



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND GERMAN STUDIES

**The Ghosts of the Natural World: A Hauntological
Exploration of Ghostly Presences and Threshold
Elements in Paul Yoon’s Short Stories “And We Will
Be Here” and “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree”**

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Abstract

Paul Yoon's short stories "And We Will Be Here" and "Look for Me in the Camphor Tree" follow Miya and Mihna, respectively, as they navigate the aftermath of loss amidst external pressures which pathologize and silence their suffering. Set against the background of Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, and the later transformation of the island life, both stories depict how private grief is inseparable from larger histories of violence and displacement. On the one hand, Miya, orphaned in childhood, now volunteers at an American hospital for soldiers while mourning the abrupt departure of her childhood companion, Junpei. On the other hand, the eight-year-old Mihna mourns her deceased mother as she opposes her father's sudden decision to sell their lifelong family farm. Drawing selectively on trauma studies and hauntology, especially Cathy Caruth (1996) and Avery Gordon (1997), this dissertation studies Yoon's use of ghostly figures and ghostly matters not as mere supernatural phenomena, but as warnings of unresolved grief and as catalysts for change. This hauntological, trauma-studies-oriented reading illustrates how Miya and Mihna, as alienated individuals, endure the hardships of grief through purposeful dwelling in the transitory stage of mourning, where threshold locations, and material objects become uncanny remnants of memory. Ultimately, by examining the ambiguous roles of the ghostly figures, I argue that they function as catalysts for action, and that welcoming rather than exorcising them facilitates dwelling.

Keywords: Paul Yoon, "And We Will Be Here", "Look for Me in the Camphor Tree", Hauntology, Trauma Studies, Spatial and Material remnants.

0. Introduction

For 35 years (1910-1945), the Korean peninsula was formally annexed by Japan and placed under harsh colonial rule. The Japanese Empire violently imposed a centralized military rule taking absolute control of the peninsula and aiming to assimilate Korea into Japanese language and culture, therefore banning political freedoms and reorganizing the economy to assist Japanese interests.

In August 1945, Japan surrendered in World War II (1939-1945) and its colonial rule in Korea came to an end. Nonetheless, the Allied leaders, following Japan's surrender in the war, reached a consensus on the division of the Korean peninsula into two occupation zones. Therefore, a division marked by the 38th parallel was formally established in 1948 having the north of the peninsula occupied by the Soviets and the south by the United States. Initially, this division aimed to be a temporary administrative measure. However, the growing tensions of the onset of the Cold War (1945-1991), alongside Korean opposition against the Allied occupation, escalated the hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union. Eventually, the 1948 elections conducted in the southern zone resulted in the establishment of the Republic of Korea¹ whereas the northern zone proclaimed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.² On June 25th, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea searching to reunify the peninsula under communist rule, precipitating thus the outbreak of the Korean War (25 June 1950 – 27 July 1953).

¹ Governed by its first president Syngman Rhee from July 1948 until April 1960.

² Under the totalitarian and socialist leadership of Kim Il Sung, also known as the "Eternal President", his government spanning from the creation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1948 until his passing in 1994.

The Korean War had a profound impact on the citizens of the peninsula, who endured bombing, executions, extreme famine, war-related segregation of families, massive displacements, widespread orphanhood, and the long-term militarization of the everyday life. Those who survived the conflict consequently bore the intertwined historical legacy of the Korean War and the prior Japanese colonial rule, thereby suffering from intense psychological trauma, including what would later be understood as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as intergenerational trauma. The war lasted until July 27th, 1953. However, the division of the peninsula persists to the present day, where the north and the south are still divided with continuing rivalry and both regimes claim sovereignty thus far failing to reach solid agreements on a definitive reunification of the peninsula.

Paul Yoon, a contemporary diasporic Korean American writer, engages with Korean history in *Once the Shore* (2009). There, through short stories and novellas, he portrays the quiet post-war existence of the inhabitants of the fictional island of Solla. In doing so, he explores how the everyday aftermath of war and trauma continues to affect the hospitals, orphanages, and farms on the island.

Prior to Yoon, Korean American authors, such as Chang-Rae Lee and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, were prone to engage with themes such as the enduring impact of historical and generational memory, cross-cultural encounters, the challenges of racist discrimination, alienation, questions of ethnic identity, diaspora, the American Dream and assimilation. However, second- and third-generation contemporary Korean American authors, whilst still acknowledging many of the concerns of earlier literary generations, do not only restrict their works solely to questions of national identity. For instance, Paul Yoon looks back at Korean history and addresses the historical traumas of Japanese colonialism and the Korean War, whilst moving beyond the search for ethnic identity

towards broader, more universal and transnational concerns. As Kim argues, “He does not merely try to retrieve once-lost national authority from anticolonial nationalist sentiment. He instead shows political and racial minorities, isolated and forgotten in Korean history” (Kim 444). “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree” and “And We Will Be Here” respectively constitute the sixth and seventh short stories of *Once the Shore* (2009), Yoon’s seminal collection of short stories. *Once the Shore* follows the individual trajectories of the inhabitants of Solla, a fictional South Korean Island which mirrors Jeju Island and other Pacific coastal locations. Historically, the coastal regions of the Korean peninsula have long functioned as significant strategic areas during both the Japanese colonial occupation and the Korean War. These areas were associated with the transnational circulation of migrant workers and constituted major economic and logistical hubs as well as significant militarization sites. During the Japanese Occupation period, the Korean coastline was commodified to fuel the Japanese Empire’s industrial and economic growth. Thereafter, during the Korean War, these coastal regions faced rapid transformation into frontline battlegrounds. Chiefly, in *Once the Shore*, Yoon, drawing from the impacts of the Korean historical conflict on both the peninsula and on the coastal zones such as Jeju Island, creates Solla to illustrate the pervasive impact of conflict on the everyday lives of locals and how they navigate personal and historical trauma.

The present dissertation will focus on how the everyday aftermath of trauma—stemming from Japanese colonial rule, the Korean War and subsequent North American military presence in the southern area of the peninsula—is represented through haunting and ghostly presences in Yoon’s short stories “And We Will Be Here” and “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree,” since haunting is particularly visible in the lives of the main female characters Miya and Mihna, who choose to remain emotionally, in threshold spaces—

where the boundaries between past and present, and life and death become blurred—and among sentimentally charged visual and material remnants of what has been lost.

“And We Will Be Here” follows the story of Miya, a thirty-four-year-old woman, who was orphaned in childhood and, as she becomes a hospital volunteer, navigates the trauma of her fragmented past while becoming convinced that a comatose patient at the hospital is Junpei, her long-lost childhood companion from the orphanage. “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree” recounts the story of Mihna, an eight-year-old girl who endures the hardships of both the loss of her mother and her father’s abrupt decision to sell their family farm, while encountering a mysterious ghostly woman wearing her deceased mother’s pale blue honeymoon dress. Fundamentally, Yoon illustrates how displacement, war and the commodification of the land through the escalation of the tourism industry disrupt Miya’s and Mihna’s lives in the aftermath of loss.

Having previously framed *Once the Shore* within its historical and literary context, however, before delving into the textual analysis of the short stories, I would like to discuss the relevant theoretical framework on which this dissertation draws. *Hauntology*, a puncept³ coined by the philosopher Jacques Derrida in his book *Specters of Marx* (1993), derives from the word “ontology”, which is the “science of being”. Hauntology has evolved into the field of study of what is not physically present but persists as a specter. Crucially, hauntology engages with the past and the future, whilst co-existing with and affecting the present. Derrida, in *Specters of Marx* (1993) employs the term to illustrate how the specter of communism haunts Europe even after the triumph of capitalism (Derrida 2). Nonetheless, several critics such as Avery Gordon and Mark Fisher have employed the puncept to discuss other concerns. For instance, sociologist

³ Neologism of the words “pun” and “concept” employed to refer to a new concept generated through wordplay.

Avery Gordon, in her book *Ghostly Matters* (1997), argues that haunting is a “constituent feature of contemporary modern life” (206) which “describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities” (8). She suggests that the figure of the ghost surpasses its mere supernatural associations, arguing that the haunting effect that it produces is a form of “mediation (...) that links an institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and a history and a biography” (19). In essence, haunting notifies individuals of their own individual troubles stemming from larger historical and social issues. The ghosts thus, as Gordon asserts, “presents itself as a sign (...) that there is a chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (65) and reminds haunted individuals that there is “something-to-be-done” (xvi), a view shared by Derrida, as he expresses that the haunted individual ought to offer the ghost a “hospitable memory (...) out of a concern for justice” (Derrida 220). Fundamentally, Gordon and Derrida assert that we must learn to “speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it” (Derrida xviii) and to “exorcise not in order to chase away the ghosts, but (...) to grant them the right, if it means making them come back alive” (Derrida 220). On a similar note, Mark Fisher in his book *Ghosts of My Life* (2014) adopts the puncept and describes it in terms of unmaterialized futures and lost pasts. Fisher defines the character of the ghost as “hauntological melancholia” (33), a spectral force that, whilst “refusing to yield” (Fisher 32) returns when one’s expectations of a future once promised never came to fruition.

At its core, haunting is a stage in which repressed and unresolved abusive systems of power—for instance, slavery or war, particularly since they are supposedly over with—make themselves known, affecting everyday life. As Derrida and Gordon assert, the oppressive nature of such systems has been denied, silenced, and neglected by major institutions, hence causing their specter to recurrently make itself known as a reminder

that action must be taken. Significantly, this notion of the ghost as a notification and as a catalyst for action will be central to the present dissertation's interpretation of the ghostly apparitions in both of Yoon's short stories.

Closely connected to the field of hauntology is Trauma Studies, which likewise examines the persistence of the past as it escapes its own temporal boundaries, intrusively returning to disrupt the present. Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) provides a pivotal framework and further clarifies the temporal structure of haunting by noting the belated "return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits" (59). Caruth's notion of belatedness aligns with Derrida and Gordon's suggestion that historical violence persists not as a finished event, but as an unassimilated experience that repeatedly resurfaces. The notion of recurring haunting resonates with Sigmund Freud's theorizations in *The Uncanny* (1919), where he argues that the uncanny is the result of repressed emotions. In his words, the "uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed." (Freud 148)

To examine how, during mourning, individuals become alienated and dwell in specific threshold, emotionally charged locations, I will draw on the term "topoanalysis" coined by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (1957) to refer to the psychological and sentimental connection between individuals and the places they inhabit. Furthermore, to explore the liminal character of mourning, I will consider Arnold van Gennep's framework in *Les rites de passage* (1909), where he defines the *rite of passage* as a social ritual—formed by three inner stages: separation, transition and incorporation—through which people cross from one state of being to another. Drawing from van Gennep's association of mourning, as a liminal transitory stage, I argue that Miya and Mihna consciously dwell, as alienated individuals, in threshold locations

marked by transition. Furthermore, to analyze how, during grief, objects, similarly to places, become visual and material remnants of loss, I will primarily build on the theory offered by Margaret Gibson as she puts forward the term “melancholy objects” to highlight how objects, during grief, adopt significant emotional weight connecting the deceased to the living individuals, anchoring the latter to the past.

With this in mind, the present dissertation offers a hauntological, trauma-studies-oriented textual analysis of Paul Yoon’s short stories “And We Will Be Here” and “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree”, in which ghostly figures, haunted spaces, and visual objects are not just portrayed as mere supernatural phenomena but as manifestations of unresolved and repressed grief. The dissertation examines how haunting is used to depict the everyday aftermath of trauma in the lives of Miya and Mihna as they remain emotionally suspended in threshold spaces while they cling to the material and visual traces of loss.

This dissertation has three sections. The first will delve into the role of threshold and transformed spaces as liminal sites between life and death. In this section, locations such as the camphor tree, the trail, the clearing, and the farm in “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree,” as well as the stone garden and the hospital in “And We Will Be Here” will be examined as emotionally charged sites where the two central figures actively choose to remain. The second section will focus on the role of objects—for instance, Mihna’s photograph of her mother, her mother’s missing blue dress, Miya and Junpei’s missing portrait, and Miya’s sewing machine, among others— as uncanny carriers of memory and, therefore, as visual and emotional traces of loss. Finally, the third section will examine Yoon’s incorporation of ghostly figures—namely, the ghostly woman in Mihna’s mother’s missing blue dress, the comatose patient Miya mistakes for Junpei, and the blind boy she encounters in the hospital’s stone garden—as haunting presences that

shape the everyday aftermath of trauma and function as important triggers for change towards recovery.

1. Threshold Locations: Dwelling in the Boundaries Between Life and Death, Past, Present and Future.

The following section examines how Yoon transforms specific places in “And We Will Be Here” and “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree” into threshold locations where past, present, life and death overlap. It will primarily center on natural threshold sites such as the camphor tree, the clearing, the trail and the stone garden, before commenting on transformed locations, such as the pony farm and the American hospital. The aim of the section is to illustrate how such locations do not function as mere narrative settings, but as meaningful sites in which Miya and Mihna experience grief and memory, and deal with the everyday aftermath of trauma. However, before delving into the literary analysis, I must first introduce the various theoretical concepts on which I will rely throughout the analysis.

As discussed in the introduction, topoanalysis refers to the analysis of the psychological and symbolic relationships established between individuals and the places they inhabit, hence exploring how places harbor memories. This link between the psychological world and the material world, viewed through the lens of hauntology, suggests that spaces, rather than simply becoming containers of emotions, can also harbor ghostly presences. By ghostly presences, I do not refer to their supernatural interpretation, but to the more abstract representation of lost, forgotten, or repressed memories that repeatedly resurface and haunt the individual.

On the liminal character of mourning, Arnold van Gennep, in *Les rites de passage* (1909), defined the *rite of passage* as the social ritual during which individuals transition

from one social status to another and stated that such rites follow three distinct stages: separation, transition and incorporation. It is the middle stage that is most relevant here, since this is where liminality⁴ emerges. Similarly, this is where mourning takes place. In van Gennep's own terms: "Mourning (...) is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society" (146-147). During grief, both the living and the deceased "constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead" (van Gennep 157). That is, they become what Victor Turner labels as "liminal personae" (95) in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1977) suggesting that liminal individuals are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between" (95) the world of the living and the world of the dead. In this light, Miya and Mihna can be read as clear exemplifications of "liminal personae" (Turner 95).

Miya, the central character in "And We Will Be Here," is a thirty-four-year-old woman who survived an earthquake during her childhood. However, afterwards, she becomes orphaned and is sent to an orphanage on the South Korean island of Solla, where she is paired with Junpei. Miya gradually assumes a caretaking role over him as they grow older. However, after witnessing a traumatic event involving the suicide of another boy, Junpei leaves the orphanage unnoticed, leaving Miya behind, who "turned silent (and) performed her chores with mechanical precision" (Yoon 217), waiting for Junpei's return.

Years after, with the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953), Solla's vocational school of arts, located near Miya's and Junpei's orphanage, is converted into an American hospital for wounded soldiers. Furthermore, after the orphanage is taken over by an

⁴ From the Latin Word, *limen*, which means "threshold" referring to the state of being in-between two different stages or places.

American organization, Miya, after the death of Miss Hara,⁵ gathers “Miss Hara’s teacup, an extra set of clothes, a comb, her unsent letters (...) and the sewing machine” (Yoon 223) and volunteers at the hospital where, while performing her duties, she relentlessly seeks traces of her past. With every new arrival of patients, Miya examines their faces, searching for Junpei’s face. Additionally, she spends substantial time examining the corridor walls where paintings used to hang in the past, when the building was a school of arts, particularly searching for the painting of herself and Junpei posing beneath one of the school’s trees. However, confusion sets in when Miya recognizes Junpei as a comatose patient whose eyes are bandaged, but whose nose bridge and chin she recognizes as Junpei’s. Because of this, she devotedly nurses him and updates him on the years he has missed. This subsequently disorients the hospital workforce, especially when a woman arrives claiming to be the patient’s mother. After this, still convinced that the comatose patient is her orphaned companion, Miya rips away the bandages covering the patient’s eyes only to discover that the patient’s eyes were gone.

Mihna, the main character in “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree”, who is not yet nine years old, mourns her mother, Nara, who died suddenly from a heart condition. Following this, Linn, Mihna’s father, decides to sell their family pony farm to a businessman who intends to build a hotel on the land. The farm appears to have become an excessive burden to him, and he believes that a smaller place near the city will be more beneficial for Mihna. However, what he does not openly acknowledge is that the underlying reason why he wishes to sell the farm stems from his inability to cope with his wife’s lingering scent all over the house. Mihna responds to her father’s decision with

⁵ Miss Hara is the woman who protectively raised both Miya and Junpei at the orphanage on the island of Solla. She served as a maternal figure and educator, teaching them Japanese and Korean. When Miss Hara falls ill, Miya transports her by pony to the American hospital near the orphanage, where she passes away.

silence and physical distance, repeatedly unpacking the boxes as a silent protest against leaving. Furthermore, by retreating to the natural sites near the farm, Mihna encounters the solace that allows her to more comfortably mourn her mother. It is in the clearing near the farm where she encounters the silent, translucent woman dressed in the same pale blue dress that her mother wore during her honeymoon. After an abrupt first encounter, Mihna attempts to communicate with the woman, but the woman never responds. Additionally, her failed attempts to notify her father about the ghostly woman further alienate her from him, which leads her to keep her grief entirely to herself.

Both Miya and Mihna are defined by grief and by their intense attachment to the physical places where their loved ones once existed. These spaces become what might be called mnemonic places⁶, which are sites charged with memory, affect, and loss. In Freudian terms—drawn from “Mourning and Melancholia” (1957)—they are cathected, since mourning binds emotional energy to particular locations, objects, and scenes. This is why, in Yoon’s stories, places do not function as neutral settings but as intimate containers of memory. As Bachelard suggests, whilst quoting from the Polish poet Czesław Miłosz, spaces such as the house are “filled with the mute tumult of memories” (79), and this is precisely what happens in the worlds inhabited by Miya and Mihna. The places to which they repeatedly return preserve the traces of those who are gone and become central to their mourning. In this sense, both characters remain emotionally attached to spaces that allow them to sustain a connection to the dead, turning those places into thresholds where grief and haunting converge.

Heidegger, in “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1951), argues that human beings live meaningfully in places. He employs the term *dwelling* to refer to the human tendency

⁶ Stemming from the German term *Mneme* and originating from the Ancient Greek *mnēmē*.

to “remain, to stay in a place” (147). Since Miya and Mihna do not simply occupy these locations; they remain emotionally attached to them, and in that sense, they can be understood as “dwelling in place”. The camphor tree, the clearing, the trail, the stone garden, and even the hospital are not neutral backdrops but places through which grief is lived and sustained. This is echoed by Edward S. Casey, in *The Fate of Place* (1997) in which he maintains that “dwelling (...) is residing in the nearness of things” (273) and distinguishes between “abstract space” (139) and intimate place. In his words: “places regarded (...) as loci of intimacy and particularity” that are “experienced and known through customary bodily actions” (233). Therefore, Miya and Mihna recurrently return to specific sites because those places preserve traces of the dead and of unrealized futures. Their mourning is therefore spatial as well as emotional. Rather than moving on from loss, they remain close to the environments in which memory has settled, turning those locations into thresholds where past and present, life and death, continue to overlap.

1.1. Natural Thresholds: Retreating to the Camphor Tree, the Trail into the Woods, the Clearing and the Stone Garden

In “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree”, nature provides Mihna with an emotional refuge to calmly mourn her mother. The camphor tree near the family farm is a pivotal haunted and threshold space. It is certainly where the memory and the scent of Mihna’s mother linger the most vividly. Cathected as it is, after Nara’s passing, the tree has become filled with the specters of the past that is no more and those of the future that never was. It has become a powerful mnemonic location where “after (Nara’s) death (...) the ponies, (...) began to gather beside the tree she adored, through the seasons, searching for the scent of her hair, which they had grown used to” (Yoon 156). Throughout Nara’s life, the camphor tree represented a meaningful sanctuary: “Look for me in the camphor tree” (Yoon 193), Mihna’s mother used to say to Linn. Under the tree, Nara sang folk songs from her youth

to Mihna. “And to (those melodies), the child slept in the shadows of the broad leaves, her ear pressed against her mother’s breasts, listening to the song reverberate from within” (Yoon 193). As a result, the camphor tree is the *place* where Mihna finds herself “betwixt and between” (Turner 95) the presence and absence of her beloved mother. It is the foremost mnemonic *place* where Mihna is most able to remain emotionally connected with her mother. It is the ultimate *place* where Mihna’s memory travels, freely, back to the time she and her mother would sit beneath it.

Linking the farm and the natural thresholds is the “trail that led into the woods” (Yoon 163), which represents the transitory path between reality and Mihna’s inner world, thereby echoing van Gennep’s theory of *rites of passage*. It represents the gateway to a liminal world apart from ordinary reality, where Mihna can, away from external judgement, mourn both her mother’s death and the future loss of the farm. Moreover, the trail allows her to reach the clearing where she builds a snow house whilst singing the folksongs she learned from her mother. Building the snow house becomes one of Mihna’s acts of resistance against the family farm being put up for sale. While her construction of a house contrasts the anticipated loss of the farm, it fundamentally symbolizes her aversion to leaving the very place where she grew up.

Significantly, the clearing is a central threshold location since it is also where Mihna encounters the translucent, motionless woman wearing her mother’s pale blue dress, thereby constituting the specific site where the boundaries between what is real and the subconscious are allowed to overlap. In the clearing, she leaves a shell hair barrette—which was a gift from her mother—and a photograph of her mother for the ghostly woman as an attempt to offer the specter a hospitable reception. This move contrasts her willingness to engage with the remnants of loss with her father’s suppression of grief.

Ultimately, in comparison to the farm, the clearing is a pivotal shelter for Mihna during mourning, offering the very solace that her own house does not.

Linn, after Nara's passing and despite having lived on the farm all his life, feels detached from it, as though it were an unknown land that he no longer recognizes. This illustrates how during grief, locations that used to be familiar might become eerie and unhomely, echoing Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny in *The Uncanny*. Nonetheless, it is only towards the end of the story, when Linn, searching for Mihna, enters the clearing, that he experiences a threshold displacement, allowing his past and present to merge and forcing him to embrace grief, which is the very feeling that he has been avoiding. At this stage, he enters the same liminal stage of mourning that Mihna has already long inhabited and reaches common ground with both her and her aversion to selling the farm: "'We are going,' Linn kept repeating. 'We are going now.'" But the conviction of these words had already left him. So he stood there, in the middle of that clearing" (Yoon 196), holding Mihna in the same way Nara used to do.

Akin to the clearing and the camphor tree, in "And We Will Be Here", Miya views the hospital's stone garden as a sanctuary where she can cope with exhaustion. It is in the stone garden that reality and delusion blur, for it is where Miya interacts with the mysterious blind boy who plays with marbles. While she is inside the building, Miya's grief is placed in the background. Her psychological needs are outweighed by her duties. Nonetheless, it is outside the building, in the stone garden, where she can communicate with the blind boy, who appears to be the sole individual who is willing to listen to her whilst the rest of the hospital staff attempt to pathologize her suffering. Essentially, the stone garden represents a liminal space between her duties and her repressed inner suffering.

Like the camphor tree, the hospital tree, and the stone garden serve as natural markers of history. More precisely, natural locations such as trees and the stone garden resiliently adapt and bear witness to major historical shifts—such as the arrival of the Korean War or the growth of tourism and capitalism on the island which disrupts the quiet local aftermath of conflict—illustrating how, although history remains vulnerable to change, nature remains still. It is, for this reason, that natural elements, such as trees and stones stand as meaningful mnemonic spaces, storing the specters of the past and non-existent futures because whilst remaining unchanged, they absorb and adapt to the transformations taking place around them. Accordingly, because both the stone garden and the tree—underneath which she and Junpei posed for a painter— have remained intact, Miya views them as meaningful anchors to her past, noting how although the school was transformed into a hospital, “there is still the tree. And the stone garden” (Yoon 206).

In a broader sense, natural sites, having remained untouched amidst the rapid change surrounding them, become threshold locations where the distinctions between past, present, life and death are blurred. In “And We Will Be Here” and “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree”, Miya and Mihna find comfort in cathected natural thresholds since, through proximity to these sites, they feel most anchored to their lost pasts.

1.2. Transformed Locations: Commodification of Meaningful Land, Identities Deferred and Dwellings Overlooked

The places examined in the present section have been labelled as “transformed locations” because a pivotal aspect of *Once the Shore* is Yoon’s representation of how private lives and personal matters, during conflict, become severely relegated, thereby blurring the separation between “a social structure and a subject, and history and biography” (Gordon

19). Miya and Mihna's cases show how during contexts of war or forced territorial commodification, inhabitants are forced to accommodate and adapt their lives.

I similarly consider it relevant to establish, in this section, a contrast between the behavior of Linn—from “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree”—and Dr Henry—from “And We Will Be Here”—and that of the female protagonists Mihna and Miya. In essence, whilst Linn and Dr Henry attempt to manage, discipline or even pathologize grief, Mihna and Miya inhabit it. This tension vividly illustrates the persistent conflict between stillness and change, thereby reinforcing how Miya and Mihna, as isolated characters, actively offer “hospitable memory” (Derrida 220) to the ghosts that haunt the spaces they inhabit, instead of exorcising or chasing them away.

Firstly, in “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree”, the overlap between the personal and public sphere is particularly visible through Mihna's uneasiness about her father selling the family farm. This significantly reveals her aversion to seeing her home—the private and intimate site where she grew up—turned into a luxury hotel. Such repurposing of the land represents a notable shift from a private site of dwelling to a commodified landscape designed for international tourism. In other words, it showcases how dwelling and mourning become deferred for profit. Furthermore, the farm's ponies, once central in the family's daily life and personal history, are repurposed as a tourist attraction. Crucially, Linn, by allowing the land where he grew up to be assimilated into a mere transactional product, is, in truth, commercializing the erasure of the memories he wishes to escape from. This illustrates the extent to which he is willing to repress mourning. He is selling the last remaining traces of Nara while remaining unaware that those very remnants enable his daughter to grieve the absence of her mother. As a result, Linn becomes complicit in the disruption of the quiet lives of Solla's inhabitants, who, in the

face of abrupt transformations imposed by external forces, are still attempting to reconcile themselves with the aftermath of the violent events for which they bear no responsibility.

The tension between private and public spheres is closely linked to the friction between dwelling—staying, remembering, and remaining still—and leaving—transforming and escaping. In “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree”, such discord is persistent and particularly visible through the contrast between Linn’s decision to abandon the farm and his daughter’s desire to remain. Whilst Linn refuses stillness and is in a rush to escape the asphyxiating atmosphere generated by his wife’s absence—bringing him to unconsciously diminish his daughter’s emotions—Mihna navigates absence by embracing it.

As Bachelard holds, the house is a “*tool for analysis* of the human soul” (xxxiii), “For our house is our corner of the world (...) it is our first universe” (4). While Linn is in a rush to flee pain, Mihna opposes her father’s urgency as she continuously rips the tape off the boxes her father packs. Certainly, for both Mihna and Linn the farm has become a claustrophobic site. Nonetheless, whilst Linn finds the farm to be emotionally suffocating on account of Nara’s absence, Mihna regards it as oppressive precisely due to Linn’s hurry to sell it. What was once a place filled with warmth has turned into a site of tension and uncomfortable silence, thereby prompting Mihna to seek solace in nature—which does not mean that she wishes to move out—and Linn to hastily put it on the market. The difference is thus the following: Whilst Mihna engages with grief by retreating into nature—mimicking the times when Nara used to carry her, still an infant, towards the camphor tree—Linn seeks to disengage from it. As a result, the suppression of grief eventually leads both to his alienation from his daughter and to his discomfort in the very house where he grew up, finding it increasingly unhomely, an eerie sensation

examined by Freud in *The Uncanny*, where “something that was once familiar to the psyche” (148) and “had long been familiar” (124) has become “unhomely” (124).

In essence, “The house had become foreign to him, indistinct, and no longer shared. He began to notice parts of it he had not seen in what seemed to be years” (Yoon 168). It felt as though emotional ties between him and his childhood had been cut, his childhood thereby seeming “to have occurred elsewhere, his parents’ house envisioned in another town, another island, perhaps, one from which he had left” (Yoon 168).

Likewise, in “And We Will Be Here”, the vocational school of arts, subject to the necessities and consequences of the Korean War and the United States presence on the island, is adapted into an American hospital for the wounded soldiers.

As Gordon suggests, haunting “links an institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and history and biography” (19), the transformed building, haunted as it is, entails the mediation and distortion of the boundaries between the individual, the institution and history, therefore reinforcing the extent to which Miya’s personal life has been blurred and accommodated to institutional and historical changes.

Although the building is now marked by the pervasive destruction caused by war, Miya persistently searches for the lingering traces of the former school. For instance, she consistently looks for the paintings that once hung from its walls. The building, together with the specific sites near it—the stone garden and the tree—has become a threshold location where Miya’s present overlaps with intimate memories of her shared childhood with Junpei. This ultimately causes Miya to continue to view the building through the lens of her younger self.

What is more, while dwelling is the process through which the boundaries between past and present become distorted, it is Miya’s direct way of preventing the building’s current function and its current workforce from silencing her memories.

Dwelling is, therefore, her way of remembering that she had known the building long before it had been repurposed to serve the needs of war. Dwelling is therefore what alienates her from the hospital's workforce. This is especially visible in how Dr Henry, who navigates the hospital as a space for rehabilitation, dismisses the building's previous life thus failing to recognize Miya's obsession with the missing paintings, her interactions with the blind boy in the stone garden, and her association of the comatose patient with Junpei. While constantly confronting Miya about not taking her medication, he is labelling her grief as a mere symptom of either lack of sleep or headaches. Additionally, by bringing in the comatose patient's mother, he attempts to exorcise and dismiss Miya's turmoil, mirroring Linn who, by selling the farm, unconsciously dismisses Mihna's sorrow.

Furthermore, the adaptation of the school into a hospital illustrates how the very place where Miya and Junpei once formed memories and began to slowly reconstruct their identities has become the site where Miya is forced to confront the loss of the past. She is thereby forced to confront the specters of her traumatic past and her "lost future" (Fisher 33). What used to be a space for the creation of art has now become a place to restore the physical destruction caused by war. In addition, it was at the school that a painter once drew a painting of them, the outcome of which they never saw. This painting, serving as a recording of a shared memory similarly to a family photograph, was meant to provide them with a sense of permanent belonging to one another as though they were siblings. Nonetheless, once the school was adapted into a hospital, it no longer signified a place for creation of both art and identity, but a place where nurses and volunteers like Miya were asked to place their desires and aspirations aside to respond to the needs of a conflict. Consequently, the hospital becomes a threshold building where Miya's past and

present overlap, since she is expected to heal and restore the lives of others, without having previously dealt with the disorder in her own life.

Ultimately, both Mihna and Miya demonstrate that remaining and dwelling oppose both historical erasure and abrupt, externally imposed change. Whereas Linn and Dr Henry prioritize progress and rehabilitation, Mihna and Miya choose to inhabit spaces marked by the lingering absences of Nara and Junpei. Strikingly, the titles of both stories evoke the notion of dwelling. “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree” suggests Mihna’s insistence on remaining in the liminal shelter offered by natural spaces like the camphor tree and the clearing, whilst “And We Will Be Here” conveys Miya’s determination to stay as she waits for Junpei’s return.

2. Long Term Aftermath of Loss and Trauma Visible in Material Remnants

The present section aims to show how, in “And We Will Be Here” and “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree,” missing objects, and retained personal objects, much like spaces, become uncanny yet sentimentally valuable carriers of memory. Labeled as *melancholy objects*, a term drawn from Margaret Gibson’s article “Melancholy Objects,” this section examines how mundane objects, in mourning, become containers of psychic charge (Gibson 287) and thus mnemonic embodiments of the “ghostly reverberation” (Gibson 293) of the deceased. Furthermore, melancholy objects mediate “the void of death and an irreversible absence” (289), functioning as persistent reminders of absence and unresolved grief, since they may symbolize both “the incompleteness of mourning” and “a reminder that grief never entirely goes away” (Gibson 289).

On a similar note, the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, in his essay “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” employs the term *profane*

illumination to describe how mundane objects transform into uncanny items linked to the surreal. Since *profane illumination* is “a materialistic, anthropological inspiration” (Benjamin 227), it can encompass “sensations at sites where ghosts of past (...) cluster” (Cohen 98) and “where the obscured past persists in disfigured form” (Cohen 98). This dissertation draws on the concept to describe the process through which “objects (...) transition in terms of their status, value and meaning” (Gibson 285), so that their familiarity “(das *Heimliche*, the ‘homely’) (...) switches to its opposite, the uncanny (das *Unheimliche*, the ‘unhomely’)” (Freud 148), inevitably loading them with “the mute tumult of memories” (Bachelard 79).

Significantly, melancholy objects constitute the means through which Miya and Mihna establish meaningful communication with the reverberating specters of their pasts and futures. This echoes what Gordon describes in *Ghostly Matters* (1997) as “sensuous knowledge” and “providing hospitable memory for ghosts” (60). Miya and Mihna, alienated and suspended in a liminal transitory atmosphere, develop an uncanny yet meaningful attachment to visual and material objects. Their attachment to material remnants illustrates how “Death vacates as well as raises the meaning and value of objects (...) objects might appear abandoned, even unhomely. Keeping the objects is a way of reclaiming rehousing (making homely) the remains of a life now gone” (Gibson 296-297). Ultimately, the link between the material and the inner world showcases their firm refusal to relinquish their pasts.

More broadly, this section illustrates how, during grief, psychological engagement with the material world reveals that the aftermath of loss is not experienced only within the survivor’s body. Instead, it expands beyond the body and reaches material elements, such as personal objects, which become significant harbors of memory. Furthermore, by drawing on Miya’s and Mihna’s links with material remnants, this section argues that

“rehousing” (Gibson 297) and hospitably engaging with melancholy objects can allow the specters of the past and the future to accompany the grieving subject.

2.1. Missing Objects: Ghost Paintings and a Pale Blue Dress

As argued above, in grief, objects that have lost their owner become uncanny and unfamiliar. In “And We Will Be Here” and “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree,” objects become haunted, storing the specters of the past and the future. Therefore, missing objects such as the paintings and the pale blue dress anchor Miya, Mihna, and Linn to their pasts. However, because Miya and Mihna do not strive to escape from their pasts but instead embrace them, their sentimental links with the paintings and the pale blue dress are more meaningful and less suffocating than Linn’s attachment to Nara’s belongings, which he constantly attempts to silence.

In “And We Will Be Here,” the conversion of the school of arts into a hospital obscures the traces of the building’s former purpose. Considering this, Miya is left to search for the missing paintings since, as I argued in the previous section on cathected sites, Miya and Junpei’s portrait functioned almost as a familial portrait. The disappearance of the paintings symbolizes how the arrival of war has put individual lives and identities on hold. Miya’s life was “a life adapted” (Yoon 200) from the moment she had “come to Korea at an early age” (Yoon 200), “did not own any childhood photographs of herself and did not have anyone to tell her what she looked like then” (Yoon 200). In her case, the transition from school to hospital reflects how the unique record she had with her chosen family—that is, the painting in which Junpei and she sat beneath a tree—was lost with the arrival of military conflict. Without childhood photographs or documents from her youth, Miya’s identity becomes deferred, even leaving her uncertain of her own age and childhood. “She believed she was now thirty-four years old but wasn’t certain. There wasn’t anyone to tell her about that, either” (Yoon 200). Essentially, the

missing paintings affect Miya because their disappearance symbolizes an identity deferred.

In the past, Miya and Junpei habitually visited the school grounds from afar, hoping day after day to see their finished painting. ““Give us back our faces!”” (Yoon 233) they shouted when they would climb the fence near the building, “days after they had posed for the painter” (Yoon 233). To give them back their faces meant to grant them the tangible affirmation of their belonging to one another, as a chosen family born from shared orphanhood. Never seeing the result of the painting haunts Miya, who never ceases to search for it. The missing painting leaves a void filled by Miya and Junpei’s “not yet of the futures (...) which never materialised” (Fisher 34). During her nocturnal wanderings, Miya carries a lamp through the hospital corridors and notices the “bright rectangular shapes” (Yoon 211-212) all over the yellowed walls, which appear similar to “ghost windows” (Yoon 212), the visible remnants of where art once hung.

In addition, the absence of the painting mirrors the unsettling absence of Junpei himself. The absence of the portrait reflects the eerie possibility that Junpei might also have disappeared because of the war. On the whole, Miya, with an identity deferred and her life adapted to war, is left wandering around the hospital corridors in search of the very ghosts that haunt her: the missing portrait beneath the tree and Junpei himself.

On a similar note, in “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree,” Mihna and her father are affected by the unresolved disappearance of Nara’s pale blue honeymoon dress. Mihna vividly preserves the dress in her memory by carrying around a photograph of her mother wearing it. Linn, by contrast, appears to have repressed the memory of the dress. This contrast is significant because, as Gibson explains, “Through the evocation of smell as well as image, clothing might be more effective in momentarily bridging (though never entirely) the space/time separation distancing the living from the dead” (290).

Mihna, who has learned to inhabit grief, does not consider the memory or absence of the dress to be simply painful. Therefore, when she encounters a ghostly woman wearing a dress similar to Nara's, she attempts to engage with it instead of casting it away, even offering it other melancholy objects, such as Nara's photograph in the dress and a hair barrette she received from Nara herself. From Mihna's perspective, the dress has transitioned from a mere physical garment to a mnemonic container that anchors her to her mother. Nonetheless, Linn's relationship with the dress is different, since his behavior is shaped by the desperate yet unsuccessful attempt to control and suppress grief. Surrounded by Nara's belongings, Linn experiences her lingering scent as a reverberating "slow poison" (Yoon 167). Therefore, when Mihna asks Linn where the dress is, he is unable to recall whether he kept or donated it.

He searched for an hour. He did not find the dress. He tried to imagine where it could have gone. They had donated clothes several years ago. Perhaps, by mistake, she had packed it in there (...) Or perhaps he was the one who had gotten rid of it. He could not recall. It all seemed possible (Yoon 189).

It is no surprise, then, that Linn's decision to abandon the farm is nothing less than an attempt to escape from Nara's scent and the claustrophobic atmosphere it generates. Ultimately, the exasperated search for the dress, and the subsequent realization of its absence, illustrate Linn's relentless attempt to hasten and suppress grief, only for him to discover that there is no rapid escape from it.

2.2. Personal Objects: Emotionally Charged and Anchored to the Past

While the previous section examined missing items, the present section comments on retained personal objects. Akin to missing objects, retained objects, during grief, anchor the characters to their pasts in a more hospitable manner. In this section, I examine how Miya's sewing machine and Mihna's star-shaped sunglasses provide substantial

emotional support, serving as tools that allow them to dwell in a more bearable way. Ultimately, Mihna's hair barrette—a present given to her by her mother—is the material vehicle through which Mihna offers a welcoming reception to the ghostly woman and, on a deeper level, to the memory of her mother, haunting as it might be.

For instance, in “And We Will Be Here,” Miya's sewing machine functions both as memory-object and a future-oriented object. Named Little Betty (Yoon 228), it is one of her few remaining possessions: “She owned few possessions. She had a teacup, a comb, an extra set of clothes, and a sewing machine, all taken from the orphanage” (Yoon 202). This detail illustrates how her life has always been adapted to historical change and displacement. Little Betty therefore constitutes a fundamental anchor to Miya's past and, most importantly, an inseparable part of her identity, accompanying her from the orphanage to the hospital room. Significantly, Little Betty harbors the weight of a past shared with Miss Hara, Miya's caretaker at the orphanage, a central figure during the earliest period after Junpei's departure, and the person who taught Miya how to sew. Sewing, then, becomes an activity associated with waiting and resistance, allowing Little Betty to become the strong source of support to which Miya has attached herself. Little Betty is, therefore, an embodiment of the hope that persists throughout Miya's past, present, and future. This is particularly visible when Miya sews a new shirt for the comatose patient while she waits for the moment when he wakes up.

All things considered, my essential claim is that, although Little Betty cannot fill Miss Hara's absence, it becomes the medium through which Miya preserves a sense of closeness to the person who remained beside her after Junpei's disappearance. Currently alone, Miya dwells in the threshold space that the hospital has become, where her past, present, and lost future intertwine and where she continues to cling to the remaining traces of the only two people she has truly loved: Junpei and Miss Hara. Ultimately, as a material

embodiment of Miss Hara, the sewing machine becomes a major object to which Miya remains attached as she hopes that, beneath the comatose patient's eye bandages, she will one day find Junpei's eyes.

In "Look for Me in the Camphor Tree," Mihna's star-shaped sunglasses, like Miya's sewing machine, represent Mihna's means of navigating loss. More specifically, the sunglasses convey the literal and metaphorical lens through which Mihna views the world after the death of her mother. In other words, they allow Mihna to filter reality through the perspective of a happier past, constituting a mnemonic link to a specific memory at Tamra Mountain, where she wore them:

"A photograph of Mihna at the base of Tamra Mountain hung on the wall. In the picture she was leaning against the wooden rails that sectioned off the trail. She wore the sunglasses they had bought for her on that day, too large for her head, the plastic frames in the shape of stars." (Yoon 172-173)

Additionally, the star-shaped sunglasses, akin to Miya's sewing machine, provide Mihna with support and comfort, which is particularly visible when she wears them as she prepares to retreat to threshold sites such as the trail, the clearing, and the camphor tree. Conversely, Linn, who considers the sunglasses a childish device that alienates Mihna from reality, removes them from her and drops them on the ground, telling her: "'You must understand, Mihna,' he said. 'You must be patient. You're no longer a child'" (Yoon 188). Linn's inability to respond emotionally to Mihna's aversion to selling the farm, as well as to her attempts to notify him about the ghostly woman from the clearing, results in their alienation from one another. Linn's removal of Mihna's sunglasses is therefore one of several ways in which he manifests his wish for Mihna to stop dwelling in the past that suffocates him.

Ultimately, Mihna's hair barrette, which "had been a gift from her mother for her seventh birthday" (Yoon 183), exemplifies how gifts from a deceased loved one become increasingly meaningful throughout the grieving process. This is because grief transforms gifts into lasting carriers of affection. The hair barrette therefore serves as an offering of hospitality. "Carrying it on the flat of her palm, she walked into the clearing and settled it on the snow beside the photograph" (Yoon 183) as a gift for the ghostly woman. This act represents her willingness to offer the ghostly presence a hospitable welcome.

3. Ghostly Figures and Delusion: Catalysts Emerging from Repressed and Unresolved Grief

The following section examines how Yoon's ghostly figures in "And We Will Be Here" and "Look for Me in the Camphor Tree" function not merely as supernatural presences, but as catalysts through which repressed grief and unresolved trauma return to disturb the present. After a brief contextual note on the broader literary uses of ghosts, I focus on how the blind boy, the comatose patient, and the woman in the blue dress compel Miya and Mihna to confront loss and move toward a new relationship with mourning.

Long before Jacques Derrida's notion of hauntology, the ghost had already been viewed as an entity that disrupts the present, calling for change—whether collective or personal change—had already begun to take shape over the course of literary history. Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* (1997), suggests that "haunting describes how that which happens to be not there is often a seething presence" (8) and the ghost represents the notification that "that tells you a haunting is taking place" and that engaging with it may bring "history and subjectivity" (8) to interact with each other, hence calling for "something-to-be-done" (xvi). Drawing from this claim, the ghostly figures in "And We

Will Be Here” and “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree,” appear before Miya and Mihna to remind them that action ought to be taken to adopt a more bearable relationship with grief. For Miya, the encounters with the mysterious blind boy and the arrival of the comatose patient, eventually lead her to abandon the hospital, which is a step further into claiming agency over her own identity and her own life. For Mihna, the recognition of her mother’s dress, worn by a mysterious translucent woman in the clearing, triggers her to gradually manifest her aversion to leaving the pony farm, and eventually brings Linn to embrace grief.

Nonetheless, prior to delving into the further examination of Yoon’s ghostly figures, I consider it useful to shed light on how the ghost have remained remarkably consistent since its earliest literary uses. Notably, “From prehistory to this day, we have been haunted by our memories, the past itself, by inklings of the future, by events playing outside our lives and by ourselves.” (Schenkel 11). Ghostly figures have thus widely functioned as the link between the present and the past and notify haunted individuals that what they assumed to be dead or concluded is still alive and asking for “something to be done”⁷ (Gordon 190). In the ancient and classical periods, the ghost was perceived as a restless soul haunting the living in demand of proper funeral rites or vengeance in the face of injustices. As a case in point, in Book 23 of Homer’s *Iliad*, the specter of Patroclus,⁸ after not being granted a proper burial, appears before Achilles to urge him to perform the rites necessary for him to enter the Gates of Hades.⁹ During medieval times, ghosts were used for religious didactic purposes since “Christian teachings about the

⁷ Whether it is to advocate for social justice, to teach moral lessons or to signal the existence of unresolved and repressed traumas that ought to be processed.

⁸ A Greek hero of the Trojan War and intimate companion of Achilles, who was stabbed in the stomach by Hector, the Trojan prince.

⁹ To enter the Gates of Hades refers to entering the realm of the dead, since Hades, in ancient Greek mythology is the God of the dead and the King of the underworld.

afterlife have been imposed on tales of folkloric encounters with ghostly creatures” (Hildebrandt 19). Additionally, the renaissance importantly associated the ghost with guilt and turmoil, visible in William Shakespeare’s ghosts in *Hamlet* (1602-1623), where the ghost of King Hamlet urges his son to avenge his death, and *Macbeth* (1623), where Banquo’s ghost resurfaces as a manifestation of Macbeth’s guilt.¹⁰ The association of ghosts with repressed psychological conflict remained consistent during the Gothic and Victorian eras. For instance, Catherine Earnshaw’s ghost in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1874) was a “metaphor of regret” (Geerken 386) and unfulfilled love repeatedly haunting Heathcliff. On the repression of traumatic experiences, Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) offers valuable insight, claiming that trauma, because it is not experienced during the exact moment of the traumatic event, remains unprocessed, later haunting the survivor (Caruth 4). This phenomenon consequently highlights the possibility of ghosts being the outcome of repressed traumatic episodes.

After the Great War (1914-1918) “haunting took another shape (...) communicating with the dead from the battlefields around the world became a great hope and obsession” (Schenkel 11). In modern and contemporary literature, specters represent trauma, grief and the return of painful memories. With works like Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), haunting is employed as a tool of critique directed at slavery, which is supposedly over but returns in the shape of ghosts to disrupt the present. Modern ghosts like *Beloved*¹¹ call for the “need to realize the past fully in order to bring forth the future” (Krumholz 401). They are “the forgotten spirit of the past that must “be loved””

¹⁰ After having been revealed by the witches that Banquo’s descendants and not Macbeth’s will ascend to the throne, Macbeth decides to end Banquo’s and Fleance’s lives out of paranoia and intense desire to secure his family’s ascent to the throne.

¹¹ Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* narrates the story of Sethe, a former enslaved woman living in Ohio during the post-Civil War and who remains haunted by both her past and *Beloved*, the ghost that symbolizes her dead daughter, who she murdered in order to prevent her from experiencing slavery.

(Krumholz 402), echoing Derrida's claim on the necessity to "learn to live with ghosts" (xviii exordium), a maxim notably recognizable in Yoon's short stories since, in order to learn how to navigate a future marked by the absence of Junpei and Nara, Miya and Mihna must first learn how to embrace the absence itself, and that includes embracing, and not ignoring, the ghosts it produces.

In "And We Will Be Here," the severe repression of traumatic episodes is what causes Miya to convince herself of both the existence of the wandering blind boy from the hospital's stone garden, and the belief that the comatose patient she is nursing is her childhood companion, Junpei. Her life, having been an accumulation of sudden changes to which she had to adapt, has led her to intense emotional constraint. Such repressed emotions, and the trauma they carry, resurface in the shape of ghostly presences and delusions. Likewise, in "Look for Me in the Camphor Tree," Mihna's emotions alienate her from her father who represses his own grief by selling the farm, hence dismissing his daughter's attempts to openly share her feelings. By neglecting Mihna's opposition to leaving the farm, and her encounters with the translucent woman in the clearing, Linn pushes her towards self-isolation and emotional silence. In both Miya and Mihna's cases, unprocessed emotions lead them to encounter ambiguous ghostly figures that signal unresolved grief and trauma.

My claim, at this point, is that in the face of unresolved trauma, Yoon's ghostly figures function as catalysts for action, indirectly notifying the characters that there is "something to be done" (Gordon 190). Considering this, the blind boy and the translucent woman do not merely haunt the atmosphere. Instead, by haunting the characters they bring them to adopt a new form of engagement with grief and navigation through the aftermath of loss. First, in "And We Will Be Here," Miya's life at the hospital is characterized by repetitive patterns: her nursing duties, her wandering through the

hospital halls in search of missing paintings and her examination of the wounded in search of Junpei. As I have mentioned in section 1 about threshold locations, the hospital is the site where Miya's inner distress is put on hold. It is the place where she is expected to assist everyone but herself. It is the place where her traumatic memories remain unprocessed to the extent that delusion—concerning the truthful identity of the comatose patient who she assumes to be Junpei—and her encounter with the ghostly blind boy, suggest that a change is required for her to navigate the aftermath of trauma more peacefully, and to ultimately achieve reconciliation with her own identity.

Strikingly, whilst appearing as separate figures, the comatose patient and the blind boy share characteristics that reveal how they represent two distinct versions of Junpei: an adult wounded by war and the persistent spirit of the child he used to be. I suggest, therefore, that the blind boy embodies the specter of Junpei's childhood and thereby the version of him that Miya has waited for since he first disappeared, when they were still at the orphanage. Notably, both the blind boy and the comatose patient are similar due to their lack of sight, therefore representing how war and trauma can damage the way individuals see the world. In the case of the comatose patient, "a young man with gauze wrapped around his head and bandages over his eyes" (Yoon 205) he has been blinded by the physical atrocities caused by war. In the case of the blind boy, whose "eyes were fogged, like porcelain" (Yoon 213)—whose identity remains ambiguous, if we assume that he represents Junpei's childhood self—his blindness represents how after witnessing the suicide of another boy in the orphanage's barn, he never again perceived the world in the same way as before. Additionally, the link between the blind boy and the comatose patient is reinforced when Miya tells the comatose patient that "he would have liked the marbles" the blind boy played with (Yoon 226). This further suggests the possibility of

the blind boy being the version of Junpei that persists inside Miya's memory, thereby providing the communication that the comatose patient cannot offer.

However, although the wounded patient is finally revealed not to be Junpei once his mother arrives at the hospital, what remains significant is that, regardless of the true identity of the patient, the patient himself has become the cathected figure who, in reminding Miya of Junpei, provided her the relief she has long desired. From the immediate moment that Miya "lifted the (comatose patient's) bandages away from his eyes" (Yoon 205) and realized that "*She knew him*" (Yoon 205), Miya, whose identity has been deferred since she became orphaned, also begins to recognize herself. With her life marked by abrupt and unnatural change, recognizing Junpei becomes a way of recognizing the self as someone who, despite all the shifts in their life, still has a past. Essentially, the cathexis projected onto the patient thus illustrates how the return of Junpei symbolizes the return of the aspects of her life that she assumed to have lost: childhood, companionship, and most importantly, the hopes of building a future alongside him.

Importantly, the blind boy from the hospital's stone garden symbolizes the external force that, towards the closing of the narrative, encourages Miya to leave the hospital behind. By offering him a hospitable reception rather than disregarding him, Miya finds comfort beside him since, unlike Dr Henry—who reduces her turmoil to headaches and pathologizes her suffering by reminding Miya that she needs to sleep and that she is "of no use to (him) if (she is not) sleeping" (Yoon 215)—the blind boy validates Miya's internal torment. In listening to her and acknowledging her decision to dwell, the ghost itself grants Miya a hospitable reception.

Ultimately, the blind boy and the realization that the comatose patient is not Junpei serve as parallel catalysts, disrupting Miya and pulling her out of "her life adapted" (Yoon 200), finally encouraging her to reconcile with the "spectres of the lost futures" (Fisher

34). In the end, Miya and the blind boy abandon the hospital. The two of them, like children, riding the same bicycle as he whispers to her: ““Hey, Miss, (...) “War’s ending” (...) Listen”” (Yoon 234), reminding her that away from the hospital, she is now able to rebuild the identity that had long been deferred.

Similarly, in “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree” the translucent woman from the clearing who wears her mother’s blue dress functions as a significant catalyst encouraging communication and reconciliation between Mihna and her father, Linn. However, the translucent woman fulfills more than one role. Since it is in the liminality provided by mnemonic natural sites that Mihna encounters a bearable way to dwell, the presence of the translucent woman in such natural threshold locations acts as a reminder for Mihna to not abandon the farm nor its surroundings. In other terms, since Mihna identifies the woman by her wearing of “a sleeveless dress with a sash tied around her waist (...) pale blue, like the one her mother wore in a photograph Mihna kept on her dresser” (Yoon 164), the encounter with the woman also triggers a change in the way Mihna perceives and interacts with her deceased mother’s belongings, leading her to realize that they are fundamental cathected items, filled with meaningful memories of her mother. The ghostly woman is, therefore, indirectly guiding Mihna through dwelling and mourning, in a way radically different from Linn, since he has chosen to escape from both remaining locations and objects to the point that these, which were once familiar, have subsequently become unrecognizable and uncanny.

Most relevantly, the reconciliation between Mihna and Linn is indirectly triggered by Mihna’s encounter with the ghostly woman in the clearing, after which the child attempts to tell Linn about it, notifying him that they have “a new neighbor” (Yoon 187). Furthermore, is by virtue of having witnessed the woman wearing the dress, that Mihna subsequently asks Linn if he gave it away (Yoon 172). Consequently, the mention of the

blue dress forces Linn to confront the specific memory attached to that garment, which in turn leads to his hour-long search through the closet and the boxes containing Nara's belongings.

However, out of frustration at not being able to find the dress, and not being able to recognize the pony farm as his own home, Linn, who is incapable of acknowledging his own grief, dismisses his daughter's, thereby insisting that she must grow up, and that she "shouldn't wander alone" (Yoon 188). As a result, this reaction further alienates Mihna from him, ultimately bringing her to retreat more frequently into the comfort offered by the natural sites like the clearing and the camphor tree. By dwelling in these remnant natural locations, Mihna ignores how her father continues to meet with the businessman who desires to purchase the farm. Linn's reaction leads Mihna to feel shame and sorry, eventually leading her, one night, to retreat into the woods after she sees, while looking out of her bedroom window, that a "silhouette appeared in the distance, under the wide arms of the camphor tree" (Yoon 190). The following morning, Linn, who has not noticed that Mihna left, finds Comet, one of the farm's ponies, "lying down at the bottom of a small cliff" (Yoon 195). In whistling for it to come back to the farm, he steps closer to it only to realize that "it was Mihna lying curled against" (Yoon 195) the pony. Lying "nearby (...) an unfinished house made of snow, the child's gloved fingers imprinted onto its walls" (Yoon 195), she is "looking down at a photograph of Nara" and a "barrette (lying) beside her hip" (Yoon 195).

Ultimately, upon approaching her quietly, Linn sees her no longer as an undisciplined child, but as a daughter who is not only mourning the loss of her mother, but also attempting to reconcile herself with the consequences of that loss. He realizes, finally, that what Mihna has been seeking is comfort and recognition from him. It is thus at this precise moment that the ghost's role as a catalyst for reconciliation is fulfilled. In

essence, similar to the ghost reminding Mihna not to give up on the house too quickly, it further—although indirectly—forces Linn, towards the ending of the story, once he “eventually (steps) into the clearing” (Yoon 196), to recognize that Mihna does not want to leave the farm. It is hence, once he finally listens to her, speaking “about nighttime and its noises. About castles and corridors. (...) About a woman in a pale blue dress” (Yoon 197), that he acknowledges her grief and allows “the conviction of his words” (Yoon 196) hence realizing that “perhaps it had been in haste. Perhaps they could stay” (Yoon 194).

On the whole, the ghostly woman from the clearing functions as a manifestation of Linn and Mihna’s shared alienation, slowly bringing them together by encouraging Linn to engage with the ghosts produced by Nara’s absence, to “let them speak” (Derrida 221) and “to give them speech back” (Derrida 221) after having long tried to escape from them. Therefore, as Linn embraces Mihna under the snow, he begins to doubt his rushed decision to leave the farm, and although his very last words are ““We are going,” (...) “We are going now”” (Yoon 196), “the conviction of these words” (Yoon 196) has already begun to fade, so “he stood there, in the middle of that clearing, rocking her, as his wife used to, and it was when his daughter (...) spoke (...) About a woman in a pale blue dress” (Yoon 196-197).

Ultimately, Yoon employs the ghostly figures of the blind boy and the woman in the blue dress as consistent reminders that it is only after reconciliation—with the self in Miya’s case, and with her father in Mihna’s case—that dwelling can more peacefully unfold. Most relevantly, Yoon’s ghosts in “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree” and “And We Will Be Here”, in transcending their association with the mere supernatural world, communicate crucial truths from the real world and from the human nature as it navigates the aftermath of loss and trauma.

4. Conclusions and Further Research

Having conducted a hauntological and topoanalytical close reading of Paul Yoon's short stories "And We Will Be Here" and "Look for Me in the Camphor Tree," the present dissertation has set out to show how in literature, the figure of the ghost and the haunting it initiates, although typically linked to the supernatural world, find their utmost relevance when associated with the real and natural world.

First, by examining the diverse key locations mentioned in Yoon's short stories this dissertation has revealed how places, in the aftermath of loss, function as threshold receptacles of memories from both the past and the unmaterialized future. By comparing Miya's and Mihna's engagement with their surroundings, to that of secondary characters such as Dr. Henry and Linn, I have illustrated how Miya and Mihna, during grief, have become alienated individuals who choose to dwell in emotionally charged locations. The natural threshold locations, where the two female protagonists dwell, such as the hospital's stone garden—where Miya encounters a ghostly blind boy—the trail, the camphor tree and the clearing—where Mihna encounters the translucent woman in the pale blue dress—function as crucial sites where the past, the present, the unrealized futures, life and death overlap. Additionally, transformed sites, such as the American hospital—which was previously a vocational school of arts—and the family farm—which is soon to become a hotel—stand as psychologically conflictive locations where Miya and Mihna's turmoil is displaced, put on hold and neglected.

Second, by associating material remnants of loss with the label of "melancholy objects", I have examined how in both Yoon's short stories, the characters' engagement with missing objects—such as paintings in "And We Will Be Here" and Nara's pale blue dress in "Look for Me in The Camphor Tree"—reveals once again, how Miya and Mihna incorporate cathected objects into the landscapes of their dwellings, while Dr Henry and

Linn initially neglect the emotional weight of objects. Furthermore, the analysis of the symbolism attached to personal objects, such as Miya's sewing machine, and Mihna's star-shaped sunglasses and hair barrette, has revealed how melancholy objects, during the aftermath of loss, can act as significant anchors to one's identity—in Miya's case—and one's memories of a happier past in Mihna's case.

Third, and finally, after offering an overview of the evolution of ghostly figures throughout the course of literary history, I have ultimately put forward an interpretation of the ghostly presences in the short stories under analysis. The results of these readings show that the blind boy and the comatose patient in "And We Will Be Here" and the translucent ghostly woman in "Look for Me in the Camphor Tree", function as decisive catalysts for action. By haunting Miya and Mihna, these ghostly figures encourage them to take action: either by abandoning the very place that pathologizes their suffering, or by seeking compassion and shared familial mourning.

On balance, Miya and Mihna's engagement with haunted locations, objects and ghostly figures illustrates how the use of ghostly presences in Paul Yoon's short stories does not refer solely to the supernatural world in which specters are perceived solely as frightening or threatening eerie entities. Instead, echoing Derrida's call for a more hospitable and direct communication with ghosts, Paul Yoon's "And We Will Be Here" and "Look for Me in the Camphor Tree" demonstrate that the figure of the ghost—regardless of whether it visits us from a lost future—and everything it haunts reveals more profound truths about one's internal universe, than those potentially offered by the rationality of the natural world.

Ultimately, while this dissertation has focused on ghostly matters, threshold locations and mnemonic material items, various elements remain promising for further exploration. As a case in point, the reference to snow in both short stories is anything but

arbitrary. Significantly, I consider it to establish liminal atmosphere deeply tied to the everyday aftermath of loss. For instance, in “Look for Me in the Camphor Tree,” Mihna’s snow house in the clearing can be read as a temporary substitute for the family farm, which is soon to be sold. However, it may also be interpreted as the organic element that indicates, towards the end of the story, that Mihna and Linn seem to finally reach a common ground, with Linn at last inhabiting liminality and grief. In “And We Will Be Here”, snow might symbolize isolation and coldness, almost as if it were a form of muting and freezing reality, only beginning to melt once Miya and the blind boy abandon the premises of the American hospital. Additionally, another compelling question for further study is to explore why Paul Yoon represents ghostly figures that evoke the deceased without being an exact representation of them. Such disparity raises questions about questions about memory, loss, and the different ways grief reshapes the survivor’s perception of those who have passed away.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Supervisor's Written Consent

I hereby confirm that I, Prof. Cristina Pividori, provided my student, Neus Heras, with consent to use AI for the purposes she outlines in the following document.

MARIA CRISTINA
PIVIDORI GURGO
- DNI 49783030J

Firmado digitalmente
por MARIA CRISTINA
PIVIDORI GURGO -
DNI 49783030J
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Bellaterra, 17 June 2026

Appendix B: A Critical Reflection on the Usage of Artificial Intelligence

Prior to the writing of my dissertation, I have made use of Google Notebook LM as a tool during the theoretical research process. I used the AI platform to consult which chapters of the theoretical books were most closely related to my TFG research scope, and to clarify doubts surrounding complex theoretical concepts, especially from Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, Walter Benjamin's *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Martin Heidegger's *Poetry, Language, Thought*, and Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* and especially, "Mourning and Melancholia."

Furthermore, before to downloading academic material from JSTOR, I consulted its integrated AI tool which provides a concise overview of the content of the academic articles. The AI tools used during the research process of the dissertation have played a crucial shortcutting role in clarifying my doubts on theoretical material, especially by having time and speeding up the process and helping me to establish solid connections between the theoretical insights of the different authors. Furthermore, AI tools have helped me develop a broad interpretation of several concepts such as 'specters',

‘mnemic’, ‘cathected’ and ‘profane illumination’, for their later application to the analysis of Paul Yoon’s short stories.

Ultimately, at the request of my supervisor, I subsequently revised the amount and placement of theoretical material included in the dissertation. Since my initial use of AI-assisted tools led me to a range of theoretical concepts that exceeded the scope of a TFG, I had to reduce this material and keep only the concepts that were directly relevant to the textual analysis of Paul Yoon’s short stories. This process helped me distinguish between theoretical material that was useful for understanding the corpus and theoretical material that, although interesting, risked overloading the argument.