Research Article

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Villains, Ghosts, and Roses, or, How to Speak with the Dead

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Abstract: If narratives that uphold secular humanism have led to an "unparalleled catastrophe" as Sylvia Wynter notes in an interview with Katherine McKittrick, then it is time to unwrite them. In this essay, I examine the dead as a category that exceeds metaphysical classifications of subject and object and provides alternate possibilities of communication and hybridity. To do so, I call on work by Claire Colebrook, Jacques Derrida, John Durham Peters, Eve Tuck, and Unica Zürn, among others, with the cultural work and words of Sylvia Wynter as a guide and galvanising force. Here, I repopulate the life/death seam with gorgons, witches, fates, and revenge stories. If ghosts are seen simply as other beings, albeit taboo ones like bacteria, or require alternate cultural narratives like villains, or exist both in the symbolic sphere of the mystical and the so-called natural world like roses, what kinds of methodologies can be opened? What do the dead have to say and how do we listen?

Keywords: death, communications, hybridity, metaphysics, hauntology, methodology

Introduction

The dead are those, they say, who never return; they are in-between, on-the-way, yet never present. What happens, though, when we start to see the dead not as over there, but right here? If death is rather a saccade, a brink, who exists in this place and what are the possibilities of articulation? How do we rethink the unthinkable, and why is this necessary? Writer and cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter drops (what I see as) a challenge: "We must now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it," she begins in an interview with Katherine McKittrick that stretched from 2007 to 2014. "If we continue with our old way of thinking . . . we drift as a species toward an unparalleled catastrophe" (qtd. in McKittrick 18). Wynter posits that the way out of the catastrophic legacy of secular humanism is through a practice of hybridity, an intertwining of *bios* and *mythoi* that has the power to reprogram the given narratives that Capitalism and "development" have been functioning through. As such, I have chosen to speak of communication with the dead as a technique that unwrites epic narratives of metaphysics and secular humanism by moving past the subject/object split into a space that Aimé Césaire called poetic knowledge—"born," as he wrote, "in the great silence of scientific knowledge" (qtd. in McKittrick 64, emphasis her own). By presenting alternate possibilities of connectedness, communication with the dead teaches us how to attune to that which we have been taught we cannot hear. In being exactly those who are not natural, those who are extra-natural, supernatural, the dead are the limit case of what Wynter terms "our now purely *naturalized* modes or genres of humanness" (16, emphasis my own).

To broach the space that the dead inhabit, I'd like to briefly open on a discussion of life—hardly a well-defined positioning, particularly within areas of posthumanism, the inhuman, and what McKittrick classifies Wynter's project as counterhumanism ("Yours," 11). Life, to anthropologist Elizabeth A. Povinelli,

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includes the category of death in her equation, "Life (Life{birth, growth, reproduction}v. Death) v. Nonlife" (9). Here, Life and Nonlife exist within the "sovereign order of substance" where there is "a crucial division between those things that are saturated with actuality when they arrive in existence (Nonlife, inanimate things) and those things defined by an inner dynamic potentiality at birth (Life, animated things)" (47). Interestingly, Surrealist artist Unica Zürn, who had a practice of automatic drawing, had a similar definition, where 6 is death, 9 is life, and the two are contained in hidden images as the number 8 (Conley 86). For Povinelli, a rock may be considered Nonlife, but it is perhaps something different that Zürn means when she speaks of the number 8 as including life and death. In both conceptions, however, there is a third space that opens up, one that does not posit life and death as a duality or a set of oppositions, but provides a space of continuum and possibility, the 8, the folding or the infinity. This third space beckons an examination of life and death that takes three, and not two, positions. To be able to approach such a space, especially from within Wynter's postulation of the human as both *mythoi* and *bios*, I went looking for categories that are root-like and near. Villains, ghosts, and roses are both general and particular; *general* in that the reader can identify their own categories within them, and *particular* in that these three positions indicate a certain cohesiveness of what has traditionally been considered mythical and what has, on the other side of the spectrum, been considered biological. If ghosts are the subjects I'm addressing here, then villains are the adepts who communicate with ghosts, and roses are where ghosts are housed.

What is Zürn's 8? To enter into an examination of life characterised by the 8 is to enter into the defamiliar. This is drawn out, I believe, in Claire Colebrook's critique of Vitalism, which is beheld, as she writes, to a process of "always-productive becoming" (64). The championing of productivity in the term *becoming* remains, to Colebrook, "within *a norm of life* in which action, production, dynamism, and being are privileged over unactualized potential" (58, emphasis my own). These values are, furthermore, associated with "man." In contrast, Colebrook continues, "a criticism liberated from the concept of 'man' would acknowledge that fragile materialization of a work that resists comprehension, inclusion, recognition and interpretation. . . . It is *this* potentiality of nonrealization, of dispersion," she states, "of remaining inert and refusing to be oneself that frees matter from the human, through the human" (82). Colebrook cites Foucault as noting that up until the nineteenth-century life was not a concept but "a style of thinking, a way in which being is folded" (65). This is where it becomes helpful to turn back to Sylvia Wynter and especially her stress on the work of poet Aimé Césaire. In his essay "Poetry and Knowledge," Césaire wrote: "It is an error to believe that knowledge, to be born, had to await the methodological exercise of thought or the scruples of experimentation" (xliii). In this direction, Césaire contrasts "the clear light of scientific day" to the "nocturnal forces of poetry" (xliv).

In speaking of life and death, I will be taking my cue from Colebrook, Césaire, and Zürn, aligning more with the nocturnal than the diurnal, more with the folding than the becoming, a space that does not extend toward comprehension but resides in the impossible or unactualized. As such, I have chosen to use the method of *unwriting* rather than the *rewriting of knowledge* that I opened this essay on. In her 1984 paper "The Ceremony Must Be Found" Wynter notes that "The rewriting of our knowledge . . . must necessarily entail the *un/writing* of our present normative defining of the secular mode of the Subject" (22, emphasis my own). It is just such a practice I hope to engage, where villains and ghosts especially participate in an unwriting of their more epic tropes (eg. the heroes, the living) while remaining slightly too asymmetrical to merely serve as replacements or critiques (the third, the ill-fitting rose).

Even still, the invitation to speak with ghosts may seem like a stretch within a post–Natural Sciences, post-psychoanalytic episteme, where, as Wynter writes, the liberal monohumanist subject works within a "*desupernaturalized* sociogenically encoded order of consciousness" (qtd. in McKittrick 35). However, it is precisely the work of defamiliarisation and discomfort that I believe ghosts can accomplish in the present moment. This invitation to summon ghosts extends outwards to a reader whom philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers defines as "an empirical 'us,'" one who betrays academic territorial rules. "I prefer to continue and relay," Stengers writes, "together with, and with the help of, contemporary witches, the (unsophisticated) cry of those who ask 'what *did* happen to us?'" (49). This empirical "us" is located not so much in a noun-defined group, but in a verb-defined one; as Colebrook puts it, in "'our' life—the life within which we think and do philosophy" (56). I myself write as both a practicing scholar and a

practicing witch. It is through those accustomed to communication with the dead and those traditionally characterised as villains—that we can learn how to attune to the unknown. The threshold where ghosts are found is one where the symbolic and the biological are thoroughly intertwined, one that is immanent and iconographic, as mythical and present as the rose. By unwriting our most seemingly natural tropes and genres, protagonists and antagonists, we can unearth the solidity of the natural they are embedded in, and, importantly, the axes and values those narratives are meant to uphold.

Ghosts

How do we recognise the voice that we've never heard beneath the din of the voice we're trained to hear? How do we splice the voice of the ghost from the clamor of the apparent? All academic ghost stories begin at Jacques Derrida's 1993 *Specters of Marx* and I'll follow suit. For Derrida everything that happens between the poles of life and death maintains itself "with some ghost," and it is therefore "necessary to *learn* spirits" (both xviii, emphasis my own). Living is not learned from life, he asserts, but from death: "the other at the edge of life" (xviii). This edge does not belong to time as we know it, but to a different form of temporality, and to illustrate this Derrida borrows from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, quoting the lines, "Enter the ghost, exit the ghost, re-enter the ghost" (xx). The ghost exists in a time that is always "out of joint" (37) and from this space, teaches us how to know. Resounding throughout Derrida's text is not only how one may communicate with spectres, but how a scholar may be called to do so. "There has never been a scholar who really, and as scholar, deals with ghosts," he notes (11). For Derrida, it is essential to know how to do so if one is in the knowledge game. For the ghost is revenant; it always, uncannily, returns.

Jacques Derrida opened the field of hauntology and instigated the "spectral turn" with *Specters of Marx*, yet there has been little (super)naturalistic reckoning of ghosts as ontological possibilities rather than as metaphors or projections within critical theory. One author who is not afraid to use the term *ghost*, and in a sense that is not metaphorical is writer and hypnotist Rosemary Ellen Guiley. In her introduction to *The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits*, Guiley states her personal belief in ghosts and spirits and notes that "Subjective factors *are* a part of the paranormal picture"—a category that includes "a huge pool of entanglement with all things" (both xi).[1] In her encyclopedia, ghosts, who Guiley qualifies as the "returning dead" (188) are demarcated from spirits, who can include monsters, demons, and elemental forces (462), as well as from the soul, which has its own entry as the "life-force of an individual" (459). I like this encyclopedia in that its knowledge of ghosts could be transferred to a scholarly realm (though this was hardly Guiley's intention). Insofar as sociologist Avery Gordon qualifies ghosts as those who meddle with taken for granted realities (8), different ghosts and spirits themselves could offer different methodologies depending on what a scholar is trying to accomplish. Or, if one does not have a fixed goal, getting to know particular ghosts and spirits might lead to a result previously unforeseen. For example, the methodology of the grey ladies[2] and the methodology of the fetch[3] would be different from that of the *preta*[4] or the *ghoul*.[5] Getting to know these different ghosts may allow a scholar to assume different points of observation and meddlesomeness. Guiley's encyclopedia, though a good jumping off point, is not a critical work. It is Eve Tuck and C. Ree's essay "A Glossary of Haunting" that I'll turn to in asking more from a knowledge of ghosts. Whereas Derrida opens the door between the scholar and the spectre, Tuck and Ree question the function of haunting or spectrality altogether, suggesting that if you open the door to ghosts, you'd better be ready to meet them.

Eve Tuck and C. Ree could be seen to align with Sylvia Wynter in writing the innocence and neutrality

1 *Belief* in ghosts is usually something that writers who address ghosts speak of; particularly their *disbelief*. This goes also for Derrida who states, in an interview with Bernard Stiegler, "the dead no longer exist." See Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, "Spectographies," in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, edited by María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 49.

2 From England; the ghosts of women who have died violently for the sake of love.

3 From Ireland; the apparition of a *living* person.

4 Sanskrit, meaning a hungry ghost.

5 Arabic, meaning a demon that feeds on the flesh of humans.

out of *homo oeconomicus*, a figure who has monopolised thoughts, peoples, lands, myths. "Erasure and defacement concoct ghosts," Tuck and Ree write, "I don't want to haunt you, but I will" (643). The ghost who rises up from erasure and defacement is a ghost who demands an adjustment of attention in order to be heard. To demonstrate this, Tuck and Ree turn to the horror genre. In contrast to the typical American horror movie, where the hero is preoccupied throughout the film with "righting wrongs, slaying the monster, burying the undead"—all acts, as Tuck and Ree assert, of "containment"—the Japanese horror genre is all about revenge. Tuck and Ree use the example of Hideo Nakata's 1998 film *Ringu*, where "the vengeful ghost of a murdered girl turns the act of seeing her trauma into a violent curse," forcing those who witness this trauma via videotape to pass it on. "Rather than spectral containment," they write, "spectral dissemination" (all 641). The ghost leaks past containers, it is that which asserts it is not going away, despite attempts to wish it gone. In this, the ghost could be figured in settler-colonial society, Tuck and Ree write, as "the Indigenous inhabitant present only because of her erasure," or "the chattel slave, whose body is property and murderable," and the so-called hero could be figured as "the inventive settler, whose memory becomes history, and whose ideology becomes reason." Haunting, then, becomes "the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation . . . . Alien (to setttlers) and generative for (ghosts), this refusal to stop is its own form of resolving" (all 642). It is here that the ghost carves a direct path not necessarily to the dead but to the living.

In her interview with Katherine McKittrick, Sylvia Wynter's opening sentence reads like a manifesto: "What I'm going to propose," she says, "is that we are now challenged with envisioning a new 'science of the World,' which I take from Aimé Césaire. This challenge can be likened to that made by Copernicus when he declared that, while it may *seem* absurd, the Earth indeed also moves!" Wynter delineates how, in the Renaissance era, Copernicus dropped the very centre out of medieval Latin-Europe's worldview, ushering in the era of Man1 or *homo politicus* (14–15). Subsequently, Darwinism and the Natural Sciences, including psychoanalysis, are major events that shaped Man2 or *homo oeconomicus*. This is the figure who, as McKittrick writes, "uncovers the teleological underpinnings of the story-lie of ostensibly human development, as well as the reality of climate change/instability, to which, inter alia, it gives rise" (19). It is not the *human* who has precipitated climate change, Wynter asserts, but the *version* of the human presented by *homo oeconimicus* who has attempted to swallow (and been pretty successful at swallowing) all other versions of the human—a danger to anyone who falls outside that version as well as to the planet as a whole. For "the Masai," to use Wynter's example, "who were (and are) being displaced have nothing to do with global warming! It's all of us—the Western and mimetically Westernized middle classes after we fell into the trap of modeling ourselves on the mimetic model of the Western bourgeoisie's liberal monohumanist Man2" (21–22).

Wynter's "wager" as she calls it is to disintegrate this naturalisation by asserting that the human is a hybrid being, *homo narrans*: both *bios* and *mythoi*, an idea taken from Frantz Fanon, where *bios* aligns with skin and *mythoi* with masks (for example, 23). This very hybridity is what unsettles and makes impossible the naturalness of the "entire order of secular knowledge/truth" (17) that the present figure of *homo oeconomicus*, and thus the figure of the scholar, has been enthroned in. The question going forward is: how do we take up the imperative of restructuring thought if we are at once so entrenched in the worldview of *homo oeconomicus* that to restructure from within is perhaps merely to fall into its traps. This is the problem of the episteme: we cannot assume to see outside of what we are within. One answer is that this task is multiple: "The struggle we are confronted with cannot be in any way a one-person task" (18). Eve Tuck takes this quite literally, multiplying her authorship by doubling her identity with C. Ree. Under the subject heading "Composite narrator / Combined-I," she writes, "I am a becoming-spectre, haunting and haunted, a future-ghost, a cyclops, a stain" (643). In their use of leakage and excess, or that which surpasses containment, I was reminded of Lucretius (99–55 BC), who noted that the vital spirit leaks out of the body in triplets (*particulatim*) in his work *De rerum natura*.

If the way to move past *homo oeconomicus* is the full realisation of the human as hybrid, a being both *bios* and *mythoi*, then we must emerge from the particular *mythoi* or stories that are the legacy of *homo oeconomicus*. This, to Wynter, is no easy task, for *bios* and *mythoi* are inextricably linked. Wynter argues that what she calls the first set of instructions or the genetic code, is involved with implementing a

second set of instructions, or the nongenetic code, i.e. our stories, our myths; but Wynter doesn't leave it there. The second set of instructions, our stories, our origin myths both religious and secular, are in turn implemented neurochemically. That is to say, the stories that are passed down through generations, are, to Wynter, "alchemically *made flesh*!" in that they are coded back into the chemistry of our brains, our *bios* (all 27). Therefore, for Wynter, the price that the human pays for being emancipated from a *bios*-only existence, and having access to an existence that includes storytelling or *mythoi*, is our very subordination to the stories themselves, "to our genre-specific storytelling codes of *symbolic life/death*" (29). Furthermore, the enactment of these codes, the telling of these stories through our languages, our bodies, are "opiate-rewarded" as we come to see ourselves reflected through them as "*mimetically desirable*" (34).

Though I would say that Tuck and Ree are still using ghosts as metaphors, much like hauntology does, they offer a sense of the ghost as an unsettling and unsettled presence. In being exactly that which is vengeful rather than reconciliatory, Tuck and Ree's figuration of haunting reaches toward a tension that has the power to surpass the opiate-induced narratives that support *homo oeconomicus*; in being non-affirmative, their ghost moves toward Colebrook's resistance of comprehension and inclusion. Theirs is the spectre who has the ability to be an elixir from the looping and sleepy narratives *homo oeconomicus* tells. Tuck and Ree are not interested in comfort zones. To emerge from the seemingly endless loop of the same harmful stories, it is imperative to attune to the destability of ghosts. Wynter quotes biologist Humberto Maturana in noting that only when we listen can we start to change: "one began to listen, and one's language began to change," writes Maturana, "then, but only then, new things could be said" (qtd. in McKittrick 28).

Villains

If ghosts have a story to tell, who is it that listens? What does it mean to be the dead (the tree) that falls in the night (the forest) when no one is said to hear? In this section, I will move past the figuration of what ghosts are to who ghosts speak with. For John Durham Peters, communication with the dead is the limit case of communication itself, one that demonstrates not the clarity of communication but its ultimate opacity and entropy. The relationship between communication and death, to Peters, is a one-way street. Ghosts, he believes, can only be read and not communicated with. "Communication with the dead is the paradigm case of hermeneutics," he writes, "the art of interpretation where no return message can be received" (149). For Peters, this communication is the ultimate in Eros; since Eros "consists not in possession but in wanting, what could stimulate Eros more than distance and especially death, itself the ultimate distance?" (137). Eros is found in wanting and not in possession. The one who chooses to extend into this ultimate distance is someone who must always, according to Peters, be in want. "Only the Lonelyhearts of the world," he writes, "expect a personal reply from the movie, phonograph record, or radio program" (151). Yet to be in want is not only to be a lonelyheart; to be in want is to suggest that something is missing; to be in want may be to seek retribution.

The ones who have traditionally spoken with the dead have also traditionally been characterised as villains. From roughly the 1580s to 1630s, around 40,000 – 60,000 accused witches were *legally* put to death across Europe under the suspicion that they were in actual *communication* with Satan, one that was very much not one-sided or hermeneutic.[6] As the scientific revolution swept across Europe, and the Witchcraft Act was instituted in England in 1753, with much of Europe following suit, the conception of the witch became one of superstition; the witch was no longer "real," yet she was still very much shunned. Under the Capitalist and legalistic model of the Western world emerging from the Enlightenment, or Sylvia Wynter's Man2, witches went from being persecuted as heretics to being persecuted as charlatans; their villainry was no longer Satanic but mercenary. "Desire is what we know about ourselves," write Tuck and Ree, "and damage is what is attributed to us by those who wish to contain us" (648).

In her book *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici notes how it is no coincidence that the most infamous

6 Silvia Federici estimates that this number was much higher, in the hundreds of thousands, citing the fact that many trial documents were destroyed, and many accounts of so-called witchcraft have not yet been examined (164).

witch-hunting manual, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches) was written in 1496, "on the eve of Columbus's voyage" (166). Federici notes, "It should have seemed significant that the witch-hunt occurred simultaneously with the colonization and extermination of the populations of the New World, the English enclosures, the beginning of the slave trade, the enactment of 'bloody laws' against vagabonds and beggars, and it climaxed in the interregnum between the end of feudalism and the capitalist 'take off' when the peasantry in Europe reached the peak of its power but, in time, also consummated its historic defeat" (164–65). For Federici, the genocide of witches in Europe is imbricated with the genocide of Indigenous populations in the so-called New World, with the *symbolic life/death* narratives of wealth and poverty, and with the beginnings of the transatlantic slave trade. This is present in Federici's very title, where she borrows the character of Caliban from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* written around 1610–11, while the European witch-hunts were actively taking place. By aligning Caliban with the witch in the title of her book, Federici is undertaking a rewriting of history. Federici's references to enclosures, furthermore, could be compared to Tuck and Ree's references to containers. Enclosures are not only privatised lands but privatised knowledge as well, such as universities. Enclosure involves simply putting a wall, either abstract or actual, around something that was previously "free" and blocking it off from public availability. To escape the capture of containers, Tuck and Ree use a distinctly witchy technique: "Each of the entries in this glossary," they write, "is a part of the telling. Together, they are the tarot—turn this one first, and one divination; turn another first, and another divination. Yes, I am telling you a story, but you may be reading another one" (640).

In a late-Capitalist era, and one in which Wynter's call to move from *homo oeconomicus* to hybridity becomes imperative, as she points out in her interview with McKittrick, it is time to unwrite the story-lie of traditional villains. Among other talents of divination, healing, and ritual, the witch and her cohorts are those who are comfortable with speaking into the time *out of joint*, not exactly a lonelyheart, but the opposite: a multiple—specifically, a triplicate. It is compelling that mythological figures who have been traditionally seen in a negative light, like the witch, stand at the threshold between death and life. This is so for the gorgons, the moerae. These villains, too, escape the capture of enclosures and containers, particularly in the way that they leak past a binary into a three. The gorgons: Stheno, Euryale, Medusa; the moerae: Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos; the fates are the drawers of the lots, the spinners of destiny, the cutters of the threads of life. They are not alone, they do not cohere to a neoliberal, individualistic, or monotheistic model—nor do they come in two, in a duality, a binary, a couple; rather the gorgons, the fates, come in groups of three like Zürn's and Povinelli's life/death equations, they form a triangle, and they open up the possibility for a radical kind of hybridity. In the way that they challenge the seams between death and life, the fates and the gorgons are, like Tuck and Ree's hauntings, difficult figures to meet. In moving from *homo oeconomicus* to hybridity, McKittrick notes that Wynter's project is not one of "replacing Man-as-human with an ascendant figure" (3). Rather, Wynter's goal is the praxis of hybridity; in this way, it is more like a motion, one perhaps similar to the fates cutting the threads of life. What happens when you cut a thread? You do not have an absence, you have two threads. The gorgon, Medusa, figured with the hair of serpents, represents death through the sheer fear of confronting her. Similarly, when you cut the body of a worm, one becomes two. This is a motion that is generative rather than subtractive; generative, as Tuck and Ree might assert, for ghosts.

If communicating with spectres is the story, it is told by the voice of the villain, the witch, who is, like the morae, like the gorgons, a composite voice, as Eve Tuck and C. Ree put it. "I made her," Tuck writes, "but she is already outside of me" (649). Within the non-productive figure of the channeller (i.e. the medium, they who speak with the dead), the act of attuning that I have hinted at throughout offers one major difference between *rewriting* and *unwriting*. Whereas rewriting might involve writing over or writing again, as Federici importantly does with the European witch-hunts, unwriting does not replace one story with another, but defamiliarises and diverts attention to what may lay beneath or metonymic to the story; what is at once inside and outside of it. A practice such as automatic writing, which is used by mediums to connect with the dead, is a genre of unwriting and it involves active listening. In a piece published posthumously as part of the *GLQ* dossier on queer inhumanisms, José Esteban Muñoz offers a methodology of getting to know the inhuman that involves an "active self-attunement to life as varied and unsorted correspondences, collisions, intermeshings, and accords between people and nonhuman objects,

things, formations, and clusterings" (210). This is an act, Muñoz writes, that is "incommensurable with the protocols of human knowledge production," yet nonetheless obligatory. For without it, we fall back "onto the predictable coordinates of a relationality that announces itself as universal" (209). This is the rendering of a "sense of brownness" for Muñoz; it is inextricable from histories of Blackness and queerness, and it is incumbent on an "attempt to attune oneself to the potential and actual vastness of *being-with*" (210). Elizabeth A. Povinelli, too, speaks of a kind of attuning when she writes: "Things exist through an effort of mutual attention. This effort is not in the mind but in the activity of endurance." She continues, "Things are neither born nor die, though they can turn away from each other and change states"; for Povinelli, this is a de-dramatisation of human life, which she views as a responsibility (all 28). Speaking with the dead is a space of discomfort that cannot be resolved. In categorising and containing what is and what is not communication, who can and who cannot respond, is to miss the act of attuning that speaking with the dead requires. It is to end, or at least to pause, the constant babble of the enlightened hero who holds the key and keeps the stage. It is the remnant left at the end of the shore, the tip of the wave, the thought that is left at the end of a long conversation that never found the time. Temporality opens. The future comes into the room with the past and the conditional, the space where ghosts are housed.

Roses

In describing the process of automatic writing with his wife Georgie Hyde-Lees, poet W. B. Yeats noted that "Sometimes if I stopped writing and drew one hand over another my hands smelt of violets or roses, sometimes the truth I sought would come to me in a dream, or I would feel myself stopped—but this has occurred to me since boyhood—when forming some sentence, whether in my mind or upon paper" (18). If the ghost is who this tale is about, and the villain is who channels the tale, then the rose is where the tale occurs. It may have seemed more logical to pick a structure like a haunted house to locate the ghost, but roses are more secretive. More so than the other categories presented here, the rose is undeniably part of the world of unmediated *bios*: to conjure the rose in words is still to inhale the sharp, fresh signature of its petals, to feel the carefulness of fingers working amongst the thorns of its protected stem. Yet the rose also gives the natural world away. It is often said that ghosts are a type of *presence*, one that is *felt*. The rose is not quite a presence in the same way that a ghost is, yet it is both present and *presencing*. Like the witch, the rose works with spells of protection. In variations of the tale *Sleeping Beauty*, thorns are portrayed as covering the walls of the spellbound sleepers in the castle, occulting their slumber to the realm of near-death. The hero of the story, the prince, the one who comes to claim the sleeping princess, must hack through thorns to get to her, he must break through the protective spell and sever the world of spells altogether. Enter the rules of the living, the laws of man. When the rose comes in multiple, it is dangerous, fierce. The rose exists between the realms of waking and sleeping; in both, it grabs our attention.

Throughout her work, poet Gertrude Stein figured the rose as a particular entity that empties out preconditioned meaning. She first wrote the famous phrase "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" in S*acred Emily* in 1913 (and many places thereafter), and contextualized it thirty-four years later in *Four in America*: "Now you have all seen hundreds of poems about roses," she wrote, "and you know in your bones that the rose is not there. . . . I know that in daily life we don't go around saying 'is a ... is a ... is a ...' Yes, I'm no fool; but I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry in a hundred years" (vi). Gertrude Stein presences language by the way that she cubically unfurls, unfolds, and addresses language in its own realm. In *Tender Buttons*, under the heading "RED ROSES," she writes, "A cool red rose and a pink cut pink, a collapse and a sold hole, a little less hot" (172). To confront Stein's work is to drop the obligation of language to express clarity, sequence, and causality, similar to how Peters looks for the entropy and the limit cases of communication itself. Stein unsettles language like the dead unsettle communication; Stein's poetry is ergodic like the Tarot, it spills over any easy textual containment. Prior learning of language's codes does not necessarily help to "read" Stein. Without a history, there is only a present, without boundary and lineament, only a presence. But here, too, we have to lean closer. It is helpful at this juncture to contextualise metaphysics and the construction of the subject/object binary

when speaking of communication with the dead for the fact that such an act of communication would have to suggest a disintegration of this binary if it is to be taken at face value. The ghost who re-enters critical theory in an era of hybridity will have to be a different ghost than the one who exited through the closed doors of Enlightenment to the plane of transcendence.

In his book *Production of Presence*, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht seeks a more presence-based relationship with the world in how research creates knowledge. He does not, however, want to evict the search for meaning from scholarship, but simply to put more emphasis on presence; to produce it. At the heart of this argument is a desire to move away from metaphysics, which sanctions and contains modes of being. Metaphysics, we could say, generally refers to the subject/object or spiritual/material (including human body) paradigm in Western philosophy, and for Gumbrecht, "to an attitude, both an everyday attitude and an academic perspective, that gives a higher value to the meaning of phenomena than to their material presence; the word ['metaphysics'] thus points to a worldview that is 'beyond' (or 'below') that which is 'physical'" (xiv)—hermeneutics, for Gumbrecht, functions in a similar way. For to say that humans are eccentric to the world means that humans are always that perspective which looks upon the world and tries to excavate meaning that is supposed to lie behind or beyond its surfaces. World-interpretation, for Gumbrecht, began as an active production of knowledge and was vastly changed with the Enlightenment, which was rather like the closure of all knowledge, the aim of its perfection and completion (38). Wynter's call for hybridity would seek to open this closure. Gumbrecht's stress on the importance of presence being reworked into meaning culture, without leaving meaning behind, is one that seems crucial when dealing with communication with the dead. For I do not agree with Peters that communication with the dead is solely hermeneutic, but I also do not believe the dead can be entirely presenced and materialised, entirely posthermeneutic. The dead must exist in the contradiction, the tension. This inflexion between meaning and presence is brought out in a poetic moment when Gumbrecht writes: "I would like to mention my memory of a Japanese tourist guide who first gave me exact meanings, one by one, for the different rocks in a famous stone garden—and then went on to add: 'but these stones are also beautiful because they keep on coming closer to our bodies without ever pressing us'" (82).

The rose, however, does press us, and can even, like a spindle, prick us. If Medusas are the sight of death, perhaps roses are the scent, as Yeats notes, that locates it. For Yeats and for Stein, the rose is not just one but many, an insistence: roses and roses. It is multiple in the various planes it occupies and works as a doubled self, an avatar. Rrose Sélavy was not only the alter ego of Dadaist Marcel Duchamp, but the female alter ego. Her name, a pun on "Eros, c'est la vie" brings us back to Peters who asserts that communication with the dead is the ultimate in Eros. The rose exists in a variety of species, with thousands of cultivars, and appears in forms ranging from shrubs to singular blooms; the rose exists equally in the fairytale as in our hand. It tells us that in order to have a present, we *must* have had a history; in order to have presence, we must have had a boundary and a lineament, a difference and a sameness. It is no mistake, I believe, that Stein was focused on red roses: in the world of roses, the red one is the epic tale, the one against which all other roses are called to compare. Though in my eyes Stein is one of the most fascinating experimentalists of the twentieth century, I would be remiss, especially when dealing with the themes of this essay, not to address that Stein presented no challenge to the dominant and catastrophic narratives of her time; in fact, the contrary. Stein was a supporter of Philippe Pétain, who led the pro-Nazi Vichy party in France during WWII, and she went so far as to endorse Adolf Hitler for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1934 (Will). Marcel Duchamp, who also troped the iconography of the rose (R(ed)rose?), presents problems of his own to the politcal narrative of art history: though his femme persona was known to the public, it is less known that a woman created one of his most iconic works: dadaist Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, it turns out, was the originator of the R. Mutt urinal (Paijmans). It is here that I would like to move from red roses to ones of a less iconic kind. Of all roses, it is the blue rose which is the most boundary crossing, occupying at once the most mythical and mystical territory.

It is not easy to find literature on the blue rose. But it goes like this: when you start to track a couple rivulets they will pull you to an ocean. First, the blue rose topples an explicitly epic narrative, the chastity of the Christian virgin mother. The blue rose is associated with Mary Magdalene, particularly by the Essene Order of the Blue Rose, who believes Magdalene to be the rightful heir to Yahshua (Jesus). In this way,

the blue rose itself is a heresy, and is also connected with the holy grail—the ultimate in the category of the evasive—and sometimes interchangeable with it. According to the Essene Church, "The Magdalene wore the Blue Rose in her hair when she conceived the Grail Child" (n. p.). The attempt to create a blue rose in nature has also seemed an endeavour both occulted and impossible, similar to the attempt of the alchemists to create gold from metal. So far, it has mostly involved dying white roses. The Suntory Global Innovation Center in Japan, however, has claimed to have produced a blue rose through biotechnologies of isolating blue genes from petunias, though their rose appears to be more an eerie violet in colour. Suntory, who also conducts studies on the experience of the taste of water, write on their website how the blue rose has "signified 'the impossible (a non-existent object)' because nobody could produce blue roses" (n. p.).

The blue rose is the rose that takes us nearest to Derrida's spectre as *the other at the edge of life*. In its knack of tying together the mystical and the biological, the blue rose also brings us into the realm of bio art, where artists such as Agi Haines are telling different kinds of ghost stories. In her ongoing work *Sacramental Antibiotics*, Haines proposes to develop antibiotics using the corpses of religious figures, principally with the molecules *Kribbella catacumbae* and *Kribella sancticallisti* found in catacombs and ossuaries. In this way, perhaps, a ghost is similar to a molecule, part of the hybridity of the human or at least the refrain that hangs between (beyond?) the assemblages of the human and the assemblages of the out-of-body. This would work on a double level: the ghost, like bacteria found in tombs, is at once too wild to acknowledge as part of the human body's immediate environment and too taboo. The striving toward the blue rose presents the connection between impossibility and an obligation toward that impossibility—it is similar to the Eros present in the striving toward communication with the dead. In Novalis's 1802 novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the main character is obsessed by a blue-coloured flower: "I yearn to get a glimpse of the blue flower," he writes. "It is perpetually in my mind . . . it seems as if I had a dream . . . For in the world where I had always lived, who ever bothered about flowers?" (15).

Conclusion

To preface her opening chapter on Sylvia Wynter titled "Yours in the Intellectual Struggle," Katherine McKittrick quotes Wynter as writing, "Human beings are magical. Bios and Logos. Words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by hope and desire, belief materialized in deeds, deeds which crystallize our actualities. . . . And the maps of spring always have to be redrawn again, in undared forms" (1). Establishing a scholarly connection with the dead is, for me, an offering to the dead concurrently as it is an offering to my work as a scholar. It is one that doesn't leave the worlds of the dead out of the scholarly gaze, and one that also acknowledges this gaze must adjust accordingly. Such a discussion neither privileges academic nor more esoteric circles but combines them and assumes a complicity that I believe both parties are ready for, with the road already paved by Isabelle Stengers and her important work on witches.

For Wynter, there are three events: "The First Event," she writes, "is the origin of the universe; the Second Event is the explosion of all forms of biological life. The Third Event, I identify in Fanonian terms, as the origin of the human as a hybridly auto-instituting, language cum storytelling species" (31). Such a movement calls for a complete reworking of what it means to be human in the contemporary era, to *practice* being human, that reformulates myths of "development" by turning to Aimé Césaire's poetic knowledge. This poetic knowledge is, in McKittrick's summation, a "Science of the Word" that constitutes a "new intellectual praxis, one that enables us to now . . . recreate ourselves" (62). This process, I would argue, includes the multiplicity of the gorgons and the fates as well as witches who have a knack for channelling and risk. In his poem "At the Locks of the Void," Césaire writes: "It is I who sing with a voice still caught up in the babbling of elements. It is sweet to be a piece of wood a cork a drop of water in the torrential waters of the end and of the new beginning. It is sweet to doze off in the shattered heart of things" (129). I see this as a surrender that may ensure a practice, as Colebrook suggests, of *not becoming man*; what could be called an *unbecoming* perhaps. This surrender is also located in Unica Zürn's connection to the "Jasmine man," a figure, as Katharine Conley recounts, who was with Zürn from childhood and who would often come through her in writings or drawings (Conley, 79). Her very connection to the Jamine man, which was

perhaps a form of mediumship (though it is unclear Zürn saw it that way), is what possibly allowed her to arrive at the 8 that holds 6 (death) and 9 (life) and hides them.

This surrender or profound defamiliarisation, which encapsulates a reworking of communication and connection is, I realise, bold to assert in theory but fraught in practice. I would like to pause here before concluding and critique a few of the terms I have been using throughout. *Recognising*, for one, is a loaded invitation. Political scientist Glen Coulthard has written about how a politics of recognition, often employed as a reconciliatory device between Indigenous peoples and (Canadian) settler states, rather reproduces "configurations of colonial power" (188–89), where the "*form of mutuality* envisioned by many advocates of the liberal recognition approach serves to foster unfree and nonmutual relations" (189). One of the major problems with this approach, Coulthard notes, is the extent to which oppression becomes internalized by the oppressed colonized subject, and he turns to Frantz Fanon in noting that as a result of internalization, derogatory racist images "along with the structural relations with which they are entwined come to *be recognized* (or endured) as more or less *natural*" (192, emphases my own). Thus, actions that can seem revolutionary, or least neutral-to-progressive, such as recognizing, attuning, developing attention, must be precisely intoned lest they become harmful rather than healing—we must know that what we are attuning or paying attention to is not merely another echo of a dominant, internalized, *naturalized* narrative or, as Coulthard puts it, "master-sanctioned forms of recognition" (191). This is similar to how Zakiyyah Iman Jackson cautions against a non-locatable invocation of the "beyond," where a Eurocentric transcendentalism is simply assumed. A move "beyond" the human must first involve a shift in view away from the "euro(andro)(anthropo)centric terms through which perspective is understood," Jackson writes (217).

Fanon argued that the objective socio-economic realm cannot change without a war simultaneously being waged on the subjective, "psycho-affective" realm (Coulthard 191, 193). This is the space that the general work of this paper has been trying to reach toward. However, *psycho-affective* is still not what I am trying to get at, for it relies on a post-psychoanalytic framework (Fanon was, after all, a psychoanalyst), that comfortable space where, as Wynter notes, "the *psyche* has now transumptively replaced the *soul*" (qtd. in McKittrick 55); it is rather the *supernatural* I am putting forward as capable of defamiliarising coded naturalizations. Sylvia Wynter has already long been introducing theory and thought that radically brings together the world of myth and the world that we think of as material, matter-ful, biological. For Wynter, this coming-together of *mythoi* and *bios* has a geography: the continent of Africa, which has been seen as either "the site of the biblical Ham's cursed descendants or the site of the *missing link*" (31). In the workshop of Bomblos Cave, South Africa, Wynter locates the "ritual of initiation" where the processing of ochre, in its mimesis of menstrual blood, allowed a rebirth into narrative (67). With the creation of fictional menstrual blood, "fellow initiates" were no longer born only of the womb, but of the story (68). With this, Wynter is suggesting nothing less than the "symbolic transformation of biological identity" (67). This symbolic transformation that is *at once already also* biological turns up the innate problem of trying to sever these terms at all—which is perhaps the symptom that points to a certain dis-ease within *Studia Humanitatis*, one that tells us that the questions we are asking of life and death are worth re-examining in those zones we thought, as secular monohumanist subjects, we'd far pushed out of our purview, deeming them too kitsch or too preposterous to examine.

It is finally not that the ghost is the one who reveals the posthuman or inhuman other, but that attempts to move beyond the human reveals the ghost as the missingness that cannot be located in the space where it is sought—for perhaps the *method* of scholarship as it stands is an ill-fitting container. But here we are anyways. The very act of finding a clearing and occupying it is perhaps the first act of the critical scholar, one which philosopher and mathematician Charles Sanders Peirce (who could open this essay to further avenues) must have been speaking of when he wrote, "For years in the course of this ripening process, I used for myself to collect my ideas under the designation *fallibilism*; and indeed the first step toward finding out is to acknowledge you do not satisfactorily know already" (50). Then maybe the secret found in the scholar's imperative to know spectres, as Derrida asserts, is that the affinity between all these meanings and all these presences is not what it was assumed to be and that knowing itself is a threshold that must eerily open. As Colebrook writes, "The true politics of matter lies . . . in a matter that fails to come to life"

(59). This is the realm of encoding from an endlessly open signal. For it is not the closedness of death or the dead that riles the hero and makes him jump, but the utter openness, the void that never ceases, the agape. This too is the desire. How do we know when we begin to work outside the episteme? When we can see its leaks. How to write about ghosts within a posthuman/inhuman/counterhuman era is not to connect, necessarily to the radical alterity of the *post-* subject, but somehow the opposite. And that is more difficult and probably less desirable, for it presents an entire reworking of positioning, particularly away from a reliance on the psyche to make sense of what exceeds the psyche, to begin with. This has to do with attuning and attention, as Muñoz, Maturana, and Povinelli have all noted, but even here that's not exactly it—how to know ghosts is not to learn how to listen. How to know ghosts is to learn how they listen.

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