

KARADENİZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY * THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

**HAUNTOLOGY ON STAGE: UNVEILING SPECTRAL NARRATIVES IN AMERICAN
PLAYS THROUGH PSYCHOANALYTIC AND TRAUMA LENSES**

PHD DISSERTATION

Tuğçe KAPTAN TABATABAEIMALAZI

SEPTEMBER - 2025

TRABZON

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Supervisor: Assistant Professor Fehmi TURGUT

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APPROVAL

Upon the submission of the dissertation, **Tuğçe KAPTAN TABATABAEIMALAZI** has defended the study “**Hauntology on Stage: Unveiling Spectral Narratives in American Plays through Psychoanalytic and Trauma Lenses**” in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature at Karadeniz Technical University, and the study has been found fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis by **unanimous/ majority** vote on **??/2025**.

Committee Member		Decision		Signature
Name and Surname	Mission	Accept	Refuse	
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Fehmi TURGUT	Chair	☐	☐	
Prof. Dr. İbrahim YEREBAKAN	Member	☐	☐	
Prof. Dr. Mehmet TAKKAÇ	Member	☐	☐	
Prof. Dr. M. Naci KAYAOĞLU	Member	☐	☐	
Doç. Dr. Selçuk ŞENTÜRK	Member	☐	☐	

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences.

Prof. Dr. Haydar AKYAZI
Director

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This thesis is not merely a document that contributes to the academic field; it also represents a deeply personal journey. At times, this path has been exhausting and even discouraging, but more often it has served to both stimulate and, at times, quell my curiosity.

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September, 2025

Tuğçe KAPTAN TABATABAEIMALAZI

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ÖZET

Bu tez, Richard Nelson'ın *The Apple Family: Scenes from Life in the Country* (2014) derlemesinde yer alan *That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), *Sweet and Sad* (2011), *Sorry* (2012) ve *Regular Singing* (2013) oyunlarında “travmatik kimliğin” inşasını incelemektedir. Çalışma, bu oyunların kimliği, şimdiki zamana nüfuz eden çözümlememiş tarihlerin spektral geri dönüşleri üzerinden kurguladığını öne sürmektedir. Derridacı musallatbilim, Caruth'un travma teorisi, Freud'un savunma mekanizmaları ve Lauren Berlant'ın “zalim iyimserlik” kavramından yararlanan bu tez; “hayalet”i doğaüstü bir varlık olarak değil hem kişisel hem de kolektif deneyimde özümsemeden kalan bir figür olarak ele alan eleştirel bir çerçeve geliştirmektedir.

Döngü, yakın ABD tarihinin dört kritik dönüm noktasına stratejik bir biçimde yerleştirilmiştir: 2010 ara seçimleri, 11 Eylül'ün 10. yıl dönümü, 2012 Obama'nın yeniden seçilmesi ve JFK suikastının 50. yıl dönümü. Bu olayları yalnızca birer arka plan olarak ele almaktan ziyade, bu tez; söz konusu olayların ailenin, seçimin, terörün ve ulusal yasın belirgin “hayaletleri” olarak nasıl işlev gördüğünü ve hane içine nasıl sızdığını analiz etmektedir. Nelson bu tarihsel kesişimleri, “travmatik kimliğin” doğrusal bir ilerlemeyle değil; yemek masasındaki sessizliğin ulusun yaşadığı kırılmaya bir mecra işlevi gördüğü, çözümlememiş tarihin döngüsel tekerrürü yoluyla nasıl şekillendiğini sergilemek için kullanır.

Bulgular, Nelson'ın döngüsünün, kişisel psişe ile politik devlet arasındaki sınırların eridiği kalıcı bir askıda kalma halini dramatize ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Berlant'ın “zalim iyimserlik” kavramını musallatbilim ile sentezleyen bu çalışma, karakterlerin tarihe yalnızca tanıklık etmediklerini, aksine tarih tarafından inşa edildiklerini ileri sürer. Nihayetinde çalışma, travmayı yalnızca felaket olaylarında konumlandıran geleneksel modelleri sorunsallaştırarak; çağdaş Amerika'da kimliğin, geçmişin asla gerçekten ölmediği, bilakis sürekli olarak yeniden sahnelenmeyi beklediği, çözümlememiş tarihin spektral tekerrürü ile şekillendiği sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Musallatbilim, psikanaliz, travma, Çağdaş Amerikan Tiyatrosu, Richard Nelson

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the construction of “traumatic identity” in Richard Nelson’s *Apple Family cycle: That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), *Sweet and Sad* (2011), *Sorry* (2012), and *Regular Singing* (2013) as collected in *The Apple Family: Scenes from Life in the Country* (2014). It argues that these plays organize identity through spectral returns of unresolved histories acting in the present. Drawing on Derridean hauntology, Caruth’s trauma theory, Freud’s defense mechanisms, and Lauren Berlant’s concept of “cruel optimism,” the thesis develops a critical framework that treats the “specter” not as a supernatural entity but as a figure for what remains unassimilated in both personal and collective experience.

The cycle is strategically set at four pivotal moments in recent U.S. history: the 2010 midterm elections, the 10th anniversary of 9/11, the 2012 Obama re-election, and the 50th anniversary of JFK’s assassination. Rather than treating these events as mere backdrops, this dissertation analyzes how they function as distinct “specters” of family, of election, of terror, and of national grief that intrude upon the domestic specters. Nelson uses these historical intersections to exhibit how “traumatic identity” is formed not through linear progression, but through the cyclical recurrence of unresolved history, where the silence of the dinner table serves as a vessel for the nation’s rupture.

The findings reveal that Nelson’s cycle dramatizes a state of permanent suspension, where the boundaries between the personal psyche and the political state dissolve. By synthesizing Berlant’s “cruel optimism” with hauntology, the dissertation establishes that the characters do not merely witness history; they are constituted by it. Ultimately, the study challenges traditional models that locate trauma solely in catastrophic events, concluding that identity in contemporary America is shaped by the spectral recurrence of unresolved history, where the past is never truly dead but is constantly waiting to be performed again.

Keywords: Hauntology, Psychoanalysis, Trauma, Contemporary American Drama, Richard Nelson

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPD : Borderline Personality Disorder
PTSD : Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
WTC : World Trade Center



INTRODUCTION

This thesis approaches literature as a medium that reflects, interrogates, and reframes social reality. Rather than a static representation, the literary work registers the conditions of its moment while exposing cultural and political tensions. It also anticipates future developments by revealing pressures that exceed its temporal boundaries. To this end, the study examines Richard Nelson's *Apple Family: Scenes from the Life in the Country* (2014) plays to show how "traumatic identity"¹ emerges through the spectral return of unresolved histories of the American experience. The dissertation draws on hauntology, trauma theory, and psychoanalysis to analyze the cycle, which is set between 2010-2013. This period represents a critical the junction between the prolonged aftershocks of 9/11 and the "hope and change" rhetoric introduced in 2008 before the election. The interval encapsulates a specific era while simultaneously reflecting the nation's broader historical background, as the plays mark the anniversaries of both 9/11 and the JFK assassination. These events have engendered eternal "specters" (Derrida,1993) constructing "traumatic identities." The specified time frame is critically significant; mirroring, as a function of literature, effectively reflects the era of its creation. Thus, the temporal scope of the plays is deliberately selected to illustrate the milestones that led to these identities and the lingering effects of prior traumas that perpetuate a cyclical pattern. America has long been shaped by its "specters." From colonial expansion and the pursuit of independence to the civil rights movements, electoral tensions, the ongoing trauma of 9/11 and contemporary debates on identity in the present and continue to structure national consciousness.

Richard Nelson is a seminal figure in contemporary American drama. Among his extensive body of work, the tetralogy, *The Apple Family: Scenes from Life in the Country* stands as his most critical achievement. Comprising four distinct plays set in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 respectively, the cycle is notable for its commitment to verisimilitude, truthfully capturing events at the precise moment they unfold. I chose his work of art partly because of the realistic stance he takes in his artwork. He truthfully exhibits the events when the plays take place. Nelson is a playwright who is aware of the purpose and function of the theater, especially in turbulent times. In a recent interview in the journal *Liberties*, he stated:

"It affirmed that theater has a purpose, a function within society and culture, even—especially—in times of crisis. That understanding was what drove me forward..... What you can do is use historical events when you want to talk about something that's really about today." (Feng, 2025)

¹ This concept has been employed in this study by the researcher herself to mean the identity pervaded by spectral returns.

The phrase that “drove me forward” signifies Nelson’s commitment to engaging with real-world situations. This specific engagement situates his work within a broader cultural phenomenon. As recent criticism in *The Paris Review* observes, the *American Theater of Trauma* functions as a unique machinery for processing collective grief, forcing the audience to witness the repetition of national wounds in real-time (2019).

This realistic and ethical attitude suggests that his masterwork offers a unique laboratory for this thesis’s questions about haunting, trauma, and identity. Anchored to specific civic dates between 2010 and 2013, the cycle stages how public time, elections, anniversaries, national mourning enters the domestic sphere and is reworked through ordinary life events. Nelson’s formal choices such as overlapping, real-time dialogue; offstage media; pauses; repeated jokes and re-announcements render haunting and trauma as lived textures rather than abstract ideas, allowing close reading to show how “traumatic identity” is stabilized by repetition, by attachments to absent promises, and by the circulation of unspoken inheritances. The cycle is under discussed in theoretical terms compared with more overtly political dramas and thus provides an original site to integrate hauntology and trauma studies while remaining feasible and evidentially robust for sustained textual and performance analysis.

In *The Apple Family: The Scenes from Life in The Country* (2014) quartet, this “specter” enters by ordinary means: the meal, the pause, the correction, and the reannouncement of loss. Election nights and memorial dates turn the home into a gathering where public time is domesticated and redistributed. Read this way, the quartet shows how the “specters” of America manufactures a “traumatic identity.” A series of significant “specters,” both individually and collectively, have profoundly influenced American history. Although many historical events have been influential, this thesis primarily focuses on the twenty-first century, alongside a retrospective analysis of the JFK assassination, to demonstrate how individuals are traumatized by political, familial, and historical pressures. This thesis argues that contemporary subjects are traumatized by political, familial, and historical pressures, and that these pressures induce traumatic identities.

This thesis argues that contemporary subjects are traumatized by political, familial, and historical pressures, and that these pressures induce traumatic identities. Adapting Derrida’s notion of the “specter” from *Specters of Marx* (1994), I treat these pressures as returns of the past within the present. I read *The Apple Family* at the intersection of hauntology, trauma theory, and psychoanalysis. Hauntology models the spectral time in which unfinished histories and lost futures inhabit the present; trauma theory clarifies the belated, repetitive pressures those histories place on relationships; psychoanalysis details the defense mechanisms such as repression, denial and displacement through which returns surface in pauses, jokes, and rituals. Taken together, these lenses keep structure, experience, and mechanism in simultaneous view, showing how the quartet manufactures a distinctly “traumatic identity”: a self-organized by spectral returns.

This thesis is divided into six parts: Introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. The subsequent chapters of this thesis undertake a close reading of Richard Nelson's *Apple Family: The Scenes from Life in The Country* cycle. The analysis is structured around four distinct "specters" which act as the focal point for each chapter: the "specters" of the family, the "specters" of the election, the "specters" of 9/11, and the specters of the JFK assassination. Therefore, each play is analyzed in terms of the existence of "specters" of the past, with a focus on "traumatic identity" from a hauntological perspective within the framework of trauma theory and psychoanalytic theory.

Chapter Two, the first analytical chapter, examines Richard Nelson's *The Apple Family: That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), set on the night of the 2010 midterm elections. Rather than treating the political setting as a mere backdrop, this chapter argues that the play converts public temporality into intimate hauntings. Drawing on hauntology and psychoanalysis, it analyses how the Apple family's domestic conversations triggered by the closure of voting polls and the loss of Uncle Benjamin's dog become conduits for unresolved personal and political histories. The chapter traces themes of loss, preservation, and recollection, reading the play as a study of identity and memory under the pressure of political time.

Chapter Three turns to *Sweet and Sad* (2011), which takes place on the tenth anniversary of September 11, 2001. Utilizing hauntology, and trauma theory, this chapter explores the enduring reflections of 9/11 and its lasting impact on both individual psyches and the social body. The play serves as a canvas for examining how personal sorrow and national mourning intertwine, revealing the complex traumatic construction of identity in the face of unresolved collective trauma.

Chapter Four examines *Sorry* (2012), set on the day of President Obama's re-election in 2012. This chapter traverses the terrain of political disillusionment, broken promises, and collective frustration, employing hauntology and trauma theory to investigate how memory and trauma shape a fractured national consciousness. The play posits that American democracy basically resembles a haunted house, whereby the "specters" of historical political failures elicit profound disillusionment among people shaping traumatic identities.

Chapter Five addresses *Regular Singing* (2013), staged on the 50th anniversary of JFK's assassination. This final chapter confronts the ghostly presences within the Apple household, especially the deterioration of Adam, Marian's estranged husband, as a metaphor for unresolved grief and historical haunting. This chapter reveals how the repetition of familial rituals and the return of spectral memories, both familial and historical, deeply entangle "traumatic identity" with personal loss, suggesting that American identity is inextricably traumatic and bound to the trauma of its past.

The Conclusion synthesizes the findings across all four plays. It argues that *The Apple Family* cycle does not merely document history but dramatizes the spectral return of trauma. The dissertation

concludes by defining “traumatic identity” as a state wherein personal, familial, and national selves are continuously shaped and destabilized by the “specters” of unresolved historical experience.



CHAPTER ONE

1. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Hauntology

This thesis grounds its analysis in hauntology, a theoretical framework established to examine how the repressed and unresolved past continues to shape the present constructing “traumatic identity.” Through “hauntology” which refers to the way that things that are not present impact the present, both conceived by Jacques Derrida (1993) and further extended by scholars like Avery Gordon and Mark Fisher, I take the “specter” to stand in for the repressed and unresolved that shapes the present. The term “hauntology” was coined by Jacques Derrida in his seminal work *Specters of Marx* (1993). Linguistically, the term constitutes a portmanteau of “haunting” and “ontology.” Derrida challenges the traditional ontology of presence which is the idea that only what is physically here exists by arguing that the present is always conditioned by the agency of the non-present. Derrida suggests that since the “specter” status of existing in this liminal space does not allow for affirmative or negation, as he writes, “A ghost never dies; it always comes and comes back” (1993: 99). Rather than seeing the past as a closed reading of events, haunting is about how the past continues to live in people’s minds, cultures, and societies, even in the absence of the events or events that activated them. In this sense, the past is intricately linked to subjectivity, helps to influence the present, and acts as a space of the future.

In the context of The Apple Family, the “specter” serves as the conceptual figure for histories, traumas, and political legacies that, while physically absent, continue to exert force on the living. The concept of hauntology centers on the Apple family’s relationships, illustrating their ongoing struggle with memories and histories they cannot relinquish. For the Apple family, the past has been like an apparition that has been lingering over their actions and discussions, gradually impacting their present and the numerous ways in which it manifests itself.

The concept has been transformed from its origins as spectral presences to a fundamental mode of analysis in the humanities and social sciences since its inception. The rise of spectrality studies in the 1990s marks a change in the concept of a ghost not being inside a haunting but rather existing as imagined, supercharged metaphors of unfinished histories, traumas, and cultural legacies. Psychoanalysis, trauma studies, and literary criticism analyses of haunting regarding psychological,

social, political, and cultural overtones have significantly contributed to the enrichment of this infrastructure of hauntology.

Andrew Weinstock dramatically demonstrates that this flourishing curiosity for ghosts and hauntings gave rise to the existence of “spectrality studies” (7). Often referred to as the “spectral turn” (Weinstock, 2004), this expansion moves beyond the literal ghost story to analyze how culture is shaped by what remains unassimilated. The crucial component of these studies mainly revolves around the presence of the past, which undeniably affects the flow of the present and future.

Further extending this framework, Avery Gordon, in her seminal work *Ghostly Matters* (2008), shifts the focus from philosophical to sociological. She defines haunting as an animated state in which “a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known” (xvi). For Gordon, the ghost is not supernatural fiction but a social figure that demands attention. She argues that:

Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis... [it] describes those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive. (2008: 7)

Gordon seeks a new way of knowing, focusing on listening rather than seeing, and being attentive to lost but still present intimations, hints, suggestions, and portents. She refers to these echoes and murmurs as “ghostly matters” and implies that they persistently haunt us. “To be haunted,” as she puts it, “is to be tied to historical and social effects” (x). Haunting represents a distinctive condition in which suppressed or unresolved social violence comes to light, whether in a direct manner or through more subtle, indirect means. This notion encapsulates the distinctive yet cyclical encounters that arise when the concept of home transforms into something alien that is dynamic central to the domestic setting of *The Apple Family*. This definition is particularly pertinent to the American context of Richard Nelson’s plays. As Andrew Weinstock observes, “America has always been a land of ghosts,” a nation where the present is governed by hopes, fears, and regrets that foreclose or open possibilities for the future” (2004: 8). Furthermore, scholars like Mark Fisher have extended hauntology to political critique, viewing it as the expression of “lost futures” political ideals that failed to materialize but continue to haunt the collective imagination. To operationalize these concepts, this thesis utilizes the taxonomy proposed by Franziska (2023), who distinguishes between modes of spectrality, identifying “literal,” “economic,” and “political” hauntings. This distinction is vital for analyzing *The Apple Family* cycle, where the characters confront not only the literal memory of lost family members but also the political “specters” of 9/11 and the JFK assassination.

In sum, hauntology supplies this thesis with a method for reading the present as haunted: it clarifies how unresolved histories and disavowed violences surface within domestic dialogue,

political feeling, and ordinary time. It will guide the analyses that follow, particularly where the plays render trauma as spectral subjectivity, a self-composed through returns to what has not yet found rest.

1.2. Traumatic Identity

In this thesis, I employ the term “traumatic identity” to describe a specific mode of subjectivity found in Richard Nelson’s characters. It is a state of selfhood that is continuously destabilized by the spectral return of unresolved history. Unlike a fixed medical diagnosis, “traumatic identity” here refers to a porous state of being where the boundaries between the personal self, the familial past, and the national political climate collapse. It is an identity constructed through fragmentation, isolation, and haunting.

The concept of “traumatic identity” is rooted in the fragmentation of the self. The state of the fragmented self is described by Phil Mollon in *Releasing the Unknown Self* as follows: “It is hypothesized that the threat of fragmentation is experienced by human beings (individually and collectively) unconsciously as a continual danger.” (15:2002) In this sense, traumatic experiences have the potential to disrupt and shatter an individual’s identity by changing the way in which they perceive the incident. This results in the individual being psychologically shattered into several smaller bits.

Michelle Balaev (2008:151) expands on this, foregrounding the influence of extreme distress on self-concept. She argues that trauma creates a pathological split in awareness. She argues that trauma creates a pathological split in awareness. For literary scholars, this “traumatic identity” serves as a metaphor to depict the magnitude of harm done to an individual’s identity and the consequent shift in how they perceive reality (151). Leigh Gilmore aligns with this view, proposing that “trauma refers to the self-altering, even self-shattering experience of violence, injury, and harm” (2001: 6). Thus, the self becomes susceptible to external assaults, unable to maintain a unified defense against the return of the event.

This shattering is not merely abstract; it results in a tangible degradation of the self-image. As Charles Figley (2005) observes, trauma and personality are inextricably linked. He notes that trauma causes a fundamental shift in identity:

Trauma itself had an impact on identity: It could cause a shift from competent to incompetent images of self, from attractive to unattractive images, from a strong sense of strength to a sense of weakness or a return to childlike status, as well as a shift from having a coherent identity to depersonalization or dissociative experiences. Trauma, or better yet the course of coping with it, could also have a harmonizing effect, leading to posttraumatic growth in identity and relationship skills such as empathy. (90)

This observation is crucial for analyzing *The Apple Family*. The characters do not just feel sad; they experience a regression to what Figley calls a “childlike status” or a shift from competence to helplessness. The trauma has not just hurt them; it has rewritten who they are.

Crucially, this fragmentation extends beyond the individual psyche to rupture the social fabric. Judith Herman (1997), a pioneer in trauma studies, emphasizes that traumatic events “call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community” (51). According to Herman, the destruction of the internal self inevitably leads to isolation, as the victim struggles to sustain the trust necessary for intimacy. Bessel van der Kolk (2014) reinforces this in *The Body Keeps the Score*, asserting that trauma renders the restoration of confidence in oneself and others nearly impossible.

However, as this thesis examines political plays, it is vital to note that this fracture scales up from the private to the public. As Roger Luckhurst (2008) notes, the concept of “traumatic identity” is now “the root of many national collective memories” (2), linking private grief to public history. This conceptual linkage is evident in the discourse surrounding 9/11. As Holloway suggests, the narrative that 9/11 was a moment when “everything changed” played directly into political agendas that sought to reshape American influence (cited in Gibbs, 2014: 4).

This political dimension confirms Judith Lewis Herman’s assertion that “the study of psychological trauma is and always will be an inherently political project” (cited in Figley, 2005: 83). Therefore, analyzing “traumatic identity” requires navigating the intersection where history, and politics meet. Judith Lewis Hermann (as cited in Figley, 2005: 83), proposes that “the study of psychological trauma is and always will be an inherently political project, because it calls attention to the consequences of oppression.” According to Herman, the integration of psychology into the study of history and politics is essential since it allows for a comprehensive understanding of complex and contentious issues that are sometimes ambiguous and emotionally charged. Therefore, analyzing “traumatic identity” in *The Apple Family* cycle requires navigating the intersection where neurobiology, history, and politics meet examining how national atmospheres of oppression and anxiety infiltrate and fracture the domestic self.

1.3. Historical Background

To understand the construction of “traumatic identity” in *The Apple Family*, it is necessary to situate the plays within the broader trajectory of the twentieth century, often termed the “Age of Trauma.” While the plays are set between 2010 and 2013, the characters’ psychological fragmentation is rooted in a historical genealogy that begins with the modern identity crisis. Identity crisis is a prevalent issue in the fields of psychology, sociology, and literary studies, originating from World War I. Understanding the chronological evolution of the construction of the identity requires

recognizing the importance of this historical origin, which is influenced by several linked elements, such as individual and collective social traumas. The devastating consequences of World War I, which took place from 1914 to 1918, have been extensively recorded as causing widespread psychological traumas throughout Europe. Soldiers endured substantial physical injuries, psychological trauma, and fatalities, while observers of these distressing events experienced a loss of faith, enthusiasm for life, optimism for the future, and resilience to persevere. This historical origin enables a more thorough comprehension of fragmentation and its influence on society. Vincent Sherry (2005:1) lists the following as the main points of contention in her work and she proposes that in the middle of a conflict that remains unclear, a devastating 10 million lives were cruelly lost in under five years.

The prominent countries of North America and Europe were engaged in a conflict that significantly diminished their human, financial, intellectual, and spiritual resources. This historically significant war has lost its clear temporal distinction, since the borders between the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries have grown blurred. As observed in this context, the magnitude of fatalities and the severity of the devastation caused by this battle were incomparable. Ronald Carter and John Macrae (1996:12) elucidate the profound magnitude of casualties during World War I, which had a far-reaching impact on a worldwide scale. The unprecedented loss of life was a ghastly ordeal for the nation, leaving many individuals with “no purpose in the war.” World War II ultimately emerged as the most devastating and horrific conflict in the annals of human history.

Sherry, Carter, and Macrae emphasize the unsurpassed worldwide fatalities during World War II, which subsequently evolved into the deadliest and most murderous conflict in the annals of humanity, exceeding the achievements of its predecessor. Kirby Farrell’s (1985:2) book emphasizes that World War II began a critical historical era spanning from World War I to World War II, which profoundly influenced the development of the era. The aftermath of World War II included economic turmoil, territorial realignments, the proliferation of illnesses, and unparalleled mortality rates. The war’s psychological impacts resulted in a deep feeling of estrangement, disintegration, and deprivation in a disordered environment. The extensive mortality and devastation shattered the former connection between self and identity. The nuclear era came into existence. Afterwards, the Cold War’s doctrine of annihilation increased the likelihood of significant psychological suffering, hence intensifying its impact on individuals. The conclusion of World War II did not result in universal tranquility, as the dropping of atomic bombs in Japan revealed their capacity for global disaster. This resulted in the beginning of the Cold War between communist states and Western countries, a conflict that lasted until the late 1980s.

Kirby Farrell (1985) asserts that the substantial amount of individual suffering during the period can be explained rationally. He asserts that the devastating events of the Great Depression and WWII impacted people’s psychological state, resulting in a post-traumatic atmosphere. Despite

assurances that the years following World War II would be peaceful, these years also witnessed the onset of the Cold War, the Korean War, and economic instabilities. Following World War II, America saw substantial effects and conflicts. Consequently, the nation experienced substantial social, cultural, and political shifts. The post-war era ushered in a feeling of tranquility, but it also gave rise to social and political upheaval. The previous historical era was characterized by a combination of unrest, worry, familial bonds, class strife, economic challenges, and a rising desire for money. These factors put pressure on people, leading to feelings of alienation and fragmentation. Major events, like World War II, had a big impact on the social and political landscape of the 20th century.

This historical trajectory is not merely a sociopolitical backdrop but is intrinsic to the evolution of American dramatic literature. As Michael Cotsell (2005) argues in *The Theater of Trauma*, the American stage has historically served as a primary site for the “psychological struggle for the American mind,” particularly in the wake of modern crises.⁽⁵⁾ Cotsell posits that early twentieth-century drama emerged as a necessary mechanism to process the fragmentation of the modern self.⁽¹⁰⁾ Richard Nelson’s *The Apple Family* cycle can thus be read as a contemporary continuation of this lineage. By grounding national history within the intimate setting of Rhinebeck, Nelson updates this modernist project for the twenty-first century, replacing the anxieties of the 1920s with the post-9/11 “specters” of surveillance, political polarization, and unassimilated grief. Through this lens, the theatre remains the essential civic space for metabolizing the nation’s trauma.

Dramatists frequently employ repeating themes of the terrible past to demonstrate how people strove to attain happiness after terrible events. But people’s painful pasts often come back to haunt them later in life. These factors made the 20th century the age of trauma, not just the initial phase of it. According to Balaev’s theory (2008), historical trauma may have lasting effects even decades after it occurs. Therefore, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are the trauma eras. Emotions like loss, anguish, and suffering have persisted because people from the first half of the 20th century, even those who did not see such events identify with those traumatized people. Wars, genocides, accidents, and terrorist acts, often driven by racial, political, and historical inheritances, have profoundly molded the contemporary globe. The play *The Apple Family: Scenes from the Life in the Country* amplifies the voices of anxious and unsettled people who live in constant apprehension of terrorist strikes. In other words, one of the causes of an individual’s internal detachment is collective trauma. There was no geographical limit to the anxiety, anger, or dread that many people felt following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. Since then, many people have experienced anxiety over indiscriminate assaults, which has left them feeling both helpless and defenseless, as well as having detrimental effects on their identity. All these incidents contribute to the formation of one’s personality as the haunting memories of these horrific occurrences resurface and disrupt people. In short, the historical background that matters for this thesis is twofold: a genealogy of trauma and identity from the world wars to PTSD and cultural-trauma theory, and a post 9/11 U.S. context in

which commemorations and elections repeatedly summon unsettled histories. Nelson's formal choices allow us to see how such histories are domesticated and redistributed in ordinary talk, shaping what this thesis term's "traumatic identity."

1.4. The History of Trauma

For the most part, it is generally accepted that trauma is "responsive to and constitutive of modernity" (Micale and Lerner, 2001: 10). This commentary places an emphasis on the relevance of trauma as a lens through which to investigate modernity. It highlights the fact that trauma exhibits a responsiveness to and a constitutive role in the process of constructing contemporary human experience. The significance of trauma within the larger framework of modernity is emphasized, and it is suggested that by analyzing trauma, a more profound understanding of the intricacies of contemporary life and literature might be attained.

In fact, the beginning of the notion of modernity is often associated with the eighteenth century and is recognized as a series of events that contradict each other because of shifts in society. Individuals are 'disembedded' from repetitive customs and practices, resulting in a liberating but stressful departure from restricted expectations. In other words, dislocation from cyclical rituals has both advantages and disadvantages for human beings. Modernity is acknowledged as a form of liberation as well as an anxiety-driven system that can cause irrecoverable damage to the psyche.

According to Seltzer, modernity, as a connotation of the term wound, is acknowledged: the modern subject has become inseparable from the categories of shock and trauma (1997: 18). Before elaborating on the relationship between the modern subject and trauma, highlighting the historical transition of the term is of utmost importance.

Merriam-Webster defines trauma, primarily in the contexts of clinical medicine, psychology, and literature, as follows: "Trauma is the Greek word for wound." While the Greeks originally used the word only to physical ailments, contemporary usage often encompasses emotional wounds as well. Later, the connotation changed to a wound inflicted upon the mind. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020). According to Luckhurst, the past connotation of the term correlates with the concept of trauma, and he suggests that scholars generally agreed that the genesis of the concept of trauma was inextricably linked to the expansion of the railways in the 1860s. (2008: 21) The railway served as an emblem of British progress, celebrated for its exceptional technical capabilities and effectiveness in reducing travel duration and distance. Although British clock time was standardized to incorporate railway timetables, the business remained risky and chaotic. Ever since the first run of Stephenson's Rocket in 1830, the railway has been associated with unfortunate events, such as the fatal accident involving the death of MP William Huskisson on the lines. "The 1871 Railways Regulation Act" required thorough reporting of fatal incidents, resulting in an annual average of 200

passenger fatalities, with a high of 758 in 1874 (Bartrip and Burman, 1983). That is to say, the railway is essentially associated with the history of trauma. The origin of trauma has sparked contentious opinions.

While the physician John Erichsen (1866) prominently attributed the railway spine syndrome to organic causes, namely to a concussion of the spine, the surgeon Herbert Page attributed it to emotional and neurological factors such as fright and “nervous shock” (Page 1883). The Berlin neurologist Hermann Oppenheim coined the term “traumatic neurosis” for this paradoxical condition, in which victims of shock-like impact seemed physically unharmed yet reported motor and sensory deficits such as paralysis and convulsions. (Figley, 2012: 455)

As noted earlier, railway spine was initially linked to physical injury but later understood to involve emotional and neurological factors such as fright and “nervous shock.” This paradoxical condition, referred to as traumatic neurosis, is characterized by motor and sensory deficits despite no apparent physical injuries. Hermann Oppenheim brought the Greek word for “wound” into the field of psychiatry, which was previously only used in surgery. According to the theory, traumatic events may cause psychological and neurological harm in addition to physical harm. Thus, the definition of trauma as “wound” has been constructed as a basis.

Jean-Martin Charcot, categorized various disorders, including traumatic neurosis or “traumatic hysteria,” under the broader term of hysteria. In the late nineteenth century, Charcot, a French neurologist at the Salpêtrière hospital, was the first to investigate the connection between trauma and mental diseases in traumatized people. Investigating the origins of hysteria and dissociation “serious and obstinate nervous states which present themselves after collisions” (221). Charcot contended that “it is customary for these ailments, including paralysis, contractures, syncope, and amnesia, to initially localize in areas where the injury, contusion, or sprain occurs” (33). Gradually, however, such sensations permeated the neural system. Charcot elucidated that the origins were not physical but psychical, asserting that “these motor paralyzes of psychical origin are as objectively real as those resulting from an organic lesion” (289). One of the principal indications of these neurotic conditions was “traumatic retrograde amnesia” (376), indicating that the affected individual had “no recollection of the events that transpired” (xxxi).

Ruth Harris, in her Introduction to Charcot’s work, discusses traumatic retrograde amnesia with an illustrative case. A guy remains unconscious for almost six days after a traffic accident. Upon awakening, he has terrible retrograde amnesia, unable to recall the event, while also enduring paralysis in his legs. He contends that this is due to the crushing of his legs. The horror he experienced during the accident compels him to remove the awful event from his memory and substitute it with an alternate narrative. Consequently, he inadvertently evades recollection of the unpleasant incident (xxxi).

Charcot discovered that hysteria had psychological rather than physical roots and affected both men and women, not just females. Charcot examined six men afflicted with hysteria in connection with He connected cases of traumatic neurosis to physical accidents, even though he thought that hysteria was a hereditary condition. (Sutterlin, 2020:12) Although Charcot amnesia, Pierre Janet stressed “dissociation” as the fundamental principle of trauma. Janet asserts that traumatized people seem to have lost their ability to integrate fresh experiences. It seems that their personality development stopped at a certain juncture, inhibiting the incorporation of fresh features. Pierre Janet, a disciple of Charcot, identified “dissociation” as a fundamental characteristic of psychological trauma. This phenomenon is evident when people exhibit physical symptoms like paralysis and convulsions, even when they have not sustained any physical injuries. (Van der Kolk, Weisaeth and Van der Hart, 1996:53) Janet’s 1889 dissertation, titled *L’automatisme psychologique*, presented a sophisticated description of the mind that preceded Sigmund Freud’s concept. He defined “dissociation” as the cognitive process by which the mind isolates violent or startling experiences from conscious awareness. While other psychiatrists, such as Moreau de Tours, had previously proposed the concept of dissociation, Janet developed the first comprehensive model that emphasized the significance of comprehending the mind’s capacity to detach itself from external stimuli (Sutterlin, 2020). Janet made a significant contribution to psychoanalysis. Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart expand upon Janet’s ideas, asserting that “the inadequate integration of intensely emotionally charged experiences into the memory system leads to dissociation” (163).

To evade the profound impacts of the emotions linked to the traumatic event, the traumatized individual essentially represses the trauma into the unconscious, leading to a division or dissociation between the conscious and unconscious mind. Dissociation or mental splitting defines the current condition of the traumatized individual.

Freud argues that the traumatized individual perpetually “acts out” the manifestations of trauma. Between 1895 and 1914, Freud did not examine traumatic neurosis; nevertheless, with the shell shock of World War I, his interest in trauma was revitalized. At that time, troops who were physically fit but declined to return to combat were seen as deserters and idlers. Despite being physically healthy, these troops “not only experienced memory deficits, but also recurrently relived traumatic events through flashbacks, nightmares, and hallucinations months or even years later” (Luckhurst, 500). Freud clarifies that the hallmark of such delayed recollection is the enactment of one’s painful events. The traumatized individual reenacts or feels suppressed memories as if they are current, rather than recalling the painful events. The afflicted individual is oblivious to his suppressed memories yet manifests them via behavior. He manifests it not as a recollection but as an act; he continues it, unaware of his repetition ... he is unable to evade this desire to repeat; ultimately, we comprehend that this is his method of remembrance. (Freud, 1914/1958: 150) The traumatized individual reenacts the traumatic memory via recurrent and involuntary flashbacks, nightmares, and hallucinogenic experiences, rather than just recalling it as a past event.

Freud returned to the study of trauma after WWI, this time concentrating on the effects of combat on troops. He ascribed the traumatic encounter to intense terror rather than the impact of a concussion, seeing it as a violation of the mind's "protective shield" (Freud 1953–74, 18: 29). In 1941, Abram Kardiner did a thorough study of combat neurosis, which is the urge to remember the experience over and over again. This study laid the groundwork for the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in modern psychiatry. Freud's notion of repetition compulsion has been included in a group of symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) known as "intrusions." The concept of a "talking cure" that "binds" or "narrativizes" the very frightening event established the foundation for contemporary trauma treatment, emphasizing the value of incorporating disconnected memories into a "personal narrative" (Van der Kolk, Van der Hart and Marmar, 1996: 309).

Modern methodologies about the potential for trauma recovery are influenced by Freud's concept of "working through." The notion of "working through" is first presented in Freud's *Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through* (1914) and subsequently in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (1926). In *Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through*, Freud expands upon the concepts of repression and the recurrence of traumatic events. Furthermore, Freud believes that trauma may be alleviated by the process of working it out, which entails enabling the traumatized individual to recall previously suppressed distressing emotions.

Freud's conceptualization of mourning is a crucial framework for understanding the "working through" phase in twentieth and twenty-first-century studies. In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud characterizes grieving as "the response to the loss of a beloved individual or to the loss of an abstraction that has assumed their place, such as one's nation, freedom, an ideal, etc." (243). Freud notes that:

profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world—insofar as it does not recall him—the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him. (244)

Mourning involves acknowledging the nonexistence of the valued thing or notion; nonetheless, mourners often struggle to accept this reality. Using Freud's conception of grieving as a foundation, LaCapra identifies effective mourning as the process of moving with painful events. One of the things that sets LaCapra's ideas apart from Freud's ideas is the fact that he describes mourning not only as an individual grieving process but also as a societal process. According to her (2001) Mourning functions as a ritual that alters the compulsive repetition linked to trauma, especially violence. Its objective is to minimize compulsiveness via the introduction of critical distance, transformation, social revival, and ethical accountability. Therefore, working through is a social process entailing "not simply alterity in the abstract but actual others—possibly empathic, trustworthy others"

(76:2001). Consequently, LaCapra's arguments include an ethical and political dimension that enables the traumatized individual to reconcile with their experience and maybe influence others around them.

1.4.1. Trauma Theory

This thesis establishes trauma theory not merely as a thematic topic, but as the structural logic governing Richard Nelson's *The Apple Family*. While founded on Sigmund Freud's early psychoanalytic concepts, modern trauma theory particularly the work of Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub shifts. The focus is from the medical diagnosis to the structure of experience.

This framework is essential for analyzing Nelson's quartet, as the plays do not depict active war zones but rather the domestic aftershocks of history, where the past intrudes upon the present in non-linear ways. Trauma is founded on Sigmund Freud's concepts of trauma theory. Caruth made significant improvements to the trauma theory. The esteemed trauma theory expert has had a profound influence on the area and is widely regarded as an essential source for future research, showcasing her esteemed reputation and influence in the field.

This thesis will establish trauma as the focal point of the study. Trauma theory facilitates comprehension of how previous experiences influence one's present state, building an environment where identities are consistently recreated in reaction to unsolved conflicts from the past. The play's depiction of trauma will also be analyzed, emphasizing the effects of the characters' personal and group identities. The predecessors of the trauma theory will be shown here.

The concept of trauma transitioned from the medical field to interdisciplinary studies in the early 1990s, highlighted by two significant publications. *American Imago* (1991) is a quarterly publication that explores Freud's impact across several fields, including the humanities, arts, and social sciences. *Cathy Caruth's Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) is an edited collection that analyzes trauma via essays and interviews with filmmakers, sociologists, and literary theorists, as well as republished writings from *American Imago*. Caruth, a pivotal figure in trauma studies influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, defines the volume's objective to investigate the impact of trauma on psychoanalytic practice and the consequences for literature, teaching, historical writing, cinema, and activism. (4:1995) Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth are recognized as the luminaries of this theory, and they facilitated the development of the field of trauma and literary studies. These early pioneers analyzed and predicted the connections between trauma, literature, and psychoanalysis starting in the early 1990s.

Trauma: Explorations in Memory, Cathy Caruth (1995) offers a concise depiction of trauma and discusses the reasons for its theoretical complexities. Caruth contends that trauma is not only

triggered by a particular occurrence and proposes that traumatic experiences disrupt the individual's perception of time. Utilizing Freud's notions of "belatedness" and "repetition compulsion," Caruth emphasizes the unknowability and incomprehensibility of traumatic experience. Cathy Caruth says that belatedness is when "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in the repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (1996:4). To clarify, trauma is first not comprehended but subsequently becomes integrated into the life of the traumatized individual through the occurrence of flashbacks and recurrent reenactments:

There is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (Caruth, 4: 1995)

Caruth examines the intricate connection between trauma and consciousness, positing that traumatic events are not fully recognized at the time of their occurrence and subsequently resurface in many manifestations. She asserts that the core of trauma is in its incomprehensible nature, indicating that attempts to describe the horrific experience eventually result in "the collapse of its understanding" (7:1995). The majority of individuals who have experienced trauma are affected by recurring and distressing recollections, visual or auditory perceptions that are not based in reality, or distressing dreams. These experiences often manifest as intrusive and vivid recurrences of the traumatic event, as well as nonverbal recollections. Caruth claims that traumatic memories, as proposed by Freud, are experienced rather than recollected, resulting in a phenomenon of "amnesia" about the past in traumatized persons. Despite the vivid and accurate imagery of traumatic reexperiencing, it typically eludes conscious recollection and control, leading to restricted access to these memories. For Nelson's dramaturgy, this concept of belatedness is foundational. The plays are set on anniversaries (9/11, the JFK assassination) or election nights, which act as temporal loops. The characters do not experience these events directly; they experience their spectral return. Just as Caruth argues that trauma manifests in "repeated, intrusive hallucinations" (4), the Apple family's dialogue is structured around the intrusive return of old political arguments and familial griefs that refuse to stay in the past. Uncle Benjamin, with his fragmented memory, serves as the literal embodiment of this theory: he experiences the loss of his dog not as a past event, but as a recurring, immediate shock, dramatizing the way trauma traps the subject in a perpetual present.

Similar to Caruth, Dori Laub in *Truth and Testimony* (1992) focuses on the unspeakability of the events. The articles in *Testimony* all address the difficult subject of how artists and regular people dealt with the terrible events of World War II and the Holocaust through their writing, including songs, tales, and short stories. Traumatized individuals often struggle to articulate their experiences due to the inadequacy of words, time, and attentive listening, leading them to silence their trauma. This silence distorts their narratives and fosters uncertainty about the reality of their experiences. At the core of their experience is "the collapse of witnessing" (65). Felman and Laub emphasize that art

and literature serve as a vital means of seeing and accessing reality in the context of trauma, particularly when other forms of information are unavailable (1992: xx). This theoretical “collapse” creates the specific linguistic texture of the plays. Nelson’s characters frequently interrupt one another, trail off into silence, or deploy humor to deflect from pain. These are not merely realistic conversational tics; they are symptoms of unassimilated trauma. When Marian breaks down in *That Hopey Changey Thing*, or when the family fails to articulate the magnitude of 9/11 in *Sweet and Sad*, they are enacting Caruth’s argument: the traumatic experience cannot be spoken, only re-enacted through gaps and silences in the dialogue.

1.4.2. PTSD, Stages and Symptoms of Trauma

While “traumatic identity” describes the ontological fragmentation of the self, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) constitutes the clinical manifestation of this rupture. Indeed, the symptoms that have been experienced after the event are called posttraumatic stress disorder. The American Psychiatric Association has defined the clinical definition of posttraumatic stress disorder as follows:

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape or other violent personal assault (American Psychiatric Association, nd.)

Individuals diagnosed with PTSD have often experienced distressing traumatic events, resulting in their traumatization. Individuals who encounter an event that involves real or potential death, severe injury, or a physical danger to the sense of self that is deemed to be beyond what is typically experienced are diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) if they exhibit specific groups of symptoms. People who go through wars, tragedies, accidents, or other highly stressful situations tend to exhibit certain physical and psychological disorders.

The historical understanding of this condition is rooted in the work of Abram Kardiner. In *The Traumatic Neuroses of War* (1941), Kardiner analyzed the psychological aftermath of World War I to anticipate the casualties of World War II. He observed that following combat, patients who had previously functioned normally developed a “physioneurosis,” characterized by a pervasive sense of futility, persistent hyper-alertness, and a heightened sensitivity to potential danger (as cited in van der Kolk, 2018).

This condition leads to a distinctive disruption of memory and identity. James Titchener (1986) outlines the “acute phase” of trauma, which encompasses shock, cognitive disarray, and memory deficits. As the condition deteriorates, the individual often experiences fatigue, social withdrawal, and a loss of interest in life. Consequently, the person adopts the role of a “shadow person,” navigating through society without actively engaging in it, focused only on securing the necessary resources for survival. This concept of the “shadow person” aligns with the hauntological framework

of this thesis, suggesting a spectral existence where the subject is physically present but psychically absent.

Furthermore, the relationship between trauma and memory is central to the dissolution of identity. Favorini (2008) argues that the self is established via the introjection of historical encounters and is therefore intersubjective. Since memory functions as the matrix for storing these experiences, it shapes the formation of the self. However, advances in neuroscience and psychoanalysis have revealed that shock and trauma often result in amnesia or blurred memory (94). This blurring is a peculiar symptom of trauma that directly impacts identity: as memory is shattered, the cohesive sense of self disintegrates. Consequently, the traumatized subject is left with a fragmented history, unable to construct a stable narrative of the present.

The fragmentation of the self is not merely psychological but physiological. Bessel van der Kolk (2014) highlights neuroimaging research revealing that during traumatic recall, there is a significant reduction in activity in Broca's area. This deactivation induces a state van der Kolk calls "speechless terror." Because the brain's linguistic centre shuts down, the traumatic experience cannot be organized into a narrative; instead, it is stored as fragmented sensory imprints. Recent scholarship in theatre studies validates this neurobiological reality. Monika Sarul (2024) argues that because trauma resists verbal articulation, the stage becomes a critical site for expressing the "speechless terror" that defies language. Sarul notes that for the traumatized subject, "speech is not the only way to treat trauma," and often the experience remains "visceral and intuitive" rather than linguistic. While plays like *Black Watch* utilize communal movement to circumvent this silence, Richard Nelson's work takes a different approach: he stages the "speechless terror" itself through the gaps, pauses, and interruptions of the Apple family's dialogue. In both cases, the theatre functions as a "safe space" where the unrepresentable nature of trauma can be witnessed collectively.

This aligns with Favorini's (2008) argument that shock results in amnesia or blurred memory, leaving the subject unable to construct a stable narrative of the present. Individuals who have experienced trauma typically have a tendency to relive and recreate prior experiences as a result of the impaired functioning of their left brain. The impairment might result in emotions such as wrath, fear, fury, embarrassment, or immobilization. Once the emotional turmoil settles, individuals may attempt to assign responsibility for their behavior, such as arriving late or failing to pay attention. While it is a typical occurrence, research has shown that trauma may impede this level of consciousness.

According to Kolk, this stage is called "speechless terror," while Herman names it "constriction." Herman classifies trauma into three distinct categories: hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. Hyperarousal is closely linked with post-traumatic stress disorder, in which patients have heightened anxiety, as if a horrific incident is going to occur again. Hence, Herman describes

the condition of individuals who have experienced trauma after the occurrence of an event. Herman (1999) outlines that traumatized individuals exhibit a heightened startle response to unexpected stimuli, together with a profound susceptibility to events linked to the traumatic incident. Although time has passed, it is challenging to overcome the lingering consequences of a traumatic occurrence. “Intrusion” refers to the persistent reoccurrences of prior traumatic experiences. The last category is ‘constriction.’ Herman proposes that “when a person is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender. The system of self-defense shuts down entirely.” (36). Constriction may be defined as a state of emotional numbness that serves as a defense mechanism against predicted painful experiences of a similar kind. Put simply, it is the act of separating emotions from actions and memories. Herman asserts that the condition of detachment might be considered a benevolent aspect of nature, serving as a safeguard against excruciating suffering. This method facilitates a means of distancing oneself from the triggers of traumatic incidents, such as activities and locations, in order to prevent the event from being recalled or remembered again. Ultimately, these symptoms lead to what Michelle Balaev (2008) describes as the “unrepresentability” of trauma. Because the brain cannot properly encode the event, the traumatic reaction remains unassimilated, haunting the subject as a ghost that refuses to be put to rest.

1.5. Psychoanalytic Theory

The thesis combines trauma theory, hauntology, psychoanalytic theory, within the historical framework of contemporary America. The objective is to examine how play reflects and adds to conversations on identity, memory, and trauma in American society. This method not only improves our comprehension of the plays themselves but also provides wider insights into the continuous development and discussion of “traumatic identity.” To ground this inquiry conceptually, the next paragraph turns to Freud’s foundational account of trauma.

The notion of trauma underwent significant transformation and advancement over the twentieth century, although its origins may be traced back to the pioneering contributions of Freud’s psychoanalysis. Freud is widely recognized as the forerunner of contemporary trauma theory. Therefore, this study examines Sigmund Freud’s pioneering contribution to psychology, which illustrates the essence of trauma and its influence on the psychological and physiological conditions of the traumatized individual, ultimately resulting in the severe affliction of hysteria.

As outlined here, trauma theory serves as a connection between the fields of psychology and the humanities. Literary theory focuses on the examination of trauma and its impact on the human psyche, as well as how the phenomenon is manifested in literary works. Susannah Radstone (2013) et al. elucidated that “trauma theory denotes a vibrant, interdisciplinary area of Western scholarship developed since the 1980s through cross-fertilization between psychology and the humanities”

(2013:1). Trauma theory is frequently regarded as the convergence of the fields of psychology and the humanities. In literature, particularly, the idea is included in the analysis of the various aspects of characters' psyches. With this interdisciplinary backdrop in place, the discussion narrows to Freud's core concepts as they relate to the plays. With this interdisciplinary backdrop in place, the discussion narrows to Freud's core concepts as they relate to the plays.

Building on the definition above, this section outlines the key Freudian terms guiding the readings. Freudian psychoanalytic notions are crucial in understanding the complex dynamics of trauma shown in the chosen modern American plays within the theoretical framework of this thesis. Freud's ideas on "repression," the "unconscious mind," and "defensive mechanisms" provide a perspective to analyze how people confront prior traumatic events. Furthermore, Freud (2015:23) elucidates the term "traumatic" as "an event such as external trauma will doubtless provoke a massive disturbance in the organism's energy system and mobilize all available defense mechanisms." According to Freud (1920) traumatic is accepted "as any excitations from the outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield" (29). Freud's concept of traumatic response is connected to the notion of shielding and acknowledging that an external traumatic experience poses an existential danger to one's sense of identity. According to Freud's research, trauma is considered a mental injury inflicted upon the psyche. The following background paragraphs extend these concepts and situate them alongside later developments relevant to the analysis.

Extending the Freudian account, the subsequent materials sketch how these ideas operate in mind and culture. Freudian psychoanalysis was developed by Freud in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Freud posits that the mind resembles a haunted place, replete with suppressed fears, desires, and traumatic experiences. Thereby, it can be said that unconscious drives, rather than conscious will, have an extensive impact on human behaviors, challenging the traditional view of individuals as rational, self-aware, autonomous beings. Psychoanalytic theory has importance since it has a relation with trauma. In other words, defense mechanisms are "psychological strategies by which persons reduce or avoid states such as conflict, frustration, anxiety, and stress" (Corsini:390). In this sense, a person who undergoes traumatic experiences may repress their conscious thought to escape the suffering and pain led by the event or trauma itself. The term "repressed" appears for the first time in Breuer and Freud's *Preliminary Communication* (1893, in Breuer and Freud, 1895). According to Breuer and Freud, "trauma persists in consciousness as a component of the subject's state of feeling" (1955:87).

However, when this person cannot endure the pain, they repress it. Thereby, memories disappear from the conscious, and Freud and Breuer suggest that "it was a question of things that the patient wished to forget and therefore intentionally repressed." (1955:10) Repression, as one of the key defense mechanisms, helps the individual escape from discomfort, anxiety, and unwanted memories. As the play progresses, the acts of suppression manifest themselves in a variety of

different ways. This dynamic underlies clinical and cultural accounts of traumatic neurosis. The concept that mental disorders might occur as a result of the mind being unable to deal with a traumatic event and being overwhelmed by the experience is the foundation upon which the conventional understanding of traumatic neurosis is built. This overload happens when the mind's defenses are breached by powerful external stimuli, which then disrupt the mind's regular functioning. Even in collapse, the ego attempts to repair over time.

Ego disorders brought on by overwhelming emotions may have severe consequences, such as death or insanity. Nevertheless, the ego generally undergoes an inherent process of restructuring and recuperation. This process may be compared to rousing from a distressing dream, although it often requires a longer duration and can lead to varying degrees of recovery and substantial alterations in defensive systems. The traumatic or stressful event has a profound impact on both the conscious and unconscious levels of understanding. The memory of the event, filled with fear and helplessness, holds significant meaning and affects the individual's mental well-being. The person may try to resist reliving the event, but intrusive images and dreams of it persist during both waking and sleeping hours. Research on intrusion helps clarify this persistence.

Horowitz (as cited in Figley, 2005) suggests that "intrusive thoughts in the form of images were frequently derived from perceptions during a traumatic event" (87). Studies on thought intrusion give us clues about ongoing illness and taking longer to heal from stress. He replaces the economic view with one that combines psychoanalytic theory with information theory. Horowitz's method is based on the idea that post-stress people have too many thinking interruptions and information processing. Memory storage leads to unwanted thoughts that stop being so annoying but don't go away either. Though memories of the stressful event become less bothersome, they can still be recovered, which means that external reminders or dates can bring them back to life. This slow recycling involves rearranging details about what happened, how it affected people's views, their fate, their future, and how they look to others. If the restructuring of information inside intrusive memories does not occur, a period of denial and repetition follows.

Parallel to this, work on identity-splitting offers vocabulary for traumatic self-formation. The Second Self and the Doubling Theory, both of which Robert Jay Lifton developed, are two of the most well-known contributions and among theories that have demonstrated their viability on both the scientific and experimental levels. In Lifton's idea of "doubling", the traumatized person experiences a fragmentation of the self as a mechanism for adjusting to traumatic occurrences. Lifton elucidates *Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Trauma* that "extreme trauma creates a second self" (165). The term "second self" describes a psychological transformation that takes place inside an individual who has experienced a traumatic event, such as the death of someone else or the threat of their own mortality. This transformation leads to significant alterations in their sense of identity. Because of this change, a distinct new identity arises, which Lifton labels the "traumatized self."

1.6. Psychodynamic Perspective

Psychodynamic theories, as a branch of psychoanalytic theory, emphasize the unconscious mind, emphasizing how important aspects of personality are hidden from our consciousness and difficult to uncover. As outlined above, psychodynamic theories are affiliated with the construction of identity, which is one of the denominators of this study. Since the “unconscious mind” is of utmost importance to analyzing the characters’ experiences and traumas, this theory will be a focus point to study further. Ewen (2014) explains how Freud created the initial theory of personality and psychotherapy, known as psychoanalysis. This theory suggests that a significant portion of our personality remains hidden in our unconscious mind. We use defense mechanisms to conceal unpleasant truths from ourselves. Additionally, we are influenced by desires, beliefs, fears, and conflicts. The idea of hidden desires, wishes, or conflicts is parallel to the notion of trauma since the victims tend to hide unwanted experiences until they are startled or intruded upon by reenactments. According to Freud, psychosexual stages are key to the development of personality. Ewen (2014) also elucidates that according to Carl Jung, as one of the pioneers, “there is a collective unconscious that contains archetypes, or inherited predispositions, to perceive the world in certain ways” (1). The plays in this study depict previous experiences that have collectively traumatized the people. Consequently, it is crucial to elucidate the concept of collective unconsciousness. According to Alfred Adler, the way we interact with our parents and the goals we set for ourselves have a greater influence on our personalities than our natural instincts. (2014:7) As outlined above, Freud emphasized the significance of the unconscious mind, while Adler focused on how a child’s personality is influenced by their parental relationships.

Erik Erikson, the successor of Freud in the psychoanalytic movement, successfully revised psychoanalytic theory without arousing a reaction from the establishment. They corrected many notable errors made by Freud, such as recognizing that human nature comprises both positive and negative parts and that the rational ego has more potency than Freud first suggested. Furthermore, they acknowledged that an individual’s personality is mostly shaped by their parental relationships rather than exclusively by innate impulses and sexuality. Additionally, they observed that personality development occurs throughout several psychosocial phases, spanning from infancy to old age. The phases include adolescence and the identity crisis, with distinct requirements for each. The process of identity formation is intricately linked to self-perception and the development of one’s personality. Possessing a highly developed sense of self is advantageous since it influences our responses to life. The aforementioned theorists will be the primary subjects of this research, with the aim of providing a detailed analysis of how identity is constructed in modern American play.

1.7. Trauma and Hauntology

“The one who is possessed is also dispossessed – of their own identity and voice”
(Fisher, 2014: 45)

Ghosts and trauma are closely related and inseparable from each other. Ghosts demonstrates how lingering memories from previous painful experiences affect the present and may reemerge in the future. They represent the unsolved conflicts and emotional wounds that endure, highlighting the lasting influence of these previous events. Ghosts, as manifestations of memory, integrate the past into the present and persistently haunt individuals. Concentrating on the haunting and memory-inducing characteristics of Specters, Emily Pine argues that “specters represent not only the past returned to haunt us but given their effect on the present” (154: 2011).

Memories from the past influence persons’ current lives, making them not merely symbols of history but also intangible forces that distort the present. Caruth posits that the event manifests “belatedly” due to its lack of absorption at the time of its occurrence. She contends that the traumatic event’s significance resides in its delayed occurrence and its reluctance to be confined to a certain location or time. A traumatic event is odd because it seems to be caused by an unattended encounter. Trauma is perceived as an absence, devoid of temporal or spatial context, rather than a constructive presence. This approach posits that trauma has delayed consequences on individuals, profoundly influencing their subsequent lives. This absence imparts a spectral quality to traumatic events. Traumatized individuals may become so engrossed in the experience that they begin to resemble living spirits. Weinstock describes the ghost as “a symptom of repressed knowledge” that “calls into question the possibilities of a future based on avoidance of the past” (2004: 6). The ghost forces us to confront and deal with the burden of the past and its unacknowledged “specters.” In effect, summoning ghosts makes the present itself appear as not something solid, one-dimensional, or self-sufficient, but as something that is split and unstable, based on the suppression of other presents and voices, and, ultimately, spectral.

Dominick La Capra proposes that “something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or revenant” (1995: 79). In other words, the past and memory pervade the individuals’ present and affect their future relationships. Individuals often struggle to maintain healthy relationships with others. Scholars like Cathy Caruth and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock often perceive haunting as the reemergence of suppressed trauma (2004). Cathy Caruth thinks that a person experiencing trauma may undergo an intense and sudden event, resulting in delayed and uncontrolled recurring hallucinations and intrusive phenomena. From this point, it is understood that the trauma causes the person to have the shocking experience of the sudden and catastrophic event as the notion of Specter continuously haunts the individual. Roger Luckhurst underscores the trauma’s haunting stance in his work of art titled as *The Trauma Question* (2013) as follows:

Of late, an array of visual and written stories involving trauma have ostentatiously played around with narrative time, disrupting linearity, suspending logical causation, running out of temporal sequence, working backwards towards the inaugurating traumatic event, or playing with belated revelations that retrospectively rewrite narrative significance. (80)

That is to say contemporary visual and textual narratives about trauma have broken chronological progression, suspending logical causality, presenting events out of order, retracing steps to the incident, or reinterpreting narrative meaning in hindsight. Most people who have been through trauma have flashbacks, hallucinations, or nightmares that bother them. Lyman says, “What if there were another attack?” (10). Here, it is visible that a person who has been traumatized is having a startling experience.

These usually come in the form of unwanted re-experiences and behavioral memories of the event. This is how Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is clinically defined: Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental condition that may manifest in individuals who have undergone or observed a distressing incident, such as a natural catastrophe, a severe accident, a terrorist attack, warfare, sexual assault, or other forms of violent personal aggression. In other words, individuals diagnosed with the PTSD are mostly traumatized since they have been exposed to unsettling traumatic events. Such individuals not only develop PTSD as a result of trauma, but they also experience borderline personality disorder (BPD). These notions will be given in detail in the seminal parts of the thesis, but it is important to underline the similarity between PTSD and the specters that haunt individuals just after traumatic events. This area is the intersection of hauntology and trauma theory, where they come together in the sense of haunting the present with the remnants of the past. Pilar Blanco and Peeren (2013:9) suggest, “To be traumatized...is to be ‘possessed by an image or event’ located in the past. To be possessed—gripped indefinitely by an anachronistic event—also describes the condition of being haunted.” It can be inferred that traumatization refers to being ‘possessed’ by a past event or image, a condition that can be indefinitely gripped by an anachronistic event as being possessed by the ghosts of the past, as suggested by Derrida. Ron Eyerman suggests that “memory provides individuals and collectives with a cognitive map” and “is central to individual and collective identity.” (2019: 2).

This perspective underscores a recurring theme of this study. As Stephen Frosh discusses, “every generation has something that haunts it” (2013:1). Collective memory is a collection of thoughts, images, and feelings about the past that are most likely not to be found in any one person’s mind but in the things that people share. Therefore, events that a whole nation experiences affect all individuals sharing the same past. Therefore, the plays that will be employed in this thesis will illustrate both individual and collective traumas caused by “specters” of the past.

According to Fisher, “the one who is possessed is also dispossessed—of their own identity and voice” (2014: 45). So being haunted brings forth the loss of identity and voice, and this is prevalent

among traumatized and haunted selves. So being haunted means losing your identity and your voice, which is a common experience for wounded and haunted people.



CHAPTER TWO

2. RICHARD NELSON'S *THAT HOPEY AND CHANGEY THING*

In *That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), Richard Nelson stages the formation of “traumatic identity” as a spectral process: on the night of the 2010 U.S. midterm elections, the Apple family’s domestic talk becomes a conduit through which unresolved personal losses and long-duration political disappointments return to organize the present. Using hauntology in dialogue with trauma theory and psychoanalysis, the chapter argues that the play converts public temporality (election night) into intimate hauntings that shape how characters know themselves and one another. The *Apple Family* quartet, spanning 2010 to 2013, uses specific national events; the 2010 midterms, the 9/11 anniversary, the 2012 election, and the JFK assassination anniversary as catalysts for revealing familial and national traumas. Before analyzing the first play, it is essential to establish the political dimension of trauma that underpins the entire series.

As Balaev (2008) suggests, historical trauma may have lingering repercussions decades after the event, marking the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as eras of significant distress stemming from wars and political legacies. This notion of enduring, collective psychological distress is critical, as it informs the hauntological reading of the plays. Herman, who is a leading, prominent figure, also emphasizes the clear correlation between trauma and politics. “three times in the last century, a specific type of psychological trauma has emerged into the collective awareness of the public” (2015: 9). She (2015) emphasizes that the public has widely recognized three psychological traumas in the last century, all of which have their roots in political movements. The first disease is hysteria, a psychiatric condition that mostly affects women and has its origins in the late 19th-century French republican movement. The antiwar movement saw and analyzed shell shock, a psychological disorder, after World War I and the Vietnam War. The feminist movement in Western Europe and North America has influenced the latest trauma, which involves sexual and domestic abuse. This connection posits that social and political variables fundamentally impact the development of psychiatric conditions, leading to the “traumatic identity” that the Apple family embodies.

The play is predicated on the night of the election; nevertheless, behind the surface, the presence of family traumas is obvious throughout the whole of the play. It is possible to assert that the political climate of the time has a role in the triggering events that occurred in the family’s history, and these occurrences are revealed. This play is a journey into the complicated connection that exists inside the Apple Family, and the majority of the journey is focused on the shadows. In terms of the

concept of a journey, it is conceivable to detect similarities between *A Long Day's Journey into the Night*. As O'Neill (1965) suggested, "It is a journey into the night of cynicism and despair that is fraught with hopelessness" (29). Some of the dynamics of family dysfunction, lingering trauma, and cyclical grief and frustration are captured in the quote.

These dynamics have the potential to give the relationships within the Apple family a sense of heart. Both plays feature families who are unable to escape the ghosts of their past and are searching for purpose in their relationships even though they are always experiencing conflicts. History weighs heavily on these families. These familial "specters" haunt individuals, and individuals can carry the trauma from one generation to the next. Overall, these events induce "traumatic identities."

The genesis of the quartet lies in Richard Nelson's dialogue with Public Theater Artistic Director Oskar Eustis, who sought an American response to David Hare's politically charged *Stuff Happens*. He expressed his appreciation for the play *Stuff Happens*, from its creation to its performance. However, he found it dissatisfying that those British playwrights had created. As a result, he invited "Richard out to breakfast and proposed that he write a large-scale, research-based play, set in Washington, about our war in Afghanistan" (2014: VII). Within a span of one week, Richard Nelson promptly executed the concept of composing the play and made the necessary preparations. Richard proposed a series of theatrical productions centered on the Apple Family residence in Rhinebeck, New York. Every play would unfold on its scheduled day, necessitating constant revisions until the final moments.

Oskar Eustis (2014: VII) asserts that each of the opening days would be a day of national importance, and as a result, they would have a public element to them. Despite this, the plays would be very personal, conversational, and family dramas. His plan effectively met one of the public's demands, ensuring timely plays that addressed significant national events. However, his proposal utterly overlooked their desire to create an epic play about our war in Afghanistan. Craig Gholson (1990) conducted an interview with playwright Richard Nelson, which was then published in the summer edition of *Bomb* magazine (48). The piece features an interview with Richard Nelson. The topics that are being discussed include the recurrent themes that can be found in Nelson's work, his method of character development, and his viewpoint on the relationship between art and society. When compared to audiences in the United States, Nelson asserts that English audiences are more responsive to socially and politically complicated characters.

He asserts that (1990) "simply the fact of doing the work, accepting it as part of your culture, as opposed to some new or spectacular or unique event, makes the work different. It puts it in a stream, as just another stone in that cultural river" (48). By situating art inside the "stream" of a culture, Nelson emphasizes the importance of historical and social context in the process of producing the creative process. Having such a framework allows for a deeper comprehension on the

side of both the spectator and the artist; rather than seeing each individual piece as being isolated or distinct, one feels as if they are really participating in a living tradition.

Richard Nelson's plays delve into the complexities of the human condition, the critique of society, and the transformative potential of art. In the course of his works, he is unquestionably posing concerns about the fundamental nature of identity, the qualities that constitute morality, and the relationship that exists between culture and variety.

2.1. The Town That Time Forgot: Staging the Haunting

The play's setting, Rhinebeck, New York, is described as "The Town That Time Forgot," immediately establishing a hauntological premise (Derrida, 1993): the past does not simply recede but lingers and acts in the present. The specific date, Election Night 2010, and the play's title, which references Sarah Palin's sarcastic critique of Obama's broken pledges of "hope" and "change," infuse the domestic space with the "specter" of political disillusionment. This national political ghost functions as the trigger for the family's personal hauntings.

Derrida (1993) emphasizes that the past never eradicates but rather continues to "haunt" the present, impacting self-perception at individual and societal levels. The play's title, *That Hopey Changey Thing*, directly references Palin's public speech where she asked: "How's that hopey, changey stuff working out?" (Gonyea, 2010). This quotation reflects the widespread political disenchantment and cynicism towards the Obama presidency, which Margarat Vente noted had permeated the air, leading to disillusionment even among supporters (Wente, 2012). This sentence acts as a spark for the Apple family's debate, pushing the idea that public discourse penetrates the private lives of individuals. Margarat Vente wrote, desperation for change permeated the air as the old order came to an end. She felt overjoyed when he emerged victorious. She had confidence in his intelligence to comprehend whatever it may have been. It was evident that his halo would lose its shine before long. However, it seemed he couldn't make the situation worse. (2012) Even the ones who had faith in Obama lost it, as is clear from the commentary. Through a hauntological frame, the slogan behaves like a "specter": it crosses from broadcast speech into domestic talk, activating latent disappointments. Setting the drama on the night of the 2010 U.S. midterm elections is decisive. Because it grounds it within the national significance time frame. In discussing political issues, the characters reflect more general concerns about identity and personal and national issues. The play's thematic appraisal of how the past continues to influence the present revolves around this interrelation between personal and political issues. Since the past of the individuals always exists in their presence, they cannot break their ties from the past. More specifically, the past and the memories of the characters are the "specters" that disrupt their current existence. Nelson uses the domestic ritual of sharing a meal to stage the haunting. The casual dialogue and pauses become the conduits through which unresolved histories break through. This is the play's dramaturgy of return, wherein

the political context shapes what the family can remember, disclose, and repress. The family's dysfunction is thus understood not as a flaw of character but as a spectral effect of historical weight.

2.2. Hauntology: The Past's Presence in the Apple Family: *That Hopey and Changey Thing*

This chapter traverses this network of hauntological thinking and focuses on the ghosts and phantoms in plays, both psychologically and culturally. It asserts the relevance of these stories within the context of contemporary cultural discourses. Additionally, it describes how haunting functions as an interpretative frame through which unresolved histories shape individual and social identities. This chapter explores the concept of ghosts as metaphorical entities that reveal hidden aspects of the self and reality, suppressed in society due to their disruptive influence on identity and social structure. Depictions of "specters" or ghosts in literature are considered metaphors that possess cultural and psychological significance. Therefore, metaphors serve as an indirect way to discuss topics that are difficult to express explicitly and are prevalent in everyday life. This thesis explores the use of "specters" as metaphors to uncover and shed light on hidden, ignored, and overlooked parts of the social, cultural, and familial sphere, both in the past and today.

The play immediately establishes how the characters' past experiences and political commitments shape their current circumstances. Richard, a character in the play, is both the family's eldest member and a lawyer. He assumes the position of the family cynic, highlighting the disillusionment that many people have, particularly toward politicians. Richard's persona is characterized by his acerbic humor and often cutting remarks, which resonate with those who are frustrated by politics and the overall state of the nation. Richard's many allusions to political leaders serve not only as political criticism but also as "specters" of his previous political ambitions and disappointments. The quotation proving the existence of political haunting is as follows:

Richard: I don't think they're crazy. I think they're just pissed off. I think they're looking at society—a government, and I'm not saying just this government, it's been like this for decades, it's just coming to a head. A government that's always saying: "We're here to give out things." (2014: 31)

In *That Hopey Changey Thing*, the Apple family's present is organized by returns of earlier political feeling. Richard, a lawyer in the family circle, often voices a caustic skepticism that resonates with wider public disenchantment. His remarks about government: "it's been like this for decades; it's just coming to a head" (2014:31) do more than register opinion; they summon "specters" of long-standing political scripts that continue to act in the present. Read through hauntology, Richard's stance exemplifies how unfinished histories inhabit the now: as Derrida writes "A ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back" (1993:199). In Fisher's terms, the broken

promises attached to 2008 reappear here as lost futures, hollowing out the language of “hope” and “change”. Thus Richard’s “decades” does not signal a purely personal wound but a spectral continuity between past political rhetorics and current self-understanding that is a key mechanism in the play’s construction of “traumatic identity.”

What haunts us is not fully available to conscious recall; it persists as an effective absence that can reappear abruptly in the present. In hauntological terms, the “specter” is neither simply there nor gone, but acts without stable presence, returning at moments of heightened historical attention. As Shaw argues that “Specters disturb the present with the possibility of alternative pasts and futures. In doing so, they also defy time and space and challenge any fixity of the temporal. This spectral effect is predicated upon the return” (2018: 7). In this thesis, I take such returns to trigger latent traces that affects, images, and narratives that re-enter awareness and organize perception and judgment. Thus, hauntology and psychoanalytic thinking intersect around a shared problem: how the past structures the present through mechanisms of return and displacement, and how memory mediates that action. In *That Hopey Changey Thing*, election night and circulating media phrases provide the occasions for these spectral activations to become visible in the Apple family’s talk and stance.

Richard: “And f*ck—”

Jane (Interrupting; laughing, to Tim): This is funny. He told me this on the phone. “And f*ck—”

Barbara: How often do you and Richard talk on the phone?

Jane (Continuing): “And f*ck—” F*ck. What’s her real name? I always want to call her Christine.

Richard (Continuing with the joke): “And f*ck Kirsten Gillibrand—”

Jane: Kirsten! Not Christine.

Richard: “And the horse—”

Jane (Excited, finishes Richard’s joke): “And the horse she rode in on whose name is—Charles!”

Richard (Correcting her): “Chuck.” The horse’s name is Chuck. Chuck—Schumer. (10-11)

The word “f*ck” evokes his emotional outburst as a reaction to the persistent apparitions, specifically the unfulfilled political commitments. Hauntology emphasizes that the past’s enduring consequences disrupt the present by manifesting themselves. In this quotation, Richard’s persistent “joke” about Albany and Kirsten Gillibrand serves not just to bring about amusement but also to expose the deep-seated resentment he has for the political system. He criticized politicians and the administration, illustrating his persistent skepticism and disillusionment with unmet promises of change. The humorous remarks highlighted Chuck Schumer and Gillibrand, emphasizing a persistent adherence to a political idealism corrupted by structural dysfunction. Richard’s comedy exposes profound “specters” of eroded confidence in institutions and the developing trend prior to post-2000s America. These grievances closely relate to the concept of hauntology, whereby familial talks embody a spirit of profound displeasure directed against the societal hierarchy. Despite its humor,

the term “F*ck Albany” encapsulates Richard’s struggle with the increasing prevalence of unfulfilled expectations. The phantoms seem deeply involved in the unsolved discussions occurring inside the household. The joke functions as both a catharsis and a painful testament to the burden of political disillusionment that envelops Richard.

As outlined before, political disappointments of the nation sometimes interfere with the individuals’ private lives. Richard is one of the characters who, because of his work position, is constantly exposed to the political atmosphere; this atmosphere not only affects his work life but also his familial life. He has problems with his wife, and this can be visible through the following quotation:

Richard (Without looking at anyone): I’m going to be leaving the office. I’ve taken a job with a big firm. It’s time. The Kids are going to be going to college . . .

Marian: What? (To Barbara) Did you know about this?

Barbara: No.

Marian: Did you, Jane?

(Jane nods.)

Barbara: Jane and Richard talk, Marian.

(Short pause.)

Marian: Because of Pamela?? (31)

His choice to quit his beloved position working for many attorneys general in favor of a corporate business is a reflection of the pressure of external factors, including financial obligations and the need to support his children’s education. At the same time, his personal conflicts with his wife, Pamela, highlight how these outside factors intensify domestic conflicts. This interplay is seen in the discourse, as Marian’s incisive inquiries over whether Pamela had an impact on Richard’s choice show how both political and personal factors intersected to shape his decisions. The play demonstrates how the larger political climate permeates private lives via Richard’s concessions, requiring people and families to make tough choices between connections, obligations, and beliefs.

The growing prevalence of ghosts in modern thought has also sparked interest in the examination of fictional ghosts, resulting in a surge of literary criticism that explores the many purposes for which ghosts have been used in literature. Literary ghosts provide a means of expressing the lingering impacts of personal and societal traumas, allowing for the expression of unrecognized and unsolved histories, spanning both the past and the present.

Uncle Benjamin is perhaps the most manifest of this haunting condition. His forgetfulness and continual loss concerning the death of his dog, Oliver, is a continual return of the past upon the present. The state that Benjamin lives in becomes a symbol of the state of frailty within memory and how the loss of it can lead to a disjointed identity: “Oliver is dead, Uncle Benjamin!”(18) It exclaimed in Barbara with frustration and an ache of sadness as she realized that he was in some kind of trap

where one forgets and re-remembers. Benjamin's amnesia could be viewed as both a curse and a protective blessing: painful memories taken away and painful connectedness with others. Caruth asserts that traumatic memories, as suggested by Freud, are experienced rather than remembered, leading to a phenomenon of "amnesia" about the past in those who have been traumatized. Despite the vivid and precise imagery of traumatic reexperiencing, it often escapes conscious remembrance and regulation, resulting in limited access to these memories.

Uncle Benjamin, the eldest uncle of the Apple Family and a former performer, has memory loss and forgetfulness. Uncle Benjamin's cognitive deterioration rendered him unable to engage with reality, tormenting the Apple family. We might see him as a metaphor for the past, which we desire to forget in order to attain happiness. The protagonist's propensity for amnesia is very evident throughout the play, particularly when it concerns his canine companion, Oliver. Scenes in which Oliver's name is prominent indicate that Benjamin carries the memory as a heavy weight, causing a division in his personality. Impaired memory is a distinctive characteristic of trauma, resulting in a disruption of identity. The more the fragmentation of memory, the more diminished one's sense of identity. In terms of familial relationships, he adopts a compassionate stance and garners adoration from other family members. Uncle Benjamin's presence in the play serves as a persistent reminder of haunting, as the loss of his canine friend prevents him from severing ties with the past. The existence of Oliver as the "specter" currently bothers Uncle Benjamin. In other words, his disease encompasses the vulnerability of memory and how the lack of Oliver may result in a fragmented sense of identity. The existence of dementia is visible in the play. The quotation highlights Benjamin as a spectral presence, always binding the family to an unresolved pain and tragedy from which they cannot escape.

Benjamin: Is that Oliver?

(This stops everyone.)

Richard: No, Uncle, that isn't Oliver.

Benjamin: Where's Oliver? (Smiles) He always eats what I don't want. He always sits here . . . (Starts to stand)

Jane: Uncle Benjamin . . . That is not Oliver.

Benjamin: Where's Oliver?

(Jane looks to Barbara.)

Barbara: I've told him. Ten times.

Richard: Oliver is dead, Uncle. You had to put him to sleep. He had cancer. He was in a lot of pain.

Benjamin: When?

Richard (After a glance at Barbara): Last week. And that's why I'm here, I've brought you a new dog from the city.

Jane (The dog): Toby. A friend of Richard's—. (18-19)

Benjamin's cognitive decline results in a profound estrangement, as his memory loss impairs his sense of himself. His questioning over Oliver's date of death illustrates Benjamin's difficulty in situating himself inside a logical timeframe. For him, the past is omnipresent, haunting his encounters and obstructing the establishment of a stable identity. Oliver's haunting of the past illustrates how

Benjamin's fragmented memory is reshaping his familial function, serving as both an important reminder of a collective history and a source of enduring emotional work for his caretakers.

Judith Herman, a prominent figure in the field of trauma studies, argues that traumatic experiences challenge fundamental human connections. They violate the bonds of family, friendship, love, and community. They disrupt the formation and maintenance of one's self-identity that is dependent on interactions with others (1997:51). Trauma is profoundly disturbing since its delayed manifestations need broader temporal and physical settings for their scope. Individuals who experience trauma may seem like ghostly figures, embodying an oppressive absence rather than a constructive presence. This ethereal attitude subtly interacts with hauntology, where unresolved loss exerts influence on the present. Uncle Benjamin's dementia shows a profound and devastating loss. The condition is characterized by severe fragmentation and a disorientation indicative of a fractured self-unable to overcome its own anguish. Benjamin seeks to preserve his identity and memories, becoming himself a "specter" inside the Apple family, present but absent. His spectral presence complicates familial interactions by necessitating a reevaluation of shared loss and trauma embedded in their family history. The interaction between individual grief and its impact on the family captures the haunting and ghostly nature of trauma as expressed by Herman.

There is a connection between the presence of a secret and the concept of a "specter," and the fact that they are confronted with remains of the past causes them to experience disruptions in their day-to-day lives. This is because the past continues to interfere with the current moment. Specters are confirmed to exist via a discourse that takes place amongst characters regarding the mysteries that their mother has kept. Marian goes on in the conversation and asserts, "So she could write them down. But she said, When I die, just ask Benjamin; he knows all the secrets" (63). This unexplained secret might be understood as a phantom, according to the theory put forward by Abraham and Torok, which states that the "undisclosed traumas of previous generations might disturb the lives of their descendants even and especially if they know nothing about their distant causes." (375). A ghost refers to the presence of a deceased ancestor inside the living ego, striving to conceal its tragic and sometimes embarrassing truths from being revealed. According to the mother who passed away, these secrets center around Benjamin, in the precise definition of the word "phantom," which means a depiction of clashing pasts, trauma that has not been addressed, or concealed information about the darker side of things. This is an intangible "phantom," which means that it cannot be seen directly or stated, but it is experienced as a generalized and overpowering worry, even if it is not specifically defined. Benjamin's family communicates a shared sense of unease and signals a haunting by the ghosts of their inherited and unfinished past via the recurrent references to secrets that Benjamin has. Considering that Benjamin is a living reservoir of these "specters," which he is unable to articulate or resolve due to the decline that seems to be irreversible, the remark that he is aware of all the secrets places him in this situation.

2.3. *That Hopey Changey Thing: The Family as a Site of Political Unconscious*

The analysis of the Apple family's behavior is grounded in the Freudian model of the psyche, composed of the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. An individual's intrinsic drives and sexual appetites are contained inside the id, which is the primary psychological agency. (Freud, 1940: 148) The ego "is concerned with taking reality into account and safety" (Freud, 1940:199). It regulates libidinal drive energies and controls them for reality. It is the superego "the representative. . .of every moral restriction" (Freud, 1933: 67). It governs moral censorship and conscience, as well as the pursuit of idealistic objectives for perfection. The superego is a representation of the ideal. This framework is essential for examining the unconscious life of the characters and the defense mechanisms they employ to maintain emotional stability.

Freud's ideas on "repression," the "unconscious mind," and the psychological theories regarding denial provide an approach to analyze how people often deal with prior traumatic experiences. Freud (2015) explains the word "traumatic" by saying an overwhelming experience like external trauma is sure to disrupt even more than one part of the system that supplies a person with energy and mobilizes all possible mechanisms of protection. Freud's concept of the traumatic response is connected to this idea of protection and recognizing that external trauma constitutes an existential threat, as it targets one's sense of identity. The family's reliance on these defenses is interpreted here as a form of spectral policing which is an unconscious attempt to manage the return of unresolved political and familial "specters."

Indeed, the play initially presents itself to the reader as an ordinary and blissful family gathering; however, as it progresses, it becomes clear that ordinary conversations conceal deeper layers of implicit meanings. Political discontent, family dynamics, and care for the uncle are the sparking topics that can be counted under the umbrella of repression. One of the most encountered symptoms of repression is escaping from the trauma and the topic, which can lead to deeper layers of the conversation. Almost all the characters in the play escape from the serious issues that currently affect their lives. Instead of focusing on the emotional struggles that the family is going through, they mostly focus on the meals, historical landmarks of the city, or small local events. Sometimes, to get away from the more serious topics, they engage in idle chatter. In some instances, they take the form of humor to overlook awkward situations or occasionally speak about the past in order to alleviate the pain that is being experienced in the present. Freud writes published in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895): "The nervous system has the most decided inclination to a flight from pain" (307). Yet, as Freud suggests, the very act of fleeing pain often leads to its return in disguised forms; likewise, the family's seemingly tranquil gathering soon unravels to expose latent conflicts and anxieties.

(And the brief burst is over. They huff and puff; look at each other. Suddenly, smiling Richard goes to tickle Marian. She doesn't resist, then suddenly she is crying.)

Richard: What? What?

Marian (trying not to cry): Sometimes it all feels so hopeless...

Richard (hugging her): Don't go there. Don't go there, please. . .

Benjamin: Why is she crying? (83)

Marian shows the feeling of hopelessness, and this feeling pervades the atmosphere of the family gathering. However, Richard does not let her go into the layers of a hopeless world. Marian's abrupt shift from play to tears stages the return of repressed affect as symptom before thought can form "Don't go there" is an explicit way of repressing the visible pains and not letting her come across that feeling that pulls down her. This exemplifies fragmented identity, and Marian struggles to develop a healthy sense of self. The "specters" of her previous traumas persist, compelling her to suppress them, a process that is hastened by Richard's participation. Another instance that illustrates the concept of repression is manifested through the character of Barbara. As the eldest sister within the familial structure, she assumes the role of caretaker for all members of the household, embodying a maternal presence that is both nurturing and authoritative. It is indeed remarkable to observe how thoroughly she has internalized this profound sense of responsibility. Despite her assumption of responsibility, she occasionally experiences a sense of fatigue in their company, particularly in relation to Uncle Benjamin:

Benjamin: Where's Oliver??

Barbara : (Then the frustration comes out.) Oliver is dead, Uncle Benjamin!

Richard: Barbara, please—

Barbara: You want to take care of him! Go ahead. If I'm not doing it right. (19)

The quotation reflects the emotional weariness of Barbara since she repeatedly has tried to explain the death of Benjamin's dog to him since he never gets exhausted of forgetting about the dog. Moreover, the repression comes out because of her caretaker role at the house, along with her frustration because of the feeling of lack. In a way, she may have felt that the struggle that she has been in was not enough for the family members, and this feeling comes to the surface in the form of rage. The combination of Barbara's unacknowledged nervousness and the pressure she feels due to her roles as an elder sister creates issues that are not immediately apparent. There is a greater level of difficulty in her caretakers' identification, and she also has repressed desires to be autonomous and free from everything. This emotional time bomb is made up of childhood sources of duty that are so strong that they could be heard as guilt if they were spoken out loud. Individuals who repress their drives and feelings constantly can construct "traumatic identity." Since repression has a significant influence on unconscious psychology, it leads to the unconscious discharge of anxious thoughts and emotions from awareness and brings forth behavioral consequences, as Barbara does. It is possible to make the case that the unconscious mind is a storehouse of repressed thoughts and

desires that impact on our behavior and emotional reactions, and that these ideas and desires often reveal themselves in the form of symbolic or veiled representations.

Barbara struggles to cope with the emotional burden of caring for her Uncle Benjamin, who is unable to communicate. Barbara makes a concerted effort to maintain the appearance that she is not exhausted or upset, and she has remained in this state for many years; yet, the irritation ultimately builds up inside of her. In general, Barbara is not fond of the emotional toll that comes with being a caretaker, and she has numerous reasons to be so. Despite her seeming calm demeanor, the burden of the numerous tasks she is responsible for is truly overwhelming her. She expresses total devotion as she holds Uncle Benjamin accountable; this might be understood as a metaphor of repression and an unwillingness to realize the full weight of caring until the stress becomes overwhelming and erupts. Sometimes, she attempts to repress her frustrations until she ultimately confronts Uncle Benjamin.

In addition to Marian and Barbara, Uncle Benjamin's propensity to forget things may be seen to be a blatant sign of repression. His inability to remember the passing of his dog, in addition to other occurrences, is a clear allusion to the psychoanalytic reflection of repression. Carlson, Martin, and Buskist (2004) define Freudian repression as "the mind's active attempt to prevent memories of traumatic experiences from reaching conscious awareness" (600). Memories, experiences, and situations that he did not wish to remember are now buried deep inside his unconscious mind, and he has forgotten them. "He keeps forgetting, and so each time—it's like he learns it again for the first time" (18). The fragmented nature of Benjamin's memory is a clear indicator of the fragmented nature of his own self. For the reason that his memory does not let him keep experiences that belong to the past, there is an inconsistency between his identity in the past and his identity in the present. One of the ways in which repression of trauma manifests itself is via this. In *That Hopey Changey Thing*, the protagonists manage repression and avoidance as part of their shattered self-perception. This occurs in the context of complicated familial relationships and unresolved traumas. Through this interpretation, unconscious urges and forgotten memories remain somewhat alive, even when they are not fully inside an individual's cognitive awareness.

While the members of the Apple family are navigating the challenges of political anxiety, family responsibilities, and personal disappointments, repression serves as a simple coping way to handle them. Rather than confronting these issues head-on, they avoid trauma by engaging in activities such as engaging in small talk to avoid having meaningful talks, adopting humor to avoid facing pain, withdrawing into nostalgia to escape present obstacles, and turning to external blame to deflect personal concerns. It is via this repression that they try to maintain their emotional stability; nevertheless, it also generates underlying tension, which suggests that unsolved concerns in the future may become apparent. In the play, their actions are consistent with the iceberg model. A significant

portion of their emotional world is concealed under the surface of everyday interactions, which demonstrates how trauma is repressed rather than being handled head-on.

Denial, which is also accepted as one of the defense mechanisms, is employed by individuals in order to cope with their anxiety, stress, or unwanted disturbing situations. To maintain a healthy sense of self, individuals sometimes deny or refuse certain facts. According to Freud's (1937) broadest view, when the ego faces a danger or worries over itself, it may negate the reality of events by disregarding them. The act of denial allows individuals to evade distressing truths that may menace their sense of self. Denial induces stress inside an individual's sense of self, often resulting in a distorted self-image at a significant psychological cost. Denial is often seen as a protective strategy that momentarily alleviates agony for the individual, although it significantly obstructs genuine self-awareness. The ego has a significant influence on problem-solving and rational ways of thinking. When an individual encounters intense or shocking events that trigger anxiety or distress, their ego struggles to function correctly. Jacobson (1957) states that "denial may still avoid anxiety and unpleasure either by disguising the true nature of such undesirable ideas or, as an ultimate device, by preventing awareness of the unpleasant nature of the corresponding affects" (79) Denial may perform as transitory shelter, and it allows individuals to form a sense of self that is protected by the outer world. This results in a split of the self, with this ephemeral refuge causing some aspects of identity to be overlooked or repressed. Denial serves as a mechanism for preserving psychological integrity by shielding people from uncomfortable or alarming emotions. However, this presents an identity that does not correspond with reality.

The phenomenon of denial is manifestly evident, especially within the realm of political discourse. Richard frequently employs humor as a strategic device to reduce the impact of criticism stemming from the significant political setback. In a demonstration of their resilience against the prevailing political atmosphere that envelops both the familial assembly and the nation at large, Jane counters Richard's assertions. She elects to present it in a manner reminiscent of humor:

Richard: Everyone in the office, Uncle Benjamin. (Continues)

"Fuck you, Albany." "F*ck everyone in Albany!"

Barbara: Do you have to keep using that word?

Jane: He's telling a joke. (10)

Richard's exaggerated outburst operates as a displaced attempt to silence what unsettles him, using humor to deflect the "specter" of political failure that hovers over the scene. Barbara's discomfort and Jane's quick dismissal reveal how the family collaborates in keeping this "specter" unnamed, showing how ordinary dialogue becomes a means of containing what continues to haunt the room.

Another type of defense mechanism is displacement. According to Baumeister et al (1998) displacement refers to changing the target of an impulse. For example, an inappropriate violent

inclination toward one's father may develop into a hostile attitude against police officers or other authority officials. The targets of real aggressiveness would be tied by meaningful connections to the goal of the first, restrained impulse. (1093) Transferring feelings, emotions, desires, or impulses from one person to another is displacement, a key psychological defense mechanism. In order to divert an emotion or impulse away from its original objective and toward a replacement target that is often safer or more socially acceptable, the mind will redirect the emotion or impulse. This usually happens when the person lacks the courage or strength to direct their feelings at their target. The person is able to avoid confrontation as a result of this. In other words, people acknowledge it as a strategy to manage their emotions and escape potentially distressing and overwhelming situations. "Oliver is dead, Uncle Benjamin! ... You want to take care of him! Go ahead" (29) At the same time that Barbara is directing her anger at Benjamin's inability to remember, she is also developing a character that is characterized by self-denial and persistence. Nevertheless, this comes with a price, which is the need to deny the genuine feelings that accompany the act of providing care, which may result in a personality that is fragmented. She consistently suppresses aspects of her past, making it challenging for her to accept the caregiving role as a part of her identity. This leads her to project her dissatisfaction externally, ultimately diminishing her sense of self. Unresolved feelings create an internal conflict for her, leading her to perceive herself as committed to the cause, yet simultaneously experiencing a sense of aversion towards it. There is a clear indication of Barbara's displacement in the quote. Because of her exhaustion from chores, she has no personal space or time for herself. This is the reason why, inside the deeper levels of her unconscious, she is nervous and furious, and finally she feels overwhelmed since she has taken on the role of a mother for the family. because she is unable to communicate his thoughts and emotions to anybody else in view. To channel her impulsive feelings for Uncle Benjamin, she discovers a technique to do so. This is generally acknowledged to be the most obvious indication of displacement.

According to Nauber (1994), "displacement is a defense mechanism employed by many other defenses and has a different role from all the other defenses. Locating conflicts in a new situation, displacement attempts to find new solutions" (113). What Nauber highlights contributes to the sense of self. That is to say, an individual who uses displacement as a coping strategy finds solutions to them rather than repressing them. Richard is able to successfully create an image of detachment and confidence in his cynicism by using sarcasm and humor as a means of concealing the hopelessness he feels in relation to the political climate. He redirects the dissatisfaction underlying his lofty beliefs about serving the public by using humorous language when discussing Albany. This contributes to the development of a cynical, aloof, and self-protective personality, which enables Richard to adapt to the defects in the political system without experiencing any shock.

However, the foundation of suppressing emotions and overcompensation for them ultimately causes this identity to crumble. As a result of this, Richard feels compelled to keep a self that is all about being on guard, which in turn serves to foster a self that is detached as opposed to one that is

involved. This is because he does not confront his disappointment head-on. This disconnected self-causes some of his diminished professional identity to remain unassimilated into the current one. This disjointed self may act as a shield for him in the foreseeable future, but it also prevents him from coping with the underlying disappointment.

These characters use the idea of displacement as a crucial component in constructing “traumatic identities” that are both constrained and adaptable. To avoid some characteristics of themselves that may potentially damage their self-image, each character redirects their conflicts and the suppression of anxiety toward areas of their personality that are less problematic. Because the characters engage in selective commitment and counteractive techniques, which give them an appearance of stability, the creation of their identities prevents the potential for complete individual cohesiveness from occurring. In this manner, displacement makes it possible for every character to develop an identity that is stable psychologically but does not have a tremendous amount of logic. Psychoanalysis’s conceptions of identity suggest that while using displacement as a form of protection allows self-editing, it also results in a shattered and unintegrated inner self. This aligns with those concepts.

Since identity is formed by unconscious processes, it’s clear that characters are having a challenging time forming their own identities for a number of connected reasons, such as an unwelcome political climate, difficult family relationships, or a painful past that has left them with wounds that can’t be healed. They transfer them unconscious; burying them is a beneficial way to escape for a short time. Since the mind is a haunted realm that is full of repressed fears, wants, and traumatic events. This theory challenges the conventional belief that individuals are rational, self-aware, and independent entities. Psychoanalytic theory plays a crucial role in understanding trauma, a situation where individuals may suppress their conscious thoughts to evade the pain and distress caused by the trauma. Trauma is a component of the subject’s state of emotion that remains in awareness; however, when the subject is unable to tolerate the trauma, they suppress it, constructing “traumatic identities.”

2.4. Spectral Trauma and the Making of Identity in *That Hopey Changey Thing*

This chapter reads trauma as a structure of return rather than a medical diagnosis. Following Cathy Caruth (1996), trauma is not exhausted by a single past event; it names what remains unassimilated and returns in the present. In *That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), those returns are visible both in family history (a father’s absence, a mother’s death, Benjamin’s memory changes) and in public time (the 2010 midterms), which draws earlier hopes and disappointments back into the room. Nelson posits that trauma is an enduring “specter,” profoundly altering identity (Herman, 1997). The play utilizes Figley’s framework (2013) of “trauma contagion,” confirming that traumatic experiences are not solitary but circulate through the family, shaping their collective identity.

Crucially, these traumatic encounters are not limited to the primary victim but come to haunt the survivors and witnesses. The DSM-5 acknowledges this by listing “indirect exposure” as a primary cause of PTSD such as witnessing a traumatic event or learning that a violent accident occurred to a close family member (Muldoon et al., 2021: 505). In the context of this thesis, this clinical definition of “indirect exposure” aligns seamlessly with the hauntological concept of spectral transmission. Just as a ghost haunts a house, trauma permeates the domestic space, affecting those who merely witness the suffering of others. In the Apple family, the siblings are “indirectly exposed” to the “specter” of Benjamin’s decline and the nation’s political failure. This creates a shared, atmospheric anxiety where the pain of the individual becomes the “ghost” of the collective.

The trauma in *That Hopey Changey Thing* is fundamentally rooted in a sense of betrayal. As Freyd (1996) and Herman (1992) suggest, those most adversely affected by trauma often perceive themselves as having been let down by trusted figures or institutions. Nelson situates this psychological reality within the political sphere. The “trauma” of the 2010 midterms is not a physical blow, but the realization that the “Hope and Change” promised in 2008 was a “specter” that is a future that never arrived. Nelson stages this collective trauma by entwining themes of fragmentation with the election coverage. The restlessness of modern society, the endless news cycle, the shifting poll numbers act as an external force that shatters the characters’ fragile identities. They are susceptible to fragmentation because their sense of self was tied to a political narrative that has now collapsed.

This collective fragmentation is embodied by Uncle Benjamin. While clinically suffering from amnesia, in the dramaturgical structure of the play, he functions as a spectral witness. His inability to recall the immediate past (the death of his dog) paradoxically allows him to serve as a reference point for the deeper, national traumas of the 20th century. Benjamin’s forgetfulness should be read as a protective mechanism against the “spectral return” of history.

He is the oldest member of the family; a living archive of the “Age of Trauma” His amnesia is a desperate attempt to sever the connection to a painful past. However, as the play demonstrates, this severance is impossible. The “specter” of his dog, Oliver, returns relentlessly, proving that even a broken mind cannot fully exorcise the ghosts of loss.

Traumatizing situations or events occur as side-effects of major social change. They are not directly related to culture; rather, they affect the actual social life of the members of the changing society, or the social structure of their society. Traumatizing events or situations may produce dislocations in the routine, accustomed ways of acting or thinking, change the life-world of the people in often dramatic ways, reshape their patterns of acting and thinking. What is potentially traumatizing differs among various societies. (Sztompka, 2000: 456)

Each character in the play undergoes distinct traumas arising from interconnected reasons. Barbara Apple may have experienced stress due to her incessant domestic responsibilities as she

became the caregiver for all family members, including her amnesiac uncle. Barbara, due to her maternal responsibilities, suffers from caregiver burnout, resulting in trauma that leads to a fractured sense of self in the context of identity formation. According to Figley (1983), being a family member and profoundly engaged in their well-being might render us emotionally susceptible to traumas affecting them, positioning us as “victims” owing to our emotional ties with the afflicted family member. This may result in emotional fatigue and negative consequences. (12). Consequently, it may be said that Barbara is likewise traumatized due to her parental responsibilities and the care of traumatized family members. The play demonstrates Barbara’s relentless control over Benjamin in the following manner: “Benjamin is in the middle of telling us—what he’s been feeling. I asked him if he despaired. He doesn’t. He doesn’t despair. We’ve wondered about that” (25). Within this charged atmosphere, Barbara Apple experiences a specific form of trauma derived from her role as the family’s anchor. While clinically this might be termed “caregiver burnout,” within the framework of this thesis, it is better understood as Simultaneous Trauma (Figley, 2013). Barbara does not merely care for Uncle Benjamin; she absorbs the spectral weight of his decline.

Figley asserts that (2013) catastrophes may directly impact people and families, resulting in emotional stress. Family members may experience trauma via four mechanisms: “simultaneous effects, vicarious effects, chiasmal effects, and intrafamilial trauma” (31). Simultaneous effects, such as when an event immediately affects the whole family (for instance, fire, natural calamity, or automobile accident). Simultaneous effects occur when a catastrophic event impacts the whole family unit. While the play lacks a single physical catastrophe, Nelson stages the 2010 Election Night as a shared psychological siege. This simultaneous trauma is dramatized through the *mise-en-scène* of the living room, which becomes a contested space between domestic care and political anxiety. The family’s frantic effort to manage Benjamin’s voting serves as a microcosm of this stress:

Barbara: Uncle Benjamin, you haven’t voted.... They have those awful new machines... **Marian:** You’re going to vote Democrat or you’re not going...
Jane: Why don’t you write it on his hand? (45)

Nelson uses overlapping dialogue here to stage the chaos of the event. The anxiety over the voting machines becomes a tangible prop that disrupts the family’s rhythm. Barbara’s panic, Marian’s aggression, and Jane’s deflection are not merely character traits but performative reactions to the simultaneous pressure of the political timeline crashing into the domestic sphere. The awful new machine functions as a spectral object as an intruder from the outside world that renders the family incompetent and distressed.

“Vicarious effects,” which were mentioned above as one of the trauma types, are highlighted by Figley (2013), “vicarious effects, as when a catastrophe strikes one family member with whom the family is unable to make direct contact” (30). As it is given above, “vicarious effects” such as when a disaster hits a member of the family only when the rest of the family is unable to communicate

directly with that individual. On the other hand, the concept of vicarious trauma has a relatively close connection to the link it has with second-hand stress. The family experiences some form of vicarious trauma due to their involvement in the political environment. This puts the rising tensions within the family against the backdrop of the 2010 Election Night candidate debates. Considering this, people's experiences define the conversations inside families about voting, political candidates, and societal stagnation. In this specific case, national events lead to discontent, causing secondhand stress. Richard's irritating cynicism reflects his profound disillusionment with the political system. The pointed remarks that he made about politicians are an indication of how bigger patterns of social failure truly resonate with him in a way that, in turn, has indirect consequences on his emotional being.

Vicarious effects refer to the secondhand stress experienced when one is indirectly exposed to trauma. In the play, the family experiences this through their sustained immersion in a disappointing political environment. Richard's cynicism is not just an attitude; it is a symptom of vicarious trauma derived from the death of the "Hope and Change" narrative. Nelson stages this trauma through the acoustic texture of the dialogue. Richard's use of profanity and linguistic violence ruptures the polite "Apple" family decorum:

Marian (Shrugs): So he broke a promise. (Shrugs) He changed his mind. He was raising a shitful of money.

Richard: That's right. A sh*tful. Well said.

Marian: And the Republicans were trying to do the same—

Jane: No, they weren't, Marian. At least not the one and maybe only Republican who believes in campaign finance reform. He took public financing. And then we outspent him five to one or something. We swamped him.

Barbara: But Obama won. (70)

Dialogues within the family revolve around the ways in which indirect exposure to the imperfections of the political system leads to the emotional pressures that shape their identities in ways that they did not plan. Their connection to well-intentioned political leaders like Obama, who compromise their integrity and fail to live up to expectations, is the source of the vicarious pain that they experience in this particular scenario. The resigned acceptance of failed promises that Marian has made is a reflection of her effort to cope with political disappointment by reducing her expectations and building an identity that is based on pragmatism. Jane's concentration on ethical paradoxes, on the other hand, is an expression of the act of striving to keep her moral spirit inside an institutional framework of corruption. As a result, she perceives herself as one of the critical observers.

The adjustment that Richard provides is rather cynical: "That's right," he adds in a sardonic manner. "That's right. A sh*tful. Well said" (70). This distance is an indication of his emotional detachment and skepticism; as a result, his identity is created around hilarious retorts as a defense

mechanism against disillusionment. This conversation demonstrates how the Apple family may experience political disappointment, which can act as a form of vicarious trauma and influence their identity. They had different reactions to institutional failures, such as giving up, being morally critical, and finding humor. These reactions show how social problems affect people's personal lives, making them rethink their values, beliefs, and duties in the community. In *That Hopey Changey Thing*, Nelson makes use of these exchanges to bring attention to the profound emotional and psychological influence that politics has on many aspects of human identity and the dynamics of families.

Another type of trauma is chiasmal. It is the mental degeneration of Uncle Benjamin that is principally responsible for the induction of chiasmal trauma in the members of the Apple family, which "infects" the members of the Apple family in *That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010). Whether done with ill will or with a repulsive goal, Uncle Benjamin's persistent endeavor to piece together the many fragments of his former self cause emotional distress for everyone involved. Benjamin's caregivers experience waves of emotional anguish as a result of the disorientation that manifests through his paneled understanding of matters. His demented state manifests this disorientation in the form of objections, such as silently accusing others of stealing his checkbook or constructing grand imaginative tales in which he is always the victim. As Benjamin creates "a world out of his imagination" (50) and later parades the other patients in a dramatic seventh act, Barbara tells the stories with a mixture of sorrow and wrath in her voice. During the events, not only do they demonstrate Benjamin's struggle, but they also provide a clue as to how his mental condition causes Barbara and the other siblings to come to terms with the disintegration of Uncle Ben. As the primary caregiver, Barbara represents the individuals who suffer the most direct effects of childhood trauma. She makes the observation that "When I sit with him, sometimes it's as if he's trying to put the pieces endlessly back together" (50). This line dramatizes the hauntological labor of the family. Nelson stages this by having the family repeatedly pause to correct Benjamin or explain the same fact over Oliver's death multiple times. These cyclical repetitions in the play's structure force the audience to experience the same frustration and stuckness as the characters. The disintegration of the uncle's mind threatens the coherence of their own family history, turning the play's temporal structure into a loop of unresolved grief. The chiasmal trauma in the above example significantly impacts the formation of identity within the Apple family. The reactions of everyone to Benjamin's illness provide significant insights into their coping mechanisms and evolving roles: Barbara exhibits practical but emotionally strained caregiving, Marian displays profound vulnerability, and Jane employs humor as a means of emotional detachment. The dynamics illustrate how Benjamin's trauma impacts the family, influencing their personal and collective identities as they navigate the emotional difficulties of caring and relationships. Ultimately, Benjamin's "as if he's trying to put the pieces endlessly back together" (50) serves as a profound metaphor for the family's struggle to balance their affection for him with the burdens and grief imposed by his condition, illustrating the profound connection of trauma and familial bonds.

Intrafamilial trauma occurs when the catastrophic event arises from within the family structure itself (Figley, 2013). In *That Hopey Changey Thing*, the Apple family appears initially as a realistic portrayal of the dysfunctional family trope. However, viewed through the lenses of hauntology and psychoanalysis, this dysfunction is not merely behavioral but structural: the family is organized around a spectral void of the abandonment by the father. This void operates as what Abraham and Torok (1994) define as a “phantom”: a formation in the unconscious that results not from the subject’s own experiences, but from the undisclosed traumas of the previous generation. The father’s abandonment acts as this primal, unassimilated event. Because the siblings cannot fully process the rejection, they construct a family dynamic designed to keep the “phantom” encapsulated that is a psychological structure Abraham and Torok call the “crypt.” The dining room in Rhinebeck effectively functions as this crypt: a space where the secret is kept alive but hidden beneath layers of politeness and ritual. The “ghost” of the father enters the dialogue through Jane, who reveals the foundational substitution that defines the siblings’ lives:

Jane (to Tim): When Dad left us, Uncle Benjamin became our father.

Marian: Not exactly.

Tim (to Jane): You told me.

Jane (to her sisters): I hardly remember Dad. (61)

This dialogue describes a spectral substitution. The father’s departure created a vacuum of authority and identity that the family attempted to fill with Uncle Benjamin. In hauntological terms, Benjamin became the corporeal vessel for the missing paternal function. However, this substitution is inherently traumatic because Benjamin himself is now disappearing into dementia. This creates a double haunting: the siblings are losing their father figure for the second time. The trauma of the original abandonment is recycling through Benjamin’s decline. Jane’s confession “I hardly remember Dad” reveals that her identity is constructed around a gap in memory and she is haunted not by a presence, but by an absence she cannot fully recall. His intrafamilial haunting mirrors the political haunting of the 2010 setting. In psychoanalytic theory, the father often represents the Law or the structural order. The failure of the biological father in the Apple family runs parallel to the perceived failure of the political fathers of the nation. Just as the siblings are grappling with the disintegration of their “substitute father”, the nation is grappling with the disintegration of political hope.

Barbara (to Tim): He put a folded twenty-dollar bill in my hand.

Kissed me on the cheek and said one more thing, before vanishing. He said, “Barbara, I know you’re my child, but I’m not so sure about your brother and sisters . . .” (63)

As the oldest member of the household, Barbara’s encounter with her father serves as the primary site of intrafamilial haunting. His remarks regarding the uncertainty of his paternity specifically concerning her siblings act as a spectral disruption that destabilizes the family’s origin

story. This setting indicates that the father has emotionally ignored the family, creating a legacy of neglect. However, rather than viewing this merely through the lens of attachment theory, this absence should be understood as a spectral void. The father functions as a “phantom” (Abraham & Torok, 1994), an absent figure whose silence and uncertainty have historically organized the family’s behavior. Scholars like Isobel et al. (2019) classify interpersonal, relational, and betrayal trauma as manifestations of intrafamilial stress. In the context of *The Apple Family*, these overlapping traumas manifest as a hauntological condition. The “dysfunctional and pathological” nature of the family unit is not simply a failure of communication; it is a structural response to living with a ghost. The father’s physical absence created a vacuum that the family filled with silence and repression. Therefore, the dysfunctional family is redefined here as a haunted system, where the members are trapped in a cycle of managing the unspoken secret of their own legitimacy.

The dysfunctional family trope has been a milestone in American history, and one of the themes that has grown prevalent in modern American discourse is the dysfunctional family unit. Concerns of transgenerational trauma and the crushing weight of economic problems have turned culture on its head in the majority of families. Additionally, dysfunctions can show up as bad communication patterns, unfair power dynamics, and unequal emotional work, such as caregiving or emotional work that has become a source of conflict because it is carried out unequally or disproportionately by one or more family members. These kinds of families are not able to provide the essential trust and support in order to really heal through the internal challenges that they are experiencing; instead, they go through cycles of anger, isolation, and lasting complaints.

In a broader sense, the dysfunctional family is a reflection of the fissures that exist within the fabric of American society. In *That Hopey Changey Thing*, the Apple family serves as a metaphor for the dysfunctional family unit that is characteristic of contemporary America. This dysfunctional family unit is a manifestation of the social pressures and individual problems that break the cohesiveness of the family unit. The dysfunction of the Apple family is also a reflection of the fragmentation of society, which is a debris of the unresolved generational trauma that is prevalent in American homes.

Barbara (To change the subject): And how are you doing, Richard?
 Your sisters are worried about you, too.
 (No response. He looks to Jane.)
Jane (To Richard): I didn’t say anything.
Barbara: When do you start this new job?
Richard (At the table): Are we done? Should we have dessert? (51)

This dialogue among Barbara, Jane, and Richard illustrates the humorous but rather serious dynamics of a dysfunctional family within the Apple family. Barbara makes an effort to inquire about Richard’s well-being, asking, “How are you doing, Richard?” (51). Although the statement “Your sisters are worried about you, too” (51) reflects a sincere concern, its indirect wording reveals a

familial dynamic that often addresses emotions and issues indirectly or completely ignores them. Richard's blatant evasiveness instead of responding, "Are we done?" (51). The question "Should we have dessert?" (51). The question appears to suggest a state of nervousness, accompanied by vulnerability, or an inability to engage in an open dialogue with family members. His withdrawal creates a barrier to communication, which, among other factors, defines dysfunctional families that use conflict avoidance methods rather than confrontation. This line is a dramaturgical pivot. Richard's sudden shift from personal inquiry to the banal ritual of dessert is a defense mechanism enacted in real-time. The family uses the domestic rituals of the table to prevent the specific ghosts of abandonment and illegitimacy from fully materializing. By invoking "dessert," Richard attempts to seal the crypt back up. Thus, the dysfunction is actually a survival strategy against the spectral return of a history they cannot bear to face. Jane's inserted remark, "I didn't say anything" (51), further contributes to this dynamic. It suggests a defensiveness or apprehension in engaging Barbara's further remark, indicating the siblings' lack of confidence and security in one another. The family's relationships therefore foster a retreat from emotional involvement. This incident illustrates how unresolved tensions and disputes exacerbate instability within the Apple family, where genuine concern is often greeted with evasion or defensiveness, hindering the capacity to confront underlying concerns. The fact that they are unable to have open conversations about emotional vulnerabilities demonstrates a significant rift in family communication, which makes it difficult for them to undergo genuine rehabilitation.

Nelson uses the Apple family as an example to illustrate how individual responsibility, societal expectations, and the presence of non-family-related difficulties all contribute to a complex and sometimes dysfunctional interplay within families, drawing parallels with other experiences in the United States. The concept of complex trauma is defined by repeated exposure to invasive events, often within the caregiving system (NTCSN, 2000). In the context of *The Apple Family*, this functions as a form of spectral repetition. The absence of a reliable caregiver, specifically the father does not merely hinder development; it creates a structural void in the family's psyche. This void forces the siblings to organize their identities around a lack of security, leading to the "fragmented self-concept" observed in characters like Jane and Richard. This dynamic aligns with Polansky's (cited in Rokach et al., 2022) definition of neglect not merely as physical deprivation but as a failure to provide the resources necessary for emotional existence. In the framework of this thesis, this emotional neglect acts as the origin of the "Phantom" (Abraham & Torok, 1994). Because the parents failed to provide a coherent narrative of care, the children inherited their silence.

The dysfunction visible in the play and the evasion of difficult topics, the reliance on Uncle Benjamin as a surrogate are the direct result of this neglect. The siblings are not simply "inattentive" to each other; they are unconsciously protecting the crypt of their childhood abandonment. Thus, the history of neglect is not just a backstory; it is an active, ghostly force that dictates the limits of their current intimacy. The dysfunctional nature of the family unit is not simply a failure of communication

or attachment; it is a structural response to living with a ghost. The father functions as a “phantom”, an absent figure whose silence and uncertainty have historically organized the family’s behavior. As Judith Herman (1992) notes, trauma leads to constriction or emotional numbing; in the Apple family, this constriction is the price of keeping the spectral void at bay. The dysfunction is, in reality, a haunted system where the members are trapped in a cycle of managing the secret of their own abandonment.



CHAPTER THREE

**Our contemporary moment is haunted one... It appears that ghosts are everywhere in American popular culture. (2004:3) Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock—
The Spectral Turn**

3. RICHARD NELSON'S *SWEET AND SAD* (2011)

In *Sweet and Sad* (2011), the second play of the Apple Family quartet, Richard Nelson dramatizes Weinstock's assertion that the American contemporary moment is defined by haunting. Set on the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, the play transforms the Apple family dining room into a space where the "uninvited guest" of national trauma takes a seat at the table. While the previous chapter explored the "specters" of political disillusionment during the 2010 midterms along with the familial traumas, this chapter argues that *Sweet and Sad* mobilize a distinct, more pervasive "specter": the unassimilated memory of 9/11.

This chapter utilizes hauntology and trauma theory to investigate how the attacks continue to haunt the collective unconscious and shape individual identity. Hauntology is here understood as the study of the persistence of the "spirit" of an event as a disruptive memory. As Weinstock (2004) argues, "America has always been a land of ghosts, a nation obsessed with the spectral" (8). Grounding the analysis in this framework, the chapter posits that the ghost of 9/11 informs the characters' aspirations, fears, and regrets, ultimately determining whether their future is open to possibility or foreclosed by the past.

Nelson stages this haunting by intertwining collective mourning with private grief. As the family gathers for Sunday lunch, the anniversary serves as a catalyst that forces the characters to confront not only the national tragedy but their own domestic "specters." Marian, now living with her sister Barbara, becomes the focal point of this intersection. Her struggle to overcome the tragic death of her daughter runs parallel to the nation's struggle to process the loss of the Twin Towers.

The dramaturgy of the play—featuring the return of Jane and her boyfriend Tim, the arrival of Richard from Manhattan, and Uncle Benjamin's preparation for a poetry reading—is structured around the failure to keep these ghosts at bay. By analyzing these interactions, this chapter demonstrates that *Sweet and Sad* do not merely commemorate a historical event; it stages the "traumatic identity" of a family, and a nation, that has not yet learned how to bury its dead.

3.1. The Hauntological Framework: The Presence of the Absent

This chapter adapts the hauntological framework to the specific context of theatre and material memory. While introduction established the broad philosophical strokes of Derrida's theory, the analysis of *Sweet and Sad* requires a more specialized lens: hauntological dramaturgy. This chapter contributes to the concept of hauntology in the way that it evokes recurrence and incursion of the past should never be considered invisible. Within the realm of theater and performance studies, the concept of hauntology, which was first presented by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1993), serves as a valuable instrument for analyzing collective and individual memory, trauma, and identity. The disruption of time is one of the denominators associated with hauntology because it does so in invisible and ghostly ways. Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage* (2001) and Alice Rayner's *Hauntological Dramaturgy* (2006) build on Derrida's ideas and show how theater and performances are affected by past events, earlier shows, and unresolved stories.

Merlin Coverly states in *Hauntology: Ghosts of the Future Past* (2020), "In both Derrida's and Fisher's conceptions of hauntology, the crucial element is time. For Derrida, the return and repetition of the past in the present is manifested through the figure of the revenant, that which returns each time as if it were the first, unchanging and insistent, demanding a reckoning for a message that went unheard or was ignored (5). In *Sweet and Sad*, the "revenant" that demands a reckoning is the unassimilated trauma of 9/11. Derrida's notion that the "specter" hovers "between life and death, present and absent" (1993) is no longer a metaphor but a description of the physical reality of Ground Zero.

Derrida's notion of hauntology defies the traditional norms of absence, presence, and time. Derrida's phantom is a deconstructive figure, hovering between life and death, present and absent, and causing established certainties to shift. At the core of this theory, the notion of revenant, which is a spectral presence that reappears, is of utmost importance. Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1993) urges us to investigate "specters," eliminating preconceived notions to comprehend what remains beyond our imagination. Such an approach does not imply a belief in ghosts, since ghosts represent the essence of existence.

The emphasis is on exploring the presence of what no longer exists or has yet to be and how it influences the subject's self-presence and contingent realities. (Davis, 2005:19) Hauntology emphasizes that the past remains evident and persistently disturbs the present. In this context, unsolved histories, painful events, and unspoken secrets manifest as specters both literally and metaphorically. Glantz and Lipton (2003) argues that the remains of the World Trade Center (WTC), such as the wrecked steel and ductwork, were powerful "haunted things" carrying "messages from the inferno" (336). Confronting these remains meant facing "the howls of the dead in every buckled strut or beam". They function as "specters" of a new world that haunts us, not in the traditional sense,

but as the “uncanny footprint of a future yet to come” (Banita, 2014: 95). This material haunting is not confined to the site of the disaster; it permeates the cultural atmosphere, creating what Mark Seltzer terms a “wound culture” or what Roger Luckhurst describes as a “trauma culture” (Wald, 2007: 93). In this context, the “traumatized subject” emerges as a central figure of contemporary subjectivity, defined by the “radical disruption” of experience (Caruth, 1995: 4).

Hauntology, memory, and identity are interwovenly related to each other. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that identity is not self-contained and stable but rather shapes itself through the traces of the past. Likewise, memory, both individual and collective, is reshaped by contemporary events, inherited traumas, and cultural repetitions. The interaction between the personal and the collective, the past and the present, the seen and the unseen shapes the essence of hauntology’s impact on identity formation and memory. Consequently, this framework reveals that identity in *Sweet and Sad* is not self-contained or stable. Instead, it is porous, shaped continuously by the traces of the past. The interaction between personal grief (Marian’s loss) and collective ruin (the WTC) constitutes the essence of “traumatic identity” in this chapter. The self is constructed through the debris of history, merging individual and collective memory into a singular, haunted consciousness.

3.2. Hauntology and Recycling of Memory in *Sweet and Sad*

The dramatic structure of *The Apple Family* cycle relies fundamentally on repetition. The notion of repetition is central to theater. Margherita Laera (2014) emphasizes the importance of repetition as “theatre rewrites history, relationships, stories, and rules. Above all, theater repeats, and incessantly so. It refashions beliefs, recycles old and used objects, and reassembles them into new embodied experiences (1). In *Sweet and Sad* (2011), the notion of repetition is a powerful mechanism to reflect the cyclical nature of memory and trauma; moreover, the repetitive nature also provides moments to the audience for deeper meanings as well as reinterpretations of the events. Repetition has a close relationship with the concept of hauntology, where the influence of the past is persistent in the present. The family’s unending conversation about politics as well as 9/11 is a significant indicator of the influence of the past on the present. That is to say, the haunting presence of the events inherently follows a cyclical and repetitive pattern. Unresolved pasts, as seen in all plays, continue to invade the present with different meanings. Since time and history are never static, even though the characters repeat themselves, historical background always adds different events to the flow of history, which in a way leads to alteration in the meaning as well as the notion of repetition.

Marvin Carlson and Alice Rayner are among the scholars who also support the idea of repetition in the theater and performance. *The Haunted Stage* (2003) posits that the recurrence of historical actions is an essential trait of all drama, as endorsed by theorists such as Herbert Blau, Richard Schechner, and Joseph Roach.

These scholars suggest that audiences see theatrical representations as reiterations of past experiences. D'Cruz (2022) highlights the comments of Carlson in *Hauntological Dramaturgy*. According to Carlson, we use our memories of prior incidents and occurrences to comprehend new events with parallel characteristics in daily life. Memory significantly influences human intellect overall (7). The text presents the same thing they have encountered before, but in a different context. Even though it seems like the theater is repeating itself, it is not actually since the prior experiences are accumulated to form a new one. In this sense, the notion of repetition is interwovenly connected with memory since the audience remembers and reconnects events from the past to the present. To some degree, in this context, memory acts as an emotional and cognitive scheme, and it does not only frame personal remembrance but also shapes how individuals interpret their surroundings. Carlson's theory is related to the idea of meaning-making from the past to shape the present. It could be underscored that memory functions as a dynamic between past and present. In the play *Sweet and Sad* (2011), Marian's grief over her daughter Evan shapes her present situation, and the grief that has not been resolved disrupts the present time, leading to the interference of all family members: By integrating problems into a historical context, these characters in the play exemplify Carlson's claim that memory is fundamental to human comprehension, establishing a continuum in which the past perpetually influences the present.

Barbara: They'd had a fight that morning. Evan and Marian.
So she wasn't answering Evan's calls.
Barbara: They'd had a fight. Not an uncommon thing between
the two of them. You know that. Mothers and daughters,
I guess. Some are more difficult than others. And so that
day, she had decided she wouldn't answer Evan's calls. So
it's not that she didn't hear them, like we first thought.
That's why Adam . . . When she told him. I suppose
he—got angry. Understandable. Isn't it? All this just came
out one night—when we were still sharing my bedroom.
She needed to talk . . .
(Silence.)
She chose—not to answer her daughter. (143)

The quote pertains to the day of Evan's suicide. All family members intervene in the incident, and Barbara, the eldest sister, provides an opinion on the matter. The quote suggests that had Marian accessed her daughter Evan's phone, she could have survived. This emotion results in a conflict inside Marian's realm. She not only recalls her sorrow for her daughter, but also the regret persists. This remark highlights the profound influence of memory and shame on Marian's identity. This recollection of Marian and Evan leads to Marian's self-condemnation for failing to respond to her daughter's call. This memory, as Derrida (1993) suggests, which does not respond to her daughter's cry, persists as a haunting presence, influencing her present with the weight of recollections.

The stillness that surrounds the quote, in a sense, contributes to the emotional load that she is carrying and provides her with some room to narrate the feelings that she is experiencing, such as

remorse, dread, and regret. Even though the choice that Marian made was primarily a choice that included a disagreement between her and her daughter, it took on a terrible significance when Evan passed away. This connection links Carlson's concept of memory to the conflict between the past and the present. Recalling the moment never simply reopens the event; instead, it reframes it within the context of a devastated situation. Marian's ordinary decision is transformed into a persistent obsession with her identity as a mother and an unresolved emotional stock of suffering as a result of her memory, which has experienced the alteration because of her experiences of sadness. This quotation is consistent with Derrida's hauntology concept, according to which the past is constantly present in the present; hence, this haunting shapes human identity and behaviors. Marian's harsh memory is thus representative of trauma that is intruding on linear time, renewing rebirth in a never-ending cycle of self-blame while also passing through a continuous identification judgment. It is a ghost; it creates a ghostly presence in Marian, Adam's wrath, and Barbara's contextual presentation of the cause for it. The memory is a ghost. *Sweet and Sad* (2011) allows the reader to access the branch of hereditary loops in family disputes and trauma that resonate across time into the present, therefore reshaping identities and relationships in a new way. Following the recent loss, Marian's experience increasingly embodies a constant interplay of memory, grief, and identity. In this context, a seemingly insignificant moment becomes a source of significance that lasts a lifetime.

Carlson's theory is somewhat related to Derrida's hauntology in the sense of memory, which is the recycling of memory. Both Derrida and Carlson propose that the past is not a static thing; instead, it perpetuates itself, exerting influence on the present via repetition and reinterpretation. Both Derrida's hauntology and Carlson's theory, which both place an emphasis on the dynamic and recursive nature of the past, directly address the concepts of linearity of time and fixity of memory. Both theories are based on the idea that the past is a dynamic and recursive phenomenon. The concept of haunting, as described by Derrida, demonstrates that the past is often not simply behind us; rather, it lingers, specter-like, and has an effect on the here and now via repetitions and reinterpretations. Merlin Carlson suggests that the idea of "ghosting" mainly addresses audience reception and the influence of intertextuality on the spectator's interpretation of a performance (D'Cruz, 2022:7).

This notion is developed further by Carlson's concept of "ghosting" in the theater, which involves overlaying the performances with remnants of their prior versions. This generates a recollection in memory that creates unclear lines of division between the past and the present. These ideas, when taken together, provide an understanding of memory not as a repository or archive, which is fixed and unchanging, but rather as a dynamic and ever-evolving process that is constantly recycling and reimagining the experience of the past. In this sense, "ghosting" pertains to the audience's reception when recollections of past events, cultural references, and performances shape the understanding of present occurrences. When seen in this light, it is reasonable to assert that the phenomenon of ghosting is the manifestation of the recycling of the memory.

Ghosting operates on multiple levels. One of them is about the theme since the play revolves around remnants of 9/11 and intergenerational trauma; the narrative of haunting becomes highly visible. Furthermore, the fragmented dialogues accentuate the undeniable visibility of structural ghosts. Each character in the play recalls personal and historical memories. In addition, the recycling of memories is connected to Derrida's perspective that the past continues to exist and plays a role in the formation of identity. Along with Derrida, Fisher suggests that hauntology may be regarded as post-nostalgic, describing a world in which the present can no longer be experienced as anything other than a sum of its pasts (Coverly, 2020: 7). This idea is consistent with Derrida's concept of hauntology, which expresses the notion that the past is not a static entity but rather one that colors the present via repetition and spectral returns. Furthermore, both theories exemplify a temporal collapse, characterized by a blurring and indistinction of time, which consequently engenders a sense of alienation and unease. Richard's remarks about the artist's idea for the 9/11 memorial in *Sweet and Sad* (2011) illustrate the relationship between memory, ghosting, and hauntology.

Richard: I know. He said, the goal was to make the world sweet again. (Smiles) And have everyone participate. And—and this was most important—he said the artist wanted to make art that would disappear. That memorials are not in the past or the future, but now. And so my friend, he was trying to convince us that the best memorial for 9/11 would be one that would have an end. (150)

The phrase explicitly references 9/11, which has become a significant memory for both the family and society. The memorial's presence corresponds with Derrida's idea of hauntology, as it resides in the past but influences the present and changes the future, thus disrupting the linearity of time via the cyclical nature of memory. "The Revenant" in this context makes an obvious reference to the occurrence of the 9/11 attacks, since it is constantly brought up in both public and private debate, pleading for attention for the effect that has not yet been addressed. In other words, it is an indelible experience that is not forgotten but suppressed by individuals.

While Derrida defines hauntology as "revenant," Fisher identifies two temporal currents in hauntology: "the no longer" and "the not yet." The former haunts the present from the past, a past event or entity, while the latter haunts the present from the future, a promise that never came to pass but may yet happen.

For Fisher, as we shall see, there are two opposing temporal currents intrinsic to hauntology: "the no longer and the not yet." The former haunts the present from the past, an event, idea, or entity whose moment is past, but which continues to make its presence felt. The latter haunts the present from the future through the unfulfilled promise of that which never came to pass but which may yet do so. (Coverly: 2020, 5)

From the point of view of Fisher, it is also possible to observe that while the events of 9/11 are a sign of "no longer," the impact of them is still widespread. The ghostly recall of the past that exists

inside the linearity of time is what it stands for. The hauntological method of recollection is also applicable to the audience. Since they are the ones who represent the society, they reinterpret the event when they come across it again since their cognitive scheme has the roots of the event. The engagement of the audience is one of the significant themes to discuss as they carry their memories about the event; the reinterpretation of the event creates an atmosphere to share experiences, which leads to the entwining of collective and individual memories. Individual and collective memories emerge, shaping the current remarks. The memorial's existence not only shapes the spectators' current experience but also impacts the family's conversation. Indeed, in a sense, the statement that Richard made regarding the memory "that would have an end" is connected to the concept of remembering and forgetting. It would seem that Richard is exhausted by the never-ending sorrow, and he is in a state of wanting to go on. However, the only way for him to move forward is to forget about the past. In the context of the concept of forgetting, the idea of reconciling with the past while simultaneously embracing it is related to the concept of lasting persistence. By combining Carlson's idea of ghosting with Derrida's hauntology, *Sweet and Sad* (2011) transforms into an in-depth investigation of the ways in which memory functions within the context of theater and the human experience. An argument is made in the play that memory is neither linear nor limited but rather something spectral, hanging about inside which identities and releases form and become relevant via a variety of intricate and meaningful ways.

3.3. Memory as Both a Tool and a Constraint

In *Sweet and Sad* (2011), memory functions paradoxically: it is the necessary tool for constructing a coherent self yet simultaneously acts as a constraint that perpetuates unresolved trauma. As Miller argues the importance of memory as follows: "a process of continuous renegotiation of selfhood in relation to the past" (2002:8). For the Apple family, this renegotiation is stalled. The memory of 9/11 does not help them integrate the past; instead, it traps them in a moment of perpetual recurrence. This fact has clearly been represented in the work:

Richard: We made them turn off the TVs in the bar this morning. So we weren't watching. But somehow a full minute before—the exact time—we all knew. We felt it. There wasn't a sound. Then just the bells. (148)

Richard's recollection stages a collective deactivation of Broca's area. The phrase 'There wasn't a sound' signifies the moment the group transitions from a linguistic community to a traumatized collective. The replacement of human speech with just the bells illustrates Sarul's (2004) argument: when trauma renders the subject speechless, non-verbal symbols must intervene to carry the weight of the experience. This moment also dramatizes the hauntological intrusion of the past. The silence in the bar becomes a heavy, active presence like a "ghosting" (Carlson, 2003) where the prior event overlays the present reality. During the anniversary, the televisions in the pub are turned

off, and the individuals sense the gravity of the occasion despite the absence of sound. In a sense, this quotation encapsulates the core of memory, which is its dual nature, which includes both the function of restraint and the function of remembering. Because of this duality, they can recall the events of 9/11, which are generally recognized as a communal recollection that brings people together to experience a similar feeling of loss. The recollection of 9/11 brings people together, but at the same time, the weight of the remembrance proves to them that the memories are unavoidable. To put it another way, the inevitability of memory continues to haunt people, influencing both their current and their future lives.

When it is thought with the notion of “ghosting” put forward by Marvin Carlson, it could be assumed that the memory that is conveyed, which takes place in the bar, is an example of the intrusion of past events to the present time. Although turning on the television may seem to be an escape from the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, it is also a reference to the quiet, which is a metaphor for the tremendous sadness that has been experienced. Its connection to the process of meaning-making in the past results in a communal sense of loss since it is a history that is shared by everyone. The phrase “then just the bells” is another ghostly presence in the statement; it is a spectral signifier. They are merely marking time; they are tolling the return of the trauma. This shared moment of recognition demonstrates the collective nature of the haunting. The individuals in the bar are bound together not by a shared future, but by a shared inability to escape the timeline of the attack.

Consequently, memory in *Sweet and Sad* operates as a binding agent for “traumatic identity.” It unites the community in a “communal recollection,” offering a sense of belonging, but simultaneously constrains them within a narrative of loss. As Derrida (1993) suggests, the “specter” is that which “always comes back.” By showing that the memory arrives even when the TVs are off, Nelson argues that the trauma of 9/11 has become atmospheric constraint that construct “traumatic identity” of the characters regardless of their attempt to look away.

3.4. The Interplay Between Individual and Collective Memory in *Sweet and Sad* (2011)

In *Sweet and Sad*, memory functions as the loom where individual identity is woven into the fabric of the collective. Memory has historically been a concept that mediates between self and the mind, consciousness and the unconscious. (Favorini, 2008: 3), In other words, memory has been considered a notion that acts as a mediator between the ego and the mind, as well as between awareness and the unconscious, and it stands as one of the most significant concepts we possess. Not only is it a mediator between self and identity, but it is also a concept that evolves over time. Susannah Redstone underscores the evolving nature of memory as follows: “Memory means different things at different times” (2000:3). Redstone’s observation about memory suggests that memory serves a dynamic purpose, not a static one.

In a way, memory shapes the present and identity depending on the recollection's impact. It is essential for one's own identity, as well as for one's social and cultural identity. Memory is one of the denominators that shapes the personality; it could be stated that those with trauma may be affected in individual and collective life. Individual and group identities are, in fact, inextricably linked to one another within the same framework. In this sense, in *Sweet and Sad* (2011), individuals are both traumatized because of their personal histories as well as their collective sufferings. Those narratives are stored in their memories, shaping their individual and collective identities. Eyerman highlights the importance of memory as follows: "Memory provides individuals and collectives with a cognitive map, a map that helps orient them with regard to who they are, why they are here, and where they are going. Memory, in other words, is central to individual and collective identity" (Eyerman, 2011:24). For both people and groups, memory acts as a cognitive map that guides them in their future, identity, and purpose.

After providing an explanation of the concept of memory, it is of the highest need to provide an explanation of the concept of collective memory. It is largely due to the contributions of Maurice Halbwachs, one of the pioneers, that memory studies have been able to gain a new viewpoint. His work on collective memory is the first of its kind. Lewis A. Coser, who is the editor of *On Collective Memory*, written by Maurice Halbwachs, has shared his personal experience about the collective memory in the introduction section. When he first arrived in the United States as an immigrant, he said that he had a difficult time making friends. He had the impression that his contact with Native Americans had been obstructed and that the barrier prevented them from having a discourse that was flowing well. Following his recollection of Halbwach's work, he began to realize that he did not share sufficient collective memories. They, from time to time, talked about historical references, and he could not follow. "I was excluded from their collective memory and they from mine" (1984:21). According to Halbwachs, collective memory is a notion that is established socially and culturally. He underscores the concept as follows: "While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember" (48). This remark underlines the essence of collective memory. That is to say, collective memory is not an individual entity but is shaped by "social classes, families, associations, corporations, armies, and trade unions." (22) Collective memory is the reflection of the past in the light of the present. In *Sweet and Sad* (2011), all family members recall their memories of 9/11. The play commemorates the tenth anniversary of 9/11, periodically reflecting on the memories associated with that day. Jane engages in a dialogue with her pupils and then elucidates it to the family members after supper. One of her students, named Billy, had a clear recollection of 9/11; he recalls a man covered in dust. Although it seems to be a personal memory for Billy, it is, in fact, intertwined with the communal pain of 9/11, which is embedded in their cultural consciousness.

Jane: He said he remembers when I came to pick him up at school—there was a man, a father—his suit completely covered

in dust. And how the man was checking his watch—to put down the “correct” time on a sheet in the school office. To sign his son out and take him home. I think what Billy was saying is that it seemed so normal on the one hand, and so—something else—on the other. At the same time. Unsettling for a kid. (Shrugs) And—this: I don’t have any memory of this at all. About two years later, Billy just came out with this—how when we had stopped at an ATM, walking uptown—Billy says there was a long, long line—and no one in that line was saying anything to anyone; no one was looking at anyone. . . (151)

This moment is a crucial instance of hauntological transmission. Billy, who would have been an infant or toddler in 2001, possesses a “clear recollection” of a sensory trauma. This memory is likely not an autobiographical record but a collective implant—an image absorbed from the cultural “cognitive map” of the post-9/11 world. By introducing this story, Nelson demonstrates that the “communal pain” of 9/11 has become a “specter” that possesses even those who did not witness it directly. Billy’s memory of the “man covered in dust” acts as a structural ghost in the dialogue, proving that individual memory is porous. The “dust” of the event has settled not just on the streets of New York, but in the mouths of the next generation, collapsing the distance between the historical event and the individual subject. He never forgets how a father, coated in dust, signed a kid out with an image that was both ordinary and hauntingly evocative, illustrating how trauma permeates the essence of daily existence. Furthermore, his memories of waiting in an ATM queue in utter stillness, with no one making eye contact, starkly illustrate how calamity alters the behavioral dynamics of a society. Notably, Jane does not recall this memory, illustrating Susan Sontag’s assertion that communal memory is seldom authentic recollection but rather a contextual interpretation of meaning. The past is often rebuilt via communal narratives rather than individual recollections, highlighting how collective memory surpasses personal experience. The juxtaposition of Billy’s old recollections and Jane’s inability to recall underscores the fundamentally subjective essence of memory and the differing expressions of pain across generations.

The juxtaposition of Billy’s old recollections and Jane’s inability to recall underscores the fundamentally subjective essence of memory and the differing expressions of pain across generations. Cathy Caruth’s analysis of trauma and delayed memory suggests that traumatic events often evade immediate articulation and subsequently emerge as disjointed memories. Consequently, Billy’s recounting of his recollections after a certain duration facilitates the existence of such theories; trauma remains unspoken inside its quiet turmoil until articulated in relation to a larger traumatic entity or topic. The relationship between individual and collective memory aligns with Halbwach’s statement. Collective memory is not an individual construct; rather, it is influenced by social classes, families, groups, companies, militaries, and labor unions. The child’s individual memory is decorated with collective events; therefore, he never forgets how a father, coated in dust, signed a kid out with an image that was both ordinary and hauntingly evocative, illustrating how trauma permeates the essence of daily existence. Furthermore, his memories of waiting in an ATM

queue in utter stillness, with no one making eye contact, starkly illustrate how calamity alters the behavioral dynamics of a society. Notably, Jane does not recall this memory. The past is often rebuilt via collective narratives rather than individual recollections, highlighting how collective memory surpasses personal experience. The juxtaposition of Billy's old recollections and Jane's inability to recall underscores the fundamentally subjective essence of memory and the differing expressions of pain across generations.

Cathy Caruth's analysis of trauma and delayed memory suggests that traumatic events often evade immediate articulation and subsequently emerge as disjointed memories. Schwab (2010) articulates the delayed nature of traumatic memories in *Haunting Legacies* as follows: "Traumatic memories entrap us in the prison house of repetition compulsion. To the extent that we are successful in banning thoughts and memories, we become a body in pain, leading a somatic existence severed from consciously or affectively lived history (2). It highlights the fact that efforts to hide these memories may result in physical suffering as well as a detachment from one's emotional and historical experiences. Consequently, Billy's recounting of his recollections after a certain duration facilitates the existence of such theories; trauma remains unspoken inside its quiet turmoil until articulated in relation to a larger traumatic entity or topic. The interplay between individual and collective memory aligns with Maurice Halbwachs's insight on collective memory, which posits that collective memory is not an isolated act of the person but is influenced by social institutions, families, and communities.

Memory is seen not just as an individual phenomenon but as a collective process of interaction in which different memories intersect, conflict, and validate one another. Halbwachs's concept elucidates how events are interpreted via the perspective of social groups, hence bringing Billy's recollections of 9/11 from his teenage years profoundly impactful to the collective mourning that seemed to permeate the country. Not only Halbwachs but also Pierre Nora's concept of "Lieux de memoire originates with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally" (12). According to Halbwach and Nora's observations on collective memory, it can be said that collective memory is rooted in the cultural awareness of people; it does not arise spontaneously but is instead influenced by "archives, anniversaries, and celebrations." Pierre Nora's idea of lieux de mémoire elucidates how traumatic experiences persist over generations and develop roots in cultural awareness. *Sweet and Sad* (2011) illustrates how individual sorrow permeates collective trauma, so demonstrating hauntology's assertion that history is not experienced in isolation.

The Apple family reunion serves as a dynamic site of memory, where previous events are invoked, reconstructed, and interrogated, facilitating the processing of both individual and collective experiences of trauma within a context of communal interpretation. The play effectively illustrates

the construction of national identity via the characters' negotiation of personal losses within a broader societal context. Marian's confrontation with personal loss mirrors the nation's enduring battle with the memory of 9/11, illustrating how individual losses are integrated into broader historical narratives. The generational dimension of memory transmission is notably significant.

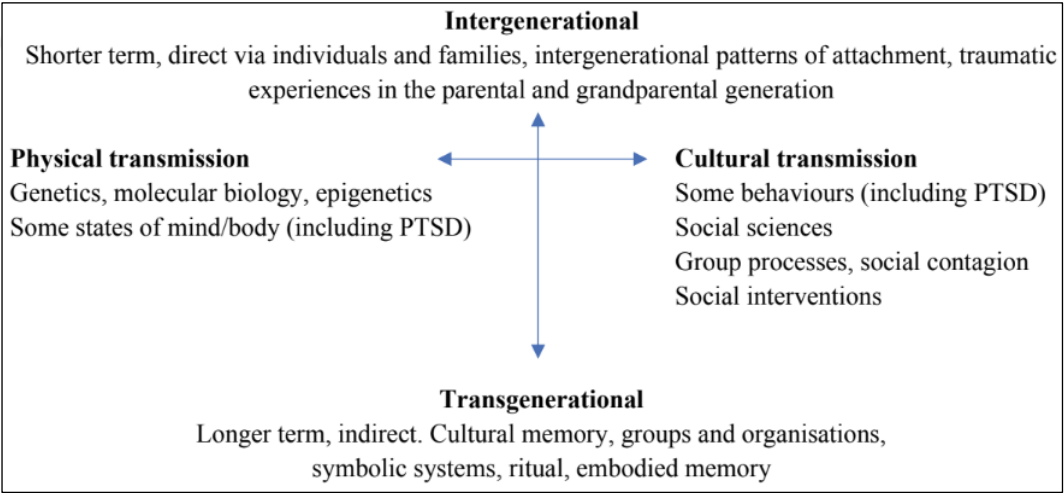
Barbara states that her pupils, who were only little toddlers at the time, have absorbed the events of 9/11, resulting in worldviews that continue to mirror those experiences. This illustrates how collective trauma transcends generations, impacting not just those who directly endure it but also infiltrating the mind of their offspring. Viewed from this perspective, *Sweet and Sad* (2011), *This* illustrates that the memory serves not only as a reflective contemplation of the past but also as a dynamic force that influences and shapes identity over time. The family's discussions on 9/11, political disillusionment, and personal grief indicate that haunting is viewed not solely as the loss of tangible entities, but rather as the persistence of existence beyond all loss, lingering in collective consciousness and seeking recognition.

Furthermore, intergenerational trauma is of the highest significance since the memories of the incident will be passed on from generation to generation by those who have experienced it themselves. Williams (2021), in *Mapping Social Memory*, highlights the notion of "intergenerational transmission" as given below: The complex association between trauma and memory reveals a profound interplay, where the echoes of past experiences shape the very fabric of our recollections. Trauma, often a harrowing event, leaves an imprint on the psyche, influencing how memories are formed, stored, and recalled. These memories, tinged with the weight of emotional pain, can resurface unexpectedly, altering. It is proposed that through the process of intergenerational transmission, memories are conveyed from one generation to the subsequent one, whereas, in the case of transgenerational memory, this transmission spans multiple generations.

Though it may appear enigmatic, it is a truth universally acknowledged that our lives are profoundly shaped by the familial bonds of our upbringing, as well as by the various communities and societal structures we engage with, each carrying its own rich tapestry of history (Williams, 2021:25). Based on the aforementioned remark, that the dynamics between Marian, her mother, and her daughter resemble an intricate intergenerational relationship. Marian, along with her siblings, found herself devoid of the tender bonds typically associated with a mother-daughter relationship. Their memories of her were scarce, except for Barbara, who seemed to hold onto fragments of a connection that eluded the others. The legacy passed down from their mother has been covered in mysteries, creating barriers that hinder the development of a wholesome relationship. The recollections are hazy when it comes to the nature of their connection. Viewed through this lens, the bond between Marian and her daughter remained fraught and unstable, ultimately culminating in her daughter's tragic decision to take her life. In light of the complexities inherent in certain relationships, one might assert that the detrimental connections are passed down through the generations. As

illustrated in the accompanying table, the phenomenon of intergenerational trauma is conveyed directly through individuals and families, encompassing various patterns of attachment as well as the haunting echoes of traumatic experiences. Furthermore, the lingering shadows of Marian’s unaddressed trauma cast a profound influence on her interactions with those around her. She struggles to establish connections with her close family members. Her loss manifests as an ethereal “specter,” deeply interconnected with the persistent essence of the absence of her daughter, creating a shadow that pervades her existence. The scars of trauma, passed down through generations, merge with the persisting “specter” of Evan, casting a profound shadow over Marian’s very essence. She resembles a soul long departed, left to remain in the shadows of memory, neglected and unburied.

Figure 1: 2.1 A Typology For Multigenerational Relationships



Even though *Sweet and Sad* (2011) doesn’t go into specifics about how memories are physically passed down, including genetics, molecular biology, and epigenetics, Uncle Benjamin’s memory loss is a powerful example of how trauma can affect how people think and remember for generations to come. Trauma uniquely disrupts memory. Titchener says that the acute phase, which comes before deterioration, has signs like shock, dread, loss, cognitive disorder, memory loss, trouble paying attention and making decisions, and problems controlling your emotions. When an individual encounters challenges in doing tasks, they suffer tiredness, social retreat, and a diminished interest in former sources of gratification. This process leads to a deterioration in general well-being, accompanied by heightened anxiety around health and physical symptoms. individuals secluding oneself from professional and social engagements may lead to emotions of isolation, distrust, and an undue preoccupation with one’s physical appearance. Such feelings may eventually result in a transformation of one’s viewpoint and way of life. His battle with the erosion of memory stems from the weight of his harrowing experiences, and this notion of memory’s fragility is further reinforced by the subsequent quotation.

Barbara (Reads): “But it is like being in prison? Your amnesia.”

Benjamin (reads): “In a way.” (137)

The use of prison as a metaphor poignantly illustrates the troubling predicament of Uncle Benjamin, encapsulating a profound sense of psychological confinement. This imagery conveys his desperate state, highlighting the disconnection he experiences between his past and present, as if he is trapped in a relentless cycle of despair. His response to Barbara serves as a testament to his entrapment, revealing the profound effects of his amnesia. In other words, he finds himself estranged not only from his personal narrative but also from the shared tapestry of history that binds others together. While the play does not overtly connect Benjamin’s mental decline to the inherited trauma, it nonetheless serves as a poignant reflection of the enduring effects of both historical and personal anguish.

The process of the cultural transmission of memory holds significant importance when it comes to preserving the legacies of historical trauma. In contrast to the memory that is passed down through generations within familial structures, the process of cultural transmission reaches far beyond the confines of social institutions. It encompasses the realms of education, media, and the intricate formation of national identity, as highlighted in the discourse surrounding collective memory. By assigning Walt Whitman’s poetry to her students on the anniversary of 9/11, she actively attempts to curate *how* the next generation remembers the event:

Barbara: I assigned a poem—the one Benjamin, you’re going to read—and to write an essay on—today. On the anniversary. On how we remember things. How we should remember. And two of my best students came up with this idea for a community concert. Instead of writing a paper. It was their idea. (156)

The choice of Walt Whitman is not accidental; it is a deliberate act of historical layering. Whitman, who served as a nurse during the Civil War, functions in the play as a “specter” of America’s *original* national trauma. As Richard notes, “Whitman worked in hospitals during the Civil War” (175). By invoking him, Nelson creates a trans-historical dialogue between the wounds of 1865 and the wounds of 2001.

The specific poem, “The Wound Dresser,” describes Whitman’s intimate encounters with broken bodies. Barbara’s selection of this text serves as an emblem of national continuity. She is suggesting that the only way to process the “unpleasant realities” of the World Trade Center attacks is to look back at the “atrocities” of the Civil War. Whitman thus becomes a spectral guide, teaching the characters that American identity is fundamentally forged in the act of tending to the dead. Through this intertextuality, the play argues that cultural memory is not just about recalling facts; it is about re-animating the voices of the past to make sense of the present crisis. The poem acts as a

“haunted object” that carries the weight of one war into the heart of another, proving that the work of the "wound dresser" is never finished.

Furthermore, the students’ preference for attending a concert rather than engaging in the task of writing an essay implies that memory transcends mere intellectual activity; it embodies a shared experience that resonates deeply within the collective consciousness. This exemplifies the varied ways in which history is interpreted and understood. Though some young children lack direct experience of the events of 9/11, they engage with the narrative through the lenses of their education, media portrayals, and the broader conversations within society. In this manner, they assimilate and reinterpret the information, crafting an understanding that resonates with their perspectives and experiences.

The figure provided on the preceding page regarding the transmission of cultural memory encompasses various elements, including collective dynamics, the phenomenon of social contagion, and the role of social interventions, all of which are essential for the efficacy of the transmission process. Exploring this subject from this perspective reveals that cultural memory transcends personal experience; it emerges as a collective negotiation among social groups. In each instance, the engagement with a poem by Whitman, coupled with the integration of the concert by the students, exemplifies the collective strive inherent in the process of cultural transmission.

The eagerness of students to organize a concert embodies a shared commitment to the preservation and transmission of memories. When considering the phenomenon of social contagion, a student’s recollection of the events of 9/11 serves as an emblematic instance of cultural transmission. Although they were not yet of an age to fully grasp the significance of the catastrophe as it took place, the memories and narratives surrounding it have been passed down through social channels, imbuing their understanding with profound emotional resonance. In conclusion, as a profound observation within the discourse on cultural transmission, *Sweet and Sad* (2011) highlight that this phenomenon presents as a dynamic interplay between individual memories and collective memories within the collective consciousness.

Having delved into the intricacies of cultural transmission, turning the attention to the concept of transgenerational transmission, which was previously illustrated with the help figure on the preceding page. The intricate interplay between cultural transmission and transgenerational memory This reveals a profound connection, yet each process has its own unique characteristics. Together, they significantly influence the ways in which historical trauma, identity, and collective memory persist and evolve through the ages. The process of cultural transmission, especially within short timeframes, typically occurs through avenues such as education, media, interpersonal connections, and social initiatives. In this manner, the events that are woven into the fabric of history, along with their inherent meanings, are recreated and reinterpreted by each successive generation. In the

poignant narrative of *Sweet and Sad* (2011), we encounter Barbara, a dedicated teacher who, on the solemn anniversary of 9/11, thoughtfully assigns her uncle the profound works of Walt Whitman. Through this literary engagement, she guides them in reflecting upon and navigating the complexities of national trauma, fostering a space for remembrance and understanding. The students' decision to choose a concert instead of writing essays illustrates that memory is not simply absorbed in a passive manner; rather, it is dynamically reinterpreted through the lens of cultural rituals and the expressive nature of performance.

Transgenerational memory, in contrast, represents the collective accumulation of memories within a group's consciousness, conveyed through recognized mediums such as symbolic systems, ritualistic practices, and the very essence of embodied memory, particularly when direct witnesses are no longer present. According to Nigel Williams (2021), the gaps in literature and records around any event, be it war, diaspora or mass migration, become hauntings in time if the actual events sink below the surface and cease to be witnessed. This active witnessing is usually inscribed in intergenerational memory held in families, communities and professions. Transgenerational haunting starts when the event is not or ceases to be inscribed in culture. (46) The youth of today, having been mere children during the harrowing events of 9/11, bear the profound emotional burden of that fateful day. This event illustrates a form of memorial tradition, that the essence of memory is safeguarded, transcending the confines of direct personal experience. While Benjamin's amnesia dramatizes the internal erasure of history, Nelson also utilizes material objects to stage the persistence of the past. The most powerful example of this is the anonymous notebook discovered by Barbara among rented books. This object functions as a spectral artifact, mediating between the living and the dead.

Barbara: Was that where it was? (Showing the notebooks) You can see what I mean here—in 2001—
(They start to get up to look.)
I'll pass them around. (Continues) He writes down his appointments, and his habit is to cross them off when he's had them. Even lunches. Shows. (To Tim and Benjamin)
He went to the theater a lot. Marian, come and join us.
(Then about the notebooks, as Marian sits:)
They stop being crossed off here . . . September 10th.
After that, nothing is crossed off . . . And slowly there are no more appointments. A dentist's appointment in December. Which he obviously did not keep. (155)

This scene dramatizes Mark Fisher's concept of hauntology as the agency of the "no longer" and the "not yet." The notebook captures the precise threshold of the trauma: the crossing-off of tasks ceases, but the future appointments remain written on the page. The "dentist appointment in December" becomes a ghost of a future that never arrived. By passing the notebook around, Barbara forces the family to physically handle this severed timeline. The absence of the ink line becomes a "silent testament," a void that weighs heavier than any written word.

This particular memoir appears to have belonged to an individual who tragically lost their life in the events of 9/11. The notebook serves as a meticulous record of the individual's daily planning, where completed tasks are methodically crossed out. Yet, amidst this organized chaos, one task remains untouched, its absence of a line through it a silent testament to the moment when the act of crossing out ceased, frozen in time since September 10. The events of 9/11 serve as a poignant reminder, embodying a profound symbol of interrupted memory and the relentless passage of time that resonates through the fabric of generations. This quotation encompasses the essence of transgenerational trauma, suggesting that the memoir of a victim of the catastrophe becomes intricately woven into both personal and collective memory. Its impact lingers through successive generations, shaping the experiences and perceptions of those who, despite never having witnessed the catastrophe themselves, are nonetheless influenced by its enduring legacy. The memoir or notebook acts as a vessel of reminiscence, evoking a profound sense of nostalgia that intertwines with the echoes of the past, ensuring the cherished connections that bind us to our history. Certainly, the slow vanishing of scheduled engagements underscores the profound transformation of a commonplace story when confronted with a harrowing incident. Furthermore, the existence of the notebook impacts not only its owner's life but also casts a shadow over the lives of those who peruse its pages, leaving them equally affected alongside the future reader. Its impact will resonate through the ages, shaping the lives of future generations by way of the voids, the unspoken, and the missing elements that linger in the collective consciousness.

Future generations will come to possess these elements through subtle upheavals, perhaps woven into the fabric of familial stories, embedded within rituals and ceremonies, or manifested in instinctive behaviors that remain unexamined. Another subject worthy of exploration is the family's discourse surrounding the notebook, which can be regarded as an instrument for the transmission of memories across generations. They are participating in a profound act of cultural remembrance, delicately exploring the echoes of history that linger in the remnants of the past. Furthermore, the tangible existence of the notebook encapsulates a memory that remains unvoiced yet is profoundly felt through the interplay of objects and symbols. This notion resonates deeply with Pierre Nora's exploration of "lieux de mémoire," where the essence of memory is intricately tied to physical manifestations. Collective memory is anchored in the cultural consciousness of individuals; it does not emerge spontaneously but is shaped by "archives, anniversaries, [and] celebrations." Pierre Nora's concept of "lieux de mémoire" clarifies how traumatic events endure over generations and become ingrained in cultural consciousness. A parallel conversation unfolds among family members, centering on the lingering echoes of 9/11 and the profound loss Richard experienced with the passing of his colleagues. Though these individuals are no longer present, their enduring impact vibrates through the lives of those left behind, shaping their present and casting shadows into the future. This interplay can be intricately linked to the notion of hauntology.

Jane (to Tim): Richard lost three people from his office...

Richard: They're the ones we toast—at our breakfasts—every year . . . This morning. (152)

On that fateful day of 9/11, Richard's recollections are deeply intertwined with the memories of the friends he tragically lost in the catastrophe; three individuals from his office were taken from him. In commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the tragic events of 9/11, Richard and his companions engage in a ritual each year, raising their glasses in a heartfelt toast on that very morning, honoring the memories of those lost. Thus, it becomes essential to articulate that the concepts of intergenerational, transgenerational memory, and hauntology are intricately intertwined, each exerting influence upon the other. In addition to the lasting influence of Richard's colleagues, the remnants of the departed serve as a poignant reminder of times gone by.

Viewed through a literary lens, the idea that inanimate objects can carry emotional weight, importance, and interpretation highlights the profound connection that exists between human beings and the tangible world around them affecting their sense of self. Items transcend their functional roles; they embody stories and sentiments that mirror the cultural tapestry. The quotation below reflects the items, such as notebooks from the departed ones.

The presence of notebooks, in a sense, casts a spectral aura within this framework, as they harbor remnants of past events. They serve not only as vessels of historical knowledge but also as echoes of the past, casting a lingering shadow over those who possess them. Williams (2021) touched upon the topic of remnants as "objects can be filled with affective charge, significance, and meaning. Objects have functions that themselves signify a meaning and purpose (104). Mounting the argument from Williams' remarks, it could be asserted that "notebooks and appointments" serve as a poignant reminder of past catastrophes since they create a connection with the past and its holders. From this point on, notebooks and appointments have a haunting presence among the people. "Personal journals can haunt" (Williams, 2021: 102).

Barbara: We're a hundred miles away up here, and this morning at church—it was a surprisingly long list of names. . .
(New thought) We found some notebooks—appointment books is really what they are. (152)

Not only they, but also names, can haunt." Names can haunt, they can contain secrets, and they can identify you. Names link us to the past. Taking up a name, or keeping a name, means keeping something from the past in the present" (Williams, 2021: 103) Mounting the argument from William's remark, it can be stated that names possess the ability to haunt, for they can harbor secrets, and they can serve to identify you. The significance of names serves to connect us to the rich tapestry of our past, weaving together stories and histories that shape our identities. Embracing a name, or perhaps retaining a name, signifies the act of holding onto something from the past while

simultaneously anchoring it within the present. Indeed, the names and notebooks are a key factor in reaching out to the collective memory of the society. Thereby, they can dig the remnants that are embedded in the cultural consciousness. In the play, another quotation signifies the importance of past through the haunting of names and places.

Tim: First you walk up these, this stairway—nothing’s been changed, touched for fifty, sixty years.

Barbara: Like what?

Tim: The names on the doors. On the bubbly glass. Old little firms. An accountant. Someone else—casting agent I think. The stenciled names are still there. Anyway, we get to the top of the theater—to Mr. Belasco’s apartment. (121)

Tim’s description of the unaltered stairs, with the antiquated stenciled names on the doors of *Sweet and Sad* (2011), implies the persistent and haunting essence of the past inside physical environments; it corresponds with Williams’ notion that names encapsulate memories and histories. By referencing these individuals, an accountant and a casting agent, Tim transcends simple memories of past titles and names, ensuring that the ethereal remnants of identities with a historical presence in this location persist. According to Williams (2021), “Names can haunt, harbor secrets, and serve as identifiers. Names connect us to history. Adopting or retaining a name signifies preserving an element of the past in the present.” (103). Similarly, the names on the glass doors in this clip from *Sweet and Sad* (2011) serve as markers of a history that seems distant.

This passage in the play elucidates Derrida’s concept of hauntology, when the past resurfaces in the present, disrupting the perception of linear temporality. The stairwell and office doors remain unaltered to illustrate that history cannot be obliterated; it is perpetually inscribed in places awaiting recognition. This interaction with these names reflects a continual confrontation with the past, including events such as 9/11, familial discord, and national disenchantment. Similar to the names on the doors that persist, regardless of their seeming distance, so too do their unresolved emotions and past tragedies endure. At long last, this moment in *Sweet and Sad* profoundly embodies the intricate relationship between memory and identity, while simultaneously evoking a sense of haunting that lingers in the air.

The names that adorn the doors have transcended their mere function as identifiers; rather, they serve as poignant reminders of a history that continues to resonate within the present, much like the intricate tapestry of memories and traumas that shape the lives of the characters. The scene serves as a poignant illustration of the way both personal and collective histories are intricately woven into the fabric of an environment, while simultaneously shaping and informing one’s orientation to the world, as well as one’s sense of identity. From this juncture, Nelson’s poignant exploration reveals that memory is not solely confined within the recesses of the human mind, but rather, it also remains

vividly alive in the external realm; for the physical world continually serves as a reminder of what has transpired and what continues to linger in our consciousness.

According to D'Cruz (2022), the purity of identity is therefore impossible. It is perpetually contaminated by the past and the future. Therefore, hauntology serves as another illustration of the fragmentation of time. To exist is to be troubled by the past and the potential future. (58). What D'Cruz underlines is the impossibility of pure identity because of the intrusion of the past into the present. The linearity of the time is broken, so is the identity. Another point that Fisher brings up is the contamination of the identity that occurs as a result of incursions from the past. According to Coverly (2020), Fisher sees history as one that is characterized by repetition and disruption. This is because the past often disrupts the present, which forces us to reevaluate events and ideas that we would have considered to be securely relegated to the past (6). Therefore, it could be assumed that the memory, as the carrier of the past to the present, does not let constructing pure identities free from the burdens of a stormy past in the play. Since memory is a bridge between the past and the present, its role in constructing identity cannot be ignored. So, Derrida's "time is out of joint" becomes a turning point to comprehend the influence of the unresolved past on the present. Consistent with this analysis, memory in *Sweet and Sad* (2011) is not an ineffectual recollection of events; it is a power that persists in the present, influencing identity.

Barbara: It was their idea—they wanted to do something.
They're now my seniors and so—they were—six, seven,
eight years old when it happened? It's interesting what
They remember. But it's been a part of who they are. (156)

The above-given quotation is an excerpt from Barbara's dialogue with her students. Her students want to commemorate 9/11 as a sense of collective remembering of the unresolved event. What is striking here is their remembrance of the event. It seems like they were six- or seven-year-old children when the event took place, and this, in a way, demonstrates that the scar in their memory is uneased, leaving them fragmented. So, Barbara's remark, "But it's been a part of who they are," is another significant indicator of the interwoven relationship between memory and identity. In a way, collective trauma becomes a part of their identity. 9/11, as a ghost fracturing the linearity of time revisits the characters in the play, leaving them fragmented.

The children's memories, which are already in the process of developing and are derived from second-hand stories, acquire access to their foundational self-understanding as well as to their surroundings, so illustrating how memory continues to haunt through the passage of time. Memory, in the end, reflects the eerie interplay that exists between time, identity, and presence in *Sweet and Sad* (2011). The play proposes that identity is not individually defined; rather, it is being formed and reconstructed via the recycling of memories. This is shown by the play's thorough examination of how the Apple family re-approaches the interpretation of their history. The very outlines of loss,

whether it be personal or national tragedy, are covered in all the seriousness of the present by these ghostly imprints, which in turn form the characters' perception of who they are in the process of becoming. When seen through this perspective, *Sweet and Sad* (2011) highlights the deep dynamics that memory provides as both a means of articulating knowledge and a terrible constraint that reduces individuals and communities to their history. Memory, as a bridge between the past and the present, cannot be ignored in constructing pure identities. In *Sweet and Sad* (2011), memory is not an ineffectual recollection of events but a power that persists in the present, influencing identity. The children's memories, derived from second-hand stories, acquire access to their foundational self-understanding and surroundings, illustrating how memory continues to haunt through the passage of time. The play proposes that identity is not individually defined but is formed and reconstructed via the recycling of memories. The Apple family's interpretation of their history is examined, showing how the outlines of loss, whether personal or national tragedy, are covered in the seriousness of the present by ghostly imprints, which form the characters' perception of who they are in the process of becoming. In conclusion, *Sweet and Sad* (2011) highlights the deep interplay between time, identity, and presence, highlighting the importance of memory in shaping our understanding of the world around us.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. RICHARD NELSON'S *SWEET AND SAD* (2011)

**It seems like everyone is asleep
Anton Chekhov, *Three Sisters***

The play opens, revealing a poignant excerpt from Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (1901), setting the stage for the unfolding narrative. The above quote is set to evoke a commentary on the prevailing circumstances of the nation, as individuals of the nation reflect an overwhelming sense of optimism along with pessimism regarding the political and historical stillness that characterizes contemporary America. This chapter embarks on an exploration of the haunted political landscape of the American populace, illuminating the profound sense of disillusionment that arises from unfulfilled promises and deceptive assurances. Through the lens of hauntology and trauma theory, particular emphasis will be placed on the intricate workings of memory and its role in shaping collective experiences of disappointment.

The play intricately reflects upon the two hours that a family spends together, just before the momentous occasion of election night. Indeed, the family members observe themselves teetering on the cliff of despair, as they are not only on the verge of losing their hopes but also desperately seeking something, anything, that might help them reclaim that flicker of hope they so dearly long for. As has been previously articulated, the play unfolds as a quartet, and the inaugural piece, *That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), not only mirrors the political climate surrounding the family but also delves deeply into their unresolved past, intertwining with the complexities of their familial traumas. The second instalment in the play is titled *Sweet and Sad* (2011), which was released in the year 2011, and it profoundly reflects the lingering remnants of the events surrounding 9/11. Indeed, the backdrop of the play is marked by the significant occasion of the 10th anniversary of 9/11, which looms large and influences the narrative throughout. *Sorry* (2012) marks the third instalment in the quartet, and it intricately weaves together the two hours that precede the election. The Apple family, much like in the earlier plays, convenes around the dinner table, where they engage in conversation about their seemingly ordinary day while simultaneously reflecting upon the political atmosphere that is, in fact, permeating their souls. They discuss the current political climate and the hope they are about to lose due to politicians' unfulfilled promises. Indeed, the work titled *That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), which serves as the inaugural instalment in the quartet, may be regarded as a fragment of this overarching narrative. This is due to the fact that the characters' gathering around the dinner table

occurs under the palpable influence of the political atmosphere surrounding the 2008 elections, and consequently, this engenders a tense ambiance. Consequently, the dialogue of the present cannot be understood in isolation, as it is inextricably structured by the intrusion of historical memory.

The election of 2010 serves a significant function, as it reflects not only upon the events of that year but also casts its influence forward towards the election of 2012.

This argument suggests that history possesses a cyclical quality akin to the structural recurrence of trauma observed in the aftermath of 2008. The Apple family, once filled with aspirations and dreams, has now found themselves in a state of despair, for the change they so eagerly anticipated has, regrettably, failed to materialize. The change, which serves as the title of the inaugural play within the quartet, did not unfold in the manner they had envisioned and anticipated. The scenario represents a particular form of political disillusionment, one that has caused them to drift away not only from their relationships but also from their private lives. The play is about the profound influence that historical events exert on the fabric of everyday lives, which are frequently hidden and made invisible, primarily due to a pervasive lack of interest among people in general. Nelson asserts that these lives, hold more significance than the significant public events that, in turn, impact them. *Sorry* (2012) is more intimate: it is the early hours of the day when Benjamin will be sent to an assisted-living facility, his capabilities and restraints having ultimately diminished beyond his niece's capacity to oversee. Eldest sister Barbara asserts her capability, despite Benjamin's actions causing concern for her safety among the others. He has monitored her as she bathed and perpetrated further transgressions she refuses to disclose.

4.1. Hauntology and Political Amnesia in *Sorry* (2012)

The concept of political amnesia permeates this play, as the characters passionately pursue hope while maintaining an enduring enthusiasm for the political transformations that promise to bring about a beneficial change in their lives. The first in the series serves as a poignant reminder that hope and transformation have, in essence, failed them; yet, they remain oblivious to this reality, allowing it to slip from their memories. Thus, they find themselves entangled in a cycle of political forgetfulness. In this regard, Uncle Benjamin emerges as a pivotal character within the narrative, embodying the shared amnesia that accompanies political disillusionment while simultaneously reflecting his own personal inclination toward forgetfulness. Indeed, Benjamin, the eldest character in the play, serves as a living repository of history. But he doesn't seem to be actively participating in the events that are taking place; instead, he seems to be a passive observer. In this regard, he embodies the collective that opts for oblivion rather than facing the truths that lie before them. His stance as a historical archive is reinforced by a metaphor in the play. Benjamin is invited to portray the ghost in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843). This play resonates deeply with Benjamin's perspective, evoking a sense of profound connection and reflection:

Barbara: Someone in town asked Uncle if he wanted to be in *A Christmas Carol* this year. Didn't they? (About the tablecloth) To play the Ghost of Christmas Future. That part doesn't have any lines. But it's a good role. Very good. People here in Rhinebeck, they know all he's done. We even went to one rehearsal. (She is serving him now) You could tell it was a big thing for them. Benjamin Apple is there. Someone even asked for his autograph. And he was—amazing. (210)

The narrative of *A Christmas Carol* centers on a figure known as Scrooge, a man who has enclosed himself in solitude, driven by a never-ending thirst for wealth. He is depicted as an individual devoid of compassion, yet a transformation occurs when he encounters the ghostly figure of his late business partner, Jacob Marley, accompanied by the haunting visions that embody the Christmases of the past, the current time, and the ambiguous future that awaits him. Throughout this journey, Scrooge undergoes a profound change, evolving into a more compassionate and benevolent individual. The novel is a Christmas tale intertwined with themes of redemption and transformation. In this context, the offer for Benjamin for the portrayal of the ghost emerges as a profound metaphor. Jacob, a Specter from the past, returns to haunt the present, bearing the weight of archival wisdom that belongs to Scrooge. This spectral visitation ignites a flicker of transformation within Scrooge, suggesting that the echoes of history can inspire change in the living. Benjamin, embodying the essence of history, possesses the potential to ignite a transformative flame, provided he does not succumb to the role of a passive spectator, ensnared by his forgetfulness. Yet, he steadfastly declines.

Furthermore, Benjamin embodies the essence of hauntological significance within the narrative, serving as a living repository of history. His role can be compared to that of a "specter," bridging the distance between the past and the present, thus carrying the weight of previous times into the contemporary moment. To dismiss the role of the ghost in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) is to turn away from the very purpose that it represents. The specter is the entity that calls forth a demand from the present, rooted deeply in the echoes of the past. Looking more closely at the connection between the specter in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and Benjamin reveals a profound intertwining that speaks to the very nature of hauntology. The unresolved echoes of the past permeate the present, casting their shadows and shaping the contours of what is yet to come. Viewed through this lens, Derrida's interpretation of Hamlet in *Specters of Marx* (1993) finds resonance in the character of Benjamin within *Sorry* (2012). The shared understanding of spectral phenomena from the past, encompassing both active and passive hauntings, is a common thread that binds the two characters together.

Hamlet is "out of joint" because he curses his own mission, the punishment that consists in having to punish, avenge, exercise justice and right in the form of reprisals; and what he curses in his mission is this expiation of expiation itself; it is first of all that it is inborn in him, given by his birth as much as his birth. Thus, it is assigned by who (what) came before him.

Like Job (3, 1), he curses the day that saw him born: "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right!" (24)

Hamlet regrets his duty, which entails correcting wrongs and sticking to moral righteousness. This kind of atonement is ingrained in him from the moment of his birth and the preceding events. He asserts that the day of his birth is cursed due to the incorrect timing and because he was destined to rectify matters. This curse indicates that he cannot coexist with his history without its consequences. The emotions experienced by Hamlet resonate closely with the role of Benjamin, as both characters are tasked with the profound responsibility of shedding light on the present through their respective insights. Yet, despite their noble intentions, neither finds contentment in their missions. Derrida emphasizes that the tragedy of Hamlet lies in his unwillingness to fulfil his designated obligation: the eradication of corrupted time from inside himself. His sorrow transcends mere resentment against his father; it embodies profound frustration over the need to rectify the situation.

While Benjamin has transformed into a "specter" of passive knowledge, he has historical awareness but refuses to manifest it. His reluctance to portray the Ghost of Christmas Future stems not from a peculiar character flaw but from a symbolic failure of historical accountability. Derrida's examination of Hamlet posits that tragedy emerges when justice is deferred, when the need to rectify the past is understood but remains unfulfilled. This is Benjamin's predicament: he has knowledge of the past, but his silence and forgetfulness render it ineffectual. Benjamin's hesitance is not only personal; it is profoundly political. If, as Derrida posits, the "specter" signifies the quest for justice, then Benjamin's passivity epitomizes a deficiency in collective responsibility, a shortcoming that permits repetition of historical injustices. By declining to portray the Ghost of Christmas Future, Benjamin figuratively deprives the world of the necessary cautions for transformation. Benjamin's tranquility serves not as a shield of innocence; instead, it casts a shadow of guilt upon him. Much like the tragic figure of Hamlet, he harbors deep-seated resentment toward the weight of history yet finds himself inevitably bound to its relentless grasp. Rather than existing as a mere phantom that had faltered, he yearned to avoid becoming a remnant of the past, casting light upon the present through the wisdom gleaned from the records of history. His story places him in a circumstance where he has been embedded in memory, yet his voice remains unheard. He exists in the gaze of others, yet remains an enigma, eluding comprehension. His presence is recognized, yet he offers no assistance.

Sorry (2012) serves as an important reminder regarding the perils of detachment from history when individuals burdened by the legacies of the past choose inaction, the fabric of history remains "out of joint." The phenomenon of political amnesia transcends a mere lapse in memory; it emerges as a powerful formative influence that intricately forms both the individual and collective identities of the characters involved. Benjamin grapples with the disquiet that arises from the act of neglecting

uncomfortable historical and political realities, a phenomenon intricately linked to their self-conceptions and ethical identities.

Hauntology posits that the “specters” of historical traumas linger, trailing individuals and communities alike. The political realities that Benjamin in *Sorry* grapple with remain an ever-present “specter,” eluding their full acknowledgment and resolution, thereby casting a shadow over their lives. Their identities are shaped not solely through memories and expressions, but equally through the silences and absences that permeate their existence.

4.2. Hauntology and Cruel Optimism

Hauntology and Cruel optimism can be defined as concepts to critique economy of modern systems. They are employed to manage the conflict between the history that never was, a present that is barely there, and a future that might have been. Hauntology and cruel optimism describe how previous promises, unmet futures, and contemporary concerns impact both political and cultural imaginings in the context of the 2012 US elections. Laurent Berlant’s notion of “cruel optimism” serves as a striking reminder to engage in a discourse surrounding the political stillness of contemporary America, a theme that resonates throughout *Sorry* (2012). She explores the bonds that prove harmful to individuals. In essence, individuals find themselves yearning for hope, which leads them to cling to dreams that remain forever out of reach. This form of attachment is harsh, as individuals continue to hold onto their convictions regarding the outcomes, despite the likelihood of impending failure. Barlent (2011) presents the definition of the concept as follows: “A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of a good life or a political project (4). Depending on Barlent’s remark about the issue, it is probable to make the commentary that cruel optimism transpires when aspirations, such as sustenance, affection, idealized existence, or political endeavors, impede one’s thriving. Within the confines of the play, the concept of democracy emerges as a poignant yet harsh illusion for the characters, who relentlessly cling to the flickering flame of hope that democracy promises. Despite politics’ repeated betrayals and failures to deliver on its lofty ideals. In a way, voting is considered as a symbol or visible indicator of the repeated betrayals of democracy. Barlent also states that voting is one aspect; communal compassion, attentive listening, and monitoring the news are distinct activities. All these modes of orientation and associated sentiments affirm our attachment to the system, thereby validating the system and the legitimacy of the emotions that create a sense of obligation to it, even if the obvious content of this attachment is characterized by cynicism or the dark appearance of political hopelessness (227). The intertwining feelings of duty and despair are essential to the essence of one’s choices, a sentiment that resonates deeply within Jane as well. Although she recognizes that voting resembles the act of recycling, she persists in her commitment to cast her ballot. Deep within, the unspoken facets of her emotions seem

to affirm her belief in the possibility of change; otherwise, she would not engage in the act of voting at all:

Jane: I tell myself—and try to convince myself—that voting is like—recycling. I know it doesn't seem to make any difference. What the hell is another Coke can more or less? But—for that second, when you're throwing something in the recycling trash—you can feel like you're part of something greater than yourself. That's what I tell myself. I'm trying to convince myself. (257)

It appears that she gets caught in a relentless cycle of repetition, as the hopes of her past continue to linger, intruding upon her present existence. In this regard, there is a profound connection exists between hauntology and the concept of cruel optimism. In a manner reminiscent of the past, one resonates with the yearnings of the emotions, while the other draws upon the tapestry of lived experiences. Jane's contemplation on voting draws a parallel to the act of recycling; both endeavors, while seemingly significant in the moment, often leave one questioning their true impact on the larger tapestry of existence. The "specter" of hauntology looms, representing the remnants of political aspirations that have faltered, while cruel optimism emerges as a poignant attachment to a system that perpetually falls short of its promise of goodness. In the aftermath of the U.S. elections of 2012, a complex interplay emerges between hauntology and cruel optimism, encapsulating a political and cultural landscape fraught with tension. This moment is characterized by the lingering echoes of past promises, the ongoing struggles of the present, and the fragile aspirations for the future, all intertwining to create a vibrant fabric of human experience and sentiment. The elections of 2012 were shadowed by several factors, not least of which were the unmet aspirations of Barack Obama's initial term. Among these were the pledges to close Guantanamo, to enact sweeping immigration reform, and to address the widening chasm of income inequality. Apart from that, the effects of the 2008 financial crisis and the influence of neoliberalism, which continued to limit economic discussions while being responsible for creating systemic inequality, were also big issues. Nevertheless, the electorate clung tenaciously to their hopeful aspirations: they persisted in nurturing within their thoughts the vision of the American Dream, the promise of bipartisanship, and the potential for transformative electoral change, even as the realization of these lofty ideals grew increasingly elusive. The optimistic visions of the future championed by Obama's messages of hope permeated the media narratives and political campaigns. These sentiments served to reinforce the emotional bonds to aspirations that had, in many ways, been suppressed by the prevailing structural realities. The relationship between hauntology and cruel optimism sheds new light on the emotional landscape of the 2012 voters. It shows the tension between the haunting memories of futures that have passed and the steady, if painful, flickers of hope that point to the possibility of a better tomorrow.

Richard: The way I see it now is that most people seem to just want somebody who can articulate their hatreds.

(Then:)

Marian: I think we're arguing about important things, Richard.

Medicare, Social Security, Ryan—

Richard: Shouting. Scaring people. Demonizing.

Marian: There are differences, Richard.

Their lives are not merely shaped by the unkept promises that linger in the air, but they are also shadowed by the haunting echoes of 9/11 that continue to resonate within them. It becomes evident that the theme of security holds significant importance. They lack a sense of security.

Not only are they haunted but also traumatized since the cycle of repetition never leaves them. From that pivotal moment onward, countless individuals around the globe have grappled with the haunting “specter” of unprovoked assaults. This pervasive anxiety has engendered a profound sense of vulnerability and helplessness as they confront the overwhelming might of forces that loom far beyond their control. Residing in a city setting, one that is frequently subjected to assaults, instills a sense of unease within its inhabitants. This persistent restlessness, which comes from the shadows of traumatic events, turns into a state of agitation and deep alienation, which breaks people apart in their experiences. The state appears to have shattered the feeling of security and trust. Herman (2015) states, in *Trauma and Recovery* “In the aftermath of traumatic life events, survivors are highly vulnerable. Their sense of self has been shattered” (60). In the aftermath of harrowing experiences, those who have endured such trials often locate themselves in a state of vulnerability. It is this very fragility that compels them to reach out for solace and companionship, yearning for the warmth of understanding and the embrace of support. Herman emphasizes the significance of solace and reinforcement in the wake of harrowing experiences, articulating this notion in the following manner: In the immediate aftermath of the trauma, rebuilding some minimal form of trust is the primary task” (61).

However, Nelson appears to imply that this fundamental responsibility was neglected; instead, the intense securitization merely intensified the collective sense of unease. In the wake of turbulent incidents, individuals find themselves deprived of their ability to confront the challenges that occur before them. These events transform into enormous barriers, hindering both the societal framework and the lives of the populace. In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Alexander JC (2004) posits that cultural trauma happens when individuals collectively see themselves as having endured a horrific catastrophe (1). In the aftermath of harrowing experiences, they emerge as individuals marked by trauma, re-entering a world that has become a web of confusion, filled with the instability of their internal struggles. Indeed, the circumstances that they experience “leave indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity” (Smelser, 2004: 1).

Consequently, individuals seek guidance because of experiencing a myriad of anxieties. In this regard, the citation presented on the preceding page suggests that they have endured a profound cultural trauma, one from which it appears they have been unable to find solace or healing. Consequently, they express a deep yearning for safety and reassurance. The relentless cycle of repetition, intertwined with a sense of security that often goes overlooked, manifests as a deeply traumatic state for these individuals, leaving them culturally scarred and burdened by their experiences. In the absence of a solid foundation of trust, individuals find themselves devastated in a state of unease and apprehension, staying in a turmoil that persists long after the event has passed into memory. Their anxiety, coupled with a profound sense of loneliness in the face of a ruthless world, serves to fracture their personalities and, in turn, shatter their identities.

Their sense of self, once whole and unblemished, is now irrevocably shattered, as they bear witness to a catastrophe that not only claimed the lives of many but also rendered the survivors feeling like ephemeral beings, drifting through a world that has irrevocably changed.

Eleven years have elapsed since the tragic events of 9/11; however, the discourse surrounding that fateful day, along with the countless emotions it evoked, has seemingly submerged into the vast oceans of time, leaving no discernible path to emerge or find resolution. Additionally, the state of unease is linked with PTSD. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) manifests as a complex psychological condition that may arise in individuals who have endured or observed harrowing events. These events can range from natural disasters and severe accidents to acts of terrorism, the horrors of warfare, sexual violence, or various kinds of brutal individual assaults. They are having the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder since 9/11 has been a traumatic encounter for them. Individuals who have been diagnosed with PTSD often find themselves profoundly affected by distressing traumatic events; however, it is important to recognize that the development of PTSD is not solely attributable to such trauma but is also influenced by a myriad of other contributing factors. In other words, individuals who have been diagnosed with PTSD are predominantly those who have experienced profound trauma, as they have been subjected to distressing and unsettling events that have left a lasting impact on their lives. Individuals of this nature not only experience the development of PTSD because of trauma, but they also endure a myriad of other challenges that stem from their experiences. Consequently, one may deduce that the concept of cruel optimism bears a significant relationship with the notion of hauntology. It can be contended that a profound connection is present between the concept of hauntology and the idea of cruel optimism. One evokes nostalgic memories, while the other reflects on the fabric of lived events.

The lingering effect of the past is common in both concepts; that is why memory stands as a pivotal point between these two concepts. Furthermore, the essence of memory serves as a powerful lens through which the present is illuminated, intertwined with the echoes of haunting and traumatic experiences that linger from the past. Thus, a complex interplay exists among memory, hauntology,

trauma, and cruel optimism, as each element plays a significant role in shaping the individual's identity.

4.3 The Specter of Political Disillusionment and the Belatedness of History in *Sorry*

In the play *Sorry* (2012), Richard Nelson artfully dramatizes the intricate intersection of personal trauma and political trauma, thereby showcasing the Apple family's profound experience of political disappointment, historical amnesia, and psychic memory, which serves as a poignant reflection of a more widespread American experience. At the heart of this exploration lies the concept of belatedness, which serves as a significant term within the framework of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. Cathy Caruth (1995) presents a succinct portrayal of trauma while simultaneously delving into many reasons that contribute to its theoretical complexities. Caruth argues that trauma is not solely started by a specific event, but rather, it also suggests that traumatic experiences profoundly disturb the individual's understanding of time itself.

Cathy Caruth articulates the concept of belatedness in relation to an occurrence, suggesting that the event is not fully assimilated or experienced currently as it transpires; rather, it is only later, in a repeated possession, that the individual who experiences it comes to terms with it (4). To elucidate, trauma is initially not understood; however, it later becomes woven into the fabric of the life of the individual who has experienced it, as evidenced by the emergence of flashbacks and the persistent re-enactments that follow. The characters within the plays reveal their ways. Many individuals who have endured trauma find themselves grappling with the persistent and troubling memories that resurface, as well as with vivid visual or auditory experiences that exist outside the realm of reality, in addition to the unsettling dreams that haunt their nights. Such experiences frequently emerge in the form of intrusive and vividly detailed recurrences of the traumatic event, as well as nonverbal recollections that linger in the mind. Cathy Caruth's exploration of trauma studies expands on the concept of "belatedness."

Richard Nelson's *Sorry* (2012) intricately revolves around the profound concept of "belatedness," which permeates the spectrum of both personal and political memories that the characters of the play navigate and grapple with. Although the family is deeply intertwined with the events of election day, they are also burdened by disappointments and unresolved grief, as well as political and personal wounds that linger in the air. The reality is that their conversation does not conclude in a manner that propels them toward a future loaded with hopes; rather, they find themselves trapped within the relentless cycle of past betrayals, unfulfilled expectations, and the disillusionment of electoral promises that have failed to appear. This structure stands in parallel with the inclination of trauma to trap survivors in an unending cycle of past experiences, which, in turn, prevents them from moving forward and finding release.

The play implies that the American political system operates as a realm characterized by a cycle of traumatic repetition, wherein the same sequence of hope and disillusionment emerges anew every four years. To put it differently, one might argue that belatedness resembles a haunting “specter” that, occasionally, intrudes upon the present moment, thereby capturing the survivor within a perpetual cycle of endlessness. In the play, Nelson skillfully employs this concept in both personal and collective terms, thereby exhibiting how political history operates much like a traumatic memory that inevitably resurfaces and continues to haunt the survivor. This concept emerges as pivotal to a comprehensive understanding of *Sorry* (2012), for it is within this narrative that the political failures and pervasive cynicism of the Apple family serve to replay the disillusionments of previous generations, yet without any sort of resolution. This notion aligns seamlessly with Caruth’s explorations concerning trauma survivors, who find themselves ensnared in a relentless cycle, perpetually reliving the unknowable wounds that continue to haunt their existence.

The play intimates that American democracy, in its essence, resembles a haunted dwelling, wherein the “specters” of previous political failures give rise to a profound sense of disillusionment. Furthermore, the election of 2012 does not signify a moment of transformation; rather, it emerges yet another instance of the historical political failures that have come before. Consequently, it arrives too late, manifesting as a painful state of emptiness that perpetually repeats itself.

Richard: I just got home. Last night, about five. (Smiles) Stupidly
I turned on the TV. (Smiles, then) All the noise,
Right? Doesn’t it drive you crazy? You must really be sick of it.

Benjamin: Of what?

Richard: The noise. The election. I’m really happy I’ve been
away for two months.

.....

Benjamin (Gestures): Could I have some wine?

Richard (Looks toward the kitchen): Is that all right? (205-206)

The quotation presented above illustrates the intricate relationship between political amnesia and belatedness, particularly at a singular moment within the broader tapestry of everyday life. Upon his arrival from London, Richard finds himself unable to endure the noise emanating from outside, as it is inextricably linked to the chaotic political atmosphere surrounding the current elections. Indeed, one might consider the very atmosphere itself to be the catalyst for Richard’s awakening, for until that moment, he had remained oblivious to the profound trauma that the atmosphere had inflicted upon him, as he had never perceived himself as an outsider. At times, it becomes essential to step outdoors to fully comprehend the experiences to which you have been subjected. At this point, his acute perception of the confusion that envelops him serves as an essential illustration of what one might refer to as “belatedness.” His remark, “The noise,” echoed through the air, resonating with an unsettling clarity. The forthcoming election, which holds significant importance, is approaching rapidly. “The noise. The election. I’m really happy I’ve been away for two months” (205-206).

His statement underscores the delayed awareness that he experienced, as well as the sudden reaction of his irritation, which had been suppressed and rendered him numb; this irritation, however, came to the surface just upon his return. In this particular sense, his arousal represents an essential response to trauma, one that is not initially experienced; however, it later resurfaces with overwhelming intensity, a phenomenon that can be described as “belatedness,” and the feeling of belatedness manifests historically, as the election is seen as a historical footnote that influences the present by its enduring painful impact. Benjamin’s response to Benjamin’s “Of What” signifies a distinct manifestation of political amnesia, characterized by communal oblivion and a refusal to acknowledge political tragedies. Benjamin’s response might be considered a reflection of the nation’s collective sentiment. His unawareness of the loudness indicates the extent to which society endures political disillusionment; nonetheless, as a coping mechanism, individuals tend to numb themselves in response to recurring traumas. Furthermore, he desires some wine, even though he is not addicted to alcohol; in a manner of speaking, he turns to wine as a means of escape. Al Ubaidi, Basem Abbas (2017), mentioned the notion of resorting to alcohol in *Cost of Growing Up in a Dysfunctional Family*, as follows:

Victimized adults tend to attempt escaping their past pain and trauma by practicing more destructive behaviors such as increased use of alcohol, drug abuse, or being forced to repeat the mistreatment that was done to them. Others had felt inner nervousness or temper and feelings without realizing the reasons behind it (216).

Victimized people often engage in detrimental habits, such as heightened alcohol and drug use, to evade prior pain and trauma, while others may exhibit internal anxiety or irritability without understanding the underlying causes. In this context, Uncle Benjamin’s use of wine could be interpreted as a strategy to avoid the harsh realities that surround them, which have profoundly affected their souls. However, he disregards the responsibility of the collective consciousness of the political background that is needed to be revealed by him, as he is the one who carries the burden and knowledge of the past. In a certain light, the haunting nature of traumatic memory, the belatedness of history, and the pervasive fog of political amnesia serve as fundamental elements in the disintegration of the self, leading to a fractured and tumultuous journey in the formation of identity. They become detached from their identity, resulting in a disjointed and fragmented sense of self.

Another intersection between personal trauma, political unfulfilled promises, and historical belatedness is visible through the following quotation. Belatedness, as one of the fundamental notions of trauma, returns belatedly and interrupts the present with the leaves of the past:

Jane (Looking at Benjamin): Will he vote before we take him to Beacon?

Barbara: I don't know. Is that necessary? Does he have to?
Richard: I ask myself the same thing.
Marian: Richard . . .
Jane: We'd have to tell him who to vote for.
Marian: He'll vote Democrat.
Richard (To himself): Glad that's settled . . .
Marian: That's what he said last night. We watched a little of Obama's last rally—
Barbara: Until I made her turn it off—
Marian: Obama with Bruce Springsteen? And Uncle said he'd Vote for him.
Jane: You sure he didn't mean Springsteen? That's what I thought he meant. (Then, to Richard) Did you vote absentee, Richard?
 (No response.)
Marian: Did you?
 (No response.)
 (To Richard) Then, Richard, I'll blame you—
Jane (over her): He's going to win.
Marian: Do you really think so?
Jane: He's going to win New York.
Richard: I would have voted for Obama. I think I would have. Does that. (256)

This is a powerful quote that beautifully captures the trauma of political disillusionment, which manifests as hesitant words and silences, demonstrating uncertainty and internal fragmentation. Richard's statement: "I would have voted for Obama. I think I would have. Does that count for something?" (256) manifests his stance, which does not entail certainty but uncertainty regarding the voting process. Richard's uncertainty is a clear manifestation of the notion of "acting out" proposed by Dominick La Capra. He (2014) underscores the definition of "acting out" in his acclaimed piece of art titled "Writing History, Writing Trauma." According to Lacapra (2014), "The concept of 'acting out' is intricately intertwined with the echoes of the past.

in post-traumatic acting out in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes-scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop. (21)

Post-traumatic acting is characterized by incessant haunting by memories of the past, where individuals find themselves trapped in a cycle of compulsively reenacting traumatic events. In this relentless movement, the echoes of history resurface, casting a shadow over the present and obstructing the path to a hopeful future. Instead, they are ensnared in a melancholic loop that perpetuates their suffering. From this vantage point, Richard's indecision regarding the voting process serves as a poignant illustration of "post-traumatic acting out." This phenomenon reflects how an individual can become trapped in the shadows of their past, unable to fully engage with the present moment, as they are persistently haunted by their previous experiences. Consequently, the lingering shadows of unaddressed past traumas drive him to engage in a relentless cycle of re-experiencing those very traumatic events. These vivid scenes compel him to relive the past, as they

resurface repeatedly, obstructing the path to the future. His reaction, covered in ambiguity as he confronts the voting process, is a product of the relentless cycle of political disillusionment. This cycle, marked by persistent betrayals, continually intrudes upon the present moment, obstructing any clear progression toward the future.

Thus, Richard found himself ensnared in a relentless loop of traumatic recurrence, rendering him incapable of perceiving any kind of meaningful agency in his life. Undoubtedly, his hesitation embodies not only personal hesitation but also a shared history marked by the scars of political upheaval. Moreover, the kind of uncertainty that he reflects has a parallel understanding with unconscious repetition of trauma, which manifests itself through indirect expressions of behavior such as slips of tongue, dreams, or unstable behavior. His uncertainty is a poignant manifestation of the unconscious repetition of trauma that is unresolved and emanates from the fragments of historical and political disappointments.

Moreover, Barbara's reaction in the face of Uncle Benjamin's voting process is, "I don't know. Is that necessary? Does he have to?" (256) It stands as a vivid expression of their surrender and weariness, a poignant reflection on the unending loop of hopeful anticipation that has become all too familiar. Undoubtedly, the feeling of exhaustion is intricately linked to the concept of "betrayal of trust," a significant aspect of trauma that Jenny Edkins (2003) explores in *Trauma and the Memory of Politic* and she emphasizes the significance of placing trust in institutions. In her view, for an experience to be regarded as traumatic, it must include certain characteristics that extend beyond mere violence. She asserts that an occurrence may be deemed traumatic.

to be called traumatic — to produce what are seen as symptoms of trauma — an event has to be more than just a situation of utter powerlessness. In an important sense, it has to entail something else. It has to involve a betrayal of trust as well. There is an extreme menace, but what is special is where the threat of violence comes from. What we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger. (4)

Trauma manifests in the presence of powerlessness and a profound betrayal of trust during an event, resulting in an overwhelming sense of threat. Trauma manifests when the very forces that are meant to provide us with a sense of safety transform into sources of anguish. This can happen, for instance, when the fabric of our community disintegrates and turns hostile, or when the safety net of our family transforms into a landscape filled with peril. The depiction presented highlights a profound sense of fatigue, coupled with the Apple family's reluctance to engage in the act of voting, serving as a poignant representation of a deep-seated betrayal of trust. The interplay of Barbara's

resignation, Marian's constant determination, and Richard's shifting doubt collectively embodies the concept articulated by Edkins. One potential remedy to liberate them from the unyielding spiral of suffering and political despair lies in placing faith in the protectors of the community. However, this trust often transforms into a source of disillusionment, evolving into a landscape of further trauma rather than serving as a refuge designed to safeguard their well-being. They find themselves devoid of hope, trapped in a relentless cycle of disillusionment that has shattered the very essence of their identity.

Another excerpt that underscores the theme of "betrayal of trust" can be found in the interactions between Jane and Billy. Billy, being among the youngest of his family, finds himself grappling with the profound sense of lost trust that permeates his surroundings. Although he has not yet reached the age at which he has personally witnessed the historical events that shape the experiences of the other characters in the play, he nonetheless possesses a profound awareness of the prevailing atmosphere.

Billy: He said, "Mom, let me explain it to you this way. How I see the country.
It's like two divorcing parents, Mom. Like you and Dad. And they hate each other. They're screaming at each other. They're certainly not talking and listening to each other. And they both turn to their son and they say to him—who's right, son? They shout at him: damn it, son, you need to take a side! They scream at him: take a goddamn side! But the son says, I can't. I won't take a fucking side. Can't you and Dad understand what I'm trying to tell you? I don't want to be like either of you ... (263)

The quotation offers a profound exploration of the current state of political polarization, utilizing the evocative metaphor of a family to shed light on the complexities and divisions that characterize our societal landscape.

He bears a striking resemblance to a nation that has experienced the separation of its parents. Truly, his metaphor resonates deeply with his own existence, particularly in light of the separation between Jane and her husband. It is within the confines of his family, the most intimate and tiny unit of society, that the seeds of his distrust were first sown. His identity lies in fragments within the confines of his family, and he is unable to uncover the fulfillment he had anticipated from the broader society. Edkins (2003) states that:

If that order betrays us in some way, we may survive in the sense of continuing to live as physical beings, but the meaning of our existence is changed. Commonplace solutions to do with who and what we are and what life might be provided by culture, religious beliefs, patriotic sentiment or close family relationships are overwhelmed. (4)

Billy's concept reflects not only the superficial emotional turmoil but also a deeper significance of existential disjunction. The family structure, a symbolic representation of political and social institutions, which has often provided meaning and identity via stability and protective bonds, has fundamentally deceived its members. The son's hesitance to 'choose a side' reflects a lack of genuine significance in the familial, national, or narrative structures of legitimacy that formerly offered a basis for familial or national devotion.

Profound hostility, symbolically embodied by the metaphorical parents, eradicates previously relied-upon sources or categories of identity, such as nation, community, or family, when either parent's stance completely dismisses a valid humanitarian identity. Whether these were social constructs of a healthy identity or significance, they were eradicated. This tragic betrayal has transformed the son's identity, leaving him existentially detached and challenging his understanding of his potential self. Billy's opposition, articulated via his anguished declaration, "I don't want to be like either of you," illustrates a battle to reconstruct meaning outside of inherited affiliations. He can demonstrate how trauma, stemming from institutional betrayal, disrupts both personal and social identities, driving survivors toward new modes of self- and meaning-making within a once-trusted identity framework of development.

Another passage regarding Jane's contemplation of her son's journey through the trials of generational displacement serves as a poignant illustration of the profound disillusionment and the deep-seated betrayal of trust perpetrated by societal and governmental institutions:

Jane: If I could have another minute with the president.
(All interested in this.)
I'd tell him what Billy said recently to me. Mom, I think mine is a lost generation. We're doing shit jobs, and not being trained for anything. And when the economy gets better, it's the younger ones they're going to want to train then. He's twenty-two years old. And he and his friends think they've been forgotten. (264)

Billy's declaration, "mine is a lost generation," along with the accompanying sentiment of economic instability and disregard, "we're doing sh*t jobs and not being trained for anything (264)," signifies a profound crisis of identity and purpose. In this context, he references Jenny Edkins' perspective on trauma as intrinsically linked to betrayal by once-reliable institutional frameworks designed to provide security and well-being. Edkins observes that Billy's sense of disillusionment epitomizes this traumatic realization: the anticipated protective and nurturing roles of social and political structures have not only failed to support the welfare of youth but have, in fact, worsened exclusion and uncertainty for his generation. The belief that any forthcoming economic recovery would exclude him and his contemporaries exacerbates his sense of betrayal; this sentiment of neglect by institutional frameworks resonates physically, psychologically, and existentially. Billy's

feelings of abandonment indicate a recurring recurrence of trauma perpetuated by enduring historical patterns of societal neglect and generational disempowerment. They find themselves ensnared in a relentless cycle of neglect and treachery, perpetuating a shared trauma that remains resistant to healing. This enduring pain is intricately tied to the very structural conditions that continue to foster such experiences, rendering the possibility of recovery elusive.

Not only are they betrayed because of their political hopelessness, but also within the unit of family, the betrayal of trust is experienced. When Uncle Benjamin monitors Barbara while she is having a shower, it is a clear indication of betrayal of trust. According to Edkins (2003), when there is a discrepancy between anticipation and occurrence, we experience betrayal of trust (9).

Benjamin: I quote:” Today I stare et Barbara in the shower.
She does not see me. I stand in the door and watch her for a long time. (229)

The quotation presented above poignantly encapsulates the essence of betrayal of trust. As the eldest member of the family, one would naturally expect Uncle to embody the highest degree of trustworthiness, although he grapples with certain lapses in his memory. Nevertheless, he shatters the faith they had placed in him. Throughout the preceding chapters, it has become evident that Uncle has assumed the role of a paternal figure for all the family members, stepping in to fill the void left by their absent parents during their formative years. It is for this reason that they hold a deep affection for the uncle. The way he conducted himself towards Barbara, despite being regarded as the embodiment of trust within the family, took everyone by surprise and ultimately resulted in a profound breach of that trust. Psychiatrist Erik Erikson posited that the abilities for autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, and intimacy develop sequentially, starting with the foundational trust created throughout early childhood (68). If foundational trust is compromised, all ensuing developmental phases are impacted.

It becomes evident that the seeds of betrayal are often sown within the very fabric of the family unit, only to later manifest in the broader political landscape. The individuals who encounter these occurrences find themselves deeply traumatized, as these events leave them fragmented and vulnerable in the vast expanse of the world around them. In their hearts, a profound sense of desperation lingers, intertwining with an insatiable yearning for hope to illuminate their path. The relentless cycle of betrayal mirrors the insidious nature of trauma; each lingers in the shadows of the survivors’ minds, relentlessly haunting them and fragmenting their very essence of identity. The profound sense of betrayal of trust along with the repetitive cycle of trauma is illustrated through the quotation given below:

Richard: This same friend? We got together three or four times.
I think we were both just lonely. One night we went to
see a show. A character in the play talks about visiting

the men's public bathroom in some fancy part of London years and years ago. The walls are all marble. And the urinals have glass tanks full of water. In each tank swam ten, maybe twenty goldfish. And so—you'd flush and suddenly the water level would go down, and he said the fish would huddle together and you could see a real "consternation" on their faces. But then—the water would start to fill up again, and so would rise, and the fish, he said, they all relaxed—because everything was going to be fine after all. And then—someone would flush again . . . (Smiles) My friend leaned over and said, "That's how it is going to be like on election night." "Hope . . . and change . . ." Glad I'm not in the city tonight . . . God, what that'll be like. Speaking of England. (237)

Richard's example of the fish mirrors the current state of America, especially in its political landscape. The earlier chapters pertaining to the play have illustrated a profound sense of despair among the characters, reflecting the very essence of the title itself. Richard employs the metaphor of "hope and change" as a poignant allusion to the campaign that propelled Obama into the presidency. He was imparting a sense of hope to those who championed it, while simultaneously indicating a transformation. Yet, the outcome diverged significantly from what had been anticipated. The air was thick with hope, a moving spirit that, while uplifting, inadvertently paved the way for unexpected challenges to arise. They remained blissfully unaware of it. Thus, they resemble the metaphor of the "fish" previously mentioned; initially, they exhibited a lack of activity and a sense of hopelessness. However, as time unfolded, they gradually acclimated to their environment and the unsettling occurrences that had once troubled them. In their close-knit gathering, they found solace, momentarily shielding themselves from the harsh realities that loomed beyond their embrace. The weight of their aspirations faded into the background, overshadowed by the warmth of their shared presence. It can be contended that it functions as a powerful metaphor for the despair often felt in the realm of politics.

In a certain sense, it bears a profound connection to the treachery of trust. People get confused because they lose their faith in the institutions, which are one of the most effective ways to gain their trust, and they feel as if they have been deceived. The act of betraying trust intricately intertwines with the dynamics of an electoral process, revealing the delicate balance that exists within close relationships. One might assert that Richard's reference serves as a vivid metaphor for the electoral process that characterizes America. The concepts are intricately linked, weaving together in a tapestry of interconnections and relationships that bind them to one another. Furthermore, this quotation subtly encapsulates the unending cycle of trauma, as the electoral process perpetually unfolds in a manner that leaves voters feeling no discernible change whatsoever. It resembles an unending loop of anguish, with individuals serving as the carriers of this deep-seated pain. Thus, the very fabric of their identity becomes fragmented, leaving them in a state of profound trauma.

4.4. The Psyche as a Haunted House in *Sorry*

The phantoms of political intrigue do not merely haunt the nation; those intimately connected to the politicians find themselves ensnared in consequences as well. Franklin Pierce, a notable figure among the presidents of the United States, has endured a profound sorrow marked by the untimely passing of his beloved son, Benjamin. In the annals of their family history, a tragic chapter unfolds with the loss of their beloved son, Benji, who met an untimely fate in a rail accident. In the depths of her despair, Jane found herself enveloped in an overwhelming sorrow that seemed to consume her very being, leaving her utterly inconsolable. As recounted by his wife, this sorrowful incident transpired because of her husband's deceit, intertwining her own emotional anguish with the sense of political treachery that enveloped their lives. Had he chosen honesty, they might have been spared the misfortune that befell them. In her mind, this was a divine retribution for the deceitful political fabrications spun by Pierce.

Richard: In front of their eyes. Jane of course was inconsolable. who wouldn't be. Franklin tries to comfort her or maybe himself, but she suddenly gets it into her head that this must be God's wrath, His punishment upon them for Franklin having lied. And sworn.

Jane convinced herself of this. Nothing he or anyone else could say could change her mind. Pretty soon, they have to start to make their way to Washington for the inauguration. Jane Pierce makes it as far as Baltimore, where she just stopped, refused to go any farther, or closer to that evil city—of lying politicians: Washington. Franklin finds friends there with whom she can stay. And she will spend the next two and a half years—the bulk of Pierce's presidency, in Baltimore, trying, she said, to make amends with God, and writing letters to herself, and all of which she signs—"Benji."

(Short pause. They eat.)

Marian: Poor woman.

Barbara (to Benjamin): Interesting, isn't it, Benjamin? (214)

Jane found herself ensnared in the lingering shadows of her son's untimely passing, grappling with the profound sorrow that remained unaddressed. She found herself unable to surmount the challenge, a truth that becomes evident through the profound solitude that enveloped her. Furthermore, the correspondence she has composed for her deceased son serves as yet another manifestation of the relentless cycle of repetition compulsion. She lacks the ability to alleviate and heal the wounds of her son's trauma. Instead of finding solace or mending her wounds, she immerses herself in the act of penning letters addressed to the "specter" of his child. She found herself ensnared in the relentless cycle of grief, a state in which the only refuge from her absence seemed to be the solitude that covered her. In a certain sense, she finds herself enveloped in a profound emotional numbness, a phenomenon often highlighted in the realm of trauma theory. This state of being reflects the reality faced by trauma survivors, who frequently endure a phase characterized by silence and an

absence of feeling. Composing a letter to a specter may be perceived as an intrusion of the ethereal into the realm of the living, embodying a prevalent theme within the discourse of hauntology.

She found herself unable to surmount the weight of her experiences, as the shadows of the past seep into her present, relentlessly pursuing her with the echoes of her trauma. Thus, her mind retreats to the haunting specter of loss, unable to progress beyond its grasp. In other words, Jane's mind is pervaded by the lingering shadows of her past and the profound sorrow stemming from the loss of her son. She attributes the tragic demise of her son to the political transgressions committed by her husband. In a way, she experiences post-traumatic stress. Those who have received a diagnosis of PTSD frequently bear the heavy burden of having endured harrowing traumatic experiences, which have led to their profound emotional suffering. Those who find themselves in situations that present actual or conceivable threats to life, significant bodily harm, or a peril to their very identity—experiences that surpass the ordinary bounds of human encounter—may be diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) should they display clusters of symptoms associated with this condition. Individuals who endure the ravages of war, the weight of tragedy, the shock of accidents, or the strain of other profoundly stressful circumstances often manifest a range of physical and psychological ailments. Therefore, the past never truly disappears from her. The past continuously disrupts the linearity of her time and shatters her identity.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. RICHARD NELSON'S *REGULAR SINGING* (2012)

For a long time I would go to bed early.
—Marcel Proust, opening of *Swann's Way* (279)

The epigraph foregrounds time's recurrence. This chapter examines how the JFK at fifty commemoration stages such recurrence, translating a long national memory into intimate scenes where identity is organized by return. The fourth play, titled *Regular Singing*, was released in 2013 and serves as the concluding piece in the quartet. The event unfolds on the momentous occasion marking the fiftieth anniversary of the tragic assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. As highlighted in earlier works, the present play similarly showcases the familiar scenes of family dinners, the fluctuating course of conversations, and the poignant recollections of past events. Nevertheless, the play is endowed with a spectral quality, as it grapples with the disjointed identities of its characters, including Adam, Marian's estranged husband, who lives in a state of decline in the upstairs areas of the house. Their haunted existence is not solely attributed to these events; rather, the anniversary of the assassination serves as a significant factor, deepening both their individual and shared sorrow. This chapter seeks to delve into the play by employing the frameworks of trauma theory and hauntology, thereby illuminating the notion that the essence of American identity is one rooted in haunting echoes of the past.

The play One, *That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), takes place on November 2, 2010. Prior to the commencement of the performance, Uncle Benjamin Apple, a renowned actor, had suffered a heart attack, which made him incapacitated. Upon emerging from the coma, he had profound amnesia. At the commencement of the play, he retired and relocated to his niece Barbara's residence in Rhinebeck, New York. The play Two, *Sweet and Sad* (2011), takes place on September 11, 2011. Months before the onset of the play, Marian's twenty-year-old daughter, Evan, took her life for reasons that remain unclear. Since that time, Marian and her spouse, Adam, have split, and Marian now resides in Barbara's home with Barbara and Benjamin. The play Three, *Sorry* (2012), takes place on November 6, 2012. Richard has had an extensive business trip to England. Barbara and Marian had been awaiting Richard's return before relocating Benjamin to an assisted-living facility, a transition that Barbara has been opposing. Marian persists in living with Barbara and Benjamin at Barbara's home.

5.1. Hauntology: Specters of American History

Nelson's incorporation of an epigraph attributed to Proust ignites a reflection on the significance of memory and its enduring influence on the present moment. "For a long time I would go to bed early." (...) The phrase in question serves as an epigraph drawn from Proust's monumental work, *In Search of Lost Time*(...), a narrative that stands as one of the most deeply affecting masterpieces in the realm of contemporary literature. The sudden emergence of unbidden recollection manifests itself as the narrator enjoys a madeleine, delicately immersed in tea.

The flavor serves as a key, unearthing a series of recollections that emerge not through deliberate intention but rather through the subtle guidance of sensation, flowing into the mind's corridors with an effortless spontaneity. Certainly, the narrative unfolds within a linear temporal structure; however, the presence of the past, embodied in the image of the madeleine steeped in tea, serves to disrupt this linearity, creating a rich tapestry of memory and experience that transcends the confines of time. When the seamless flow of time is interrupted, the remnants of the past emerge vividly within the fabric of the present moment. Indeed, Nelson's use of this epigraph makes the audience think that even doing a routine of going to bed changes its flow, having an influential boost of memory from past to present, as the characters of Regular Singing.

Amidst the lively atmosphere of a family gathering, conversations continue through the realm of commonplace facts. Yet, these seemingly mundane details possess the potential to awaken asleep memories as did in Proust's work of art. It is subtly shaping the present moment, as posited by Derrida.

A spectral moment, a moment that
no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the
linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present:
"now," future present). We are questioning in this instant, we
are asking ourselves about this instant that is not docile to time,
at least to what we call time. Furtive and untimely, the apparition
of the specter does not belong to that time, it does not give time,
not that one: (Derrida, XIX)

The concept of haunting, as expressed by Derrida, unveils the idea that the past transcends the boundaries of mere recollection; it lingers, much like a ghost, shaping the present through continuous cycles of recurrence and novel understanding. In a manner similar to Proust, Nelson skillfully illustrates how even the simplest of gestures, fleeting moments of observation, or the subtle intricacies of daily life can reveal profound insights into the essence of identity, the nature of relationships, and the complexities of familial interactions. Furthermore, these elements serve as vessels for both personal and collective memories, weaving together the fabric of history in a rich tapestry of understanding. The Apple family grapples with the weight of their historical sorrows,

including the tragic loss of Evan, Marian's daughter who took her life; the looming "specter" of Benjamin's death, a figure caught in the liminal space between existence and void; and the collective grief stemming from the assassination of JFK, a national wound that lingers in their consciousness. The essence of time transcends the confines of linearity, revealing itself as a multifaceted and spectral phenomenon. In other words, history manifests as a haunting presence for those who inhabit the present, as it lingers in the recesses of collective memory.

5.1.1. The Singing War: A Haunting Allegory of American Discord

In the play, Tim narrates a story that is explained by Adam, and this story transfers an early American religious history that partially seems trivial but engrains more profound meaning.

Tim: Adam told me this story: a lot of early American Puritan congregations, they only knew how to sing a handful of tunes? And they couldn't even sing those well. A leader had to sing, and the rest would copy him. Line by line. Line by line. Adam said—some people wanted to change this, they wanted there to be written-down agreed-upon notes—so that everyone could follow at the same time and sing together. But that got other people incensed: "We need a leader. It will be the end of authority." So, Adam said, all hell broke loose. They even called it a "singing war."

Richard: A singing war?

Tim: In the 1720s. In America. You hungry, Benjamin?

Benjamin: No.

Tim (To Richard): Just to agree to have notes so people could f*cking sing together. A war. Then, after telling me this, Adam looks up from his sickbed, and says—"Nothing's changed. America, Tim ... (283)

The quotation encapsulates a narrative that captures the essence of a significant historical moment. Despite being presented with a comic and ironic flair, the underlying truth of the situation is one of sorrow, as war demands both authority and unity. Instead, the focus was diverted to a quarrel regarding the way the song should be performed. Some steadfastly adhered to the belief that performing each line sequentially was the best approach, while others strongly supported the practice of writing it down. In a moment of chaos, their minds wandered, leaving them unable to reach a consensus on a matter of little consequence, despite the pressing need for harmony among them. This metaphor vividly illustrates the profound political incapacity to achieve consensus among its members, highlighting a significant failure to uphold democratic ideals. It portrays a scenario where the political culture is steeped in dysfunction, ultimately leading to a disconnection from the very principles it seeks to embody.

This occurrence resonates deeply with the fundamental nature of hauntology, a concept that Nelson endeavors to explore and articulate. Certainly, the fundamental motif present in the Singing

War of the 1720s reveals an influential framework comparable to the one observed during the elections of 2010 and the deeply divided state of America. Truly, the fundamental nature of the culture remains constant and unaltered. As Derrida contemplates “without this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present” (6), the echoes of the past linger, casting their shadows upon the present as they transport their weighty darkness into the present moment. From the confines of his sickbed, Adam’s voice rises, casting the immutable shadows of the past upon the canvas of the present. Nelson emerges as the poignant voice of the nation, illuminating the profound tragedy that envelops the country. This sorrowful narrative unfolds in cycles, as if the nation is ensnared in an inescapable fate, perpetually submerged in the depths of its own recurring trauma.

In conclusion, the inability of Americans to reach a consensus on the manner of their collective singing suggests that the act of singing may convey meanings that extend beyond the literal interpretation of the words themselves. In other words, the act of singing in unison may signify the presence of a shared concept and a collective movement; nevertheless, they failed in achieving this unity. This conclusion indicates that the ancestors of the Apple Family were unable to reach a shared agreement. The inability to generate a unified sound serves as a metaphor for the fragmented national identity that Nelson delves into via the grief, memory, and dialogues of his characters. It is evident from the discourse that the Singing War transcends its origins in the 18th century, manifesting instead as a haunting presence that persists through time, articulated by Adam and resonating within the lives of subsequent generations.

5.1.2. From Whitman’s Chorus to Nelson’s Lament

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear.
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands (Whitman, 1995 :12)

The poem presented above is attributed to the esteemed poet Walt Whitman. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Walt Whitman possessed a unique disposition; his professional endeavors were often inconsistent, yet he was profoundly captivated by the tumult of the Civil War. He stood wholeheartedly in support of Lincoln, a support as steadfast as the North Star guiding sailors through tempestuous seas. He devoted his life to serving in a hospital as a male nurse, where he bore witness to the harrowing realities of war. He was renowned as a notable poet. Emerson offered his unwavering support, and in doing so, he discovered that *Leaves of Grass* was nothing short of a remarkable tapestry woven with threads of both wit and profound wisdom. In the poem, individuals from every phase of life come together in celebration, their voices united in song for the sake of their beloved nation. A sense of optimism envelops their thoughts regarding the nation’s future. He presents a novel approach that resonates with all levels of society, daring to confront and dismantle

ingrained biases. The essence of national identity resonates clearly throughout the stanzas, revealing a profound connection to the collective spirit and shared heritage of the people. These melodies embody the essence of individuality and the toil of human endeavor. In stark opposition, within the realm of *Regular Singing* (2012), Nelson crafts a narrative that portrays a nation where the melody has stumbled, rather than flowing seamlessly like a harmonious symphony.

Here, the echoes of loss and the shards of fragmented memories resonate profoundly, creating a tapestry of significant relevance. The transition from the optimistic melodies of Walt Whitman to the profound hymns of Nelson in *The Singing War* transcends mere musicality; it delves into the very essence of existence itself. A shift unfolds, moving from the realm of existence to the void of nonexistence, transforming the assured self into an ethereal “specter.” Thus, Nelson’s play embodies the essence of spectral traces, echoing Whitman’s optimistic perspective. Derrida underscores the act of ghosting as follows:

A specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back. Think as well of Macbeth, and remember the specter of Caesar. After having expired, he returns. Brutus also says, "again-" (Derrida, 1993: 11)

The highlighted quote discusses the concept of a “specter” as a revenant, emphasizing its uncontrollable nature of returning after death. It references literary examples, specifically Macbeth and the specter of Caesar, highlighting the theme of resurrection and the haunting presence of the past. A mournful reflection evokes a sense of nostalgia for a chorus that existed in the past and may now be lost to time, along with the uncertainty of its return. In essence, *Regular Singing* serves as a lament not only for Adam, Benjamin, and Evan but also for the elusive dream of a unified American identity.

5.2. Memory and Inheritance: Living with the Specters of Past

In *Regular Singing* (2013), the weight of historical traumas lingers not merely as remnants of bygone eras; rather, the present is profoundly unsettled by the haunting resonances of the past, which assert their spectral influence in the here and now. Understanding the spectral tissue of the play depends on the frame of the notion of hauntology and the concept of memory. The influence of history on what lies ahead is intricately linked to the notion of ‘post memory,’ a term introduced by the esteemed scholar Marianne Hirsch. She articulates that trauma has the capacity to transcend individual experience, being transmitted through the intricate threads of memory and the legacy of inheritance. Within the confines of the play, the characters find themselves profoundly influenced by the unfolding of events around them, as well as by the tapestry of others’ individual experiences.

Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1993), underscores that “the ghost is not simply a dead or missing being, but an always-already absent presence” (5). In other words, the specter transcends the mere definition of a deceased or an absent entity; it embodies an ever-present absence, a haunting that lingers in the spaces between existence and non-existence. In a similar vein, Marianne Hirsh in *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012), highlights that;

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. (5)

As it is highlighted above, postmemory is the relationship between the subsequent generation and the personal, communal, and cultural traumas of the preceding generation, who recollect their experiences via narratives, visuals, and behaviors that are profoundly and effectively conveyed. Consequently, one might assert that a complex interplay exists between postmemory and hauntology, as both concepts resonate with deep echoes or remnants from the past that persist and extend into the contemporary moment.

5.3. Hauntological Echoes of National Tragedy: JFK’s Assassination and Post-Memory

The concepts of hauntology and post-memory provide instructive lenses with which to explore the ways in which historical traumas can echo through time, influencing and haunting the collective consciousness of subsequent generations. The assassination of John F. Kennedy (JFK) on November 22, 1963, presents a profound opportunity for exploration within the realms of hauntology and post-memory. This analysis engages with the concepts of hauntology and post-memory as they pertain to the assassination of JFK, exploring how these frameworks illuminate the lingering impacts of this traumatic occurrence on the fabric of American culture and collective memory.

The past disrupts the present, often via unresolved traumas, overlooked injustices, or ambiguity. This concept intersects philosophy, culture, and memory and inherently recognizes the haunting presence of the past that resists oblivion. The parameters of hauntology in the JFK assassination case study are particularly pertinent due to the absence of resolution, which continues to disrupt the collective memory of the American populace. The assassination of JFK is a disappointing example of a traumatic occurrence. The abrupt and brutal demise of a prominent leader, together with the ensuing debates and peculiar conspiracy theories, creates a lasting impact on American society.

As previously noted, the event occurred in 1963; nevertheless, its repercussions remain significant for both those who lived through it and those who did not. The following lines detail the

sequence of events as they unfolded. To meet with Governor John Connally and well-wishers, the presidential party travelled by motorcade to Dallas. The procession then moved through downtown Dallas, passing Trade Mart. Gunfire hit the president's head and neck during the assassination in Dealey Plaza, while Governor Connally was wounded in the rear. At 1:00 p.m., Kennedy was declared dead, and Connally recovered. Kennedy's remains were loaded into Air Force One and transported to Love Field. Before the aircraft took flight, Lyndon B. Johnson took the oath of office.

Lee Harvey Oswald was slain by local nightclub owner Jack Ruby after he was apprehended for the Kennedy assassination and the shooting death of Patrolman J. D. Tippit. (Hanna and Stengle: 2025) The event's existence in the play confirms the nature of hauntology since Nelson does not behave as if it stayed in the past. The assassination is staged as a spectral return, its haunting effect disrupting the linearity of time.

Jane (Quietly to Benjamin): Today's November 22nd, Uncle . . .

Richard: What do you think he was afraid of missing? Today doesn't seem to be about anything . . .

Barbara (Shuffling through the papers, about the papers): I asked them at the beginning of the week to talk to their parents—or grandparents—it's been that long—

Richard: Your students?

Barbara (Nodding): It doesn't seem that long ago—and see what today means to them. And then I asked them: "What does today mean to you?" If anything. If nothing, come back with that. Which—is what most did come back with. That surprised me. I guess it shouldn't. (Smiles) One senior she said—she's very smart—she said for her it was a "mythological time"—"when heroes died."

Tim (Smiles): I like that . . .

Richard: Fifty years ago is now "a mythological time"—?

Barbara: Another said—his grandmother—she is always worrying, still—and especially, he said, during the last election—about an Obama assassination. Because of the tensions? . . . He didn't say why. His grandma just told him there was a "Kennedy-aura thing" surrounding Obama. (300)

The quotation encompasses the essence of hauntology, as Jane, Barbara, and Barbara's students lack direct experience with assassination; instead, they exist within its shadow, shaped by the impressions it leaves behind. The remnants of the past expand upon the present, exerting their influence on those who inhabit the current moment. The influence of history is expressed via the accounts of those who have experienced it directly. Hirsh emphasized that the offspring of survivors are subjected to trauma while not having lived it directly. She emphasized the impact in *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012) as follows:

that descendants of victim survivors as well as of perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they identify that connection as a form of memory,

and that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory can be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event. (3)

The above-given quotation highlights that heirs of those who suffered, those who inflicted harm, and those who stood by during harrowing occurrences share a profound bond with the recollections of their forebears. This intertwining of experiences is recognized as a distinct manifestation of memory.

In the most extraordinary of situations, the essence of memory may find its way to those who were not physically present. In the play's work, considering that the assassination transpired fifty years prior, the grandparents of the students are endowed with the capacity to remember it vividly. Therefore, the recollections of students' parents and grandparents are passed on to the students. Students are deeply influenced by the echoes of history that linger in their present. Yet, the recollection of the event, as preserved by the elders, is passed down through generations; in other words, the past exists as a form of postmemory, intertwining with the present in a manner that disrupts its linear progression, creating a tapestry of interconnected experiences. Hirsh (2012) defines postmemory and the transmission of the past as follows: "My parents' stories and behaviors, and the way that they reached me, followed a set of conventions that were no doubt shaped by stories we had read and heard, conversations we had had, and fears and fantasies associated with persecution and danger (4). The shared foundation lies in the past; however, the manner in which it manifests itself varies in both instances. In a manner that evokes a sense of the spectral, one might assert that the occurrences from the past permeate the present within the dialogues of the characters in the play, subtly weaving their influence into the fabric of everyday exchanges.

Furthermore, one of the students described the tragedy as "a mythological time, a period" where heroes died." This remark exemplifies how the agony of assassination has been culturally conveyed and altered. In other words, it is no longer historical but rather established in the present, when memory, imagination, and loss converge. Barbara's task for her students, which involves engaging in conversations with their parents or grandparents about the significance of November 22, serves as a poignant illustration of the concept of post-memory. Over the course of many years, as the students distanced themselves from the actual occurrence, they came to "inherit" the emotional remnants and fragments that lingered in the aftermath of the event's profound feelings. They carry with them a deep-seated melancholy, wariness toward those in power, an idealization of authority figures, and a deeply rooted apprehension of political brutality. This anxiety may find its roots in the tragic assassination of JFK. This feeling is vividly exemplified through the apprehensions expressed by one of the students' grandmothers regarding Barack Obama, as she perceived an essence reminiscent of the aura surrounding Kennedy. This scenario serves as a poignant illustration of how emotional intricacies are passed down through generations, continuing to resonate within the evolving landscape of political contexts.

Consequently, this play reveals that the construction of identity transcends mere personal experiences; it is intricately woven into the fabric of inherited narratives, mythic tales, and the poignant recollections of the past. For certain students, the date of November 22, which holds considerable importance across various nations, embodies what can be described as a “mythological time.” This notion arises from the idea that “heroes died” on this day, indicating that the assassination of JFK has woven itself into a broader narrative that shapes the very fabric of American identity. Even those students who conveyed a sense of “nothingness” in their interviews find themselves molded by the very lack of connection that permeates their experiences. Their state of “nothingness” serves as a poignant illustration of how the “specter” of absence can intricately shape the existence and identity of both individuals and communities alike.

5.4. Living Through Loss: Traumatic Structures in *The Regular Singing*

In contemporary literature and culture, the notion of trauma has emerged as a pivotal theme, resonating deeply within the narratives and experiences that shape our understanding of the human condition. Trauma profoundly alters the fabric of memory, disrupting the coherence of narrative structure and intricately reshaping both individual and communal identity. Roger Luckhurst posits that trauma fundamentally undermines the very essence of straightforward temporal and linear narrative structures. According to him, “No narrative of trauma can be told in a linear way: it has a time signature that must fracture conventional causality” (Luckhurst, 2008:9). Therefore, trauma is not viewed as a single event or a series of events; rather, it is an unyielding condition that affects one’s identity.

Experiences marked by trauma are intricately linked to how a person views themselves, shaping their sense of identity and the aspects of themselves that bear the scars of such experiences. In other terms, experiences filled with trauma possess the capacity to fracture and dismantle a person’s sense of self, altering fundamentally the lens through which they view the event. This culminates in the individual experiencing a profound psychological fragmentation, leaving them in a state of disarray, as their psyche is splintered into numerous smaller pieces. An individual who has endured profound and harrowing experiences finds themselves in a state of disarray, where this very disarray serves their connection to the natural rhythm of existence, ultimately steering them towards a life marked by desolation and solitude. The concept of a fragmented self or identity, one that has not been properly formed as it ought to be, has also been elaborated upon by Michelle Balaev (2008: 151). He highlights the profound impact that traumatic experiences can have on one’s sense of identity. He articulates that an intensely distressing event can significantly disrupt an individual’s understanding of who they are, leading to a fragmentation within their self-concept.

Events like the assassination of JFK, political unrest, the sense of insecurity, and an unsolved past traumatize Richard Nelson’s characters in *Regular Singing* (2012). Since the wounds from the

incident prevent them from forming wholesome relationships with others around them, their identity is destroyed. They were broken into tiny fragments because of traumatic events. Luckhurst (2013) defines the influence of trauma on identity titled *Trauma Question* as follows: Individuals who experience wars, disasters, accidents, or other extreme ‘stressor’ events seem to produce certain identifiable somatic and psychosomatic disturbances. Aside from myriad physical symptoms, trauma disrupts memory, and therefore identity, in peculiar ways (1). As highlighted in the above-given quotation, Nelson’s characters who endure the ravages of war, the chaos of disasters, the unpredictability of accidents, or other profound stress-inducing events appeared to manifest distinct and recognizable disturbances, both in their physical bodies and in their psychological states.

In addition to a multitude of physical manifestations, trauma intricately interfered with the fabric of their memory, thereby unsettling the very essence of their identity in uniquely profound manners. The members of Nelson’s family find themselves entwined in a complex tapestry of “traumatic identity,” their very selves molded by the shadows of unresolved losses, the weight of historical events, and the echoes of their memories intertwined with the anxieties that loom over their futures.

5.5. Assassination of JFK: Cultural Trauma and the Construction of Traumatic Identity

The tragic assassination of John F. Kennedy stands as a pivotal moment in the tapestry of American history, leaving a permanent imprint on the nation’s memory and collective psyche. For countless individuals across America and around the globe, it endures as a haunting trauma, a profound tragedy etched into the collective memory, and an enigma that remains forever unresolved. In the wake of the tragic assassination, the American populace was enveloped in a profound wave of disbelief, sorrow, and an intimate feeling of sadness. A multitude of individuals conveyed that they had never experienced such profound sorrow throughout their existence. Individuals conveyed sensations of tension, a sense of disarray, and emotional numbness, alongside a diminished appetite and profound exhaustion. The depth of this sorrow was akin to the heart-wrenching anguish one might anticipate from the loss of a beloved family member or an intimate companion.

Richard Nelson’s *Regular Singing* (2014) vividly illustrates the enduring presence of deep-seated trauma within the shared psyche of America, capturing the echoes of past wounds that continue to resonate in the collective memory. The theatrical work explores the profound nature of national traumas and their echoing effects on both personal and collective identities. The congregation of family members commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the JFK assassination serves as a poignant reminder that individual identities are intricately linked to this national tragedy, revealing the profound impact such historical events have on personal narratives.

In his work, *National Trauma and Collective Memory* (2005), Arthur Neal draws a clear distinction between the concept of national trauma and that of personal trauma:

A national trauma differs from a personal trauma in that it is shared with others. A rape victim or a person diagnosed as having the AIDS virus experiences some degree of stigma and is thrown back on his or her own resources. The trauma of the victim is an individualized experience that occurs within a context of otherwise normal and happy people. The victim runs the risk of being rejected, developing a sense of estrangement from others, and losing the support of significant others. In contrast, a national trauma is shared collectively and frequently has a cohesive effect as individuals gather in small and intimate groups to reflect on the tragedy and its consequences. Personal feelings of sadness, fear, and anger are confirmed when others express similar emotions. (13)

Giladilad Hirschberger (2018) in “*Collective Trauma and Social Construction of Meaning*,” elaborates on this concept, stating that collective trauma represents “a cataclysmic event that shatters the basic fabric of society. Aside from the horrific loss of life, collective trauma is also a crisis of meaning” (1).

In his play, Richard Nelson artfully illustrates these theoretical assertions through the insightful reflections of Uncle Benjamin, who offers his commentary on the news report that emerged in the wake of JFK’s assassination. The subject is the original news report authored by Jon Wicker, presented in the following manner: President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was shot and killed by an assassin today” (Nelson, 2014: 303). Indeed, the vocabulary that Uncle Benjamin has employed reflects the abrupt and sudden features of this collective trauma. This aligns with Hirschberger’s description of the trauma as a catastrophic event that shatters the continuity of society. Moreover, Uncle Benjamin’s reading of the news serves as collective events echoing through Neal’s statement, which is national trauma experienced collectively and often fosters unity as individuals come together in small, close-knit groups to contemplate the tragedy and its implications. When others articulate similar emotions, it reinforces the acceptance of personal feelings like sadness, fear, and anger. In other words, national trauma is inherently shared and communal.

Furthermore, Uncle Benjamin’s reading of the news contributes to the families’ collective identity within the narrative of national loss. Recalling the incident helps the family to rebuild their identities using a common trauma. By means of group listening and interpretation of Benjamin’s performance, they actively rebuild their sense of self and community against the background of unresolved national trauma. Therefore, the seemingly simple passage from Nelson’s play encapsulates significant theoretical concepts in trauma studies. By means of shared narratives, memory, and meaning-making techniques, it is a precise illustration of how collective trauma not only disturbs but also transforms identities, so exposing trauma’s ongoing and generational psychological resonance inside personal and collective identity. In *Explorations in Memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth mentions the essence of trauma to underscore its repetitive, belated form as follows:

Yet what is particularly striking in this singular experience is that its insistent reenactments of the past do not simply serve as testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a The past was never fully experienced as it occurred. Trauma, that is, does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned.(151)

The construction of “traumatic identity” revolves around this belatedness. In *Regular Singing* (2014), the Apple family reenacts the JFK assassination fifty years after it happened. Such an event is a ritualized form of deferred witnessing, not just a historical remembrance. In addition to being a statement of historical truth, Benjamin’s news delivery as “President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was shot and killed by an assassin today” (Nelson, 2014:303) also represents a psychological rupture that the characters and, consequently, American identity, have never entirely healed. The trauma is re-experienced now because it was never properly registered in consciousness, not because it was forgotten. The fact that the Apple family keeps returning to this event implies that their combined and personal identities are formed around a void or an absence that ironically becomes the framework around which their sense of self is built. Thus, in line with Caruth’s framework, it can be grasped that the trauma of JFK’s assassination was not only a national rupture but also a psychic imprint organizing identity through repetition.

This repetitive behavior serves to define rather than to heal; it does not resolve issues. Included in this orbit are Barbara, Benjamin, and even the younger generation who were not alive in 1963. Their terrible identity comes from historical memory that is still unassessed but always present, not from personal memory.

5.6. Cultural Memory, Identity and the Dynamics of Traumatic Recollection

Trauma and identity are two concepts that are associated with each other through the mechanism of cultural memory. The term cultural memory impacts the individual and collective identities. George (2013), *The Assassination of John F. Kennedy: Political Trauma and Memory*, underscores the assassination as a part of broader cultural memory, and he argues that cultural memory shapes the personal and social identity of individuals.

For many Americans who remember those eerie days in 1963, JFK remains a vibrant figure. His death is a tragedy not to be forgotten, a puzzle that defies assembly, and a trauma that colors memories of their younger selves. Because Kennedy’s murder and its aftermath became a shared experience of virtually all Americans, he holds a prominent place in the nation’s collective memory of the twentieth century, an indelible image enlarged by frequent media coverage. In a way, modern media have extended his stardom and allowed him to conquer the finality of death. (34)

As illustrated in the quotation, the assassination of JFK in 1963 endures as a pivotal moment in American history, representing a terrible and horrific event that challenges remembrance. His death became a collective experience for many Americans, resulting in a lasting picture amplified by media attention. Trauma is not perceived as a historical event, but it also shapes collective self-perception across generations. The above-mentioned situation is visible throughout the play when Barbara reflects on her fear about the assassination:

Barbara: I then said something that surprised even me. I wonder if it's true. It just came out. Tell me if you think it's true. I said—I wonder if there are two kinds of fears in the world. One kind, you learn from your parents. Like spiders and traffic or “Nazis.” I certainly was scared of them.

Jane (As a “joke”): I still am.

Barbara: Then there's this second kind of fear. The fear we learn on our own, from your own experience of the world. For me, the assassination was that kind of fear. Maybe the first of that kind of fear for me. For an eleven-year-old girl. (350)

Through this quotation, Barbara artfully establishes the two distinct forms of fear, one of which is passed on through familial or cultural channels, exemplified by the term “Nazis.” In her view, these forms of fear are acquired through collective experience, in contrast to those that are encountered directly and personally.

Undoubtedly, the assassination of Kennedy has been profoundly imprinted into her consciousness, a haunting memory that has lingered since she was merely eleven years old at the time of that fateful event. Ronald Eyerman described a comparable scenario regarding the political assassination of Robert Kennedy in his work, *Cultural Trauma: Emotion and Narration*, as follows: Collective trauma refers to the emotional impact of traumatic events, such as the shooting of Robert F. Kennedy, which left a deep emotional impression on those present but also affected significant collective emotion. (5-6)

Jane: Sometimes—and I was about to say this when we were talking about the Kennedys and your class, Barbara. I wonder if sometimes—and Tim, you have kept saying this as this anniversary approached—if sometimes it's best not to see . . . Not to pick up the rock and look underneath . . . (321)

The dialogue takes place between Jane, Barbara, and Tim, connecting their thoughts and perspectives into a common narrative. The discourse surrounding the cultural memory of the assassination revolves around a poignant dilemma: should we choose to forget the past, or should we embrace the act of remembrance? In truth, the act of selecting between the paths of remembrance and oblivion is intricately intertwined with the essence of one's identity. This dialogue recalls the work of Gil Eyal, specifically his piece entitled *Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to*

Memory. Eyal explores the complex pattern of collective memory within the post-communist landscape of Eastern Europe, examining its manifestations through two distinct lenses: one rooted in Czech experiences and the other in Slovakian narratives. The viewpoint from Slovakia emphasizes the significance of remembrance as a fundamental protector of one's identity or "guarantor of the identity" (7). Conversely, the perspective from the Czech Republic perceives memory as a means of healing from the wounds of historical trauma. Returning to the quotation, it could be stated that Jane's conversation with the family members represents a societal dilemma and reflects the dual way of memory. The family's hesitation to remember overlaps with Eyal's concept of "crises of memory."

Consequently, the play highlights the profound influence that cultural and historical traumas exert on the process of identity formation. Identity is intricately woven not solely from the threads of memory but is also profoundly molded by the surrounding environment.

5.7. Anticipatory Grief and Traumatic Identity

As Caruth explains in *Unclaimed Experience*, "Trauma is broadly defined as an overpowering experience resulting from unexpected or catastrophic occurrences, characterized by a delayed and uncontrolled recurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive experiences in reaction to the incident." (2016:181) The statement suggests that while traumatic events may have occurred in the past, their effects might persist in the present. Consequently, the present contains the remnants of previous traumatic events. Anticipatory sorrow and trauma are closely interconnected in their effects. In trauma, the repercussions of the incident thereafter afflict the survivor; however, in anticipatory mourning before the traumatic event, namely the loss of a loved one, the consequences manifest immediately. The concept of anticipatory grief emerged in 1944, introduced by Erich Lindemann, a psychiatrist affiliated with Massachusetts General Hospital. His research focused on the profound emotional responses associated with trauma-related grief, particularly following a catastrophic fire in Boston, where numerous survivors suffering from severe burns received care at his facility. Lindemann characterized anticipatory mourning as a reaction to the impending threat of death, rather than to death itself. (Mosher, 2018; 115) Both of the concepts that were elaborated above share common features: both are traumatic and both influence the identity.

In the play, Marian functions as the unifying aspect of both concepts. Her ex-partner Adam's progressive deterioration affects her, leading to anticipatory grief throughout his extended dying process. She also recognizes the impact of her daughter's tragedy, namely the abrupt death of Evan. In other words, Marian remains affected by the suicide as she periodically feels Evan's presence. The following quote from the play illustrates Barbara's perception of Marian.

Barbara (To Marian): You had some very good times together.
You two. Come on.

(Short pause. They listen to the ticking from the monitor.
 No one knows what to say.)
 (Reaches and takes Marian's hand) This woman, Richard—you should know this about your sister—what she has been doing for her ex-husband. These past few months. I can't even begin to describe . . .
 She stopped everything to take care of Adam. Gave up everything . . .(334)

Throughout Adam's sickness, Marian remained by her ex-husband's side, diligently assisting in his recovery. Barbara recounts her experiences during this period to her brother Richard. Simultaneously, she is providing emotional support to Marian, which is her expectation.

Family members of a critically ill individual may endure profound anticipatory sadness, leading to emotional disarray, heightened alertness, impaired concentration or decision-making, and disturbances in sleep or food, resulting in fatigue. (Mosher, 2018: 118) What Mosher suggested is suitable for Marian. She is one of the leading ones to experience anticipatory grief; she has stopped everything related to her and her relatives just to help Adam. One might observe that she is caught up in a duality of sorrow, simultaneously grappling with a tumult of emotions that leaves her in a state of confusion. She truly relinquished all that she held for the ex-husband. Certainly, the outcomes of the sacrifices that Marian has made for her former spouse resonate with Judith Herman's observations regarding the complexities of "traumatic identity." Herman (2015) underscores the traumatic events' impact on identity in *Trauma and Recovery* as follows: "Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others... Trauma isolates" (214). In the Apple Family, Marian feels isolated since she relinquished all she has for the upcoming death of her ex-husband; she remains isolated emotionally and enveloped in the grief that is to come. Below is another quotation that pertains to anticipatory grief. Richard and Marian engage in a conversation, delving into the intricacies of Adam's present circumstances.

Richard (To Marian): Everything all right upstairs?
Marian (That was a dumb thing to say): No.
Richard: I meant, Marian . . .
Marian: Adam's sort of sleeping.
 (Then:)
 (To Richard) He's dying.
Richard: I know. (291)

In a certain sense, both individuals find themselves bracing for the inevitable demise of Adam that looms ahead. Yet, the tone of resignation in her voice reveals that she has begun the process of mourning even before the loss has fully unfolded. Her sense of self is transforming, burdened by the impending sorrow that stands ahead. In anticipatory grief, an individual lives in the present with sick loved ones while simultaneously mourning the individual as they were in the past and the future experiences they will never have. Anticipatory grieving may produce mental and physical symptoms

like those experienced following a death. (Mosher, 2018: 118) Marian finds herself covered in the profound emotions that accompany the loss of a beloved individual. Simultaneously, she grapples with the sorrow for the memories she once shared, now mixed with the bittersweet realization that such moments will no longer be part of her future. It appears that she is relinquishing a collective experience that constitutes an integral aspect of her identity.

She bids farewell to a fragment of her identity. She occupies a liminal space, crossing the roles of caregiver, mourner, and survivor. Her identity is shattered and disrupted while crossing over among the roles that she assumes.

Indeed, Adam is not the sole figure exerting influence over her sense of identity. Certainly, the loss of her daughter Evan has an important impact on her identity. If Marian had accessed her daughter Evan's phone, she could have lived. This feeling engendered disagreement inside Marian's domain. She not only remembered her sadness for her daughter, but the regret still endures. This observation underscored the significant impact of memory and guilt on Marian's identity. This specific memory of Marian and Evan results in Marian's self-reproach for not answering her daughter's call. This specific memory, unresponsive to her daughter's plea, endured as a haunting presence, impacting her present with the burden of reminiscence. Within the confines of this chapter, Marian finds herself consumed by the belief that she has caught a glimpse of her daughter. The narrative of Marian evokes a sense of realness, as the haunting presence of her daughter profoundly influences her account.

Marian: One day about four weeks ago, we'd just moved Adam here, to take care of him. I return from school, Adam I know is asleep. The aide, the one we had before Nadine, she comes downstairs, I pay her. It's a gray day. I don't turn the light on in here. I hear a voice, "Hi Mom," come from the kitchen. "You're back. Hi!" I heard it. And then I saw her. I saw her expression and her face, as she came out of the kitchen. And walked right past me. Right here. I swear to god—I could smell her. (347)

The persistent regret and unresolved trauma of her daughter's suicide deepened Marian's wound, and she started to feel her absence again. This occurrence is also exemplified by Roger Luckhurst (2008) in *Trauma Question* and he underscored the influence of the past on the present as follows: "The traumatic memory persists in a half-life, rather like a ghost, a haunting absent presence of another time in our time" (81). What Luckhurst suggests is compatible with the experience of Marian. Even though her daughter passed away, she is enveloped between real life and the haunting presence of a ghost. Marian's anticipatory grief for Adam triggers unresolved anguish for Evan, intertwining emotional timelines and disrupting Marian's sense of self. Freud, followed by Caruth and LaCapra, explains this phenomenon using the term *Nachträglichkeit*—the return of trauma in a deferred form, where earlier wounds find belated expression through new but related loss. Bistoien et

al. (2014) explain the term that “*Nachträglichkeit* presupposes that the effects of a potentially traumatic experience can be delayed by several years and require a second constituent moment in order to arise” (674). The event pertaining to Marian draws a striking parallel to what Freud articulated. The suppressed feelings surrounding her daughter’s death became apparent during the period of anticipatory grief experienced for her ex-husband. Her repressed trauma surfaced with the impending death of Adam. Furthermore, Marian’s symptoms of traumatic grief outlined by Prigerson et al. (1997), including “intrusive thoughts..., avoidance of reminders of him, feeling upset by memories of the loss and of her deceased husband, emotional numbness since the death, and upsetting visual hallucinations about her husband, could be viewed as symptoms” (1004).

Pregerson’s remark highlighted above serves as an illustration of a woman grieving for her deceased husband, while Marian mourns the loss of her daughter, thus experiencing similar symptoms of sorrow. She finds herself in a state of ambiguity, where the boundaries between past and present grief, as well as trauma, become indistinct. Furthermore, the emotional numbness, which constitutes one of the symptoms of the event, also traps Marian. She finds herself in a state of isolation, having relinquished all that once defined her. The situation signifies a profound emotional detachment as she fixates on the impending death of Adam.

According to Baddeley et al. (2010), it is essential for all individuals who are grieving to engage in discussions about their sorrow to facilitate a successful and healthy recovery from their loss (205). Those who find themselves unable to articulate their thoughts or convey their memories and sorrow are often unable to heal from the effects of their loss, resulting in a traumatic sense of self for the individual. In Marian’s case, a similar situation takes place, as she has suppressed her feelings regarding the loss of her daughter; the eruption of emotions has manifested itself in the context of Adam’s approaching death. For her, maintaining a robust sense of identity presents itself as a formidable challenge. Throughout the play, the discourse surrounding Evan’s memories fails to resonate, resulting in Marian’s silence. This silence, steeped in the weight of unarticulated recollections, leaves her feeling fragmented and shattered. She is not the sole individual experiencing fragmentation; rather, all family members are affected by this event as well. Baddeley et al. (2010) underscore this scenario in the following way: Silence regarding memories associated with the deceased person or the loss itself can play a role in preserving or reshaping the narrative identity of each individual, along with the collective narrative of the family (199). The experiences encountered have a significant impact on both individuals and their families.

Subsequently, it can be asserted that when the identities of individuals within a society are fragmented, this fragmentation inevitably echoes throughout the societal fabric. Eyerman et al. (2015) articulate this phenomenon by stating, “To transform individual suffering into collective trauma is cultural work” (XVIII). Although Marian’s narrative is predominantly personal and often unarticulated, her unique experience of trauma serves as a mirror to a more extensive cultural reality,

namely the construction of American identity. They are perpetually shaped by unresolved grief that traces back to their historical foundations. Barbara makes a further statement that bolsters Marian's situation. She elucidates the intricate journey of experiencing loss and the profound effects it bears upon the parent as follows:

Barbara: I've read that pretty much a majority of people who suddenly lose a loved one—especially mothers with children—they see them or smell them or feel their touch.
(Tim returns with batteries. He and Richard put them in the monitor. The sisters and Benjamin watch as:)
They think it's like how when you lose an arm or a leg, suddenly. And then you still feel it. It's the memory that is real. One feels the memory physically. It is more real than anything. There but it isn't there. I know that feeling. (353)

Roused from the depths of his tormenting hallucination, Marian's anguished search for her daughter resonates with the essence of an individual grappling with the profound consequences of a painful suffering. The time following a traumatic event can be particularly tough for those affected, as they find themselves grappling with the intrusion of dreams, hallucinations, and nightmares that weave themselves into the fabric of their daily existence. Kai Erikson (1995) delved into the profound experiences of individuals grappling with the consequences of traumatic events in his work *Notes on Trauma and Community*, exploring the intricate layers of their aftermath: "Above all, trauma involves a continual reliving of the original experience in daydreams and nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations, and in a compulsive seeking out of similar circumstances" (58). The disintegration of Marian's psyche may be viewed as a manifestation of his struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder. Throughout much of the play, Marian's harrowing ordeal remains largely unspoken, yet the presence of the ghost of his daughter serves as a powerful conduit for revealing the depths of his PTSD. This spectral figure invites the audience to confront the unspoken horrors that linger beneath the surface, hinting at a profound tragedy that has yet to be fully unveiled.

Prior to the moment of revelation, certain indicators, notably Mary's encounter with the apparition, suggest that she is grappling with the lingering aftermath of trauma. In essence, the apparition serves as a testament to Marry's status as a victim, one who struggles to navigate the profound anguish he endured during his formative years. This scenario exemplifies the phenomenon articulated by Judith Herman, wherein the individual who has suffered trauma may develop the capacity to overlook intense suffering, concealing their recollections within intricate layers of amnesia... (59) This act of repression manifests itself in the haunting imagery of the ghost that he envisions.

Marian's character is not formed solely by a singular traumatic incident but rather by a continuous and sorrowful narrative of awaiting grief, a journey marked by the weight of persistent loss. Her sense of self is not a fixed entity; rather, it exists in a state of anticipation, hauntingly elusive

and perpetually postponed. In the character of Marian, Nelson vividly illustrates the notion that grief is not merely a response to death; rather, it manifests as a profound psychological state that intertwines and distorts the boundaries of time, merging the past, present, and future into a singular, overwhelming experience. In this regard, the experience of trauma does not extend into or transcend the realm of loss. It comes before, shapes, and profoundly characterizes the essence of the self through its inherent foresight.

In her role as a maternal presence, Marian is not one to perceive the apparition; however, it is noteworthy that Adam's mother exhibits similar manifestations. With tears streaming down her face, Adam's mother engaged in a heartfelt conversation with Marian. The mother reveals that she has encountered an apparition resting upon Adam's bed. Nevertheless, upon asking Marian if she perceived such a presence, Marian responded with a firm assertion that she had never encountered a ghost in her lifetime. The conversation between Marian and Adam's mother unfolds as follows:

Marian: Adam's mom. That's what she was crying about, she said. A ghost hovering over Adam in his bed.

(Then:)

A girl . . .

(Then:)

(About the baby monitor) She was calling me to come and see her. To see "it."

Barbara: Did you? Did you see—"it"?

Marian: No. (347)

It is interesting to notice that Adam's mother displays similar manifestations; yet, Marian, in her function as a maternal presence, is not one to witness the apparition. During a really moving talk with Marian, Adam's mother's response to the sighting of the appearance holds significant weight, as she yearns for a companion to bear witness to this harrowing moment, desiring to convey the experience to Marian. According to Judith Heeman (2015), recovery from the trauma depends on the communal sharing and witnessing. She underscores this notion as follows:

The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. (214)

Consonant with this perspective, the solidarity of the group mitigates the isolation of trauma; it operates as a restorative force that re-establishes social bonds and provides essential affirmation to the sufferer. In the case of Adam's mother, her desire for the ghost's affirmation reflects a quest for communal witnessing. The mother's phrase "come and see" serves as a representation of collective observation. It illustrates the necessity for trauma to be communicated and acknowledged by others.

This demonstrates that anticipatory grief, especially in the context of familial relationships, is experienced not in isolation but as a shared phenomenon.

Another aspect worth discussing in the play is the ailment afflicting Adam. Adam, who remains mostly quiet throughout the play, serves as another significant figure in the narrative. His anticipatory grief intertwines with the earlier traumatic experience of losing his daughter. He is desperately waiting for his death. Despite the play's lack of explicit reflection, Adam's illness may have arisen following the death of her daughter. Her daughter's sense of loss may have left him sick, and with the impact of illness, grief becomes more visible. Mosher et al. (2018) suggests that "for youth with combined physical and mental health issues, such losses can disrupt multiple domains of life, including physical, social, psychological, educational, familial, and existential, among others" (111). Building upon the argument presented in Mosher's statement, Adam's existence has undergone significant transformation across various aspects of life; he has resumed smoking and has become engulfed in the depths of his sorrow. The following quote illustrates Adam's situation immediately after his daughter's death:

Marian (Explaining): When Adam learned he had the cancer . . .

Benjamin: What's today?

Jane (To Benjamin, pats his hand): Sh-sh . . .

Marian (Continues): You know he had started smoking again.

Richard: No.

Barbara: After Evan died.

Marian: He tried to hide it—

Barbara (As she goes through the papers): He started again. Just like Peter Jennings—after 9/11 . . . (300)

For him, navigating life without the presence of his daughter proved to be a formidable challenge. The demise of the daughter was not an ordinary occurrence; she took her life, which profoundly altered the father's existence, leaving him to navigate the echoes of her presence. Adam finds himself in a troubling predicament, one that seems to deteriorate with each passing day. The symptoms in question are intricately linked to the experience of grief, thereby revealing the bodily expressions of trauma. According to Luckhurst (2008), trauma embraces "identifiable somatic and psychosomatic disturbances" (1).

Therefore, Adam's grief extends beyond mere psychological or emotional traumatization; it significantly impacts his physical health, intensifying his vulnerability and ultimately contributing to his illness. But, by identifying the case of public figure Peter Jennings in relation to a different affective response to collective trauma after 9/11, Barbara has positioned Adam's experience of grief as situated within a larger cultural response to traumatic activation that holds personal grief as the simultaneously individual and collective loss and experience. Additionally, Adam's grief is anticipatory in another sense: his return to smoking and subsequent diagnosis of cancer imply that he is undergoing a complex grieving process, where his unresolved grief related to his daughter acts

as an impetus for self-destruction and aligns with Freud's notion of the death drive—the unconscious and repetitive tendency to engage in self-destructive behavior or harm as a means of coping with significant genocidal traumas. Adam's self-destructiveness shows us grief is anticipatory and has a vaporous and formless hold—as it is seen in Marian's emotional anticipatory mourning and Adam's ghost from his mother, who is dead. Adam's body is the final phase of the trauma; it concretizes the uncontained and unresolved trauma of losing a daughter within the body. It illustrates how anticipatory grief is not a purely forward-looking interpretation; it often loops back so that past trauma is exerting its force on present behavior and ultimately future action.



CONCLUSION

To the best of my knowledge, this dissertation is the first to systematically synthesize trauma theory and hauntology to analyze the construction of “traumatic identity” in Richard Nelson’s *The Apple Family: Scenes from Life in the Country* (2014). This thesis has undertaken a comprehensive examination of Richard Nelson’s *The Apple Family* cycle: *That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), *Sweet and Sad* (2011), *Sorry* (2012), and *Regular Singing* (2013) to demonstrate how contemporary American identity is constructed not through linear progression, but through the cyclical recurrence of unresolved history. By utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Jacques Derrida’s hauntology, Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory, Freud’s defense mechanisms and, Laurent Berlant’s concept of cruel optimism, this study establishes that the characters in Nelson’s quartet do not merely experience history; they are constituted by it.

Each chapter has considered various types of “specters: the “specters” of family, the specters of elections, the “specters” of 9/11, and the “specters” of the JFK assassination. The thesis has demonstrated the ways in which “specters” induce “traumatic identities.” Each play encompasses a traumatic incident, or several “specters,” at its core and intermittently alludes to prior traumas. As exemplified across the chapters the visibility of “traumatic identities” varies in prominence across the spectrum of each play within the frame of “specters.” Therefore, each play embodies the “specters” of its time, emphasizing historical, political, and social contexts. This study has examined each play for the presence of historical “specters,” emphasizing their influence on the formation of traumatic identity via a hauntological lens within the context of trauma and psychoanalytic theory.

Through the analysis of the four plays, this thesis has moved beyond a surface level reading of domestic realism to uncover a theatre of spectrality. The dining table in Rhinebeck, New York, serves as a microcosm for a nation that is haunted by its own unfulfilled promises. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the “specter” in Nelson’s work is not a supernatural entity but a socio-political force. It is the silence of Uncle Benjamin, the frantic hopefulness of Richard, the somatic deterioration of Adam, and the anticipatory grief of Marian. These figures collectively illustrate that in the post-9/11 landscape, the boundaries between the personal psyche and the political state have dissolved. To be an individual in this context is to be a vessel for the collective traumas of the nation.

In the first play of the quartet, *That Hopey Changey Thing* (2010), the characters have reflected more general concerns about identity and personal and national issues in their discussions of political issues. The play has explored a thematic assessment of how the past has continued to influence the

present, revolving around the interrelationship between personal, familial, and political issues. The past of individuals has consistently influenced their present, demonstrating that they have been unable to break their connections to it. The past and the memories of the characters have “specters” that disrupt their current existence.

This chapter has explored the implications of Freudian psychoanalytic theory in understanding the dynamics of trauma as depicted in the play. It has highlighted how the interplay between the id, ego, and superego, along with the conscious and unconscious mind, has shaped the characters’ responses to their traumatic experiences. Repression, denial, and displacement are employed to navigate emotional struggles and maintain stability amidst unresolved tensions. By examining these psychological constructs, it becomes evident that the characters’ identities are fragmented due to their inability to confront their traumas directly.

In the second play of the quartet, *Sweet and Sad* (2011), the thesis has shifted its focus to the “specters” of 9/11 on the tenth anniversary of the attacks. Utilizing Maurice Halbwachs’s concept of collective memory, this chapter has emphasized its relationship with individual memory. The thesis has argued that even though 9/11 is a national event, its collective weight has influenced the construction of “traumatic identity” for the individual. The thesis has concluded that collective memories surpass personal experiences, and the “specters” of 9/11 remain connected to the individuals they haunt in the present. This influence has extended not only to the individuals themselves but also to the subsequent generations.

To map this influence, Titchener’s concept of a typology for multigenerational relationships has been used to show how “specters” are transmitted. These influences have been categorized as intergenerational transmission, physical transmission, cultural transmission, and transgenerational transmission. A pivotal example of cultural transmission analyzed in this chapter has been Barbara’s assignment of a Walt Whitman poem to her students. Nelson has chosen Whitman to show how collective awareness evolved from the Civil War to 9/11. From the standpoint of hauntology, this literary transmission has revealed the past inside the present; Whitman’s poetry acts as an outlet linking the past to the present. This part concludes that “traumatic identity” is intergenerational; it is passed down not through genetic code, but through the silence at the dinner table and the spectral presence of the unmentioned dead.

Based on D’Cruz and Fisher’s theories on identity, this chapter has emphasized that a sense of “pure identity” is impossible because past experiences permeate the present, disrupting the linearity of time. Therefore, 9/11 has been a persistent “specter” throughout the play. The analysis of Barbara’s students has demonstrated that they are haunted by events they did not witness directly, experiencing the impact through transmission or collective memory. This section concludes that traumatic identity

is intergenerational; it is passed down not through genetic code, but through the silence at the dinner table and the spectral presence of the unmentioned dead.

In the third play in the quartet, *Sorry* (2012), the narrative unfolds over the two hours before the election. I propose that the family is afflicted by the election, and their disillusionment is evident in the quartet's first play. It reemerges and influences their present circumstances. Their only recourse is to forget, which explains the phenomenon of political amnesia. Benjamin, as the family's uncle, accepts the concept of forgetfulness. Since the beginning of the quartet, he has been shown as a guy suffering from forgetfulness, and in this chapter, I have highlighted his amnesia from another perspective. Benjamin encapsulates the spirit of history and has the capacity to inspire others around him, but he inadvertently neglects the past. Although he has served as a path between the past and the present, he, like Hamlet, as stated in *Specters of Marx*, was reluctant to assume his responsibilities. Benjamin has transformed into a "specter" of passive knowledge.

This chapter has integrated Laurent Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" with the framework of hauntology. The analysis of Jane's conversation regarding the voting process which she likens to "recycling" has emphasized the act of repetition without resolution. Hauntology here has represented the lingering effects of unfulfilled political ambitions, while "cruel optimism" has reflected a painful commitment to a system that repeatedly fails to deliver on its promise of virtue. This part has concluded that a complicated interaction arises between these two forces, reflecting a politically and culturally tense terrain that induces "traumatic identities." Furthermore, this chapter has employed Cathy Caruth's concept of "belatedness." This notion has been essential for a thorough understanding of *Sorry*, as the political failures and widespread cynicism of the Apple family reflect the disillusionment of earlier generations without closure. The play has suggested that American democracy fundamentally resembles a haunted house, where the ghosts of past political failures evoke a deep feeling of disenchantment.

Finally, I have utilized Jenny Edkins's concept of "betrayal of trust" to illustrate the character of Billy. Billy's disappointment in the face of both society and family has highlighted the issue of existential division. The family structure, serving as a symbolic representation of political institutions, has misled its members. This profound betrayal has altered Billy's identity, rendering him existentially estranged and questioning his conception of his prospective self.

The last play of the quartet, *Regular Singing* (2013), situates the familiar family dinner against the 50th anniversary of the JFK assassination. This chapter has focused on the "specters" of the JFK Assassination and the familial "specter" of Adam's mortality. The analysis has employed Marianne Hirsch's notion of "post memory" to show how historical tragedies echo across time. Although Barbara, Richard, and Tim did not all live through the assassination with the same maturity, they have been affected by it. The play has demonstrated that identity formation extends beyond

individual experiences; it is intimately interwoven with inherited narratives and legendary stories. The Apple family's repeated presence at this event has suggested that their collective identity is constructed around an "empty space" or absence and the trauma of 1963 serves as a psychological imprint that shapes identity via recurrence.

Accordingly, using Caruth's framework, it may be seen that the trauma of JFK's killing constituted not just a national split but also a psychological imprint that shapes identity via recurrence. In addition to the political backdrop, the final play of the quartet showcases the familial "specters" of Adam and Marian. Crucially, this chapter has unveiled the intersection of "anticipatory grief" and "traumatic identity" through the characters of Marian and Adam. Marian's grief has been doubled by the sickness of her ex-husband and the suicide of her daughter, Evan. Her self-identity has been evolving, weighed down by the looming grief that lies ahead. The thesis argued that Adam's physical body serves as the somatic archive of the quartet's trauma. His return to smoking and subsequent cancer have been interpreted not merely as medical facts, but as the biological manifestation of the "death drive." In the end, Marian and Adam have contended with the grief for memories previously experienced, now intertwined with the poignant acknowledgment that such times will no longer appear in the future.

This thesis has employed the concept of "traumatic identity" to mean the identity pervaded by spectral returns. This dissertation refines the application of both trauma theory and hauntology in theatre studies. Unlike traditional models that often separate the individual psyche from the political state, this study demonstrates that identity is constructed at their spectral intersection. By resituating the "specter" not as a supernatural intrusion but as a constitutive element of daily life, the research expands the scope of hauntology to the socio-political. Simultaneously, it redefines trauma not as a singular event to be overcome, but as a recurring historical condition that shapes the present. *The Apple Family* cycle suggests that the only way to endure this condition is to acknowledge the ghosts at the table, accepting that in the landscape of contemporary America, the past is never truly dead; it is merely waiting to be performed again.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Tuğçe Kaptan Tabatabaeimalazi graduated as the valedictorian (ranking first) from the Faculty of Letters at Karadeniz Technical University in 2013, where she enriched her undergraduate experience through an Erasmus exchange at Università Degli Studi di Salerno in Italy. She subsequently earned her master's degree from Istanbul University in 2019, during which she completed another Erasmus exchange at Universidad de Coruña in Spain; her master's thesis explored the fragmentation of the self in contemporary plays. Currently, she is advancing her academic journey as a Ph.D. candidate in English Language and Literature at Karadeniz Technical University. Professionally, she serves as an English instructor at the Istanbul University-Cerrahpaşa School of Foreign Languages, where she leads the material development unit to enhance curriculum flow. Her career within the institution is marked by significant leadership experience, including serving as Vice Director and Head of Curriculum from 2020 to 2022, and as Erasmus Coordinator from 2017 to 2020. Her academic contributions also extend to international collaboration, highlighted by her Staff Teaching Mobility in Poland and her role as Assistant Editor for the *International Journal of Media, Culture, and Literature*. She possesses a diverse linguistic background; alongside her proficiency in Turkish and English, she studied French at the university level, German in high school, and acquired familiarity with Spanish and Italian during her studies abroad.