ‘creature’ in the final pages of *A Change of Climate* outlines another profoundly talkative silence. This quotation points towards a ‘place’ of discomfort where the reader, as an *effect* of the text, can be perceived to play. It is troubling because it opens a space of deconstruction, displaced from time yet ‘real’, where this approaching vision simulates the return of the missing child, Matthew, which is simultaneously acknowledged as ‘impossible’. This gesture outlines an exchange momentarily containing the irresolvable duplicity that *allows* the text and exceeds it; a vibration of differentiability that describes an affirmation that is not *positive*, i.e. ‘present’. This excess is signified through what happens at the shrine, elliptically another ‘beginning’ at the end of the novel, where Matthew does return, *in writing*.

The novel still shocks Mantel; for example, our discussion of Melanie produced this unexpected annotation – ‘*Oh God* it means black doesn’t it! The name’.⁵⁶⁰ The ‘something else’ of this name, which eludes authorial agency, hints from the ‘tail of the eye’ as the *just perceptible effect* of the trace. Yet the transcript suggests the author is less surprised by other reactions to Melanie’s return, other betrayals of this symptom of writing:

EP: And then I had this horrifying shock, I don’t know, and it doesn’t even make any sense, and it must have only been for a split second, this figure that is kind of crawling and running towards them...

HM: [*Interrupting*] Was the baby.

EP: [*Excited*] Was the baby!⁵⁶¹

The tones of ‘*Melanian*’ further the friction between Melanie’s position as white child and the villainy of Enock as an African man; it is a word that outlines the difference of their relationship, the trace of Enock as Other in the Self-Same of Melanie, and the duplicity of Matthew’s disappearance.⁵⁶² The text twists backwards over itself, evoking a return that is

⁵⁵⁹ *A Change of Climate*, p. 340.

⁵⁶⁰ ‘In Conversation’, 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, pp. 217, original emphasis.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶² ‘*Melanian*’ is an adjective originally meaning ‘Negrito’ then later ‘Negroid’, it harbours a dubious discourse of cultural anthropology that incites a strong sense of racial guarantee, *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116018?rskey=1yBAzq&result=7&isAdvanced=false#>> [accessed 26 April 2013].

elliptical rather than the same, through questioning the privileged patronage of Ralph and Anna while simultaneously reinforcing the solidity of their position as powerful and authoritative.⁵⁶³ Enock offers eclipse and ellipsis, an ex-centricity that both enables and troubles the ‘single story’ of his life as *perceived* by this white couple.⁵⁶⁴ The return of Melanie, a white Briton whose name signifies ‘black’ but cannot *affirm* it, and who also initials or signs ‘M’ yet is not Matthew ‘contains’ a vibration that disrupts the text with a silence of differing differences: ‘[I]t becomes the very place of a word that is all the more powerful because it is silent’.⁵⁶⁵ This ‘place’ differs from itself and the fact that Mantel ‘talks’ of it changes nothing. Like Derrida’s description of the eclipse of the secret of why he writes, any ‘talk’ must always already *come* ‘from a certain silence, a matter which endows it with form’ – the differing origin of differences that is *differance*, or the duplicity of ellipsis.

The significance of Melanie’s name allows the return of the floating signifier of race in the writing of *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* too – with the following description of Frances’ encounter with the veiled figure. There is a tension within the *double* duplicity of this figure; the word ‘figure’ means person, the edges of a person, the difference, but is also a metaphor, or deferral. Moreover, this ‘veiled’ figure remains ambiguous and unaccountable and, like the Signifier, the veil offers a ground ‘on which it traces a figure’:

The visitor stopped dead. An outline of features beneath black cloth, no surprise discernible, no fear, no challenge, no expression at all. The visitor was tall; a strapping lass. Frances raised her hand. The visitor pulled back, but she had made contact. She tugged at the concealing abaya, felt it part, felt something cold, metallic, under her hand. She reached up, with her other hand, and clawed at the veil. But a veil is not something you can pull off. You can dream of doing it, but you cannot just accomplish it, because the black cloth is wound around the head. The head strains back; and then she is pushed away with all the visitor’s ungirlish strength, sent flying against the wall. Her neck snaps backwards, her head hits the tiles, two long strides and the visitor has crossed the hall, and while she is recovering herself is already out of the front door, and out of the gate, and on to Ghazzah Street.⁵⁶⁶

Frances is returning from the doctors as she has symptoms of pregnancy, though she knows herself not to be pregnant; like the eight months of the title Frances ‘falls short’, opening a gap for neuroses, perhaps neuralgia, as commented on in chapter five. Preceding the

⁵⁶³ For further discussion see Jacques Derrida and Avital Ronell, trans., ‘The Law of Genre’, *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1980), 55-81.

⁵⁶⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, ‘The danger of a single story’, TED talks, 7 October 2009 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg>> [accessed 16 April 2013].

⁵⁶⁵ ‘The Spatial Arts’, p. 13.

⁵⁶⁶ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 235.

quotation is the phrase ‘no doubt’, Frances thinks, ‘no doubt’ the doctor will offer me tranquilisers. This sense of foresight illustrates an omniscience within the narration that is both eccentric and ex-centric – eccentric because it offers a paradoxically *marginal* conduit, the narration is coldly positioned within and without the story, and *ex-centric* by being elliptical. The narrative describes a double focus, a within and a without, and outlines a ‘place’ that is all-seeing without ever being seen, booked into the present, or mastered.⁵⁶⁷ It is a refrain in the novel, and though the trace of doubt remains, it also implies certainty, certainty that Frances is ‘right’. This hubris frames her view of the veiled figure, it is her Eurocentric privilege that positions her as able to explain Saudi Arabia to itself. However, there is friction between the tones of surface and depth, Frances is thrown back, dazed, hitting her head on the tiles, and yet – ‘She reached up, with her other hand, and clawed at the veil. But a veil is not something you can pull off’. Frances wishes to master with a single look, so that her perspective effaces that of the Other, but the figure retains its anonymity. It sees without being seen, occupying the ‘centre’ like the Derridean *revenant*, offering a talkative silence that is ex-centric, flirting with full presence yet never succumbing to it.⁵⁶⁸ It is Frances who initiates the aggression, and though the protrusion of the gun is phallic and the ‘parting’ threatens rape, it is *Frances* who means to cleave the veil from the figure to expose what it conceals.

‘Can we say that this silence is hidden?’: Differentiality and privilege as implication⁵⁶⁹

This fear concerns race – that is, *you* are not/do not ‘look’ the Same, *you* are Other – a process that ‘books’ through distance, yet the above extract unravels ontological stability within any identity or culture. The text *effects* differentiality; Frances’ perspective implies the appearance of the veiled figure is frightening because it simultaneously signifies

⁵⁶⁷ Royle also cites Derrida’s thoughts on the duplicity of narrative voice in his confrontation with the double in *The Uncanny*: ‘The text is written in the so-called omniscient or, more accurately perhaps, the telepathic third person: it thus testifies to that structure of doubling or “being-two-to-speak” – and of being-two-to-think and being-two-to-feel – that Derrida has argued is a defining characteristic of literature’ (*The Uncanny*, p. 198).

⁵⁶⁸ Another ‘veiled’ figure in Mantel’s writing is Sister Philomena in *Fludd*, who offers a double focus in proximity with Fludd, who *can* see without being seen. This ‘without’ always concerns silence; thus, Mantel describes the stillness of reading this extract from *Eight Months* to a German audience: ‘[W]hen people are working in their second language and they’re very fluent, but they have to listen very carefully, you tend to get a very attentive, still audience. And I was on a stage, and the hall was wide rather than long, so you saw the whole sweep of these people, and I had the extraordinary experience of seeing an audience all move together to the edge of their seats [...] Just at that moment, when she comes into contact with the veiled figure, and, of course, one thinks that’s a figure of speech. But I suppose it does illustrate how it plays with the thriller genre, and even the horror genre’, ‘In Conversation’, 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 204.

⁵⁶⁹ ‘The Spoken and the Unspoken’, p. 96.

concealment, or disappearance. However, such ‘obvious’ concealment also implicates Frances’ character too, since her obsessive search for The Truth outlines another silence. The veil offers a ‘place’ of exchange and, like Spivak’s recognition of the unavoidably gendered position of Lacan’s phallus, this veil is a ‘floating’ signifier in the differential sea of the language of race; it yields the friction of a ‘harsh reality’. In *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* such ‘talkative’ gaps return to the text through representations of the empty flat, the silence of this vacant space endows Frances’ alienation from Saudi Arabian culture in a talkative form. Like, for example, this description of the vicinity skirting the Shores’ flat: ‘On her left a wall had been built, enclosing nothing; a gate gave access to nothing but a tract of muddy churned-up ground and some stagnant pools’.⁵⁷⁰ The wall enclosing ‘nothing’ is reminiscent of the ‘negotiating position for a face’ in ‘Comma’ and signifies another terrifying excess of possibilities. It makes a promise in the text that the emptiness of flat four leaves teasingly unfulfilled, raising questions that offer such deferral as a ‘place’ for everything, while in itself possessing *nothing*. Is it the rendezvous for a love tryst? Do arms deals happen within its walls? Does its ‘emptiness’ facilitate a murder? It is the vibration ‘in between’ the lines of *khōra*, not a place, but a *come*, yet not a coming that ‘arrives’. Thus, the text does not answer these questions; it merely teases with the tones of the thriller, echoing the generic horror in ‘Comma’, and it is the superficiality of such flirtation that is genuinely subversive. The comma evokes a come, marking a pause, with the promise of the rest of the sentence *to come*.

In *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* the silences of this tonal friction efface Saudi Arabian culture because the text privileges the perspective of a white woman. However, this angle does not hide the effects of positioning through any pretence of objectivity. The text exposes the process of effacement that the stabilising of any view requires and the consequent ‘Othering’ it effects, which appears in disappearance as the trace. Frances never discovers The Truth because it cannot be booked into the present in this way; the novel offers only tension(s) and its white privilege highlights the fetish of perspective within the ‘harsh reality’ of race. It is a fetish because it outlines a craving for mastery perceived as ‘lost’ and the desire within writing cannot avoid its lure; hence the ‘centrality’ of the apartment roof in *Eight Months* and the ‘privileged and private view’ it affords.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷⁰ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 75.

⁵⁷¹ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, p. 185.

The gate ‘gave access to nothing’ rather than the house, garden or signs of European mastery Frances expects. In a diary entry, Frances writes: ‘People talk so much about going to the souk that I feel I must be missing something. Perhaps I am blinkered. [Line break] No doubt’.⁵⁷² Acknowledging the line break is important because it underlines the paradoxical certainty within the phrase ‘no doubt’. These examples describe the neither/nor of the ‘something missing’ in *A Change of Climate*, though the double focus in terms of character is actually the proximity offered by Frances and Ralph. This doubling occurs because it is Ralph’s perspective that effaces the Other in the latter novel and also through Mantel’s admission: ‘I was not convinced that Ralph was a man’.⁵⁷³ Missing the ‘point’ of the souk evokes Nancy’s thought that to miss the point is, in fact, *the ‘whole’ point*. This emphasis haunts *A Change of Climate* because the missing child *comes* to define the Eldreds, even those who know ‘neither’ of his birth ‘nor’ his heart-breaking disappearance. Ralph explains this fall-out to his sister Emma, who knows a version of their *truth*:

‘Doesn’t [Anna] want to *live*, for the children she has?’
 ‘It is the one we don’t have that dominates our life,’ Ralph said. ‘It’s what is missing that shapes everything we do. Sometimes she smiles, but have you noticed, Emma, she never laughs. She is crippled inside. She has no joy’.⁵⁷⁴

Nancy warns in ‘Elliptical Sense’ that *we* are truly missing something, probably many things. The empty flat in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and the missing child in *A Change of Climate* suggest the necessity of gesturing towards such a margin within any writing. Ralph thinks it is not Matthew himself who ““dominates our life””, it is his being missing that ““shapes everything”” that remains. This describes an uncomfortable spatiality that clarifies the silence Macherey claims texts to be an effect of – the silence of the missing child does not imply ‘absence’ because his appearance in disappearance retains a sense of agency. It is the *sense* of the ‘tail of the eye’, like the electron as Signifier in the writing of quantum theory, it

⁵⁷² *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, pp. 98-99.

⁵⁷³ The transcript of my interview with Mantel skirts the *silence* of Ralph’s gender in terms of psychoanalysis: ‘[A] man in the audience said, and he prefaced it with an apology saying he was not a hard line Freudian and he didn’t want to be reductive, but that in the early part of [*A Change of Climate*] where Raph, *Ralph* makes a sacrifice of himself for his sister Emma’s career – he has handed her his phallus, was the way the man put it. And I thought that is *absolutely* right’, ‘In Conversation’, 3 September 2012 (both references). Please see Appendix Two, p. 215. The influence of Oliver Sacks’ thought in Mantel’s writing evokes spectres of both Freud and Lacan via the unconscious and ambiguity; these ‘ghosts’ also demonstrate the impertinence of reading Mantel’s work through the ‘origin’ paradigm and offer further avenues for research into her corpus. Furthermore, the duplicity of ‘*Raph*, *Ralph*’ is not an error; it describes a moment where the ‘wrong’ name slipped in.

⁵⁷⁴ *A Change of Climate*, p. 258.

eludes direct line-of-sight, yet its ‘presence’ is a *just perceptible effect* on what is seen, the *overprinting* without a base of Derrida’s thought.⁵⁷⁵

Frances is preoccupied with cartography as a means to ‘locate’ in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, yet the map keeps a secret and a silence like the Red House in *A Change of Climate*. Emma questions why, at this stage in their early adulthood and adolescence, the Eldreds’ children are *now* reconsidering the past and laying claim to it:

I don’t understand the process by which our lives have unravelled. Why this year, and not other years? Because they are growing up, I suppose, and there had to be a turning point; Ralph met this woman, spoke to her no doubt of certain things, and after that everything must change. When a secret has been kept for twenty years, reality has been built around it, in a special way: it is a carapace, it is a safe house. When the walls have been pulled down and the secret has been let out, even to one person, then it’s no good trying to rebuild the walls to the same plan – they are walls to hold nothing. Life must change, it will, it has to.⁵⁷⁶

This ‘now’ highlights a tension, a differentiability, across both novels. It rejects this *walled* stability while simultaneously acknowledging the thwarted desire ‘to rebuild the walls to the same plan’. The building is a decentred metaphor because its ‘origin’ is a secret so shrouded that it subverts any sense of unification, or essence. Yet this extract releases a suspicion that this sense exceeds metaphor and ‘real’ buildings are enclosed spaces, or emptiness – receiving everything, possessing nothing – a ‘talkative’ or *full* silence.⁵⁷⁷ Hence – ‘it’s no good *trying* to rebuild the walls to the same plan – they are walls to hold nothing’ – questions whether or not *all* walls hold ‘nothing’, or rather, if all construction depends upon ‘deconstruction’. The ‘ground’ of the Red House reflects this instability and people become an *effect* of the space, and vice versa or neither/nor. The Eldreds have lived in the Red House since their return from Africa, though their renovations have always been *half-hearted*. Anna suggested once that they should sell, a thought that returns to her after she has discovered Ralph’s (Glasse) secret and asked him to leave:

⁵⁷⁵ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 104. Also, Žižek’s inclusion of the writing of quantum theory as an *effect* of the parallax gap helps unpack this play of perspective as effacement/mastery; within this discourse the electron is the Signifier *par excellence* because it orbits at different energy levels, yet ‘spiralling inwards is simply forbidden’. For further discussion see Žižek, p. 7 and Cox and Forshaw, p. 11.

⁵⁷⁶ *A Change of Climate*, pp. 328-329.

⁵⁷⁷ For further discussion of art as ‘a certain mode of organization around this emptiness’ see Jacques Lacan, ‘Marginal Comments’, trans. by Dennis Porter, in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 128-138 (p. 130).

She remembered how she had tried to sell the place, only a couple of years ago. It was a house with no centre, she had always felt, no room from which you could command other rooms. Sound travelled in its own way; from one of the attics, you could hear the downstairs telephone quite distinctly, but from nearer rooms it couldn't be heard at all. The house had its own conduits, sight-lines. Sometimes one of the children's friends had stayed overnight, without her knowing.⁵⁷⁸

The house is elliptical, perhaps *unheimlich*, since the implication that Anna has hosted other people's children unawares, offers a cruel chiasmus of her own loss. This quotation outlines the silent centre that refuses to present itself and the text then evokes Anna and Ralph as the double focus *within*. Ralph comes to pack his belongings, there is an ellipsis in the writing and this description follows: 'He was conscious of Anna, moving elsewhere in the house. Wherever he was, she wasn't; they *skirted* and avoided each other'.⁵⁷⁹ There is an eccentricity to their behaviour and a double ex-centricity to this elliptical writing. The Red House opens an ellipsis, a silence, as it operates 'with no centre', and *coming* from this silence is a matter endowed with form, a ground on which is traced a figure, the elliptical figure of Ralph and Anna skirting and avoiding one another, a constant shifting between two points. The unexpected paths, or 'conduits', of the house offer its *own* 'sight-lines' – not the effacement necessary for coherent perspective but the *just perceptible effect* of the trace.

Julian also 'occupies' a silent centre, opening a hole in the text. He is the child Anna and Ralph conceived after Matthew's disappearance, which displaces his identity as mirror of his missing brother.⁵⁸⁰ Kit transfers the figure of the baby Julian onto an inexplicable memory of a male playfellow in Africa, though she cannot legitimise this process because of the time and space of Julian's birth. However, the work of differance is no abider of temporal and spatial borders: 'The one is the other in differance, the one is the differance from other'.⁵⁸¹ Julian is also counterpart and opposite to Kit because his elder Eldred sister is both bright and socially well-adjusted, while Julian's *view* positions him as a doubly displaced 'twin', again echoing 'the living shadow child' of the text.⁵⁸² Julian is the *only* Eldred child anxious and fearful of the catastrophic consequences of abduction, developing a neurosis that his younger sister Becky will be snatched. As a character, Julian outlines a secret that cannot be 'booked' in the

⁵⁷⁸ *A Change of Climate*, p. 333.

⁵⁷⁹ *A Change of Climate*, p. 336, my emphasis.

⁵⁸⁰ As discussed in my interview transcript, there is a sense that Ralph is rendered 'impotent' when his first-born son is murdered because, until his affair, he is represented as asexual in the novel.

⁵⁸¹ 'Differance', p. 150.

⁵⁸² *A Change of Climate*, p. 262.

present, though the ‘presence’ of this secret can be sensed from its effects on every family member. It offers an imprint, leaving a mark without ‘marking’:

The problems were not over; at least, his new teachers did not think so. Hard not to nag such a child, at home and at school. Julian was unpunctual, dreamy, sweetly polite but deeply uncaring. His conversation was intelligent but *elliptical*. He was seldom on time for anything; he did not seem to see the point of punctuality. Even when he reached his teens, he never wore a watch. ‘He’s a natural animal,’ Kit said. ‘He goes by the sun.’⁵⁸³

Of course, elliptical ‘talk’ is always intelligent! As with every character in *A Change of Climate*, the text applies a contradictory pressure causing an inward collapse and effecting a ‘dangerous hole’ –without transparency to the process of pressure and collapse. Thus, *A Change of Climate* is a decentred novel, decentred by characters, but ultimately made ex-centric by its elliptical narrative. And this is an effect of the narrative rather than the characters; the ‘silence’ of both novels – a silence that implicates the privileging of western ‘eyes’ and perspectives – is not an absence, or ‘a negative atheology’ that is ‘full’ and can be mastered and understood.⁵⁸⁴ This silence is not absence, but a kind of stuttering, and stuttering is imperfect and elliptical.⁵⁸⁵

Silent ‘antithetical’ laughter as implication⁵⁸⁶

In *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* the narrative becomes elliptical through its descriptions of ‘return’ and perspective, or privilege:

Frances didn’t reply. She felt too tired to think about it any more. Life is not like detective stories. There is a wider scope for interpretation. The answers to all the questions that beset you are not in the facts, which are the greatest illusion of all, but in your own heart, in your own habits, in your limitations, in your fear. She sees the vehicle spin out of control; she sees the panic-stricken driver. Then she sees,

⁵⁸³ *A Change of Climate*, p. 143, my emphasis.

⁵⁸⁴ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 375.

⁵⁸⁵ It also describes Deleuze’s notion of ‘stuttering’, which surfaces in the stammer of Camille Desmoulins in *A Place of Greater Safety*. Moreover, Camille’s speech impediment is not represented by ‘gaps’ in the text, but via ‘a certain silence’. There are no differentiations between his speech and that of other characters, but there is the trace of his stammer in the *tone* because of Camille’s acknowledgement of it in the content: “‘Camille – when you were talking to the Prince, you somehow lost your stutter’” “Mm. Don’t worry. It’s back” “I thought he was going to hit you” “Yes, so did I””. Camille has just challenged a Prince in front of his father (his interlocutor here) *without stuttering*, which suggests a tonal departure between personal and political discourses. Also, the content of “‘Mm. Don’t worry. It’s back’” does not ‘visualise’ the stutter (with a *graphie*) although the frame of the dialogue makes its silence *talk* (*A Place of Greater Safety*, p. 45). Instead, this silence situates difference, or differentiability: ‘it is the structured and differing origin of differences’.

⁵⁸⁶ *The Uncanny*, p. 190.

alternatively, the felon, the corpse, the car door swung open, the body slithering down the embankment: then she sees, in either case, the skid, the slide, the smashed bone, the spilled petrol, the sand, the sun, the sickening flux of human blood... the story is what you make it. In either case, the young man is dead.⁵⁸⁷

There is a sense of infinite exchange within a finite field to this narration of Frances' response to Fairfax's death. It is subjective, yet detached, disorientating while also self-referential: 'Life is not like detective stories'. *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* traces the ground of the thriller, but the answer is *eclipsed* and remains so – only orbited, given space. However, there is a tension between overall ambiguity and the certainty of this statement – 'Life is not like [...] – ascribed to Frances yet simultaneously independent of her. This text is disobedient to genre. *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* is not a reaction to detective fiction, a reversal of it or challenge to its 'box' – it exceeds such pedestrian resistance. This narrative is elliptical, it is therefore not a *box*. The quotation offers Frances' attempt to rationalise or account for the death of Fairfax, but this explanation yields *two* catalysts, *two* origins, those of accident and design. The novel cannot resolve this duplicity into a single unified answer; here the spatial *graphein* of ellipsis surfaces, followed by the return, the repetition, the iteration of – 'the story is what you make it' – that haunts Mantel's corpus. Its appearance (in disappearance) echoes the description in *Giving Up the Ghost* of familial secrecy and its effect – cobbling together a narrative as best you can – that is the 'accident' all narrative amounts to. Beneath this ellipsis, though, there is a friction of perspectives within the narrative, the third person, omniscient yet *infected* by Frances, both displacing and privileging her point of view. The weight of this agency is 'hidden' by the association with Frances, the 'heroine' of the novel. This causes a conflict of 'voice' and perspective that releases the mistrust, the uncertainty, the 'cobbling together' of narrative – this is ellipsis, both describing narration and making it possible.

It is silence that allows for western representations as privileged. Yet silence is not coherently homogeneous, and this privilege is just one possible *tone*; the trace of this silence through a pervasive friction between what is done and what is declared emerges in book after book by Mantel. This silent variable also forms part of the work of her critics, but it is neither absolute nor impenetrable: 'A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game'.⁵⁸⁸ These laws and rules are not

⁵⁸⁷ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, pp. 274-275.

⁵⁸⁸ 'Plato's Pharmacy', p. 69.

harboured within an inaccessible secret because that inaccessibility would signify death, and a text begins *play*. This is its duplicity, its double focus: it cannot exist *and* be transparent. There are, for example, duplicitous differences between the experiences of the Eldreds in *A Change of Climate* and representations of exile in *An Experiment in Love*. Both novels describe children haunted by the unknown of their parents' past, yet the differences of frame and effect are problematic in terms of *silencing*. Karina in *An Experiment in Love* does not ask questions about her heritage and forcefully rejects speaking Polish, but the story of her family's ghosts remains eclipsed – it is a 'cobbling together' that privileges silence. By contrast, *A Change of Climate* does not offer a perfect conclusion, but it does yield *imperfect* revelations and describe a trauma in the Eldreds' past that cannot be 'booked' but *is* acknowledged, an acknowledgement that constitutes most of the novel. The experiences of a white, British couple generate a gradual lure through a diminishing silence, while the untold histories of an immigrant, Polish family catalyse power through a silence without borders. In Said's *Orientalism*, the effect of ontological distancing is an active one, born of 'human effort', which means that the 'position' of silence is not 'an absence', but rather an *agent* in the text.⁵⁸⁹

These experiences of alienation and cultural adaptation connect Frances with Karina through disconnection. Their differences cross generations, motivation and notions of permanence, but their positioning is *marked* by a difference in representation. On the other hand, Mr Kowalski in *Vacant Possession* offers silence as an agent of humour in the text.⁵⁹⁰ This laughter points to the 'place' of the implied reader where there is an exchange with guilt – it is not 'fair' to laugh at Mr Kowalski – it is a moment of darkness, or silence. There is an excess and play to this laughter that is both naughty and nice: '[T]he figure of the double is also a figure of humour [...] The double is funny, in the most strongly antithetical or *duplicitous* sense of "funny"'.⁵⁹¹ Such doubling is without original, and the 'origin' is laughing because play is neither a positive nor a negative term. This laughter is an agent that defies fixed notions of agency and textual 'obedience', it is both self-reflective and *returns* duplicity.

⁵⁸⁹ Said, p. xii.

⁵⁹⁰ For further discussion of Mr Kowalski, *Vacant Possession* and laughter, please see Appendix Two, p. 227.

⁵⁹¹ *The Uncanny*, p. 190, my emphasis.

‘The space of this proximity’: The eccentric gift of the ex-centric centre *not-at-the-centre*

Žižek’s *The Parallax View* offers a section in response to Lacan’s outlining of vision that exposes the impossible position of the subject in relation to the object; it parallels the impossibility of Mantel’s position in relation to her corpus:

[T]o put it in Lacanese – the subject’s gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its “blind spot,” that which is “in the object more than the object itself,” the point from which the object itself returns the gaze. [...] Materialism means that the reality I see is never “whole” – not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it.⁵⁹²

The slippages in the writing of *Vacant Possession* evoke again Macherey’s ‘The Spoken and the Unspoken’, alongside a corporeal sense of *what remains unsaid* as ‘itself’ a repetition. Overall though, there are three broad implications to this *just perceptible effect* of the silence as outlined in this chapter; representations of race, deconstruction of privileged perspective and the – ‘Words create silence’ – of self-reflexive writing, which are all implicated in this silent nonplace. The effacement of the Other through perspective articulates a desire for mastery – such mastery offers a fantasy position whereby the position *seen from* can master everything with a single look. This movement is also why to see without being seen describes the ultimate insignia of power – *revenant*, *khōra*, trace, differance – it is the *inscribed ex-centric centre*, an impossible yet necessary excess of any attempt at mastery. It offers a frame, like Mantel’s *fame*, and this *sense*, as in ‘Elliptical Sense’, offers merely the ‘tail of the eye’, whereas *meaning* implicates an unreasonable solidity. All this framing and gesturing towards the margins is intended to signal the pertinence of the ex-centric and eccentric centre *not-at-the-centre* as means to breach the ‘origin’ paradigm and allow for the adestation of this thesis.

⁵⁹² Žižek, p. 17.

Conclusion ‘There are no endings [...] They are all beginnings’: Giving up as gift

The epigraph is taken from the final paragraph of *Bring Up the Bodies* and the thought outlined in this conclusion is Derrida's 'gift'. The following extract from 'Circumfession' will demonstrate how thinking through such *offering* can help 'conclude' the elliptical path of this thesis, since ellipsis itself denies the finality of arrival. 'Circumfession' synthesises the double focus of gift/ellipsis by gesturing towards the 'giving up' of confession, but only in outline, as Derrida's orbiting of his name-as-gift in the text suggests:

*it is the given name, which I received without receiving in the place where what is received must not be received, nor give any sign of recognition in exchange (the name, the gift)*⁵⁹³

The gift points towards Derrida's other thoughts – trace, *khōra*, differance – and it does so elliptically. For example, in this brief quotation there is the trace of *khōra*, not merely in the mention of the 'given name', but also within this 'place' that receives without position or possession; such effacement is elliptical and its gift is the ex-centric centre – the unavoidable *adestination* of this thesis.⁵⁹⁴ As noted in my introduction, 'Elliptical Sense' describes its author's relationship with Derrida: 'There is something of an *ellipsis* in our very proximity – or rather, our proximity resides in this very ellipsis'.⁵⁹⁵ The proxy in this final chapter is Nancy's thought concerning the gift, or – 'To give what I [do not] have [...] To give is to abandon, to *give up* [...] to the Other'.⁵⁹⁶ This conclusion will summarise the findings of each chapter and highlight the *thoughts* that trace Mantel's corpus in order to restate the original contribution of this thesis. Thus, this summary will consider the impact of the thesis on the existing analysis of Derrida's thought, particularly the potential of the largely ignored ellipsis and where this 'revelation' leaves this philosophical field. The originality described in the thesis abstract is two-fold, with an overbalance towards the significance of initiating a sustained analysis of Mantel's corpus. Such a *weighing-in* will also consider how the thesis has established a new field for literary research with many potential avenues for future projects.

⁵⁹³ 'Circumfession', p. 84, original emphasis.

⁵⁹⁴ 'The Spatial Arts', p. 11.

⁵⁹⁵ Nancy, p. 175.

⁵⁹⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Love and Community', European Graduate School (2001) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMFuH2eECGQ>> [accessed 26 August 2009].

‘We take up or *give* signs; we make signs’: Ambiguity and the ‘Author’⁵⁹⁷

The interview transcript (see appendix one and two) illustrates Mantel’s frustration with the general critical appraisal of her texts as *astonishingly* different: ‘There’s a perception that my books completely change one to the other [...] but people only look superficially at genre and setting and timeframe’.⁵⁹⁸ This thesis propounds instead that these differences are in fact a ‘shared’ characteristic (a gift) and that *all* the texts can be described as elliptical due to a pervasive ambivalence, dark humour and sense of narrative return. Moreover, this nonsuperficial re-evaluation concludes by *drawing together* the threads of Mantel’s corpus and highlighting these differences – this complete change, ‘one to the other’ – as *reiteration*, repetition, or Derrida’s notion of iteration. Mantel as ‘Hilary Mantel’ also unites them because, like Cromwell in the Tudor trilogy, she has risen and risen so that her dizzying fame now shadows, *and* is ‘the living shadow’ author of her corpus. In February 2013 Mantel was criticised in the tabloids for maligning the Duchess of Cambridge when in fact she was maligning media representations of her. Following ‘Kate Gate’, she acknowledged the ambiguity of her writing, but explained that if the *LRB* lecture and essay *introduced* ‘an’ ambiguity, ‘it’s an ambiguity that’s meant to be there’.⁵⁹⁹ This fantastical level of authorial agency underscores a consistent contradiction in Mantel’s ‘body’ of work – an oscillation between oscillating points – a tight sense of control to the writing, always already shot through with uncertainty, or Derrida’s notion of content and *tone*, the difference between ‘what is done and what is declared’ of my thesis title page.⁶⁰⁰ What *vibrates* within this nonplace is shared by all her texts, plus Mantel’s thought and her ‘figure’ (which the thought endows) pervade this double focus of control and uncertainty. She both occupies and absents these positions, delighting in playfulness, eclipse and ellipsis while also insisting that any ambiguity in the work is one she *herself* has ‘placed’ there. Summarising the work of each chapter will help consolidate how the ellipsis has emerged from this thesis (re)reading Mantel’s writing, and the implications of these findings for future research into her work.

Chapter one conducted a literature review of the limited material available on Mantel’s texts and problematised the search for an ‘origin’ *to explain*, which all this material works to

⁵⁹⁷ ‘Differance’, p. 138, my emphasis.

⁵⁹⁸ ‘In Conversation’, 3 September 2012. Please see Appendix Two, p. 202.

⁵⁹⁹ Anne McElvoy, *Night Waves*, BBC Radio 3, 7 March 2013 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01r0zr4>> [accessed 1 April 2013]. This interview followed Mantel’s acceptance of the David Cohen Prize for her ‘body’ of work, rather than *just* the Tudor books; the award is referred to colloquially as the ‘British Nobel’.

⁶⁰⁰ ‘*Khōra*’, p. 119.

fetishise. The chapter considered the importance of a stable notion of the ‘Gothic’ for Horner and Zlosnik’s “‘Releasing Spirit from Matter’” and Spooner’s “[T]hat Eventless Realm”. This decentring also undermined Stewart’s ‘A Word in Your Ear’ in terms of history, while recognising that this text allows more scope for the play of Mantel’s writing. Derrida’s thoughts on ‘play’ were elliptically described by the movement of the chapter, so as to work *against* the stabilising paradigm of all three of these secondary texts. Play also inscribes the relationships in and between this material, Horner and Zlosnik’s article pairs with Spooner’s chapter in *London Gothic* via the focus on gothicism, whereas Stewart’s essay echoes “[T]hat Eventless Realm” through exploring *Beyond Black*. The status of repression and return as ‘Gothic’ tropes was challenged in the chapter through the pitting of one reading against another, which yielded similarities but no outright ‘victor’. The done/declared difference was observed within the gothic criticism in the relish for the unexplained alongside an ultimate desire to explain it. This pitting of agendas exposed the anxiety of these texts, but that historical discourse has less to prove than gothicism as an unassailable origin for meaning. The chapter concluded in agreement with Knox’s work ‘Giving Flesh’, which suggests that Mantel ‘is no writer of the Gothic’, yet this conclusion simultaneously rejected the article’s argument with a refusal to substitute the gothic with any other ‘origin’, for example, the autobiographical. Overall chapter one worked to decentre the ‘original’ criticism through focusing on its inherent anxieties.

The second chapter developed the work of the first by ‘exploding’ the gothic as origin for meaning in Mantel’s writing, in particular it used the ‘centre’ itself to problematise the ‘Gothic’. It offered a reading of *Fludd* with an emphasis on Derrida’s notion of the affirmation-that-is-not-positive gesturing towards a ‘place’ of deconstruction; this yielded a proliferation of ‘masks’ in the text – alchemy, the village, the curate and the statues – that elliptically described Derrida’s thoughts on ‘space’. It is important to note here the significance of Fludd *giving* his name to the novel, like a gift, because such gestures weave Mantel’s texts together. Chapter two concluded by gesturing towards the *revenant* as not a place, but a *come*, and a means to develop the sense of a ‘duplicity’ to the rotten and the virus in the next chapter. Chapter three then exploded the body as origin through doubling Derrida’s thoughts – *khōra* and *revenant* – in order to highlight the *just perceptible trace* of ‘the empty space within’. This challenged the relevance of French feminist theory for the work of the thesis using Spivak’s essay ‘A Literary Representation of the Subaltern’ from her text, *In Other Worlds*. This section engaged with the writing of Irigaray and Kristeva then

utilised the elliptical sense of orgasm as means to break-out of this ‘sterile quarrel’, and yielded a very different *excess*. This groundwork allowed a reading of *Beyond Black* to emerge that outlined the significance of Derrida’s *revenant*; a thought described in *Specters of Marx* through *Hamlet* and also in McMullen’s film *Ghost Dance*, which ‘stars’ Derrida as *himself* while simultaneously eclipsing him. The chapter rejected any privilege inscribed on The Body (as transcendental signifier) through the emphasis on *voice* in Mantel’s novel. It concluded with a line from *Ghost Dance* that describes the power of ghosts as ‘hiding between the letters [...] jumping out between the words’, which then allowed for the complexity of the autobiographical ‘I’ to *appear* in chapter four.⁶⁰¹

The fourth chapter developed the elliptical description of *khōra* initiated at the beginning of chapter three in order to explode a stable autobiography to the narrative of ‘Hilary Mantel’. This interrogation involved confronting the contradictory position of interviews with the author, including my own, as sites for meaning, and released the neologism ‘auto-biography’ as means to describe the oscillation of this process. This chapter introduced laughter as a trace in Mantel’s writing, *and* as elliptical, through exploring the vibrations of the ‘I’ of *Giving Up the Ghost*. Writing as ‘mask’, highlighted in chapter two, surfaced again through an engagement with de Man’s article ‘Autobiography as de-facement’. The analysis of the memoir elliptically described *khōra* as ‘marked’ by receiving all properties while in *itself* possessing nothing, which began to outline a silence in Mantel’s work to galvanise the final chapters of the thesis. This sense of reception without possession as the working of auto-biography was strengthened by a comparison of Mantel’s writing with that of Frame, through the former’s introduction to the latter’s novel, *Faces in the Water*. The chapter concluded with the oscillation of off-balance laughter in ‘Clinical Waste’, a text where the ‘I’ of auto-biography emerges *independently* of the author.

Chapter five developed the silence in Mantel’s writing gifted by the work of chapter four. It combined Macherey’s chapter ‘The Spoken and the Unspoken’ from *A Theory of Literary Production* with Deleuze’s essay ‘He Stuttered’ in order to instigate ‘a certain matrix of inquiry’, that *entirely* escaped certainty. The chapter read this work on silence through Said’s notion of the west as a self-reflexive ‘great original’, so as to trace representations of the west in Mantel’s corpus as both silenced and silencing. This process facilitated an elliptical

⁶⁰¹ *Ghost Dance* (1983).

description of Derrida's thoughts on trace, particularly in terms of writing and race via Hall's theory of the 'floating signifier'. Chapter five furthered this reading through analysis of the short story 'Comma' and *A Change of Climate*, with reference to *Beyond Black* and *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*. This discussion acknowledged that the chapter's work initiated a two-fold movement to be concluded by another theoretical interruption in chapter six – specifically *viewpoint* and *ellipsis*. Through combining the 'comma' of the short story and the *Gryphaea* fossil in *A Change of Climate*, this chapter revealed that which is elliptically missing from the text as itself a *tone* of silence. Chapter six culminated the work of chapter five by developing the implications of the silence previously 'highlighted'. This amalgamation was achieved through a clarifying of any such silence as a 'frame' with all the visual/spatial privilege that word implies. It continued the discussion of race through emphasising that the relationship between Same and Other is *always already* a battle of perspective and viewpoint; this allowed the spectres of Lacan's writing to surface through the desired mastery of 'vision' and the fantasy of the total view, in which there is no 'place' for the view of the Other. This chapter revisited *A Change of Climate* by demonstrating its tonal friction with *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, particularly in terms of the 'something missing' of the elliptical narrative. It outlined several implications of 'Mantelian' silence through elliptical description of *differance*, Derrida's most famous thought and one that gestures backwards through the thesis towards all the other thoughts – also inscribed by sight lines – while simultaneously pointing towards the gift of the conclusion; this gift is not a 'place', but an offering, and a *come*. The implications (of silence) fall broadly into three areas – representations of race, deconstruction of privileged perspective and the self-reflexive nature of writing – all at work within this silent nonplace and gesturing towards the *ex-centricity* (and *eccentricity*) of the *ex-centric centre not-at-the-centre*. The west is the exception *and* the rule of Mantel's writing, offering the irresolvable oscillation of perspective as neither omniscience nor effacement, while also occupying both positions simultaneously. 'It', this nonplace, gifts the duplicity of repetition and laughter; *ex-centric*, *eccentric* and repeated 'the same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has exactly the same centre, *the origin has played*'.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰² 'Ellipsis', p. 373, original emphasis.

‘You’ll know that’s not true and I know it’s not true’: The *repetitions* of Mantel’s corpus

This ‘truth’ oscillating between the ‘I’ and ‘you’ of the subheading is that Mantel’s corpus offers repetitions and departures, or repetition *with* the first time, and the findings of this thesis support such a ‘truth’. First, there is the sense that imperfection is enabling for Mantel’s protagonists, an eccentricity – Fludd, the giant O’Brien, Cromwell – that offers an ex-centric centre: ‘It is here that the hesitation between writing as decentring and writing as affirmation of play is infinite’.⁶⁰³ Importantly for this conclusion, ‘the eccentric’ also relates to the gift, or rather the gift, as Nancy suggests, as a giving up and a giving what you do not have. This do-not-have is *true* of the representation of Alison’s gift of ‘sight’ and is reiterated at the end of *Fludd* – ‘Every possession is a loss, Fludd said. But equally, every loss is a possession’.⁶⁰⁴ The *revenant* gives what it does not have, or possess (it is *itself* a ‘place’ of reception not possession) the ability to see and *be seen*, which is the recognition of the neither/nor of possession and loss – to see and be seen is a process, or ellipsis.

Another repetition *with* the first time that is more ‘obviously’ elliptical is the iteration of the double focus of characterisation; for example, Father Angwin/ Fludd, Alison/Colette and Sylvia/Lizzie Blank in *Vacant Possession*, plus the relationship of Fludd/Judd as descriptive of the trace of the other in the self-same of differance. Fludd and Lizzie Blank offer a particularly complex duplicity within these double foci because Fludd’s features are erased the moment *following* perception while Lizzie Blank is a *blank*, an effacement, a ‘mask’ for Muriel Axon. Here again is the ‘sense’ of the *revenant*, but also the *just perceptible effect* of the trace. Mantel’s corpus also emphasises the *privilege* of the ‘last word’ rather than the ‘origin’, *first* word or beginning. Consider these moments of having-the-last-word: Colette cannot resist ‘thinking’ that Alison will regret absorbing people’s pain later, the ‘I’ of *Giving Up the Ghost* declares a rejection of the last word, while occupying its ‘place’ through such a declaration, and the established historical reputation of Cromwell is redeemed through his point of view being privileged rather than effaced as malignant. Yet Mantel’s writing is also consistently suspicious of ‘essence’ or essences – “‘Ah, this is the *essence* of the apartheid policy, my dear. The government wishes to return *them* to their tribal areas”” – offers a snippet of conversation from *A Change of Climate* that suggests essence is impossible to

⁶⁰³ ‘Ellipsis’, p. 375.

⁶⁰⁴ *Fludd*, p. 166.

‘locate’, and that the search for it is often fatal to those unaware of the urgency behind such a search.⁶⁰⁵ Instead there is the repetition of the power of what remains unseen, unessential – ‘invisible hands plucking at [Ralph’s] clothes’ – in *A Change of Climate* offers a link to *Every day is mother’s day* and the experiences of Evelyn and Muriel Axon in their haunted house, strengthened by the unwanted ‘visitors’ that haunt both novels.⁶⁰⁶ Furthermore, Anna’s ‘dizzying lightness at her centre, a space under her heart’, echoes Alison’s very uncomfortable body in *Beyond Black* and also the ambiguous ‘I’ of ‘Hilary Mantel’ in ‘Clinical Waste’. This doubted physicality extends to the sexual act, which is repeatedly eclipsed in Mantel’s corpus. The two female characters glancingly sexualised are Carmel in *An Experiment in Love*, young and sexually active, and Emma in *A Change of Climate*, mistress to Felix Palmer, though they are more obviously *tonally* connected by the lines of poetry that run through both their heads.

In terms of methodology, this thesis is indebted to the rigor of Belsey’s essay ‘Textual Analysis as a Research Method’ and Derrida’s confession in the film bearing his name that he has not read many books, but those he has read, he has read *very* carefully. Each chapter departs for ‘something else’, yet such *insistent* rereading of the ‘same’ sections of text connects them while also contributing to the overall work of the thesis, and its originality. Returning to the text, again and again, offers the reiteration of ‘Elliptical Sense’ too, which is of course itself a rereading of ‘Ellipsis’: ‘Let’s go back; let’s repeat the text again’.⁶⁰⁷ This offers a hyper-intertextuality, and hyperactivity is an appropriate metaphor for such a self-consciously, self-referential corpus as Mantel’s provides for this thesis.

Despite its ‘situation’ as an English and critical theory dissertation, the thesis does partially contribute to philosophical work on Derrida’s thought as well, though it is perhaps a contribution more *situating* than situated. Ellipsis offers a methodology that reinvigorates the complex and profound implications of Derrida’s thinking, while simultaneously yielding a reading process that allows for decentring within texts (as a necessity) for embracing play. This thesis has demonstrated the validity of Nancy’s statement that ellipsis describes *the entire orbit* of Derrida’s thought, by undertaking to *begin* this process without ever attempting to shut-it-down. Regarding the second ‘fold’ of the thesis, there is undoubtedly

⁶⁰⁵ *A Change of Climate*, p. 76, my emphases.

⁶⁰⁶ *A Change of Climate*, p. 120.

⁶⁰⁷ Nancy, p. 184.

potential for future projects on Mantel's writing. One avenue for further research is Mantel's journalism, either work limited strictly to its complex position in her corpus, or developing on from my elliptical readings of her fiction and memoir. Other areas alluded to in this thesis include the influence of Sacks' writing in Mantel's texts, and analysing ambiguity using this discourse would involve an engagement with psychoanalysis and the unconscious. There are also Mantel's thoughts and her position on feminism, which has been briefly interrogated in this thesis, but merely as a means to continue with the Derridean trajectory in an 'aware' and gendered context. This thesis has had to exclude several of Mantel's texts, including the large, historical novels for reasons of space and remit, but these works offer promise for future research too. Mantel's fame will catalyse a reassessment of her work within the academy over the next decade; this thesis has stolen a march on the introductory texts that will appear in response to media attention and her raised profile. In this sense, coupled with the potential of ellipsis as a means to read decentring in *any* text, this thesis is an original contribution to knowledge and – as the initiator of a field of inquiry – a seminal text. Necessarily this 'seminality' concludes by 'giving up' and it offers, in this gesture of giving, Mantel's last words (to date) from the close of her now infamous novel, *Bring Up the Bodies*:

There are no endings. If you think so you are deceived as to their nature. They are all beginnings. Here is one.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁸ Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012), p. 407.

Appendix One Questions

Hilary Mantel and Eileen J. Pollard, 'In Conversation', 3 September 2012, Burleigh Salterton, UK.

All my questions are a mixture of part research/part curiosity, although the two are of course difficult to separate!

1. You have talked widely about your late (and sudden) success as partially resulting from a difficulty of categorisation. Do you think that this could be to do with the absence of stabilised 'origins' within your texts that would support the popular notion of such categories – i.e. the thriller as a secret *explained*, the historical novel as 'the truth', the autobiography as linear?
2. What are your thoughts on what might be termed 'motifs' in your work, such as characters searching their own reflection for meaning, slammed doors and footsteps heard overhead or in the night? What significance do you think these 'lightly drawn' *traces* have in your writing?
3. The film *Ghost Dance* (1989) is a great favourite of mine; in it, the philosopher Derrida is asked by a postgraduate student whether he *believes* in ghosts. Do you believe in ghosts?
4. Where do you think 'the author' is in their text?
5. What do you consider is the relationship between humour and writing in your work?
6. Most of your characters are openly flawed; I celebrate their imperfection and imperfection generally, do you? If so, why?
7. I delivered a paper comparing *Every day is mother's day* with Nicola Barker's novel *Darkmans* (2007) because both texts suggest that ghosts can father children. Have you read any of Barker's books? If so, which ones and what did you think?
8. Who are your preferred contemporary writers?

9. You use the dot, dot, dot of the ellipsis frequently in your work. What draws you to it?
10. What does the notion of ‘the gift’ mean to you, and your writing?
11. What is the relationship between a book and its sequel? Or a sequel and its ‘book’?
Especially in terms of the sequels within your corpus.
12. Of all your books, you have said that *A Change of Climate* was the hardest to write – does that make it different? Does it stand out? And which is your ‘favourite’ of your books?

Appendix Two Interview

Hilary Mantel and Eileen J. Pollard, 'In Conversation', 3 September 2012, Burleigh Salterton, UK.

EP: So the questions intrigued you.

HM: Yes, they did. I can't answer all of them.

EP: They are a bit mean some of them I think.

HM: I suppose they're not really susceptible of answers, but they did, you know, spark off thoughts.

EP: That's great, I think that was my intention really.

HM: Yes, the more every time I think about them. What do you want to do, how do you want to play it? I can't remember what you asked first. Oh, yes, the text... the new readers and categorisation.

EP: Yeah.

HM: I think there are two different levels of answer to this question, and one's the one that has meaning to journalists really, what I've been saying about the difficulty for my publisher of working out what kind of author I am, and hence the difficulty in marketing me.

EP: Yeah.

HM: And there's a perception that my books completely change one to the other, you'll know that's not true [*EP agrees*] and I know it's not true, but people only look superficially at genre and setting and timeframe. And they say, 'Oh we don't know if she's a historical novelist or a contemporary novelist, and *we don't know her views*, we don't know where she's coming from, so she's got no trademark'. And I think that makes it difficult as a publishing proposition.

EP: Yeah, I think you're right.

HM: But there's a more interesting answer, which I think is to do with the fact that, my books do require of the reader quite a large toleration of ambivalence.

EP: Yeah, and ambiguity.

HM: Yes, and not being told the end of stories and of the ellipsis.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: And the problem tends to come when you gain a rush of new readers, as I have.

EP: Yeah, I'd not thought of that actually.

HM: And, many of my new readers bring with them, I suspect, the same expectations that they bring to historical genre fiction, and they're not going to be satisfied. And, therefore what – I have this great body of new readers – what I don't know is if they're all mutinous and muttering.

EP: Right.

HM: And whether a great proportion of them have thrown down the book in disgust, I mean they make themselves pretty vocal online, you know.

EP: Yeah, because you've got a huge kind of blog following now.

HM: It seems, I tend to keep away from it.

EP: Yeah, I mean I stumbled on it by accident actually, but it's quite sizeable really.

HM: Yes, and as, as you will know, the reception varies from the highly intelligent to the completely puzzled.

EP: *[Laughs]* Yeah.

HM: And, the only thing a writer can do is write what they'd, what she'd like to read herself, I think. So you pitch it at a certain level and of course the difficulty is with that is that by the time you're a writer you're also a professional reader. It's the great part of what you do, so you're an expert at reading if you like, and you are only interested in books that you find challenging in some way. Whereas this is not the expectation of the average reader, their expectation is entertainment. And I've never wanted to be one of these people who just writes for literary critics.

EP: No, absolutely, well who do you reach in that kind of scenario really.

HM: Yes, but I've tried to deliver the satisfactions of story, but at the same time build something self-referential into each book. I mean I think if you look at *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* it's probably a good instance because that is all about areas of mystery and areas of darkness, which are never penetrated. And, all the time that book is telling you, life is not like detective fiction.

EP: Yeah, and yet it's interesting because one of my supervisors, he loves that book, and he wanted me to write about it as a thriller, you know, because it plays with that kind of genre.

HM: Yes.

EP: But it also plays really carefully, and cleverly, with this whole idea of empty spaces and things that you can't actually access, whereas the thriller, you know, in a kind of straightforward way I suppose reveals the answer.

HM: You can break down the door, and beyond it you see.

EP: Yeah, absolutely, it might take you to the end, but finally, you do get the answer.

HM: Yes, that's right, as you do in a detective story. The thing is that even the existence of the body is problematical...

EP: Absolutely, yeah.

HM: ... in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, you never know if there was someone in the case.

EP: Yeah, you only know that it has moved slightly.

HM: That's right, yes, and of course the women around Frances are walking around veiled, and in one instance the body that she thinks... that purports to be underneath is not...

EP: No, it's one of the most haunting moments actually, I find.

HM: It's quite scary isn't it?

EP: ... she's knocked out of the way, and it's this kind of sense of him being, well, she makes the... she has the realisation that this isn't a female body because of the confidence of the walk and the physicality... but you still don't know, but there's something really unsettling about that moment. I've actually just been writing about *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and I was looking at it in relation to 'Comma', you know, your short story.

HM: Yes.

EP: And it's the same sort of... it's playing with the same sort of idea, I think, that there's something beyond words that's going on here, that is evoked through words, which I really like, it's those points that really fascinate me about your writing.

HM: I had a strange experience with regard to that passage because I read from the book in Germany, and you know when people are working in their second language and they're very fluent, but they have to listen very carefully, so you tend to get a very attentive, still audience. And, I was on a stage, and the hall was wide rather than long, so you saw the whole sweep of these people, and I had the extraordinary experience of seeing an audience all move together to the edge of their seats.

EP: Wow!

HM: Just at that moment, when she comes into contact with the veiled figure, and, of course, one thinks that's a figure of speech. But I suppose it does illustrate how it plays with the thriller genre, and even the horror genre.

EP: Yeah, well and I think 'Comma's like that as well... the child, or the young baby, in the chair lets out this cry that's not quite human, it is quite horrifying actually, but it – one of the ways that I've been talking about it is in terms of a sort of neuralgia, which is what one of the critics I've been reading – uses that word about these points in fiction where it sort of vibrates, you can't quite put your finger on it, and it is that, it's kind of horrifying but it's mysterious. And you're right, it's playing with a couple of genres, at least, I think really.

HM: Yes, and of course, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, it was only long after I'd written it that I became conscious of how it fitted into this gothic, as... One of the few conditions under which one could actually write a modern gothic is the rare circumstance of living somewhere like Saudi Arabia, because those conditions are your life, the... the immurement, the... trying to construe the intentions of other women about you, who may or may not be your friend. The total dependence on a male figure, who...

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: ... who, you know, as Frances suspects, may be in a sort of covert conspiracy with all other male figures.

EP: Yeah.

HM: And the fact that the woman has to wonder if she's going mad.

EP: Yeah, yeah. And there's a point as well at which Andrew talks about how she is... hysterical, essentially, the figure of the hysterical woman, that if she just sort of calmed down and thought about it logically than she'd know that there was the right answer. But he's very much, like in the gothic novel, he's in the public domain you know...

HM: That's right.

EP: ... he's autonomous, so you're right, I'd not thought of it like that... but she's quite incarcerated really.

HM: Yes, and although she knows logically that he's not part of any oppressing class, she can't help think that just simply the fact of being a man amongst other men is what is giving him the edge in the situation... And being female – being female and being victimised in that society are almost synonymous. And of course when I was writing it, I was just writing what was, it was only later that I saw how it fitted into, an eighteenth-century form, but it was the modern version. And, of course, as you see in that book there's the fourth flat, in *Vacant Possession*, there's the... well, I think in *Mother's Day* there's the room one doesn't go in to.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: And then in *Vacant Possession*...

EP: It becomes a room that a child is in, doesn't it.

HM: Yes, the sort of semi-demonic child.

EP: Yeah, he's infected by the atmosphere.

HM: Yes, that's right.

EP: And when Muriel goes round and she's impersonating a cleaning woman, essentially, I think she's quite sort of quietly satisfied that somebody's occupying that room that even her and her mother were afraid to go into.

HM: Yes, yes... I had a lot of fun with that! *[Laughing]*.

EP: She's a great character!

HM: Well, she's... Muriel's... in *Mother's Day* is a great unnegotiable lump, but in *Vacant Possession* she's able to transform herself at will.

EP: Yeah, it's true.

HM: None of her transformations are particularly advantageous to her, I was fascinated by the idea of the self as empty vessel, you know, into which Muriel can pour... well she thieves the identities of the people around her.

EP: She does, doesn't she. She mimics them, doesn't she... because there's that woman, there's a woman... I think it's in the factory, I can't remember what she's called...

HM: Poor Mrs Wilmot.

EP: That's it, Mrs Wilmot, yeah! Poor Mrs Wilmot, yeah!

HM: When Poor Mrs Wilmot retires, Muriel takes on her identity.

EP: Yeah, she does... And she does her own thing with it as well, she... it's in a different context, because I think it's in a factory that Poor Mrs Wilmot works, isn't it? And then, she uses the identity somewhere else.

HM: Yes, well yeah... Poor Mrs Wilmot works in the tobacco factory, and then she... Muriel becomes a hospital cleaner and persecutes Mrs Axon.

EP: Oh yeah, of course.

HM: And, it's as Poor Mrs Wilmot I think, that she goes to Mr Kowalski's house as a lodger.

EP: Yeah, it is, and it all gets very confusing in the house because she has to do multiple costume changes!

HM: That's right!

EP: *[Laughter]* Yeah, and he goes, he goes... because he's obviously got some sort of underlying paranoia himself and it only feeds that really...

HM: Yes.

EP: ... comings and goings of people that he doesn't recognise.

HM: Yes, that's right, and its misconstruing of the language and his understanding of the postman's notes as sinister, when he writes who do you think I am Olga Korbut? *[Laughs]*⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁹ *Vacant Possession*: 'A letter came, pushed under the door. There was a rude message from the postman, saying would they please unseal the letter box, having regard to his bad back, who did they think he was, Olga Korbut? Muriel picked it up. It was addressed to one of her, to Lizzie Blank. Good thing Mr K didn't see it.

And, I knew when I was growing up a lot of children of refugees, you know Polish and Ukrainian people, who'd come in one way or the other. It was a long time before I suspected that they might not all be 'goodies' and that some of those people, particularly the Ukrainians – you don't know what their past has been – but a number of them were notably paranoid, I think.

EP: I suppose it's with the, because it's such a... I suppose it's like the opposite of *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* in a way, it's kind of a shifting into a totally different culture, and the effects on Frances in terms of the hysteria and the effects on the character in *Vacant Possession* in terms of extreme paranoia.

HM: Yes, yes, I mean those people lived more in the imaginary homeland that they had lost, which is no longer a physical place but a place they carried in their heads. And slippages and misconstructions in language... England, English being so plural in meaning that it's very hard to be at home in the language, I think, and very sure...

EP: Yeah, there isn't stability is there, in language.

HM: Yes, you can be fluent, but not fluent enough, it's... and so you... I did used to wonder how much of it was not understanding English perfectly, because it kept one from completely adapting to the new society. I did know people who were wholly adapted and then I knew people who, you know, they would be ninety-eight per cent of the way there, but you would find out from their daughters that in just two per cent of their psyche – was persecuted, and might give strange meanings to the mere fact of a car that appeared to be following them, or something like that.

EP: Yeah, it's a kind of haunting past as well I suppose.

HM: Yes, I mean they felt in some way that the past would catch up with them, whether it was the Nazis or whether it was the Communists, or whether it was some memory they'd repressed of course, because some of those people had seen pretty horrible things. And you know it's again the thing, you always look at such people and you wonder 'At what price did you survive?'

EP: Absolutely.

HM: Was it someone else's... have you substituted yourself for... someone else.

EP: Yeah, and do you feel you made the right decision, and what would life have been like if you hadn't come here, would you not have survived, would it have been different... well I mean it inevitably would have been. Yeah, it's interesting, it's interesting about English, because I think there's something... because obviously we both grew up in the same place, initially! There's something about northern humour and language I think, which I think is one of my questions, about humour in your writing... because it is terrifically funny in places, you know, to me particularly because I have that same idea of a northern humour, which plays with language. I suppose if you don't have a particular fluency in English, those

He'd have thought it was a letter bomb, or something. She sneaked it off upstairs', p. 147. Mr K ultimately thinks he has received a note signed by Olga Korbut, p. 158.

meanings are lost, because it's all about pushing the meaning further along with that kind of humour. Yeah, I wonder what you think...

HM: That's a good point actually, they might have wondered why everyone around them, in the north, why everyone seemed... giggling all the time – when apparently circumstances were quite adverse.

EP: Quite severe, yeah.

HM: It's... Yes... I have trouble, it's one of the questions that comes up from journalist-type interviewers, and I try to say, 'Oh look it's nothing special, we're all like that, this is the north', but I don't know whether they believe me. That there is a kind of mordant vein, and it's a laughter in the dark, and it's laughter in the face of adversity.

EP: Yeah, absolutely, and it's a kind of release and a playfulness I think, and it's certainly my experience of it that it can get you through some very difficult times. There's a good northern expression when things are all going horribly wrong – 'Well, you know, if I felt any better I don't think I could stand it!'

HM: [*Laughs*] Yes, yes!

EP: And that kind of epitomises that sort of northern humour for me. But what I love about it in your work, is that I've not really found it anywhere else, done so effectively in writing, you know, because it's very much about, about I suppose conversation and the way that people interact together, but it's there in the writing and it comes out. I mean particularly in passages in *Fludd*, there are passages in *Fludd* I re-read regularly because I just find them so hilarious [*HM laughs*]. Of you know, working-class men wouldn't tell you where they were going – what business was it of yours – that kind of thing!⁶¹⁰ And is that something that comes out quite naturally in your work?

HM: Yes in that, although I suppose from the lit. crit. point of view this is a very disappointing thing to say [*EP laughs*] – there is such a connection between one's personality and what emerges on the page. And there are things one can only, well not only speak of autobiographically, but they are very much things sucked in from the environment, from when you were very small.

EP: Yeah.

HM: And... I think there is one thing that bothers me about my continual need to crack jokes though, and right at the end of your questions you asked what contemporary authors I admire.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: And I found that a very difficult question, you know, partly because you... tend to admire one book and perhaps not a person's other books.

EP: Not everything, yeah.

⁶¹⁰ This is actually a line from Mantel's memoir *Giving Up the Ghost*: 'In Hadfield, men had no form of farewell that I could remember. If they were going out, why should they mention it? It wasn't your business', p. 123.

HM: But it did make me realise, I mean for example; I like Annie Proux, her short stories, not her novels so much, I like Cormac McCarthy, but not *The Road*... And it made me realise that I have a great affinity for that strain in American writing, that is about hard-scrabble existence, and the under-class, and rural poverty. And of course what I realised is that the Americans are able to take it tragically.

EP: Whole-heartedly.

HM: Yes, without feeling the need to point up its absurdities all the time. And I think to some extent, that the Scots and Irish, they do a better job on it, I think... authors like John McGahern...

EP: Yeah, oh he's great!

HM: ... and even modern authors, contemporary authors, like Andrew O'Hagan, who write about Scotland, but... and so this makes me feel what's going wrong here, why when the English write about poverty why is it comic, and I think it's because it's so mixed up with the idea of a class system.

EP: Yeah, yeah, because often that's where the humour arises from, isn't it.

HM: Exactly, yes, the quintessential English story of poverty is that somebody's trying to rise from it, a young man trying to get on in the world, the Joe Lamptons and all his predecessors.⁶¹¹ And the reader is at one remove, horrified and laughing at the absurd gaffs he makes, and at the same time indignant on his behalf, because how would he know which fork to use?

EP: Yeah, you don't know, if you don't know.

HM: But because it's predicated, that kind of writing is predicated on someone, meeting a series of invisible trip wires and tripping over every one, and it inclines to comedy and absurdity. So I ask myself, can an English writer write... about... poverty is too narrow a word... Can an English writer write about the working-class struggle?

EP: Yeah.

HM: About working-class life without making it absurd, and I can't find many examples of where we do it.

EP: That's really interesting, you know, because you mentioned John McGahern, and there really isn't that in his work.

HM: No.

EP: But it's not an unpleasant kind of seriousness, it's one you become completely immersed in. I remember reading *The Leavetaking* by him, and it made me *sob*, you know, absolutely

⁶¹¹ *Room at the Top* (1957) is a novel written by John Braine that was made into a film in 1959. It concerns the social ambitions of northerner Joe Lampton.

breaks your heart, there's nothing clichéd about it. But it is hard, you're right, it's hard to think about an English writer who writes about that kind of pushing yourself forward in the world...

HM: That's right, in his memoir where he writes about his mother dying in the house, and they are taking the house apart around her, they carry the furniture away whilst she's in an upstairs bedroom and she can hear them – and it is tragic, it's heart-rending. And there's a kind of daring in that, it would be very daring for an English writer to try to do it.

EP: Yeah, it would.

HM: And as you know, I'm always conscious myself that the tragic and the absurd are a hairs-breadth away...

EP: Yeah, because one of the things that I like about your humour, apart from that it does make me laugh out loud, is that it does, for me as a reader, and when you're writing a PhD you tend to see yourself as everybody, every reader!

HM: Yes, of course.

EP: But I think that it makes you reflect on the material in a way, because there are certainly moments in both *Fludd* and in *Giving Up the Ghost* where you laugh, and then almost the minute you've laughed, even if it's internally, you think – 'I shouldn't have laughed at that, that wasn't funny'.

HM: Yes, yes.

EP: And it makes you, I suppose it makes you return to the text feeling slightly different... and it is what you said earlier about your writing being challenging, and some readers feel more or less comfortable with that, but to me the humour in a way is kind of deceptive because it's not straightforward. It's not that you read through it and have a jolly good laugh and you put the book down and you feel great, it's part of that thinking process for me in a way I suppose.

HM: Yes, I mean it's interesting the way it comes about because of course if someone said to me – 'Be funny!' – write us a funny story or a funny script, I couldn't do it.

EP: Yeah, it's the death of comedy being asked to be funny!

HM: But I often find that what it is, is that you put something on the screen and then you do the equivalent of a double take and it's only then that you realise it's funny, it's... so it has a previous existence as... it has a moment where you haven't perceived it's nature. And then it's as if, it holds up a mirror and there you are... and I sometimes actually cover my mouth, so transgressive does it feel at times, but it's a look what I said, without meaning to.

EP: Yeah, that's really interesting because I mean that is how it feels to read it, obviously from a different point of view, but you have no... I suppose in the same way that you almost feel you have no agency over the humour that bounces back at you, when you read you have no agency over the laugh, you know, it is interesting. But I love it, I have to say, I really, really like it, and *Fludd* still makes me laugh, which I think is a great achievement, I've been

reading your work consistently and studying it for five or six years and it still makes me laugh!

HM: It's great if there's still something in it.

EP: Yeah, no definitely!

HM: I think it's a product of distance as well, I mean *Fludd* the events took place when I was four years old, and... well I kind of said this to people before, but... the statues really were taken out of the church. And I do remember being about this high [*indicates*] and listening to people's conversations, and my mother debating with herself whether we had room for the statue Gerard Majella.⁶¹² Are you a Catholic?

EP: I'm not a Catholic, no.

HM: But you, obviously lived in the world of *Fludd*, so you'll understand.

EP: Yes, indeed, fully immersed!

HM: Saint Gerard was a great black thing, and these things were high, I think even to my adult eye, not just to my child's eye. So, I mean, Saint Gerard, what we... we'd have had to manoeuvre around him.

EP: He would have been a physical and emotional *presence* in a household!

HM: That's right, and... that was a kind of dramatic thought that my mother would have, but then I did hear someone say they were going to bury the statues, somebody said, 'What are they going to do with them', and someone else said, 'Bury them'. And the shudder that went through me, as a tiny child, and it's that moment carrying that sense of the uncanny, all those years. But again, more generally, I think, if you look at a book like *An Experiment in Love*, which is semi-autobiographical, and it does use a lot of my own experiences, although the character's life isn't... the character's biography isn't mine. But I think, I could well in a sense have written that book when I was twenty-two, but it would have seemed tragic then, whereas later it seemed absurd.

EP: Yeah. It's a well sustained project, I think, *An Experiment in Love*, I enjoyed it, and I enjoyed again, sorry, the humour of the halls of residence meals because it's still like that now, it's quite surprising.⁶¹³ And all of that politeness over the meat and everything, and one piece being left and everyone being starving! [*Laughs*].

HM: The shred! [*Laughs*]. Yes! It was during the writing of that that it occurred to me for the first time that... some of the Eastern Europeans refugees might have been the concentration camp guards rather than the victims, and you wouldn't know.

⁶¹² Saint Gerard Majella (1726-1755) is a Roman Catholic saint. His patronage includes children, particularly the unborn, childbirth, mothers, expectant mothers and motherhood. He is associated with all aspects of pregnancy apparently because he was falsely accused of impregnating a woman, who later retracted her statement. His intercession is thus also requested for the falsely accused and good confessions. It is also claimed that he experienced bilocation, or being in two places at one time, conceptually explored within numerous historical and philosophical systems.

⁶¹³ *An Experiment in Love* is, of course, an experiment.

EP: Right, because Katrina's the young woman, isn't she? Is it Katrina?

HM: Yes, that's right.

EP: I *really* liked her character.

HM: Karina.

EP: Karina, that's it sorry, do beg your pardon. Yeah, she's brilliant, the whole kind of 'pull yourself together' northern-ness, at the same time as her coming from this very displaced family where she's having to sort of operate as an adult really.

HM: Yes,

EP: And you, I think, convey the kind of quite lacerating childhood cruelty of children to one another very accurately.

HM: Yes, and the way the adult world can take you to be friends when actually you'd do anything to be sundered.

EP: Yeah, but you can't *not*. No, I've had very similar experiences and it is... it rings very, very true, I think – that you kind of need one another and it is Karina at the end of the book that actually, comes to her [*Carmel*] but it's not the same as being friends, it's almost like a kind of sisterly relationship...

HM: Yeah.

EP: ... in the sense that you can be equally as mean to each other as you can be kind.

HM: That book started off as a short story and it was about Carmel and Julianne, and it kept falling over. And it just happened that one day on a journey I was thinking about, shall we call her 'X', the Karina-character, and thinking why *was* she like that? And... so then realising that she was what the book needed, it needed a triangle.

EP: And she is a proper catalyst...

HM: Yes.

EP: ... but she's kind of hidden through maybe the latter half of the novel, which makes her all the more powerful. Yeah, she was my favourite actually, that probably says a lot about me [*Laughs*].

HM: Well, yes because she's so... such a brutal realist, isn't she?

EP: Yeah, oh absolutely, and she's a survivor.

HM: Yes, and of course I think in that moment when I thought, oh I need Karina, then everything about her background came back to me... this almost force-feeding of her by her mother...

EP: Strengthening her, and debilitating her at the same time.

HM: ...yes, and of course it's the mother making up for the starvation she's endured, as if you could make up in one generation for what had happened before. And I realised... again it comes back to language and comprehension in a way because I went to school with many children who didn't speak English at home. Now of course that's a common thing nowadays, but less common then, and they were punished for it as if it was vast transgression, and treated as dunces... Whereas actually to move between two languages like that argues some intellectual ability.

EP: Yeah, and stands you in very good stead later, in terms of parts of your brain being developed at a young age.

HM: But also they were negotiating something else, the very different atmosphere because they were haunted by their parents' pasts – they couldn't even put a name to those ghosts.

EP: No, and it wouldn't potentially be something that was ever spoken about but was a presence.

HM: Not directly, but it was always there in that you would wonder I'm sure, 'What are they thinking about', as you got older, and knowing that they were far, far away from you.

EP: Yeah, and what happened? You know, and all of those questions.

HM: Yes, and I think as well... oh what was I just thinking... you know the Karina character is adamant – [*With feeling*] 'I don't want to know, I don't want to go to classes on a Saturday morning to speak my language, *I'm English*'. And she would say that with such vehemence that of course you knew she was not because real English people just take it for granted they don't go on about it.

EP: Yeah absolutely, and they're completely... there is no challenge, there's no anger, and there is with Karina, yeah I liked her. Is it... I was just trying to remember when she goes to the school exam they have to write an essay on their... their... their... who is? Their inspiration, or something?

HM: The person they would most like to meet.

EP: Yeah, and she writes about the pope.

HM: [*Simultaneously*]... and she writes about the pope.

EP: Carmel's just like – 'Oh my God!'

HM: Well I can tell you that *is* true! And I remember *exactly* where we were in Hadfield when we had that discussion – 'What did you put?' – and when she said the pope, I thought 'Oh God, why didn't I think of that!'

EP: *[Laughs]* It's perfect isn't it! It's just so inspired! Applying for a place at a Catholic school like that... yeah, I loved that moment, I loved it, and she sort of says it with a wry smile to herself, 'You can't get better than that'.

HM: It's like putting down your ace isn't it?

EP: It really was! It really was. But thinking about that kind of idea of children wondering what's happened to their parents in the past, I've also been recently writing about *A Change of Climate*, and that's something that's quite explicit in that book, this kind of... uncertainty that the children have about whether their parents were tortured, or whether or not... because there's kind of this sense as they grow older that something is wrong, or something is missing. And as a reader you become privileged to some of that information, and yeah, I suppose I wonder what your thoughts are on that book really because it's... I found a great quote from you where you said it was *really* difficult to write, and 'I was writing around the point', which is a metaphor that I love, and... I suppose I wonder if you still feel like that about it?

HM: Yes, it was the hardest book, the secret in it didn't want to come to light. And that is the nature of secrets in life, so it must be the nature of secrets in books, and yet they're always there, it's like... walking in a river where there are rocks under your feet, you're conscious all the time, it's there and it will make itself felt. I think there were certain practical problems, I wanted... to write about the disquiet that Africa had created in me, but you are conscious of... not wanting to say 'It's the heart of darkness'.

EP: Absolutely, yeah, avoid the Conrad metaphor.

HM: Yes, you... and yet another part of you cries 'But it is, it is'.⁶¹⁴ And I hope to write another book set in Africa, though I actually started it before I started the Cromwell books and when I go back I don't know if it'll be there...

EP: Right, I see, and it might have changed.

HM: Well, it would be set in Africa at the time when I was there, and it would come much closer to my own life. I think that was one of the difficulties with *A Change of Climate*, the political-correctness difficulty, if you...

EP: Well it's interesting because I feel that there is that tension within the book, but it's addressed explicitly, because Ralph and Anna, you know, they have this kind of impossible position of the well-meaning missionary couple, and they're very young...

HM: Yes, they are very young.

EP: ... and it's all highly problematic and everything. But then this awful thing happens and Ralph actually I think says, you know, 'I can't talk about it, I can't have people, these people in this place believing that of Africa because it'll be everything then', it'll be the single story in a sense, you know. And it is interesting, it's another very, very fraught, but another

⁶¹⁴ This repetition is reminiscent, and to an extent, reinforcing Kurtz' famous exclamation of 'The horror, the horror'.

unresolved tension in the book, which I think is interesting because it isn't something to come to a conclusion with I think.

HM: I think... well I mean various things about that book, one thing is that it replicates my own experience in a way because you know when they come back from Africa they're afraid that they'll be called to account, and what they find is nobody's interested, and their experiences then become unspeakable, there is no listener. And they fear being asked again and again about the missing child, only to find that as far as the attention of their families go, the waters have just closed. Nobody wants to probe and nobody wants to know if they wanted to tell, and so it becomes a buried secret.

EP: And I think that's very realistic actually, because what more is there to say, you know. It's never... it's never going to be alright, so to speak.

HM: And then again, and you know, they can't talk about it to their children because – not only because of the sheer horror of the thing, but because it puts Kat in the position of being... *Kit* in the position of being the guilty survivor. And, you know, they're very much the products of wartime and of what emerged after the war about human wickedness, and, I think... it seemed like a book of many parts. And I've written about revolutionary action, and the wish to ameliorate the world through political action, *and this was trying to write about*, trying to improve the world by being good.⁶¹⁵ And I'm less sure-footed with the personal than the political, I think sometimes. I had a certain problem with Ralph... in that, you know how in *Fludd*, nobody can ever remember what Fludd [*together*] looks like, as soon as he's gone they can't imagine him, and I had a similar problem in keeping Ralph's physical appearance fixed in my mind. And I had trouble with him as a character, throughout... and I talked about the book with a psychotherapist friend before an audience made up of a professional body, and I said that my problem was that I was not convinced that Ralph was a man.

EP: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

HM: And I thought that I'd tried to do something quite difficult in, in constructing an image of the altruistic male, giving him the characteristics we often associate with femininity, and his caring role [*inaudible*]. But a man in the audience said, and he prefaced it with an apology saying he was not a hard-line Freudian and he didn't want to be reductive, but that in the early part of the book where Raph, *Ralph* makes a sacrifice of himself for his sister Emma's career, he has handed her his phallus, was the way the man put it.⁶¹⁶

EP: Oh right, yeah that's interesting.

HM: And I thought that is *absolutely* right.

EP: Yeah because then Emma is very... she has real agency, but it's an interesting one because she has... I think that's a good way of putting it, he does really fall on his sword, and then give his sword to her, quite metaphorically and literally! But it's, it's... it's almost at his dispensation, kind of at the dispensation of the two males in the family that she's able to do that, and she's *blind* to it.

⁶¹⁵ My emphasis; writing is only ever an *attempt* to solidify.

⁶¹⁶ There is a sense that Ralph is metaphorically 'impotent' because of this act, and his first-born son is murdered; then later Ralph has an affair, having been represented as almost asexual up to that point.

HM: Yes she doesn't know.

EP: Yeah, so it is quite interesting, the one thing I suppose that makes me... and this will reveal my attitudes to gender – but the one thing that makes me think that Ralph *is a man* is his behaviour, particularly after they come back from Africa and they have more children, he is just never there [*HM assents*] you know, his work for whatever justification he can create, is really more important. And I think there's something really interesting going on with him, whereby he believes it is ok to sacrifice the good of his family for the good of other people, and that his own sense of self is somehow not part of those good deeds, and it *is*, and I think there's a kind of selfishness there, if that makes sense.

HM: Well, I think that's right, and he has once done this selfless thing, and for a man that sets up problems, we would be, in the old-fashioned gender construction, we would think less of Emma if she didn't sacrifice herself for her brother... but when the brother sacrifices himself for the sister, strangely we don't think more of him, we think less of him. We think 'Man up! Don't do it that way, go and tackle your father, have the big fight, you know you need to have it'. So there are all sorts of kind of problems around his masculinity, and I think that the Freudian in the audience absolutely nailed it when he said it goes back to that early incident.

EP: Yeah, he's always going to compensate I suppose.

HM: Yes, and then as you point out he's somebody... he becomes somebody who does good to humanity in the mass, but he doesn't do good to the people closest to him, and he's actually quite oblivious to what's going on...

EP: Yeah, and I think out of choice in a way, particularly in terms of Anna, because it's almost like they haven't got anything left to say to each other.

HM: Because she's set herself against forgiveness.

EP: Oh yeah.

HM: And she's turned to stone really.

EP: Yeah, well it's eaten her up, she becomes a kind of hollow figure really.

HM: That's right, yes, I think that's right, the gap left by that missing child is inside her. And she is, as you say, she's like a stone on the outside and hollow within, and the only thing she's carrying is a secret.

EP: Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

HM: And... yeah what else is there to say about that? Well I just mentioned it being a book of kind of parts, and I think the South African chapter where they're in the township... It took me a year to write that, and I think that's the part of the book I'm quite proud of, but you see I was fleeing to the sanctuary of what I knew because it was research based... done in the way one would do a historical novel. So although the township is fictional it's put down on the ground-plan of a place that really did exist, and I felt in that chapter as if I knew what I was doing... The rest of it was more a question of floundering.

EP: Yeah, I mean it doesn't come across like that at all, I can imagine if you were, you'd researched a missionary house, and created that world, which is very vivid actually – and the curtains that don't quite shut and everything is hugely detailed, the knowledge of what was on the horizon later in the book could have been pretty daunting really [*HM assents*] – because they don't even have children at that stage of course, do they. Yeah, it's a very interesting book, I think it's a challenging and fraught one, but I like it for that, there's so much to try to unpack about perspectives and culture really I suppose, and... just how young Anna and Ralph are, that there is no correcting the legacy of colonialism in a few years with one white couple! [*HM assents*] You know... that's very palpable in the book, which I think is impressive actually.

HM: I think sometimes you have to... flounder in one book, in order to get a grip in a later book. I don't know if *A Change of Climate* is like that, it was valuable to me in that I found I didn't particularly value that Victorian novel structure.

EP: Yeah, because that's the other thing you said in the interview I read...

HM: Yeah, it didn't feel natural.

EP: ... it felt good for the story, but it didn't suit you.

HM: Yes, that's right, and it felt good for readers, they knew where they were in that book, they don't have to go into all the areas of darkness, but... it's plotty... and the one dissatisfied was me because... but there was another funny thing about that book as well, which is pushing things right to the wire in terms of not knowing what is going to happen, in that when Ralph's on the threshold with his suitcases in the last chapter...

EP: Oh yeah, and Melanie appears doesn't she!

HM: Yes... and I was going frantic because I was thinking, 'He's packing, he's packing! He's fastening the suitcase, he's... out of the door practically'. And she of course wants to say, 'Don't go', but she's not going to say it.

EP: And she's too proud.

HM: What's going to stop him! What's going to *stop him going!* And I really didn't know 'til he got to the threshold.

EP: That's really interesting.

HM: Therefore, I felt perhaps the figure of Melanie... again I wasn't sure what she represented in the book or whether she was sufficiently represented in it... [*Surprised*] *Oh God* it means black doesn't it! The name.

EP: Melanie?

HM: Yes.

EP: Oh does it?

HM: Well, it must be from that root, mustn't it, of whence... we'll look it up.

EP: Yeah! No we should do.

HM: Of whence... It never occurred to me before.

EP: That's quite interesting...

HM: Let's see if it does...

EP: Because I've read...

HM: You know, melancholy, melanoma...

EP: Oh right, I'd never thought of that. Because she's... she is returning, and I... it's funny actually because I found that part, similar I suppose in a way as a reader, because you can't believe he's going to leave, you know, you can't believe it. Even though you probably think it might be the best thing for them in a sense, you still can't *believe* it's going to happen, because they are almost in that sort of position where they can't really live together, or apart... And then I had this horrifying shock, I don't know, and it doesn't even make any sense, and it must have only been for a split second, that this figure that is kind of crawling and running towards them...

HM: *[Interrupting]* Was the baby.

EP: *[Excited]* Was the baby! Yeah! That's exactly what I felt.

HM: I think it is.

EP: And it was just like...! Obviously there's a rational part of my brain, somewhere, that made me think 'No, it can't possibly be', but it didn't stop me from thinking it, even for a tiny amount of time, and it's interesting, if... it does mean black, because... I've been reading quite a lot about race, and I've been reading a guy called Stuart Hall.

HM: Yes.

EP: And he's got this fantastic lecture called 'The Floating Signifier' of race and how it takes on different meanings in different situations and it can't be fixed. And he also writes about how the troubling always comes back to the comfortable, and that's exactly what happens in that moment *[HM assents]*.⁶¹⁷ It penetrates so absolutely and it almost does not matter who Melanie is, you know, she's not even...

HM: Well, she's got this head like the sun.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: And she's not quite a human thing as she comes crawling towards them...

⁶¹⁷ It is actually the 'excluded', not the 'troubled', the sentiment is that the excluded always returns to trouble the comfortable.

EP: And she's *[inaudible]*.

HM: ... it's their going out to her that makes her human.

EP: Yeah, absolutely. The recognition of her as a character, and so, what you were saying briefly there, you weren't sure whether it made a difference whether she'd been introduced enough, but it doesn't matter... to me anyway, it didn't matter because it was more the kind of... the *shock*, of the moment, that was... it wouldn't matter who it was in a way, it was just the unknown figure returning, you know, the kind of excluded returning to the comfortable *[HM assents]* even though, of course, it's not a very comfortable situation...

HM: But she's being taken into the house.

EP: ... she's changing it.

HM: Yeah.

EP: Well I suppose, I think we've covered, we've covered masses really... I suppose the only thing that I wanted to ask you in conclusion was whether you had any questions for me? Having questioned you for an hour and a half!

HM: *[Hesitates]* Now that's stumped me! That really has!

[EP laughs]

HM: I'm just wondering what's kind of left unsaid here, because you asked me this interesting question about motifs...

EP: Yeah!

HM: ... reflections, slammed doors, footsteps... and, and I wanted to show you, show you the view through this *[stands up and indicates mirror over letter writing desk, EP also stands up and takes a seat at the desk to look at the reflected view of the whole bay outside]*. When you sit at this desk, and you look through the mirror, and, you know, and I fix that...

EP: That's amazing!

HM: Yeah! *[EP and HM laugh]* And this mirror here *[indicates another mirror on the wall facing the window]* when I was in a boat out at sea, you can see that mirror!

EP: Did you see it flashing?

HM: Yes!

EP: That's amazing!

HM: And that just gave me enormous pleasure, somehow... as a kind of... well I suppose the whole thing of mirrors gives me a kind of intellectual *frisson*, you know.

EP: Yeah!

HM: The last book of the Cromwell books is called [*together, and also both sitting down again*] *The Mirror and the Light*, and you also asked about sequels, and I have a sense you see that all three books are in progress at the same time.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: And that the idea's that, *The Mirror and the Light* somehow reflects... it has to catch in that mirror everything that went before.⁶¹⁸

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: But sometimes it will look different now, and I think I wanted to... well, yeah, again it's stark autobiography. In my grandmother's house, where I actually grew up, she had a sideboard and it had a *huge* mirror, so considering that the sitting room was the sort-of cockpit of the house, everything happened in there, not just in our own family but all the people who poured through the door, relatives and neighbours and so on, everything was reflected in that mirror. And I was much more taken with *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* than *Alice in Wonderland*.

EP: Oh, by miles myself! Yeah, yeah.

HM: Yes!

EP: Yeah, and the whole geometry of the chess game and everything...

HM: It's beautiful isn't it?

EP: It's fantastic!

HM: Even when you're little and you can't quite catch onto the ideas, you know there's an idea there.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: But it always seemed to me quite plausible that you should step through the mirror [*EP assents*] and I was afraid that it might happen, but at the same time it fascinated me. Whereas you're not frankly going to fall down a rabbit hole are you!

EP: No, no, exactly.

HM: The other thing my grandmother had was a mirror, an oval mirror, with a scene painted on it of a lady in a garden.

EP: Oh right.

HM: And I was fascinated by the idea of a story taking place *on the mirror*...

⁶¹⁸ This seems indicative, or perhaps even *reflective*, of the operation of the trace.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: ... and trying to make up what had happened before she came to the garden, and I think that that's where mirrors started, basically, with the sideboard. And then also grandma used to say 'If you make faces in the mirror, the devil will rise up behind it'.

EP: Right, I see.

HM: Which made me think, 'How far can I push it?'

EP: Yeah.

HM: Because I was very afraid, you see, of seeing the devil, which I thought might happen, any moment, by accident.

EP: Well there's something kind of implausible about mirrors as well, they can so easily distort, even a straightforward mirror, your understanding of a room, you know, seeing the room reflected in the mirror can feel quite... strangely disorientating. I mean of course you understand it, on one level, as obviously a 'mirror-image' so things aren't quite in the same place, but it can be really, really unsettling. So, if it's unsettling about ordinary things, why can't it have more to it, you know really.

HM: Yes! And then you see we moved from this house of mirrors to Brosscroft, to the haunted house, and that was full of the... 'lightly drawn traces' [EP assents] as you described it. I became preoccupied with finding out what was going on in the next room, or downstairs when I was upstairs – for good biographical reasons as well, because I realised that my mother was unhappy and I believed that she would go in the night, that she would just pack a bag and leave. And therefore it was very important for me to be able to divine what was going on downstairs when I was lying in bed, or... and then of course it occurred to me, that the wardrobe with her clothes was in the room where I was [EP acknowledges]. If... it didn't make it much better, but it meant that I would know, my real dread was of waking up in the morning and finding she'd gone.

EP: Just gone.

HM: And I felt better after that when I thought she'd have to come into the room, but I think, you know, even in the Tudor novels there's an intense preoccupation with eavesdropping, and...

EP: Yeah, finding out what's going on behind closed doors.

HM: Exactly, yes! And there's a point in which, Cromwell, in *Bring Up the Bodies* he thinks back to an incident where he *broke down a door*... but he thinks, you know, 'I was young and powerful then' [EP laughs] you can't necessarily go on breaking down doors, it's like a once in a lifetime event and it leaves you bruised, you have to use your cunning to intuit what's going on. And I think the whole penetration of my work by ghosts really started in that house.

EP: Right, yeah.

HM: And that brings me to the question you asked about whether I believe in ghosts, and the answer is, 'For practical purposes, yes'. Not necessarily believe all through, or believe in a scientific sense, but as a writer it is a great advantage to me. And it came about because, before I wrote *Beyond Black*... a little lass of about fifteen asked me if I believed in ghosts... and it came out of the blue in a conversation we were both finding hard to sustain [EP laughs] because we'd been dumped on each other in a way, you know.

EP: Right, I see!

HM: And... I thought 'Oh, do I?' and it was a moment of panic! [EP laughs again] But I thought no, if I say no I close down this conversation...

EP: Yeah, and she's offering me a lifeline!

HM: Yes, yes... and if I say yes, it opens the whole world of possibility, and then I thought well actually that's a creative decision, isn't it? 'No' slams the door and 'yes' opens it.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: And therefore, *Beyond Black* came about and again it's the connections between what seem like wildly dissimilar books, in that... in a way the whole of *Beyond Black* is nothing but a vast preparatory exercise for writing the Tudor novels. Because the question you ask yourself when you're writing a historical novel is – 'How far are you inventing the story? And how far are you a medium for the story that already exists?' – and is the story 'out there somewhere', waiting for you as mediator to get it onto the page, does the story pre-exist the author? And in a way there is a sense in which it *does* with historical material, in that it's latent in other interpretations, you know, my representation of Cromwell is part of a network of representations of him... in fiction and drama as well as in historical documents.

EP: Well, and the paintings as well, which of course you discuss.

HM: Absolutely!

EP: Yeah, I mean I think, I suppose... I like your answer actually, you know, that it is for a practical purpose, but... the ghosts, in your work... *Beyond Black* is an example where ghosts are characters, you know, and I love the exploration of that, and them as malevolent... and slipping in, and undoing, you know, children's car safety seats [HM assents] and so forth... and they're a kind of uncontrollable-ness. But I think it works really well in terms of what we've already said about language, as well, and you, in *Giving Up the Ghost* of course there's that fantastic paragraph where you say I can't locate myself in a body, but I will try to locate myself in between the gaps of the letters and the words [HM assents], the ghosts are between the lines essentially. And I think that, I think that that's something that is traceable in a lot of writing, but with yours it's a question of the content and the *tone*, the very playfulness of the writing lends itself to this understanding that – yes there's always going to be something going on in a site of exchange, whether that's like you say the 'cockpit' in your family home or the mirror, that's there and it's not there, you know. So, it's a good answer [EP laughs].

HM: There are all these bodies, you know, in my books that are or are not, and exist and don't exist at the same moment, and there are the people who fade out, like Fludd, as soon as they're not in the room. But I myself I'm fascinated by the body as a site of story-telling, well

as a site of intertextuality because of the interplay of the genetic story with the life-story, with the stories told about the body in a medical discourse [EP assents] that they... the medical history as a form of narrative fascinates me! Oliver Sacks is, needless to say, one of my inspirations. And because I... because I've had so much *illness* and it's the kind of illness that breeds metaphors, I'm fascinated by the repression of stories by muscle memory, by the body's memory, by buried trauma, which I actually believe *and know* has physical locations within the body, not just... it is not just a mental artefact [EP assents]. And, yes, these are some of the questions that go around and around I think, explored through the memoir but also through Alison's very uncomfortable body.

EP: Yeah, absolutely, yeah. And she... there's a kind of repeated idea that she is actually a sort of space, there's a sort of space around the solar plexus, which is something that comes up elsewhere in your work [HM assents]. The sort of door opening in the solar plexus, which I think is a really powerful metaphor, and yet she's this larger-than-life kind of figure in various capacities, and sort of mercurial I suppose in a way, and yet she, she feels totally displaced from her body, and that there isn't... there almost isn't a body! [EP laughs].

HM: Yes, that's right. I think that's true, and of course the thing about the ghosts is their... capacity to become material [EP assents] and interfere with the material world. They're like the obverse of Fludd who is physical but keeps disappearing, and these are ghosts but they keep... they... the frightening thing is when they threaten to manifest, and you think that Morris might actually be standing there in the room.

EP: Yeah, and there's... I wanted to ask, I haven't put this on the sheet of questions actually, but one of my supervisors won't forgive me if I don't ask you about the sock in the dryer at the end of *Beyond Black* ['Oh' says HM]. Does that have any particular meaning for you because she's created a whole kind of landscape out of this sock, and Morris' resurrection, and...

HM: Yeah, it's Morris's.

EP: Right, yeah, that's what she thought.

HM: Now, I can't... yes it's... I can't, see I can't remember all the plot now...

EP: Sorry I'm a bit the same actually!

HM: ... but yes, it's... so evidently, in its horribleness, it's a sock that belongs to one of those men [EP assents] and I think really the fact that it's got into, Colette's washing machine shows you, you know, 'You're not off free!'

EP: Yeah, you've not got away with it.

HM: Morris has just reattached himself, and he's going to *manifest* in your life now! But the fiends distil between them all that is most coarse and threatening about masculinity, and of course she's asking for it isn't she, by going back to [together with EP] Gavin.

EP: Yeah, absolutely! And there's something about it being his sock, you know, and a *dirty* sock in the washing machine, and all that to do with gender, yeah, and I thought it was a good

final moment because she's always so terrified of course, isn't she, of going into a room and spotting him out of the corner of her eye.

HM: That's right.

EP: And she very deliberately tries not to do that [HM assents] and look *directly* at spaces, and yet... a very visible sock is in the [together with HM] washing machine.

HM: Yes, yes, so they can have hands and feet, and yes...

EP: They have autonomy.

HM: ... I don't know if that... when you said your supervisor has a theory, I don't...

EP: Well, she... it was really interesting because we both have tried to kind of get to the bottom of *Beyond Black* in various meetings, even though we know that's not really the point, we have still tried! [HM assents] And she said to me that you know, at one point she'd suddenly decided actually Colette was dead! Colette was dead all the way through the book and wasn't really there at all! And had gone back to read the book again and thought, 'No, that doesn't really work either'. So she'd... the sock had been a sort of catalyst [HM assents] for all of these ideas about meaning I suppose, in the whole novel.

HM: Well, I mean it's an interesting thing in that it's like a condom, which Colette very much has need of it she's going [together with EP] back to Gavin! But it's also like a dead end [EP assents] it's... but it's also... God, you see it's one of those things men do in real life, though not my own saintly husband, they leave their socks on the floor.

EP: And they're not turned the right way out or anything.

HM: Yes, and of course although you don't have a dread of the man and his physicality, you don't actually want to pick up this outboard bit. It's something like, you know how hair is lovely when it's on the head but disgusting when it's detached from the body.

EP: It's in the drain, or detached in any way, yeah.

HM: It's that kind of... it's the sort of disgusting aspect of masculinity which the fiends are about, always [inaudible].

EP: Absolutely, absolutely, yeah. Well there's something, like you say about the hands and feet as well, that they can have hands and feet, because you know if he's got a foot then he can move around, you know, there's not any stopping him! You know, he's got actual real feet!

HM: And of course he's signalled his intention to be reborn.

EP: He did! And he tried!

HM: Yes, so you've got this womb-like drum of the washing machine.

EP: Yeah, that's interesting, that is interesting, yeah!

HM: So, be very afraid Colette! [*Inaudible*].

EP: Yeah, definitely! It is, I think... because obviously a lot happens in *Beyond Black* but it's one of those kind of, again, for me, a neuralgic point, you know, of 'What *is* going on here?!' And the possibilities seem to be endless.

HM: I mean there's an intense fear of the masculine in that book. [*EP assents*] It's...

EP: Well Gavin doesn't do men any favours really, does he? [*Laughs*].

HM: He doesn't. But it's men as a collective force [*EP assents*] and I suppose it was then when... when I'd written *Beyond Black* that I realised that all through my work there are men in the collective. And sometimes they manifest as benign and sometimes as malign [*EP assents*] and they are actually... you know, there's the gang who follow the giant O'Brien [*EP assents*] and the gang of fiends...

EP: And there's a kind of gang around Muriel Axon in a way, isn't there? A sort of... there's a few men in *Vacant Possession* that kind of group around her.

HM: Yes, yes, not quite constellated in the same way [*EP concurs*]. But there's... they... In *A Place of Greater Safety* far more positively, there is, well actually [*gets up*] here's the German edition [*showing copy*] it's called *Brothers*.

EP: Oh, interesting! That's really interesting!

HM: And, it's... and then in, again as a positive construction you've got in the Cromwell novels, you've got the masculine Austin Friars household, which is actually a nurturing place.

EP: Yeah, and he rescues young men really doesn't he?

HM: Yes, yes, and... and then it takes on a kind of, it's capable of taking on all sorts of sinister overtones that household solidarity [*EP assents*] when they, Cromwell, his nephew, Wriothesley, they've got Mark Smeaton in a room and they don't even have to talk to each other, they communicate almost by telepathy, but they have a common purpose.

EP: Yeah, absolutely.

HM: And Christophe, as well, who's the invented character, and who's Cromwell's *id* of course!

EP: Yeah! Totally yeah!

HM: And, of course I realised that a lot of this goes back to Shakespeare and it's Nym and Bardolph and ancient Pistol.⁶¹⁹ And...

EP: Yeah, it is actually! That's really true!

⁶¹⁹ These three trouble-making characters appear in Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

HM: ... they are *marauding* through my work in all sorts of guises.

EP: Yeah because that makes me think about the fiends as well, because one of the things I tried to write about was this kind of, this sort of... Jacobean bodiliness about them as well, not only... I mean in that sense like you say, with Pistol and the gang and everything, but also that, you know, things like in *The Alchemist*, everybody's always farting, and the body's very much a part of it, the male body.

HM: That's right.

EP: You know, and the fiends are marauding along in that kind of way.

HM: I'm glad you said that because I once said to someone, an interviewer, that I was totally Jacobean and not at all Jamesian.

EP: Yeah [*laughs*].

HM: When it came... and then she looked at me [*laughing*] as if I'd said something completely *mad*!

EP: Oh no, I really get it, no I definitely get it!

HM: I mean, I think... yes, that... but you know with the Jacobean dramas, there is nowhere where they stop.

EP: Yeah.

HM: *Nothing* is too horrible [*EP agrees*] and I think *Beyond Black* is that kind of book.

EP: Yeah, well, in the vein of Webster really, nothing is too bad.

HM: Yeah, and a lot is done in the form of ellipsis [*EP assents*] even though the ellipsis may not be present on the page, it's still... *it goes on in the reader's mind*.

EP: Yeah, well I'm fascinated by it because, the premise of my thesis is to look at the way that you've been read, both in terms of academic readings, in terms of the gothic, as I'm sure you're aware, and, sort of address the fact that there's not a lot of academic material and address also how you're read in terms of journalism [*HM assents*]. And, I mean a lot of the... there are broad readings, as you know, but for me all of them try to *stop* your work, they nail it down [*indicating*]. They say, 'This is what she's does', and they provide an argument as to how you do that, which is really sound, but for me that's not *just* what it does, it does that and then it does this and then it does this. So the ellipsis for me is a theoretical tool and a metaphor to explode it because it has always for me signified the burst full stop, as well as a number of other things [*HM assents*] that actually there is this, but then it goes out into all of these things as well. So that's what I suppose fascinates me about it because it works really well to be able to read your work like that rather than say, 'I've got a coherent thesis', it's not great for writing a thesis! [*HM agrees*] But it is good for reading your work.

HM: I think that... I mean someone like you can see the interconnections between the work [*EP agrees*]. How what will look like a drop-stitch will be picked up in quite another novel, in quite a different context.

EP: Yeah, but you recognise it.

HM: I don't often, 'til it's done.

EP: Yeah, I can believe that, yeah.

HM: Which is the... *Oh you know* the whole paradox about writing, that what you put in is not necessarily what the reader takes out, etc. And what you put in is not, the same as what you *think* you're putting in [*EP agrees*]. You're putting in far more than you consciously know, or...

EP: There's not the kind of agency it implies, because it's so singular, you sit down and you write.

HM: What, oh yes, that's right. I mean your first, my first reaction to that question 'Where is the author in the text?' was, 'Like breath is in the body', and I'm not sure that's a good analogy...⁶²⁰

EP: I know what you mean, yeah.

HM: ... it doesn't completely work, but in the way that breathing is something we don't have to think about [*EP assents*]. It's something the body does, and...

EP: It's quite ghostly as well.

HM: Yes, because where is the breath, you can say, 'Here are the lungs', but you can't say where the breath is.

EP: Absolutely, and yet it's crucial to the rest of the body being in existence, I suppose.

HM: And even if... however decisively we kill the author off, you can't take all the ghostly traces out of the text.

EP: Absolutely, yeah.

HM: As soon as you've swept one away, it's leaving another trace [*EP assents*]. And... it's strange to think that you embed all these ideas in the text without consciously having them, and you have to acknowledge it works independently from you [*EP assents*]. You're not its controller, you're not its *mother*. And the point, you know, the way in which you are its origin seems quite uninteresting really.⁶²¹

⁶²⁰ It is significant that Mantel uses the metaphor of the body to explain the text, in terms of Derrida's thought on the book.

⁶²¹ The trace, the origin, the mother – this is perhaps the most significant section of the interview with regards to the premise of my thesis.

EP: Yeah, it's not the, the answer that you crave in a way [HM assents]. I think that's what's, I think that's what's interesting, because I mean there is stuff available about reading, particularly say *Giving Up the Ghost* for example, in terms of autobiography, as you know. But it seems like that's only a part, it's not one that you can dismiss, but it leads to a whole other kind of set of avenues, you know, in terms of what you perceive in the text as a reader, and what different readers do, like we were saying at the beginning this new influx of readers being potentially quite different from readers who read your work prior to *Wolf Hall*. Yeah, I suppose for me the ellipsis is just a kind of opening up a little bit [HM agrees] so that they can co-exist, there's not a hierarchy of meanings, if that makes sense.

HM: Yes, an interesting thing is that when I write radio drama I do the same thing. But I've realised that working with actors you always have to tell them, and put in brackets, what they're going to say next, if they said it... And actually I *hate* doing that...

EP: [Laughing] It's too directive.

HM: I don't know if anybody else does it, but for me it seems a necessity for the actor because they've got to be forming up the consonant or the vowel, or whatever. But I feel that it's like trapping your finger in a door, it's *actually* quite painful, because you're slamming the door on all the other things the person could have said [EP agrees].

EP: It's too decisive, isn't it? It's too final.

HM: My favourite writer of all time is Ivy Compton-Burnett, and... as you know her work's almost entirely dialogue, and there are many different classes of utterance, those things that are meant to be heard, and those things spoken aside, and the way people break up into conversational groups within a room, half hearing each other. And, you know, I'm fascinated by this, and that's why I've kind of evolved this direct, indirect speech [EP assents]. There's a difference between what comes in quotation marks and that speech that's without quotation marks, which is more, often more emphatic, but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be listened to, but I, I imagine it as the unformed thought flowing out of the mouth [EP assents] rather than the... the utterance which is like a nail driven in...

EP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, there's no mistaking it.

HM: Yes, but a lot of people don't know what I'm doing [EP assents] when I'm doing that, they don't see why I don't put it all in inverted commas.

EP: Yeah, I think, I suppose it's coming back to that idea, of a... of reading being quite challenging, and for some people that's really, that's too unsettling, you know [HM agrees] because as you know, and as I've heard you answer at the Southbank, there's been a lot of, kind of, discussion shall we say, of the, 'He says', in *Wolf Hall* etc. But you know for me, that feeling... your answer was really clear and made sense that you don't want the reader to be over the other side of the room somewhere, you want them to be behind Cromwell's eyes, but also it's good to make your reader work a bit! You know, to get inside the project [HM agrees] you know to get inside what's happening and make them pay attention I suppose, you know, because it does. Again it's a bit like the humour making you laugh and then thinking, 'Oh God why did I laugh at that?' and returning to the text. You're doing that with the, 'He's says', thinking, 'Who's saying this?' and it really makes you think [HM agrees] it makes you

think, ‘Oh it’s *Cromwell*’, and the penny does drop despite what people say. And then you think, ‘So why’s that important?’ you know, so I like it, personally.

HM: Well, I changed it a bit in *Bring Up the Bodies* and now I’m beginning to get letters from people saying, ‘Why did you change it? You shouldn’t, you should’ve stuck to your guns’ [EP laughs] but I’m wondering what I’m going to do in the third book because when it becomes, as it sometimes does in *Bring Up the Bodies*, ‘He, Cromwell’ [EP assents] there is a kind of point to it because he is becoming a phenomenon...

EP: Yeah he is by that point isn’t he!

HM: ... that he witnesses, so I think he becomes more and more conscious, self-conscious if you like, as the years go on.

EP: And he’s so *powerful* as well, you know, I think the ‘He Cromwell’ works in terms of power.

HM: Yes, it’s like [thumps arm of chair] isn’t it?

EP: I said *that*!

HM: Yes! And not anyone else, but *Cromwell*!

EP: Cromwell, exactly.

HM: And... he’s an awed witness to himself [EP assents] whereas in the first book he was thoroughly inside himself [EP agrees]. So, I guess there’s more to the change than trying to please readers.

EP: Yeah, but there is something interesting about... that it’s impossible, that it just creates more dialogue for readers, you know, with yourself and with each other, in terms of what’s going on in the text [HM agrees] which can only be positive, I think, for me, the idea of people discussing texts, you know.

HM: Yes, yes, and the more that pours into it, the more the merrier with interpretation really...

EP: Absolutely.

HM: ... and sometimes it is very merry indeed [EP laughs]. I’ll tell you a thing that’s begun to happen! With the, the reviews of *Bring Up the Bodies*, some of the reviewers have elected, have erected all sorts of conspiracy theories...

EP: Oh really!

HM: ... that aren’t in the book, but because it is a conspiracy by its nature, it’s not going to be made plain, but one reviewer, God it was in the *LRB*, he says, ‘Now you notice that... Katherine of Aragon was in the habit of drinking Welsh beer...

EP: [Interrupting] Oh I read this! Yeah!

HM: ... yes, 'and there's a Welsh boy in Cromwell's household' [*EP laughing*]. Now that's really paranoid!

EP: Amazing, that was amazing! But [*Colin Burrows*] reviewed *Wolf Hall* as well didn't he?

HM: Yes, he did.

EP: And he's kind of shifted in terms of his perspective and stuff, and now he's got all of these ideas!

HM: Yes, yes, and I'm thinking, God, you know that's a stretch [*EP agrees*] for the most Machiavellian of us. And there've been other instances where people have actually hugely complicated it [*EP agrees*] but I think, ok, because that shows you what it was like to be there at the time.

EP: Yeah, yeah, that everybody had an idea of what was going on, and a story about it, I suppose.

HM: Yes, that's right – now that's been quite eye-opening.

EP: It's interesting, it is very interesting.

HM: And also the way in which people... and you know this is the thing about historical fiction, people bring their prejudices and their predilections with them [*EP assents*] and then they almost literally cannot read what you've put on the page, because in the... people have this thing about Cromwell not being a religious man, and him just using religion for political ends, but you know, right in the first chapter, in the first pages it says, 'He goes to bed, and he prays, he prays to God!' And they cannot read that [*EP agrees*] and you almost wish, then you realise what you're up against, and you wish there could be flashing lights on the page! [*EP laughs*] Which raises the possibilities for the ebook!

EP: Yeah, it really does! Yeah, yeah.

HM: Of course! Mark this well!

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