

**An Unsettling Presence:
Indigenous Spectres in Settler Ghostlore on Coast Salish Territories**

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Acknowledgments

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Part I. Introductions

To be haunted and to write from that location . . . is not a methodology or a consciousness you can simply adopt or adapt as a set of rules or an identity. . . . Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located.

– Avery Gordon

Introducing the Researcher

I would like to present this project's inception as an unbounded process of being and becoming. This process encompasses the entirety of my life's experiences and reaches beyond to the events and relationships which have made my presence possible. Too often the products of academic research present themselves as spontaneously generated vessels of objective facts. Behind every text there is a human being with memories, emotions, and visions—behind every human being there is an entire world of complex and dynamic relationships. For this reason, I feel compelled to locate my work within the web of relations that has brought me to this place and made me who I am. Given the supernatural object of my inquiry, perhaps I'll begin with a ghost story of my own:

A long, long time ago, on an island far, far away, my distant British ancestors suffered an immense trauma from which subsequent generations have failed to entirely heal. We forgot our responsibilities to the lands that nurtured us and ate up all that our motherlands could offer, but we were not satiated. We began to roam the earth in search of ever more sustenance. When we encountered other peoples, we made excuses to justify why we were more entitled to their lands than they and divined all sorts of elaborate tricks to guarantee access to what they held dear. Our hosts were more than willing to share, but sharing would not suffice for my hungry ancestors. Instead, we adopted a tactic of dispossessing the peoples we met from the lands we so

coveted. However, my ancestors' confused logic failed to recognize that the relationships between Indigenous Peoples and their homelands are much more difficult to break than the binds of property ownership.

I am the child of these hungry ghosts. This is the story that makes me possible, and I've been wrestling with these ravenous revenants since I first stepped into this world. I was born the daughter of Brian Chewter and Kim Hollinshead on the territories of the Haudenosaunee of Grand River and the Mississaugas of New Credit. Iroquois Heights, Mohawk Road, Chedoke Golf Course . . . these are some of the names of landmarks in and around which I was raised. For most of my early life these names appeared arbitrary, devoid of meaning. As I grew, they became mysterious clues suggestive of a history I could not fully grasp nor understand my connection to. My family was not partial to sentimental musings about the past or our position on this continent. Perhaps it was because of this mystery, a need to locate myself in the context of all that came before, that I became enthralled with history.

Seeking refuge from the chaotic sibling dynamics of my three sisters, I spent a great deal of time down the street in the home of my best friend, Sara. Sara lived with her mother, grandmother, and aunt. Sara went to big parties called powwows, Sara's family told a lot of strange stories, and they had mysterious cards that were sometimes left on the kitchen counter. Sara's mom and grandma were "Indian"; Sara didn't have a card, but grandma said she was "Indian" too, regardless. Lacking any real grasp of temporality or place, I didn't really understand what any of that meant—more cryptic allusions to a world just beyond my reach.

My family had a trailer near Pigeon Lake that we used to go to on weekends and for good chunks of the summer season. Much to my mother's distress, I used to go wandering alone in the woods behind our trailer. I harboured a sneaking suspicion that something was hidden in those

woods and that I would find out what if I only spent enough time there. I remember feeling the same way about the old brick houses on our street in Hamilton and the rail line that ran behind them. Sara's mother and grandmother were big fans of ghost stories, magic, and horror films—naturally, Sara and I became obsessed with the paranormal. We boldly declared our intentions to become paranormal investigators when we grew up: we were going to get to the bottom of all these funny feelings we felt around old buildings and in the woods. As an adult, I have come to understand our quest to investigate and summon the mysterious forces we sensed all around us as a longing to reach out to the spirits of the land and our ancestors, whom we instinctively felt the presence of but had not learned how to listen to.

Many years later, I entered university as a mature student with the intention of analyzing the dynamics of settler-colonial power in Canada in the hopes that this might better inform a decolonizing praxis. I soon discovered that the halls of the academy harboured their own resident spectres—their unsettling presence looming over me in the archives as I skimmed through microfilms of colonial records, peering out at me from the pages of dusty books in the library's towering stacks. A deafening chorus of disembodied whispers rose to meet my insubordinate prodding: “Beware, ungrateful daughter of Empire, knowledge is our domain!”

Anti-colonial scholars around the globe have elucidated the connection between knowledge-production and the colonial enterprise.¹ Within the context of settler colonialism, academic institutions in the colonies came to represent bastions of colonial authority over what constituted valid knowledge and intellectual inquiry. I aim for my work as a researcher to challenge this colonizing intellectual tradition. By engaging the topic of ghosts as real and capable of acting on the living, I seek to undermine the domination of empiricism and positivism

¹ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012).

² Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood

in the academy. I endeavour to continually ground my approaches in Indigenous-generated theory to counter the tendency among settler academics to dismiss the brilliance of Indigenous thought in favour of a routine handful of European male philosophers. Taking inspiration from Shawn Wilson's assertion that "research is ceremony"—that is, it should aim to "build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves"²—my research is guided by an overarching mission to create enchanted intellectual spaces where Indigenous and settler academics can meet to collectively theorize new ways of being together on these lands in harmony with its myriad spirits.

This project, as a process of becoming, has been in the making since a time long before my physical body entered this world. It gained momentum in the clashes between Sara's ancestors and my own; through our friendship, this project began to take form as a shared quest to summon the spirits of those ancestors. The colonial ghosts I encountered holed up in the academy's fortifications further inspired the project's approach as a challenge to epistemological hegemony. The task of a humanities scholar has never been to expose objective and static truths of human nature; rather, it is to leverage our subjective positionality towards the invention and transformation of dynamic lenses for understanding our relational existence on this planet. Emerging from the web of relations described above, this project endeavors to offer a decolonizing lens through the re-enchantment of settler history and society.

Introducing the Project

This project is not an exorcism, it is a beckoning. In this age of "reconciliation," urgings to "move on" and "put the past behind us" are commonplace in Canadian discourse. It is my

² Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 11.

contention that such an approach only serves to reinforce the settler-colonial project through an erasure of the Canadian state's violent colonial heritage. By contrast, I argue that Euro-descended settlers must learn to accept a haunted existence as part of our identity—to acknowledge that we are continually at risk of possession by those hungry ghosts that drove our ancestors across the globe in search of evermore wealth and power. Reckoning with *our own* revenants means keeping them in sight—telling the stories that make 'us' possible and recognizing the influence of our pasts in our presents. It also means speaking to them—interrogating their assumptions, contesting their motivations, and deconstructing their desolation. Ultimately, through recognizing the ongoing presence of our own ancestors, we might begin to acknowledge and respect the relationship between the Indigenous spirits of this land and their descendants. I consider such recognition and respect to be an essential precondition to any meaningful renegotiation of the terms for our continued residence on stolen lands. Decolonizing the land means returning jurisdictional authority to those relationships through territorial repatriation to its original kinsfolk and stewards. The academy must respond by embracing those relationships as legitimate sources of knowledge.

Settler ghostlore is rife with tales of spectral visitations by ghosts marked as Indigenous by the witness. Many of these accounts are found in written collections with titles like "True Canadian Ghost Stories," thereby claiming the Indigenous ghost as part of a national heritage. These collections are researched, compiled, and narrated from within a settler-centric paradigm that assimilates the figure of the Indigenous ghost to suggest the fulfillment of colonial desires for self-indigenization. Freud's concept of *unheimlich* is usually translated as "uncanny" and taken to imply something amiss or not as it should be.³ This term has been leveraged by academics of ghostlore to describe the affective impact of spectral visitations. I contend that in

³ Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" trans. Alix Strachey, *Imago*, 1919, web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf.

the settler-colonial context, “uncanny” is not an appropriate adjective for Indigenous ghosts as it naturalizes settler presence while implying the un-belonging of the spectre. Freud’s original essay instructed us that “an uncanny experience occurs either when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed.”⁴ Freud’s obvious subscription to a stadial model of human societies and his conflation of spirit belief with infantile complexes that should be “surmounted” drives home the inappropriateness of this term for discussing Indigenous ghosts. It is my hope that this project will begin to shift settler feelings about their experiences with Indigenous ghosts to be in line with the more literal translation of *unheimlich* as “un-homely.” Indigenous spirits are very much where they should be, it is the settler witness who is out-of-place. Let these visitations be a reminder to settlers: never get so comfortable in someone else’s home that you forget you are a guest—and an uninvited one at that. Throughout this paper I employ an intentional discursive shift from a language of uncanniness to one of “unsettling.”

The choice of topic and design of this research project are indebted to a rich tradition of Indigenous-generated theory regarding decolonizing research practices. Universities and researchers have historically been complicit and active agents in the process of colonization. Imperialism is not only a process of violent physical resource expropriation, it is also a discursive field of knowledge.⁵ The negation of alternative ways of knowing and being is a critical part of colonial expansion onto the lands and into the minds of those marked as Others. Positivism, then, is a fundamentally colonizing approach to knowledge.⁶ Unfortunately, despite

⁴ Freud, 17.

⁵ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 23.

⁶ Debbie H. Martin, “Two-Eyed Seeing: A Framework for Understanding Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Approaches to Indigenous Health Research,” *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research Archive* 44, no. 2 (2012), <http://cjunr.archive.mcgill.ca/article/view/2348>.

decades of Indigenous and critical theorists interrogating the positivist paradigm, academia remains a hostile place for alternative ways of knowing and being.

This project seeks to break with the rules of the “Western cultural archive” in order to make space for Indigenous ways of knowing, inclusive of spirituality, within academic discourse.⁷ The choice of Indigenous ghosts as the topic of inquiry strategically challenges colonial constructions of space, time, distance, and truth. Ghosts, by definition, break with any conception of time and space as linear, as well as with empiricist constructions of reality as that which possesses measurable, concrete physicality. Experiences with ghosts are phenomena that link many diverse human cultures, although each culture has its own way of interpreting such experiences. No one will deny that Europeans have a long history of haunting; however, since the so-called Scientific Revolution ghostly phenomena have become increasingly overlooked as a serious topic of inquiry within Western academic institutions. There is a glaring disjuncture between the ongoing proliferation of ghostly experiences and the unwillingness of academics to talk about ghosts in non-metaphorical or pathologizing ways.⁸ I interpret this self-denial regarding the significant place of ghosts in European and Euro-descended cultures to be reflective of a larger process of disenchantment. Disenchantment renders relations into things and thus enables extractive, use-centered mentalities devoid of respect, reciprocity, and accountability. Of the few settler academics to broach the topic of Indigenous ghosts in settler ghostlore, the majority have treated the ghost either metaphorically as a manifestation of settler guilt, or else as a collective hallucination functioning to erase living Indigenous peoples from the psychological landscape of the settler state. This paper will diverge from this trend by granting the ghost ontological substance and interrogating the self-referential ways that settler witnesses

⁷ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 35.

⁸ Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Ann Grider, and Jeannie B. Thomas, *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2007), 8.

and commentators have interpreted encounters with Indigenous ghosts. Decolonization is not a metaphor, and neither are ghosts.⁹

Reviewing the Literature

In 1993, Jacques Derrida delivered a series of lectures on the continuing relevance of Marx's thought in contemporary theory. These lectures were published in a book titled *Specters of Marx*, ushering in what has been referred to as the "spectral turn" in postmodern, deconstructivist theory.¹⁰ Derrida's "hauntology" suggested an ontological shift towards the recognition of ever-present, unacknowledged influences embedded within that which is. In other words, that which is there is always influenced by that which is not there—absences with haunting presence. Deconstruction, therefore, is an attempt to get at these "ghosts," understanding that each unspoken influence is itself haunted by yet another. Literary theorists enthusiastically embraced Derrida's hauntology, combining it with Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny—"something familiar which has been repressed"—to discuss the role of ghosts in literature.¹¹

Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* brought the spectral turn to social theory, urging sociologists to treat the phenomena of ghosts and

⁹ Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Tony E. Adams, Carolyn Ellis, and Stacey Holman Jones (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 639–58, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315427812.ch33>; Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹¹ See Cheryl McEwan, "A Very Modern Ghost: Postcolonialism and the Politics of Enchantment," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 29–46, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d460t>; Emilie Cameron, "Indigenous Spectrality and the Politics of Postcolonial Ghost Stories," *Cultural Geographies* 15, no. 3 (July 2008): 383–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474008091334>; Stef Craps, "Learning to Live With Ghosts: Postcolonial Haunting and Mid-Mourning in David Dabydeen's 'Turner' and Fred D'Aguiar's Feeding the Ghosts," *Callaloo* 33, no. 2 (July 3, 2010): 467–75, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.0.0651>; Warren Cariou, "Haunted Prairie: Aboriginal 'Ghosts' and the Spectres of Settlement," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (May 2006): 727–34, <https://doi.org/10.1353/utq.2006.0245>.

hauntings as significant elements of modernity.¹² Seeking out the ghostly—those alternative experiences and knowledges of reality that are dismissed in dominant academic discourse—was presented as a method for generating “a counter-memory for the future.”¹³ Taken together, the spectral theories of Freud, Derrida, and Gordon set the stage for a successive proliferation of the “ghost” as a metaphor in postmodern theory from the late nineties to the present.¹⁴

Academic writing addressing the phenomena of Indigenous “ghosts”¹⁵ in North American settler society is relatively sparse in comparison to the much broader spectral tradition outlined above. Nevertheless, in reviewing the available materials I have been able to trace a genealogy of the topic as it has developed in the settler-colonial context of Turtle Island. Over the last twenty years, writings about Indigenous ghosts have ranged from settler-centric approaches in literary studies and cultural history, to radical deployments of spectral discourse in Indigenous theory and art. Considering the influence of the spectral turn in literary theory, it is not surprising that the first academic writings to investigate the prevalence of Indigenous spectres in settler ghost stories dealt primarily with the trope of the “Indian ghost” in the North American literary tradition.

These early works did not engage with reported experiences of haunting, rather, they interrogated fictional renditions of “Indian ghosts” in American gothic literature. Renée Bergman’s *The National Uncanny*—the first monograph published in the field—argued that the “Indian ghost” trope served as a form of discursive removal. Settler authors wrote stories that erased living Indigenous peoples and converted them into ghosts in the American literary

¹² Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

¹³ Gordon, 22.

¹⁴ Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, eds., *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

¹⁵ I retain quotation marks around the term “ghost” here to indicate metaphorical usage.

imagination.¹⁶ Bergman also highlighted the contradictory roles of the “Indian ghost” in the formation of American subjecthood. As a reminder of the original sin of genocide, the “Indian ghost” was a source of anxiety that challenged the moral legitimacy of settler society—but it also provided a comforting illusion that the settler-colonial project was complete and irreversible.

Bergland’s conclusions regarding the literary trope were enthusiastically recycled by a handful of academics in Canada. Some of these works pushed beyond the realm of fiction to deconstruct the use of ghostly metaphors in non-fiction writings by settlers about Indigenous peoples. Many of these early studies were settler-centric, written by settler authors, within a Western ontological framework that precluded treating ghost stories as anything other than “stories” in the literary sense. Two exceptions to this literary focus are Christine Nilsen’s 2005 MA Thesis at the University of Victoria, *Possessing Eden*, and Kathryn Troy’s *The Specter of the Indian*.¹⁷ While remaining firmly planted within an approach that privileged settler subjecthood, these academic works did dare to engage with settler reports of real-life paranormal experiences involving Indigenous ghosts. Heavily influenced by Bergman’s work, Nilsen’s thesis interpreted such ghostlore to be an alternative form of popular history telling by which settlers connected themselves to place through a self-indigenizing fictive kinship.¹⁸ Troy explored how the Indigenous spectres that appeared to nineteenth-century Spiritualists contributed to altered conceptualizations of race, gender, and morality.¹⁹ In all the studies discussed thus far, you will notice that the settler subject remains the constant point of reference—the Indigenous ghost is interpreted to exist through and for the settler.

¹⁶ Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, Reencounters with Colonialism: New Perspectives on the Americas (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000).

¹⁷ Christina Esther Nilsen, “Possessing Eden: Victoria’s Ghosts” (MA Thesis, University of Victoria, 2005), <https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/845>; Kathryn Troy, *The Specter of the Indian: Race, Gender, and Ghosts in American Séances, 1848-1890* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017).

¹⁸ Nilsen, “Possessing Eden.”

¹⁹ Troy, *The Specter of the Indian*.

One of the most obvious turning points for this trend is Métis author Warren Cariou's 2006 essay "Haunted Prairie: Aboriginal Ghosts and the Spectre of Settlement." While Cariou's piece remains anchored in literary scholarship, he observes that Indigenous authors approach ghosts in an entirely different way. While the deployment of Indigenous ghosts in settler literature has the capacity to produce unsettling effects in settler readers, "the question remains whether such uncanny fear can be productive in any way, or whether it creates only a horrified sense of inevitability, a passive conviction that colonial sins will be punished, and therefore it is not necessary to work toward reconciliation" with the living.²⁰ By contrast, the spirits in Indigenous literature often call for present-day redress, healing, or ceremony for their descendants. After all, Cariou notes, Indigenous peoples have no reason to find Indigenous ghosts scary. Indigenous skeletons and spirits are not uncannily out-of-place remnants of vanquished peoples, they belong to the land and to living cultures and descendants. In a recent compilation titled *Everyday Acts of Resurgence*, Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua reflects upon how settler pop-culture had taught her to fear the ghosts of her ancestors: "Colonial violence aims to sever relationships. My own paralyzing fearfulness of ghosts and the alienation that caused between me and my ancestors is just one example of the violence that colonialism does to our spirits and, consequently, to our families and nations."²¹ Reflections like these point to the harm latent in limiting academic discourse around Indigenous ghosts to damage-centered narratives of settler fear and erasures of Indigeneity.

²⁰ Cariou, "Haunted Prairie."

²¹ Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, "Dreaming Is an Everyday Act of Resurgence," in *Everyday Acts of Resurgence: People, Places, Practices*, ed. Jeff Corntassel et al. (Olympia: Daykeeper Press, 2018), 83.

Part II. The Current Situation of Indigenous Ghosts in Settler Ghostlore

Before we can begin to collectively theorize a decolonizing discourse of Indigenous ghosts, we must first analyze the current trends within the ghostlore of settler society. The purpose of the present paper is to conduct such an analysis from within a particular spatialized context. As Judith Richardson has argued, hauntings are best examined from the ground up—situating the ghost in concrete relationships to place and to particular communities.²² In the case of an Indigenous ghost, this relationship to place is especially critical. Being a resident on the unceded territories of the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, I have grounded my research in the ghostlore of south-east Vancouver Island and several neighbouring Gulf Islands. This region has a disproportionately rich tradition of ghostlore for its size, a feature frequently attributed to its abundance of Indigenous burial sites and other sacred locations.²³ In the Victoria region, many of the area's small islands were used for interring the remains of ancestors. In addition to these, the region was once spotted with thousands of burial mounds, many of which were destroyed in the first decades of settlement. A veritable necropolis at Cadboro Bay is reported to have contained over two hundred such burial mounds.²⁴ The abundance of burial sites in the region has caused some to refer to Victoria as a “mortuary landscape.”²⁵ Given the settler fascination with “Indian burial grounds,” it is no small wonder that half of the stories encountered in my research were premised upon the desecration or accidental discovery of

²² Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4.

²³ John D. Adams, *Ghosts and Legends of Bastion Square* (Victoria: Discover the Past, 2002), 11; Ian Gibbs, *Victoria's Most Haunted: Ghost Stories from BC's Historic Capital City* (Victoria: Touchwood Editions, 2017), 2; Robin Skelton and Jean Kozocari, *A Gathering of Ghosts: Hauntings and Exorcisms from the Personal Casebook of Robin Skelton and Jean Kozocari*. (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), 81.

²⁴ Grant Keddie, “Fortified Defensive Sites and Burial Cairns of the Songhees Indians,” *The Midden* 16, no. 4 (Fall 1984): 8.

²⁵ Darcy Mathews, “Burial Cairns and Mounds: An Ancient Landscape of the Dead,” in *Victoria Underfoot: Excavating a City's Secrets*, ed. Brenda Clark, Nicholas Russell, and Nicole Kilburn (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2008), 62.

Indigenous remains. What the “Indian burial ground” trope overlooks, however, is that the presence or absence of bones does not delineate the limits of sacred space. Every inch of these lands is infused with millennia of Coast Salish ancestors who have emerged from and returned to these soils. This is a landscape thick with memories, and their reverberations can, on occasion, rupture the conceptual divides of present, past, and future in the unsettling form of a ghost.

To complete this analysis, I have relied primarily upon two forms of textual documents: popular ghost story compilations and, when available, historical newspaper articles reporting ghostly encounters. While the scope of this thesis has limited my ability to engage directly with the oral culture of settler ghost stories, the texts I have used are derived from this oral tradition. I have found that, typically, the authors of ghost story compilations draw upon three types of sources when generating their written account of a haunting. First, they will feel around in the local lore for well-known stories of haunted places. These are usually second- or third-hand accounts with many variants and fluctuations over time, but the endurance and popularity of these stories testifies to their significance within a particular community. The haunted spaces uncovered in these stories often serve as gateways into the second type of source: newspaper articles, journal entries, and other written accounts of eerie experiences connected to a particular site. Finally—and perhaps most intriguing of all—once the work of these authors becomes known in a community, they will often be sought out by individuals who have had first-hand experiences of ghostly phenomena and who wish to share their stories. The experience of being sought out is reported by the authors of every compilation used for this research. This urge to divulge unexplainable experiences to a receptive stranger reveals the cathartic role this sort of compiling work can have for individuals who feel alienated and stigmatized within our supposedly “rational” society. Interestingly, of the sixteen stories of Indigenous ghost sightings

considered for this thesis, ten of those stories were first-hand experiences that had been shared with the authors. It is my contention that the intimate nature of these first-hand experiences greatly increases the potential for meaningful cross-cultural communication, as will be argued in the concluding section of this thesis. For now, however, we must consider how the process of narrativization undertaken by the compiling author may impact the resulting interpretation and presentation of these experiences with Indigenous ghosts.

As discussed in the literature review portion of this paper, most of the extant scholarly writings about Indigenous ghosts have been confined to its deployment as a character trope and plot device in settler literature. In my research, I have found that settler ghostlore displays many of the same colonial tendencies that have been described in the literary realm. I contend that the representation of the Indigenous ghost in settler cultural production has had a profound effect on how settlers perceive and interpret direct experiences with what they identify to be Indigenous ghosts. Furthermore, when these experiences are collected and collated into written ghostlore compilations, the authors of such works either intentionally or unwittingly recreate the problematic literary tendencies in the process of narrativizing these experiences. The following paragraphs will analyze examples from local ghostlore in light of previous scholarly work about the function of the Indigenous ghost in settler literature. I have found these stories to exhibit three previously identified discursive qualities that further the settler-colonial project. Settler stories about Indigenous ghosts often (1) express anxieties about the “unfinished business” of colonialism; (2) obfuscate the living presence of contemporary Indigenous peoples; and (3) are frequently leveraged to suggest a fictive kinship that naturalizes settler presence on colonized lands.

Discursive Erasure

In 2000, Renée Bergland published the first monograph to investigate the proliferation of Indigenous ghosts in the literature of the United States. His argument—that “first and foremost, the ghosting of Indians is a technique of removal”²⁶—proved highly influential to subsequent scholars writing about Indigenous ghosts. According to Bergland, the American national consciousness is constituted through such a haunting:

Native American ghosts haunt American literature because the American nation is compelled to return again and again to an encounter that makes it both sorry and happy, a defiled grave upon which it must continually rebuild the American subject.²⁷

Bergland’s thesis is reinforced by the obvious fixation settlers have upon Indigenous remains and burial sites. Six of the stories analyzed for this project involved either the discovery of Indigenous human remains or hauntings in the vicinity of former burial sites. A common trend in these sorts of stories is the framing of the remains as belonging to an ancient and irretrievable past—or at least to a time well before the arrival of Europeans. In this move, such narrativizations naturalize the supposed disappearance of Indigenous peoples from the landscape—portrayed as a process of natural and inevitable sublimation of Indigenous bodies into the landscape, where they ought to remain undisturbed. Only one of these stories mentioned the response of contemporary descendants to the desecration of their ancestors resting places.²⁸ In all other accounts, no mention is made of living descendent communities.

The old Craigflower Manor and Schoolhouse along the gorge waterway in Victoria is the location of one such story. In September of 1918, several workers “accidentally disturbed the ancient grave of an Indian.” The author writes that the skeleton was “very brown and old-

²⁶ Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 4.

²⁷ Bergland, 23.

²⁸ Gibbs, *Victoria’s Most Haunted*, 8.

looking.”²⁹ The remains of this Indigenous person are immediately considered to belong to so distant a past as to negate any sense of kinship to the living. As such, no consideration is given to alerting the living Lekwungen members of the family whose village site had been located in the vicinity. Instead, the groundskeeper places the remains in a box in his shed so that his amateur anatomist daughter can amuse herself with them. This ancestor’s body is rendered both a curiosity and an object of research. After experiencing several disturbing and unexplainable incidents in the days following, the groundskeeper resolves to rebury the skeleton in an unidentified spot. According to Robert Belyk, the author of the compilation in which this story appears, there have been several other reports of strange occurrences in the area. He postulates that “one explanation may be that a number of ancient remains had been disturbed there.” Belyk tells us that the Craigflower School is built on a “large Indian burial ground,” pointing to a *Victoria Daily Times* article from 1911 that reports the discovery of several skulls and arrowheads.³⁰ Once again, the possibility of any connection to living communities is ignored.

In her 2005 MA thesis for the University of Victoria, Christina Nilsen analyzes the Craigflower Schoolhouse haunting in light of Bergland’s thesis. Reflecting on the schoolhouse’s standing as one of the first museums established to preserve the history of white settlement in Victoria, Nilsen concludes that the unceremonious unearthing and quick reinternment of Indigenous remains in its vicinity reveals a settler desire to suppress Indigenous ties to the land: “Buried, as it were, beneath the ground, aspects of the past associated with First Nations peoples are rendered part of the natural landscape. House aboveground in a museum, the memory of white pioneers and settlers, by contrast, is associated with ‘living’ history.”³¹ Settler colonialism seeks to erase Indigenous presence on the land in order to replace it with settler presence. As

²⁹ Robert C Belyk, *Ghosts: True Stories from British Columbia* (Ganges, BC: Horsdal & Schubart, 1990), 113.

³⁰ Belyk, 16.

³¹ Nilsen, “Possessing Eden,” 100–101.

Nilsen points out, tangible evidence that could connect Indigenous presence in the past to Indigenous presence in the present must be suppressed to naturalize contemporary settler dominance and jurisdiction. Writing about the Lekwungen burial cairns at Beacon Hill, nineteenth century settler James Deans attributes their presence to an “unknown and long forgotten race.”³² Discursive erasures such as this are all the more egregious when we consider that Indigenous descendent communities have always remained highly visible in all of the locales where these tales are based. In this regard, the inability of Deans and others to link ancestral remains to the Indigenous people they encountered on a daily basis appears suspiciously calculated. Furthermore, many of the burial sites that fascinated settlers were not as ancient or mysterious as the discourse would suggest. Grant Keddie’s *Songhees Pictorial* contains several mid-nineteenth-century paintings of Lekwungen burial sites in the Victoria region.³³ The paintings are accompanied by descriptions found in news articles and diaries from the same period and reveal that these sites were still in active use: “Canoes have been observed to come frequently about twilight . . . till after midnight, till which time the Indians keep up an incessant [sound].”³⁴ The frequent desecration of these active sites (including a fire lit by several youths on Halkett Island in 1864 and the wholesale pillaging of burial cairns in search of “treasures”) points to an extreme disconnect in the settler psyche between the ancestors interred there and the ongoing presence of the territories’ Indigenous stewards. By conceptualizing these sites as “ancient” the ancestral remains interred there become objects of settler curiosity and accountability to descendant communities is disclaimed.

³² Nilsen, 108.

³³ Grant Keddie, *Songhees Pictorial: A History of the Songhees People as Seen by Outsiders, 1790 - 1912* (Victoria, BC: Royal BC Museum, 2003), 33, 65, 81, 82.

³⁴ Keddie, 65. The editorial insertion of “sound” at the end of this quote is Keddie’s.

These discursive practices of erasure found within settler ghostlore seem to mimic the “ghosting” practices Bergland identified in settler literature. Settlers have managed to conceptually turn the appearance of an Indigenous ghost into a confirmation of the myth that Indigenous peoples and nations have all but disappeared from the landscape. This process is framed as tragic, but inevitable—the impact of settler colonization is carefully circumvented. A poignant example of this is found in the subtle variance found between two versions of a first-hand account with Indigenous ghosts written by *Vancouver Sun* columnist Jack Scott. In both versions, Scott recounts an experience of waking up in the middle of the night while camping to see “a great crowd of Indians dancing in the moonlight.”³⁵ A short while after this experience, a friend of Scott informs him that the Valdez Island beach where they had camped was “the burying grounds of the Haida Indians.” In the original version of the article, Scott reports that it “seems there’s a thousand or more *Haida* buried all along the beach there, *many of them victims of a plague of smallpox*.”³⁶ When the piece was reprinted in a published collection of Scott’s columns, the line had been altered to “seems there’s a thousand or more *bodies* buried all along the beach there *from the old days*.”³⁷ Through this subtle shift, the age of the remains is projected backward in time to convey greater distance from the present and the guilt-inducing implications of a small pox outbreak (likely that of 1862-63) is removed from the account. The settler reader can now safely enjoy this story without the disquieting reminder that the arrival of Europeans was not entirely benign in its consequences. Further, the Haida ancestors have been robbed of their relational identities in the latter version and re-presented as neutral, unclaimed, and ancient “bodies.” Through the erasures exhibited here and in the stories connected to Beacon Hill and the Craigflower Schoolhouse, we can see how settler ghostlore casts all evidence of longstanding

³⁵ Jack Scott, *From Our Town* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1959), 96.

³⁶ John Robert Colombo, *Ghost Stories of Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2000), 179. Emphasis added.

³⁷ Scott, *From Our Town*, 96. Emphasis added.

and ongoing Indigenous connections to place as mysterious and intriguing oddities to be absorbed as the “Indian inheritance” of settler society. As argued by Bergland, this “inheritance” fulfills a duplicitous role as both a source of anxiety and of fictive kinship narratives.

Settler Anxieties

Jeffery Weinstock, an American scholar of gothic culture, argues that ghosts are metaphorical tools that do cultural work for political purposes.³⁸ This involves the projection of contemporary anxieties about the past onto the figure of the ghost: “beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events.”³⁹ In cultural production, the ghost becomes an emblem of sublimated historical narratives—the skeletons in our national closet. In my analysis of local ghostlore, I have found this sort of historical anxiety to be consistently present in settler interpretations of experiences with Indigenous ghosts. Several of the stories examined dwelt upon a notion of post-mortem retribution for the sins of colonialism. Some of these ghosts were interpreted to be punishing settlers for disrespecting sacred spaces, others forced settlers to confront a legacy of racial and sexualized violence against Indigenous people.

Laurel Point in Victoria’s inner harbour is now home to a luxury hotel nestled in the heart of the city’s tourist district; however, the point is also a sacred space for the Lekwungen and a final resting place for many revered ancestors. As settler industry in the area expanded, the location caught the eye of Jacob Sehl as a prime location to build a furniture factory in 1885. According to the account provided in Ian Gibb’s *Victoria’s Most Haunted*, Sehl began clearing the land for construction and unwittingly destroyed the resting place of these ancestors: “as the

³⁸ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, ed., *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press/Popular Press, 2004), 8.

³⁹ Weinstock, 5.

trees came down, the men noticed the boxes and baskets of bones tumbling from the trees to the ground.”⁴⁰ This did not deter Sehl or his men from their mission: “the boxes and baskets of bones that had fallen were thrown into a giant pile and unceremoniously set on fire.”⁴¹ With this grave insult, Sehl is said to have invoked a curse upon himself and all who would dare to build on the site. In January 1894, the Sehl mansion and factory at Laurel Point were themselves engulfed in flames. As they fled, Sehl’s wife Elizabeth claimed to have seen “figures leaping and dancing in the flames. . . . running their hands down the drapes and along the walls to make the fire burn faster.”⁴² Elizabeth went mad and died within six months of the fire; Jacob never rebuilt the business. But this was not the end of the curse: two patriarchs of the Pendray family were decapitated in freak accidents on site after daring to build a paint factory on the cursed land.⁴³ Gibbs reflects on his own impressions of the area, describing a profound sense of “darkness,” “wistfulness,” “lostness,” and “sadness” in the vicinity; “Could this be the displaced spirits who’d had their eternal home disturbed and destroyed?”⁴⁴

In the story of Laurel Point, we see how settlers invoke the notion of an “Indian curse” to make sense of the complications and tragedies which plagued early settlement projects. A similar invocation is found in two accounts from the seventies, as described by Robin Skelton—a poet, witch, and paranormal investigator from the Victoria region. Skelton and his associate had been consulted by a woman whose family had suffered a series of unfortunate events after recently moving to a plot of land on Valdez Island. After attributing the family’s issues to the land’s history as a significant site for Indigenous ritual practices, Skelton concludes that “it is not wise for people of other strong races or religions to build or live on land held sacred by another race.

⁴⁰ Gibbs, *Victoria’s Most Haunted*, 7.

⁴¹ Gibbs, 8.

⁴² Gibbs, 8.

⁴³ Gibbs, 9.

⁴⁴ Gibbs, 11–12.

Indeed, the consequences of doing so can be extremely disturbing and even life threatening.”⁴⁵ The land was “crying out for blood. The evil was in the earth itself.”⁴⁶ This story is followed by another involving a house in Victoria whose male occupants seem to be drained of their vital essence within a short while of moving in—suffering career setbacks, health complications, and marital dysfunction. Again, the personal troubles of these men are attributed to the obscured history of Indigenous land-use in the area. The house, Skelton tells us, was built upon a sacred space “used by native Indian women as a retreat following child birth . . . men were not permitted on the place.”⁴⁷ The chapter of Skelton’s book containing these two stories is titled “The Indian Inheritance,” suggesting that settlers have come to possess these places through a naturalizing kinship relationship. But the history and practices of these Indigenous “forefathers” has left many unfathomable mysteries hidden within the land itself. These mysteries are at once a source of anxiety and an eccentricity to be assimilated into local settler identity.

Anthropologist Colleen Boyd has invoked the metaphor of a palimpsest to describe the settler-colonial process of clearing the land of Indigenous markers to make way for development, a process repeated across Victoria and accounting for the destruction of hundreds to thousands of burial cairns and other sacred sites.⁴⁸ These are landscapes of belonging, “buried in layers and whose purposes and meanings have been scraped away and replaced by newer ones” through the process of colonization.⁴⁹ But stories like the ones connected with Laurel Point and Skelton’s “Indian Inheritance” indicate that settlers are not so confident in the efficacy of the “scraping” process. The ongoing presence and territorial claims of contemporary Indigenous communities

⁴⁵ Skelton and Kozocari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 84.

⁴⁶ Skelton and Kozocari, 86.

⁴⁷ Skelton and Kozocari, 97.

⁴⁸ Mathews, “Burial Cairns and Mounds: An Ancient Landscape of the Dead.”

⁴⁹ Colleen E. Boyd, “‘We Are Standing in My Ancestor’s Longhouse’: Learning the Language of Spirits and Ghosts,” in *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History*, ed. Colleen E. Boyd and Coll Thrush (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 196.

seem ever poised to rise up out of the earth in the form of ancestral bones and spectres haunting the settler-colonial project. The appearance of an Indigenous ghost can also have a troubling effect on the dominant historical narratives of settler society. Judith Richardson, analyzing a story about the ghost of a violently murdered servant girl in the Hudson Valley, reflects that ghost stories invoke an “unresolved past [that] haunts by virtue of its unresolvability.”⁵⁰ The telling and re-telling of such stories exposes a need to “estimate what has been lost or to give understandable form to what seems unexplainable or unassimilable.”⁵¹ The extent of the sheer violence inflicted upon Indigenous bodies during the process of colonization is one such inassimilable element of Canadian history. The disproportionate violence experienced by Indigenous women has been a particularly shameful feature of Canadian society, both historically and today.

Historians Sylvia Van Kirk and Jean Barman have both contributed to a growing repertoire of scholarly work uncovering the extent to which relationships between Indigenous women and male fur traders played a formative role in Canada’s early history.⁵² Often, these relationships took the form of “country marriages” between fur traders and the daughters of local Indigenous leaders. These relationships consolidated alliances with local Indigenous peoples, providing increased access to trade. In addition to encouraging trade alliances, the traditional knowledge held by these women greatly facilitated the navigation and survival of the European men they married. Van Kirk argues that in the West, “alliances with Indian women were the central social aspect of the fur trader’s progress across the country.”⁵³ The significant place of

⁵⁰ Richardson, *Possessions*, 122.

⁵¹ Richardson, 122.

⁵² Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1999); Jean Barman, *French Canadians, Furs, and Indigenous Women in the Making of the Pacific Northwest* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).

⁵³ Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 14.

inter-racial marriages in Canada's heritage was no doubt a source of discomfort and anxiety for settler society after the arrival of European women to the colonies. The mixed nature of many of Victoria's founding families went relatively unacknowledged until only just recently. While this subject has become less taboo in recent years, there remains a degree of unease around the possibility that not all of these unions were as harmonious or consensual as that depicted in Disney's *Pocahontas*. Three of the ghost stories uncovered in my research attest to the anxiety induced by the return of female Indigenous ghosts who refuse to let their violent deaths at the hands of settler men be forgotten.

Hudson's Bay Company trader John Tod is considered one of the founding fathers of Victoria. The Tod House, the first homestead to be built in Oak Bay, is now a well-known heritage building. It is also the site of Victoria's most famous haunting. Between 1947 and 1952, a flurry of news articles were written about the home after it became known that its latest occupants, the Evanses, had experienced a series of unexplainable phenomena: hats were routinely strewn along the hallway, the latched door to the basement continually opened itself, and a biscuit jar in the kitchen would swing rhythmically on its own for half an hour at a time. The most startling manifestation, however, was witnessed by two guests who had been set up in the home's notoriously eerie guest room. Halfway through the night, one of the guests awoke to the faint clinking of metal on metal. He opened his eyes and began scanning the room for the source of the sound. He was startled to discover they were not alone:

Over in the corner of the room stood an Indian woman, her hands held out toward me in such a manner that she seemed to be pleading with me to help her.

On her arms and legs were what looked like fetters. She kept looking at me, her hands outstretched and saying something I couldn't catch. As suddenly as she appeared. She was gone. I'll never forget the sight.⁵⁴

A short while after this incident, the Evanses were having a new heating system installed when a headless skeleton was discovered buried along the side of the house. According to most versions of the story, an anatomist or archeologist was brought in to remove the remains and identified them as belonging to an Indigenous woman.⁵⁵ The haunting is reported to have stopped after the removal of the bones, but their discovery and the spectral visitation by a woman in chains led some observers to speculate about John Tod's character. Tod is reputed to have had at least seven wives, most of whom were country marriages to Indigenous women at the various posts he occupied in his time as a trader for the HBC. After the discovery of the skeleton, rumour spread that the body was perhaps one of Tod's estranged Indigenous wives: "The secret of these eerie manifestations must lie forever buried in the grave of the Honourable John . . . The explanation may be, as some of the psychic researchers stoutly maintain, that one of the wives returns in spirit at times to haunt the scene of a great unhappiness."⁵⁶

In reviewing a biography compiled by Robert Belyk from Tod's journals and letters, it seems Tod did have a habit of abandoning his Indigenous wives and companions whenever he changed posts.⁵⁷ Laura Anne Stoler has extensively theorized the importance of intimate and affective domains to the colonial enterprise. According to Stoler's argument, Tod's treatment of these women was not an eccentric personality quirk, but rather a direct expression of imperial

⁵⁴ Ron Baird, "Haunted House Stirred by Strange Events," *News Herald*, February 13, 1950.

⁵⁵ Barnett McKinley, "'Ghosts of the Old Tod Home,'" *Daily Colonist*, February 27, 1949; Baird, "Haunted House Stirred by Strange Events."

⁵⁶ Corday Mackay, "Victoria's Oldest House," *The Beaver*, June 1948, Tod House/BC Heritage Fonds, F123/2004-003, Box 1, File 10, Oak Bay Archives.

⁵⁷ Robert C. Belyk, *John Tod: Rebel in the Ranks* (Victoria: Horsdal & Schubart, 1995), 35, 59, 86, 88.

power: “In recluse and repose race was put to the test. In these ‘tense and tender ties’ of empire, relations of power were knotted and tightened, loosened and cut, tangled and undone. These ties are not microcosms of empire but its marrow.”⁵⁸ While it remains speculation that Tod confined and murdered one of these women at his Oak Bay home, the ongoing popularity of the ghost story is a testament to the depth of settler anxieties about the dark secrets hidden in the closets of our cherished heritage figureheads and the role of intimacy in establishing colonial relations of power.

If we cast our nets a little further, beyond the limits of the Victoria region, we can find two other instances of hauntings by the ghosts of murdered Indigenous women. On South Pender Island, there is a story of yew tree haunted by the spirit of an unnamed Indigenous woman. The story of her death is particularly violent:

A young native clam digger . . . was murdered while fleeing two European men who had rowed from a ship to the island . . . They caught the woman by a small yew tree and, after raping her, one of the men took a pair of oarlocks and beat her to death. As if to mark the terrible deed, the murderer took the oarlocks and drove them into the tree trunk where they remain to this day.⁵⁹

The woman’s spirit is said to manifest as a glowing mist, and employees at a nearby resort are said to often sense her presence. Belyk recounts the first-hand testimony of a woman who lived in the vicinity of the yew tree and experienced several unnerving incidents. One night she awoke to the sound of running feet terminating with a terrible cry; her room had filled with a thick fog, which dissipated following the final wail. The following night, the same woman experienced the

⁵⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 3.

⁵⁹ Robert C. Belyk, *Ghosts II: More True Stories from British Columbia* (Victoria, BC: Horsdal & Schubart, 1997), 68.

sensation of “a cold hand moving slowly up her leg” as she lay in bed. The allusions to rape in these experiences render them intensely disconcerting. The traumas of the past erupt into the present, impeding the settler’s capacity to feel safe and secure.

Farther up Vancouver Island, near the town of Comox, there is a local tale about an ill-fated and “attractive young Kwakiutl woman named Mary” who married a white man in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁰ The marriage quickly became abusive; Mary’s new husband turned out to be a violent drunk and began regularly beating her. One day, Mary disappeared. When asked about her absence, her husband curtly reported that she had left him. While people found Mary’s disappearance suspicious and her husband’s explanation lacking, there was no proof upon which to charge him with her murder. Over time, Mary was forgotten. A short while later, a farmer arrived in town reporting a strange incident he’d just experienced. The farmer had been half-way up Comox Hill when he spotted the figure of an Indigenous woman dancing alone in the middle of the road and surrounded by a luminous blue mist. He knew immediately he was not in the presence of the living. While his story caused quite a sensation in town, with time “Dancing Mary” again faded into obscurity. Her story was resurrected once more, however, in the 1940s after a young airman witnessed a spectral vision in the same spot as the farmer decades before. He had been riding his bike back to the base when he spotted a lone Indigenous woman dancing amidst a glowing blue fog up ahead on the hill. Unnerved but undeterred, the man hurriedly rode by; the spectre dissolved into nothingness as his bike reached the spot.⁶¹

The two stories recounted above, like the Tod House ghost, invoke a legacy of violence committed against Indigenous women by European settler men. These ghosts reveal themselves time and again to settler witnesses, refusing to let their stories fade into oblivion. The violent

⁶⁰ Belyk, 94.

⁶¹ Belyk, 94.

incidents they invoke complicate the more wholesome paternal images of hardworking, honourable pioneer men or romantic idealizations of their relationships with Indigenous women. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson has argued convincingly that the targeting of female Indigenous bodies is a strategic and necessary tactic of settler colonial occupation. Indigenous women's bodies house and reproduce alternative political orders that threaten the legitimacy of settlement and patriarchal European governance structures.⁶² Leanne Simpson picks up this argument to reflect that “My body sovereignty is not subject to attack just because it is an Indigenous woman's body. My body sovereignty is subject to attack because it exists as a Nishnaabeg political order. . . . Colonialism is by its nature gendered.”⁶³ In addition to muddying the mythic image of our forefathers, the resurgence of these missing and murdered Indigenous women as ghosts is, therefore, also a direct threat to the legitimacy of settler occupation and claims to belonging. Like the vengeful ghosts of Laurel Point and Skelton's “Indian Inheritance,” these female spirits continually thwart attempts to clear Indigenous pasts and presents from the surface of the palimpsest. With a tenacity insensitive to our tripartite divisions of time, their stories continue to bleed through.

Fictive Kinship and Settler Adoption Fantasies

The previous section described the anxiety-inducing effects that encounters with Indigenous ghosts can have on the settler psyche. Taken on its own, this response seems a likely launching point for settlers to critically self-reflect on the violent processes that have made their presence on these lands possible. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. When combined with the first discursive tendency—the erasure of ancestral connections between Indigenous ghosts

⁶² As outlined in Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, Indigenous Americas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 115.

⁶³ Simpson, 117–18.

and contemporary Indigenous communities—these experiences are frequently interpreted in ways that actually naturalize settler presence as “inheritors” of the Indigenous past. The appearance of the ghost is taken as a sign of acceptance and an imperative for the settler to rectify a wrong or pay homage to the dead. In both cases, the appearance of an Indigenous ghost is perceived as an opportunity for the moral ascension of the settler witness. It is of significance that in none of the stories discussed thus far did the settler witness feel any inclination to reach out to local Indigenous populations regarding the repatriation of remains or the obvious unrest of spirits on their territory. In most cases, settlers either assimilate the story into a repertoire of eccentric local anecdotes (as in the case of Jack Scott’s “Dancing Indians” on Valdez Island and the curse of Laurel Point) or the settler assumes responsibility and authority to try and respond to the spirit’s needs.

A story from Salt Spring Island illustrates this dynamic quite saliently. One day in 1978, a woman living off Beaver Point Road was riding her horse down a forested lane to Weston Lake. At a particular spot on the road, her horse stopped, and her dog began to growl. This was not the first time her animals had acted strangely on this stretch of the path. She was stuck by the sense that she was not welcome there, and so she rushed on. A short time later, she was walking in the same area when she spotted the stalky figure of a man leaning against a tree at the edge of the forest. She identified him to be an Indigenous man, but she was sure this was not a living person. While his spectrality alone would have been alarming, she was further frightened by the extreme hostility she sensed he was directing at her: “He was standing there and glaring at me . . . I felt such anger from him.”⁶⁴ She rushed home, but the experience lingered in her mind: “Despite his anger, she was convinced that the young man wanted her to do something for him.” After discovering that one of her neighbours had also experienced a spectral visitation by this

⁶⁴ Belyk, *Ghosts II*, 97.

figure, the woman decided “it would be her responsibility” to release him from this world.⁶⁵ So, she attended a workshop by a “native shaman” and did some reading about Indigenous practices for honouring the dead. Armed with her newfound wisdom in “the ways of the native,” she crafted a hanging ornament and placed it in a tree near the location of her sighting. Reflecting on this experience, she conveyed the validation it gave her: “I felt his anger and I felt his desperation . . . but I also felt very privileged. He somehow communicated that he needed me to do something for him, and to do it was an honour.”⁶⁶

In the above related story, we can see how the anxiety-inducing appearance of an Indigenous ghost—even an obviously disapproving one—can be manipulated by the settler witness into an opportunity for moral ascension and the confirmation of a fictive kinship relationship. As Nilsen has pointed out, in these situations the settler endeavours to replace the Indigenous descendent community (which they have discursively erased from the scene) by assuming a role normally fulfilled by kin: honouring and tending to the dead.⁶⁷ This mechanism of assuming authority is repeated in many of the stories I encountered throughout my research. In the case of the Tod House, paranormal investigators had all sorts of suggestions for how to best pacify the ghost of the woman in chains. The Evanses were recommended to place a bucket of water in a corner of the room.⁶⁸ Another “expert” told them they should leave a pad of paper and a pencil out for the ghost to write on.⁶⁹ Needless to say, these strategies for appeasement were not terribly effective. In “The Indian Inheritance,” Robin Skelton and his witchy compatriots attempted to cleanse the bloodthirsty land through an elaborate and prolonged ceremony

⁶⁵ Belyk, 99.

⁶⁶ Belyk, 99.

⁶⁷ Nilsen, “Possessing Eden,” 110.

⁶⁸ J.K. Nesbitt, “Victoria ‘Ghost House’ Antics Excite Interest of Psychic Experts,” *News Herald*, January 25, 1947, Tod House/BC Heritage Fonds, F123/2004-003, Box 1, File 10, Oak Bay Archives.

⁶⁹ Baird, “Haunted House Stirred by Strange Events.”

exhibiting a stunning pastiche of ceremonial rites, deities, and sacred symbols from cultures around the world—a true medley of spiritual wisdom made accessible through the British imperial gaze. Skelton tells us he “spoke rhythmically . . . because I was dealing with a culture not only devoted to, but centered upon, rhythmic dance and speech.”⁷⁰ He laments that “The history of the Indian culture and of the settlements and sacred places of the Indians on Vancouver Island is a book that has not yet been written.”⁷¹ If it had, he muses, he would have been able to leverage such knowledge to better mitigate the curse of the land. Once again, the possibility of consulting with or alerting resident Indigenous populations is not considered because their contemporary existence has already been discursively erased. In the (alleged) absence of Indigenous descendants, these settlers perceive themselves to be heirs to both the land and its spiritual inheritance by default.

This pretense of fictive kinship once again mimics a pervasive tendency within settler literature. As Bergland argues, the literary figure of an Indigenous ghost often signals a privileged acceptance of the settler witness, who is then presented with an opportunity for moral ascension—an opportunity to redeem themselves and become like the “noble savage.” Kathryn Troy has also observed this tendency through her analysis of Indigenous spectres in the nineteenth-century American Spiritualist movement. Drawing upon a plethora of Spiritualist pamphlets, treatises, monographs, and periodicals, Troy argues that Indigenous spectres were interpreted as guides for the ethical progress of white society: “Spiritualists understood Indian ghosts to appear in séances with a mission to fulfill: to help ensure the inner illumination of Spiritualists, to support white attempts at social reform, and to serve as sources of strength to the

⁷⁰ Skelton and Kozocari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 88.

⁷¹ Skelton and Kozocari, 94.

female mediums they possessed.”⁷² While these reforms included reconceptualizations of racial boundaries and laments over the treatment of Indigenous peoples, the Spiritualists’ reformist tendencies promulgated an assimilationist agenda: Indigenous people could and should become American citizens.⁷³ The ultimate goal of these reforms was to assuage settler guilt over the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in the hopes of they might restore the nation’s “sense of honor” and “spiritual future.”⁷⁴

The appropriation of Indigenous ghosts towards a project of naturalizing settler presence and futurity on stolen lands fits easily into the spectrum of colonizing behaviours described by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang as “settler moves to innocence.” When settlers are confronted with unsettling reminders of the violence that has made their presence on these lands possible, the knee-jerk response is an unbearable “desire to be made innocent, to find some mercy or relief in the face of relentlessness of settler guilt and haunting.”⁷⁵ In their article “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” Tuck and Yang meticulously breakdown and describe several of the most common tactics settlers deploy in the quest for reprieve. The process repeated in the ghost stories described here is a classic example of what Tuck and Yang term “settler adoption fantasies.” Building on the work of Sara Ahmed, the authors characterize these adoption fantasies as a psychological process of absorbing the threatening Other into a consolidated white settler identity. Adoption fantasies “refer to those narratives in the settler colonial imagination in which the Native (understanding that he is becoming extinct) hands over his land, his claim to the land, his very Indian-ness to the settler for safe-keeping.”⁷⁶ It is a “mythical trump card” that “absolves them from the inheritance of settler crimes and that bequeaths a new inheritance of Native-ness

⁷² Troy, *The Specter of the Indian*, xii.

⁷³ Troy, xii.

⁷⁴ Troy, xiii.

⁷⁵ Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” 9.

⁷⁶ Tuck and Yang, 14.

and claims to land.”⁷⁷ This is a fantasy played out in countless works of fiction (some obvious examples being *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans*), and which is recreated in many of the settler interactions with Indigenous ghosts described herein. After mimicking the honouring responsibilities of kin, the woman on Salt Spring Island no longer feels threatened by the anger of the Indigenous spirit at the edge of her property. She rests easy, convincing herself that she has been accepted. And what of the settler families plagued by the land’s “Indian Inheritance”? Here too, settler anxieties are laid to rest with the help of Skelton’s ritual; the land is cleansed, finalizing the inheritance.

Tuck and Yang’s stated purpose for identifying settler moves to innocence is to bring attention to the behaviours obstructing sincere commitments to decolonization. As indicated in the introduction to this project, I do not believe that the interactions between settlers and Indigenous ghosts are fated to eternally reinforce settler-colonial mentalities. To the contrary, I argue that the persistence and proliferation of ghost belief amongst the settler population signifies a promising site for decolonizing communication between Indigenous and settler communities. Settlers who believe in or have had encounters with ghosts are more receptive to serious consideration of Indigenous worldviews. In the ghost story compilations considered here, all the authors and their informants were willing to seriously acknowledge the validity of Indigenous spirit beliefs and practices. Further, the anxiety aroused by an encounter with an Indigenous ghost clearly shows potential for “unsettling” the settler witness. The Indigenous ghost forces settlers to wrestle with the depth of Indigenous ancestral ties to the land; it also forces confrontation with episodes of colonial violence left out of dominant and celebratory narratives of settlement. Indigenous ghosts make us uncomfortable because they are a reminder of the complicity of all settlers in the displacement of Indigenous peoples. They threaten the

⁷⁷ Tuck and Yang, 14.

given-ness of our belonging in place. As this section has sought to illustrate, however, the radical potential of acknowledging complicity is currently thwarted by conceptual tendencies borrowed from the discourse of settler gothic literature.

At this point in time, the Indigenous ghost in settler ghostlore is framed by a discourse that renders contemporary Indigenous communities invisible in order to naturalize the settler presence through a fictive kinship with ancestral Indigenous spirits. This discursive process extracts the Indigenous ghost from its traditional kinship network and reorients it towards the settler witness; its appearance becomes an affirmation of settler belonging as the de facto beneficiaries of an Indigenous inheritance. To harness the decolonizing potential of these encounters, this process must be inverted. Indigenous ghosts must be firmly located in their relationship with living descendent communities. The following section draws upon decolonization scholarship to theorize how this might be achieved.

Part III. Conclusion: Decolonizing Ghostlore

In recent years, there has been a move to reclaim the Indigenous ghost as a source of healing, strength, connection to place, and resistance to colonialism. An anthology titled *Phantom Past, Indigenous Present* was published in 2011 with the explicit intention of challenging dominant settler discourse surrounding Indigenous ghosts and the trope of the “Indian burial ground.”⁷⁸ The essays therein each highlight ongoing, place-based relationships between Indigenous communities and ancestral spirits. Haunting has also been taken up as a decolonizing strategy by Eve Tuck, Karyn Recollet and the Super Futures Haunt Collective in a three-part essay series titled *Glossary of Haunting*.⁷⁹ Writing as “future-ghosts,” the authors radically reclaim the trope of the vengeful “Indian ghost” and convert it into a source of radical Indigenous power and survivance. In the world of art, Marianne Nicolson’s 2008 installation *The House of Ghosts* was projected onto the façade of the Vancouver Art Gallery (formerly the provincial courthouse), overwriting the colonial architecture and invoking ancestral ghosts.⁸⁰ Since 2015, the Super Futures Haunt Collective—a queer, Indigenous, feminist performance art group—has been performing “Visitations” in high-visibility public spaces as “a remembrance of an old futuristic way of relating to place, non-human persons, and each other.”⁸¹ The Collective reminds settlers that Indigenous haunting is not a presence by or for settlers: “When I practice visitation, I am not visiting you. I am visiting our children’s future homelands. I am *their* guest, not yours.”⁸² It is crucial that settler ghostlore does not distort the presence of Indigenous ghosts

⁷⁸ Colleen E. Boyd and Coll Thrush, eds., *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

⁷⁹ Eve Tuck and Karyn Recollet, “Visitations (You Are Not Alone),” in *#callresponse*, ed. Maria Hupfield and Tarah Hogue (Vancouver: Grunt Gallery, 2017), 9–13; Tuck and Ree, “A Glossary of Haunting”; Angie Morrill and Eve Tuck, “Before Dispossession, Or Surviving It,” *Liminalities* 12, no. 1 (2016): 1–20.

⁸⁰ “Marianne Nicolson,” *Among the Unburied* (blog), January 26, 2016, <http://exhibits.haverford.edu/amongtheunburied/artists/marianne-nicolson/>.

⁸¹ Tuck and Recollet, “Visitations (You Are Not Alone),” 11.

⁸² Tuck and Ree, “A Glossary of Haunting.”

to imply the absence of living Indigenous nations, or the completion of the settler-colonial project of self-indigenizing.

This paper has sought to begin the process of decolonizing the discourse of Indigenous ghosts in Coast Salish territories by searching out and compiling some of the more accessible settler stories about hauntings by what they identify to be Indigenous spectres. Through an analysis of these accounts, I have found that settlers have thus far been highly influenced by longstanding literary tropes in their conceptualization and narrativization of encounters with Indigenous ghosts. The result has been a reorientation of these spectral visitations towards the fulfilling settler-colonial desires to replace Indigenous populations, claiming the Indigenous past as the natural and inevitable inheritance of the settler nation. This reorientation and appropriation of the Indigenous ghost is only made possible through a stubborn tradition of discursive erasure that renders the ongoing presence of living Indigenous communities of descendants invisible to the settler. It has been observed that Indigenous ghosts can have a profoundly unsettling effect on settler witnesses, however, harnessing the decolonizing potential of this confrontation requires a commitment to continually reinforcing the ancestral ties between present-day Indigenous populations and the spirits of their territories. As Warren Cariou has observed, unease can be a useful first step in decolonizing relationships on these territories. To be effective, however, “unease must not only direct us back into the past, but must also situate us squarely within the problems and opportunities of the present.”⁸³ It is my conviction that Indigenous ghosts can offer sites of critical dialogue between present day communities grounded in the particularities of place.

⁸³ Cariou, “Haunted Prairie,” 730.

Nilsen's thesis posited that settler ghostlore in Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ territories functions as a popular mode of history-crafting and connecting to place.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, such ghostly history-making has thus far been one-sided, failing to meaningfully engage in dialogue with the area's very real, living, and present Indigenous communities and thereby ignoring the vast majority of stories embedded in this landscape. "How can the rich textures and deeply rooted meanings contained within the palimpsest be revealed and appreciated," Boyd asks. "For one thing, the story could be shaped by what tribal citizens have to say of their experiences. It is the work of anthropologists and other social scientists to follow them down unfamiliar paths."⁸⁵ This project approaches settler stories about Indigenous ghosts as a point of intervention, where Indigenous descendants can step in and give their own testimonies regarding their relationships with ancestral spirits in place. In this way "haunted" spaces are re-storied as Indigenous sites of power and connection to ancestors.

I have conceived of this work as the initial stage in a much larger project. The next phase would necessarily be a community-engaged research project under the guidance of Indigenous mentors and supervisors from the university and the community. It would initiate a consultation process to set the goals, design, and methods of the project. I would suggest the strategy of re-storying, by which the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ families connected to the sites marked as "haunted" according to settler testimonies will be invited to collaborate on the project. If interested, they will be presented with my findings regarding the settler accounts and interpretations as gathered in this thesis. In response to these settler hauntings, they might share their opinions, reflections, and any other information they deem to be relevant. This could take place on location and might involve enacting place-based responsibilities. In some cases,

⁸⁴ Nilsen, "Possessing Eden."

⁸⁵ Boyd, "We Are Standing in My Ancestor's Longhouse," 197.

collaborators might feel that particular ceremonies are necessary or warranted in which case Elders will be consulted for guidance on how to proceed. Because this research project concerns relations between humans and the spirit world, strict protocol must be upheld to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all involved, inclusive of the spirits. Such protocols would be dictated by the Elders of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ communities on whose territory and with whose ancestors the research is engaged.

In 1947, reporter Humphrey Davy paid a visit to the provincial archives to conduct some background research for an article he was writing about the haunting at the Tod House in Oak Bay. He began by asking the archivists on duty whether they knew anything about the haunting, to which they replied: “We’re not interested in ghosts, only history.”⁸⁶ This project has sought to directly challenge such a conceptual divide and advocate for spectrality as a legitimate and productive topic of historical inquiry. Ghosts are manifestations of people, events, and energies from the past in the present. They are as mysterious and seemingly out of reach as those histories that make us possible, and the appearance of a ghost—much like the reading or hearing of a historical narrative—provides the witness with a momentary sense of connection and understanding of their relationship to that past. Ghosts present the historian with a number of challenges capable of pushing the discipline into radical new directions, for “a history conceived as spectral would necessitate a reflection of how the past is both absent and present within the now moment, but also how the past can open up possibilities for the future.”⁸⁷ The spectre, as a non-physical entity outside of time, ruptures the assumption of a tripartite temporal division and upends ontological certainties about the nature of reality. Such challenges are necessary to

⁸⁶ Humphrey Davy, “Eerie Happenings in ‘Haunted’ Oak Bay Residence Intrigue Owner and Guests,” *Times Colonist*, January 18, 1947, Tod House/BC Heritage Fonds, F123/2004-003, Box 1, File 10, Oak Bay Archives.

⁸⁷ María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, “Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities,” in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 14.

moving beyond the teleological, history-as-progress narratives that have dominated the discipline since the nineteenth century. The ghost presents us with an opportunity to consider and work with alternative ways of knowing and relating to the past, an opportunity we must take up if we are to uncover the occlusions they point to. The halls of our academies are rife with spirits; to deaf ears they taunt and beckon. It is time we attended to them.

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Appendix I. Glossary

ghostlore: a storytelling tradition and repertoire purportedly based upon first-hand encounters with ghosts.

“ghostly Indian”: A settler-generated stereotype, in which metaphors of haunting and ghostliness are used by settler authors to talk about living Indigenous nations as though they are doomed, vanishing, vanquished, or non-existent.

“Indian ghost”: A particular literary trope in settler fiction. I use this term to indicate that I am talking about a fictional, settler-generated figure and stereotype that is interpreted to exist solely for settler purposes.

Indigenous: Existing in relation with the land since time immemorial. In the context of this project, I will be referring most frequently to the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

Indigenous ghost: This is a neutral term I use to describe entities perceived by witnesses to be the “soul” or “spirit” of a deceased Indigenous individual. These spectres can appear to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons, in waking hours or in dreams. In my research I seek to emphasize that these entities are real agents capable of influencing and acting on the living (see entry for “real”).

Indigenous spirit: In the context of my usage this term will generally imply a once-human, ancestral relation, with acknowledgment that there are many other kinds of spirit. In this project “Indigenous spirit” is used more restrictively than “Indigenous ghost” to imply that the witness is themselves Indigenous. A non-Indigenous person cannot claim, confirm, or deny the presence of an Indigenous spirit. Following the definitions here, every Indigenous spirit is also an Indigenous ghost, but not every Indigenous ghost is an Indigenous spirit

real: This is a loaded term which I use carefully, understanding that there are as many realities as there are minds—and perhaps more! When I use this term I mean to describe something that “is there” to whoever is experiencing it—that is, it has ontological substance within a relationship.

settler: someone whose ancestors or themselves voluntarily migrated to Turtle Island without explicit prior consent or invitation from Indigenous peoples. In my usage, descendants of slaves are not settlers.

settler colonialism: a particular brand of colonial enterprise in which the colonizing peoples come to stay, establishing permanent settlements on the territories they claim and endeavouring to replace the Indigenous population through a mixture of genocidal policy and discursive historical erasure.

spectre: This is the term I will use most liberally and which can be applied to all the above manifestations.

Turtle Island: An Indigenous-generated, non-state-based term for the territories referred to by settlers as “North America.”

uncanny: A common translation of the German word *unheimlich*, associated with Sigmund Freud and often taken to imply something amiss and out-of-place.

un-homely: The literal translation of *unheimlich* and my preferred term for the affective reaction of settlers to Indigenous ghosts—a reminder that this is not home and not to get too comfortable. This inverts the notion of the uncanny, rendering the perceiver to be the one out-of-place.

witness: Denotes the living, human being who experienced the presence of the spectre.