Ambivalent Visions:
Dreams, Bereavement, and Belonging
in Contemporary Canadian Memoirs

by

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Graduate Department of English
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Abstract
This study examines the prominent intersections between dreams, representations of bereavement, and negotiations of social and geographic belonging in ten contemporary Canadian memoirs. Dreams are a remarkably common device in the memoir, most often appearing in accounts of family members’ deaths or staging encounters with deceased others and originary landscapes. I argue that these dreams operate as ambiguously authorizing and paradoxically reassuring spaces of contradiction and reconnection that convey the ambivalence of contemporary responses to death and displacement. As such, I suggest that dreams are prevalent in memoirs because they align with the genre’s characteristic focus on personal and social relationships and its irresolvable tensions between representations of self and other, private and public, and desire and detachment.

The four chapters theorize dreams through the lenses of bereavement studies, elegy studies, diaspora studies, and body and affect studies, considering how they adapt the conventions of literary modes such as dream-vision, elegy, and pastoral to address contemporary concerns. Chapter One argues that memoirs frequently link premonitory dreams, deathbed visions, and dreams of the dead in “narratives of dying” that assert the
possibility of continued subjectivity after death, with reference to memoirs by Daphne Marlatt, Wayson Choy, and Philip Roth. Chapter Two considers the similarities between the use of dreams in memoirs and poetic elegies, analyzing memoirs and poetry by Lorna Goodison and Patrick Lane to argue that dreams problematize the possibility of speaking for the dead and act as a form of elegiac compensation in both genres. Chapter Three examines diasporic memoirs by Wayne Johnston, Janice Kulyk Keefer, and Michael Ondaatje, theorizing the circumscribed, originary landscapes depicted in dreams as sites of simultaneous nostalgia and irony, reminiscent of complex forms of the pastoral. Finally, Chapter Four argues that memoirs’ tendency to privilege embodied and affective responses to dream experience enables memoirists such as Choy, Rudy Wiebe, and Sharon Butala to claim affective affiliations that extend beyond the family. Ultimately, this study posits that dreams’ ability to articulate relational tensions within a solipsistic psychological form offers a strategically non-committal and open-ended way of representing loss and belonging in contemporary Canadian memoirs.
Acknowledgments

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This thesis reflects on the ways in which relationships with family members and spaces are represented and enacted through the writing of dreams, and my own writing would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. Most of all, I thank Lucas Carson, who keeps me grounded in the waking world.

This work is dedicated to my grandparents:
Herman de Jong, Stiny de Jong, Gerrit Fluit, and Swansea Fluit.
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Introduction
Dreaming Ambivalence in Contemporary Canadian Memoirs

In the opening chapter of her family memoir, *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* (1998), Janice Kulyk Keefer relates two evocative dreams about her deceased maternal grandparents. Keefer presents the dreams as a testament to her grandparents’ influence on her imagination and memory, reflecting that “[t]hey were the two people I loved most as a child . . . After they died, I had dreams in which they came back and spoke to me” (15). Instead of recording these dream-figures’ words, however, Keefer’s narration of the dreams focuses on their gestures and on the enigmatic quality of the dreams. One dream relates her grandfather’s appearance at the dinner table as a skeleton gradually acquiring flesh, “as if . . . to please someon e he loved” (15), while another depicts her grandmother offering a basket of food from “the cellar steps of her emptied house in Toronto” (15).

The dreams’ tangible, spatial, and nonverbal encounters provide Keefer with a sense of resolution and reconnection that alleviates the reality of loss. She concludes her narrated dream of her grandmother by emphasizing the paradoxical nature of this reconnection: “As we faced each other—unexpectedly, yet with the calm of those who have loved each other forever—I knew that I was both taking leave of and greeting her forever” (15). The dream captures an iconic relational moment that is simultaneously surprising and marked by a sense of certainty, suspended between absence and presence, departure and greeting. Keefer’s repetition of the word “forever” also places the dreamed moment outside of time, rendering it an ongoing, poignant memory. The dreams’ singular images lend an affective weight to her opening chapter due to their apparent status as actual dreamed experiences with complex, uncertain meanings.

While the dreams effectively convey Keefer’s relationship with her grandparents, their purpose and referentiality are curiously thrown into question with her qualifying commentary on the following page. Turning away from the dreams to reflect on the family memoir she is introducing, she explains,

I do not mean anything so fantastical as that my grandparents appeared to me in dreams, demanding that I write down the stories of their lives. What I mean to say
is that love is one of the debts we can never repay . . . [T]o make good our debts, we speak love out, write it down. (16)

With this pre-emptive interpretation of the dreams and the act of writing as expressions of love and indebtedness, rather than invocations of authority, Keefer draws attention to and rejects the dreams’ potential for rhetorical authority. Declining the idea that her grandparents actually authorized her writing of their lives through their posthumous dream appearances, Keefer instead interprets her dreams as confirmations of the love that puts her in her grandparents’ “debt,” thus justifying her memoir as a form of repayment. However, her shift of focus away from the significance of the dreams raises questions about her purpose in relating them, especially since the ambiguous syntax of her first sentence destabilizes the apparent referentiality of her dream experiences. The sentence could be read simply as, “I do not mean anything so fantastical as that [they] appeared to me in dreams” (16), suggesting that the dreams themselves may be read as metaphors rather than real experiences. Keefer’s simultaneous evocation and dismissal of the authority and referentiality of her dreams of the dead highlight the emotional and rhetorical power as well as the instability of this device in the contemporary memoir.

The dreams of the dead that introduce Keefer’s memoir exemplify a prominent use of dreams, visions, and hauntings in contemporary Canadian memoirs, particularly in works that are introduced or concluded by accounts of familial deaths. In these memoirs, dreams frequently appear at significant transitional points—at the beginning or ending of the memoir as a whole, or at the ending of a major section, for instance—and like the dreams in Keefer’s memoir, such dreams are evocatively suspended, spatial and embodied, and referentially and rhetorically unstable. From Michael Ondaatje’s Running in the Family (1982), in which a journey of paternal discovery begins with his father’s appearance in “the bright bone of a dream I could hardly hold onto” (21), to Lorna Goodison’s From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People (2007), which characterizes the memoir as not only authorized but bestowed by her mother in a dream (2), dreams and other visionary experiences have become pervasive framing devices in memoirs, whether recollections of childhood, of specific events or travels, of a parent’s life or family history, or of a recovery from addiction or illness. Although accounts of dreams and visions might be understood as a natural extension of a subjective and often
psychologically reflective autobiographical voice, contemporary uses of dreams have appeared most prominently and consistently in what Paul John Eakin describes as “relational lives,” works that blend autobiography and personal biography to varying degrees to attest to “the decisive impact on the autobiographer of either (1) an entire social environment . . . or (2) key other individuals, usually family members, especially parents” (Selves 69). Notably, the dreams in such autobiographical works, which I will argue should be characterized by the term “memoir,” nearly always feature encounters with deceased parents or grandparents, with ancestral spaces, or both. In contemporary Canadian works, dream accounts coalesce around these interconnected social and familial influences, reflecting concerns not only with authority and representation but also with bereavement, displacement, and familial and cultural inheritance.

This dissertation theorizes the layered functions of dreams and visionary experiences as recurring topoi in contemporary Canadian memoirs, arguing that the inconclusiveness of dreams’ agency, authority, and referentiality lend themselves to the ambivalence and idiosyncrasy of contemporary responses to death and displacement, as well as articulating conflicting representational demands that are inherent to the memoir genre itself. In the chapters that follow, I examine a set of ten Canadian memoirs from the last three decades, works that are both diverse in subject and curiously unified in tone. They include family memoirs and parental biographies; besides Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes*, I examine Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*, Wayne Johnston’s *Baltimore’s Mansion: A Memoir* (1999), and Goodison’s *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People*. My primary texts also include childhood memoirs, such as Wayson Choy’s *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood* (1999) and Rudy Wiebe’s *Of This Earth: A Mennonite Boyhood in the Boreal Forest* (2006), as well as feminist works reflecting on travel and mid-life crises, in Daphne Marlatt’s *Ghost Works* (1993) and Sharon Butala’s *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature* (1994). Finally, they also include memoirs of recovery from addiction or illness; Patrick Lane’s *There Is a Season: A Memoir* (2004) recounts a year spent recovering from alcohol addiction, while Choy’s second memoir, *Not Yet: A Memoir of Living and Almost Dying* (2009), relates a heart attack, near-death experience, and recovery. Despite their differences, these categories often overlap, and all of the memoirs but Butala’s are framed by a familial death. What
these works have in common, further, is their reliance on dreams, visions, and hauntings as vehicles of reflection on loss, belonging, and relationship with individuals and communities.

I argue that dreams’ evocative imagery of reconnection and their ability to convey similar concerns and tensions in a wide range of memoirs makes the topos peculiarly suited for the genre. Thus, examining dreams also provides a way to conceptualize the poetics and concerns of the memoir genre. While dreams provide tenuous spaces of connection to deceased family members or to landscapes from which the memoirists are detached, the indeterminacy of the dream experience itself is paradoxically reassuring and meaningful in these narratives. The dream’s mediated access to lost people and spaces allows for a negotiation of representational ethics, bereavement, and diasporic mobility that acknowledges and embraces the uncertainties involved in absence and loss. In effect, the dream introduces an uncertain, detached model of enigmatic reading while also dealing with material questions of mortality, subjectivity, family, representation, and diasporic identity. The long literary histories and broad interpretive implications of dreams and visions are thus mobilized to address contemporary concerns through idiosyncratic interpretations that find meaning through possibility and desire rather than through certainty or verifiable authority. I argue that these characteristics of visionary writing offer insight both into the open-ended, reflective tone of memoir and into concerns with representing the complexity and perplexity of loss and identity in contemporary Canadian life writing.

My methodological approach to reading dreams in this study emphasizes the multiplicity of literary, psychological, and theoretical discourses that intersect in the literary representation and interpretation of dreams. The range of different approaches to dream interpretation, even within psychology itself, contributes to the dream’s capacity to express equivocality and ambiguity, balancing distinct and even contradictory discursive possibilities as well as multiple understandings of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. While I draw on important contributions by Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and other psychoanalysts, my dissertation is not primarily a psychoanalytic study. Instead, my approach is more akin to that of psychologist Gary Grenell, who similarly emphasizes the
importance of multiplicity in dream interpretation and the significance of the individual dreamer’s ideas. Grenell’s synthesis of dream theories provides a useful analogue for my reading of the dream’s ambivalent function in contemporary memoir, as he suggests that a major function of dreams is to integrate conflicting ideas and affects within a detached and contained mental space. As Grenell posits, dreams provide “the capacity . . . to host conflictual ideas and ambivalent positions without loss of ego integrity or self-object organization” (224). Rather than threatening the constitution of the dreaming subject, the dream experience creates a psychological space wherein overwhelming, contradictory, or highly complex affects that under waking conditions are subject to dissociation, splitting, or disavowal may be brought together for observation by the dreaming ego. This process serves the need for psychological balance and equilibrium. (224)

According to Grenell, dreams thus allow contradictory possibilities, including disavowed notions, to coexist in tension with each other, resulting in an equilibrium or suspension that I will argue similarly characterizes the often open-ended genre of memoir. Grenell’s general approach is reminiscent of other twentieth-century theories of dream interpretation, but his iteration of the way that the dream operates is particularly useful for my purposes. Noting that the ambivalence enabled by dreams is facilitated by “the dreamer’s ambiguous distance from the dream,” Grenell specifies several different elements of the dream that make this use of dreaming possible, each of which interestingly resonates with my theoretical discussions of the literary dream in memoirs: “the nature and use of the dream-space, the oscillating ‘me / not me’ quality of the dream, the apparent reality of the dream, and the use of nonpathological projective identification in dreaming” (224). The dreamer’s sense of detachment from the dream allows for a negotiation of conflicting ideas that may ultimately remain unresolved, enabled by a

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1 Grenell’s approach is reminiscent both of Freud’s emphasis on the juxtaposition or “condensation” of usually separate ideas, and of Jung’s “compensatory” theory of dreaming, which posits that dreams have a regulatory function that enacts a “psychological adjustment” to compensate for imbalances in an individual’s waking psychic life (“General Aspects” 31). Such content-based approaches are typically seen as distinct from neurological models, though brain scientist J. Allan Hobson emphasizes that brain dynamics do not negate the possibility that dream content is meaningful; rather, they help us to understand how in dreams, “discontinuity and incongruity are in a dialectical and oppositional struggle with associativity” (“Delirium” 211). He calls for a “both/and” mindset that recognizes “the impact on cognition of emotional forces that might be expected to create contents rich in salience” (221).
narrative approach that “fluctuate[s] along a continuum between ownership and depersonalization” (232) as well as by the dream’s transformations of time and space. Dreams thus enable a suspension of evaluation in which multiple concerns can converge.

While Grenell’s focus is on how dreams function in the service of psychic regulation, my concern in this study is how the dream’s capacity for bridging contradiction and expressing ambivalence operates in a literary context, and particularly in the memoir genre. Literature has capitalized on the dream’s ability to stage tensions and ambivalence for centuries, and the particular associations between dreams, loss, and spatiality that I trace in my primary texts are not solely a contemporary phenomenon. Medieval dream visions like the anonymous *Pearl* and Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, for instance, address experiences of loss and bereavement through dream encounters in detailed landscapes, featuring naïve dreamers who write down their experiences. In his analysis of Middle English dream visions, Peter Brown posits that “[t]he experience of betweenness is what the dream vision, distinctively, allows poets to express and explore” (46). As in contemporary works, the resulting liminal experiences demand recording and reflection by the dreamer and by others; as Brown notes, “The dependence of dream survival on literary reconstruction is clear from the Apocalypse onwards, when John is enjoined by God: ‘What thou seest, write in a book’” (41). As I will discuss in the chapters that follow, the representation of dreams in contemporary memoirs also resonates with elements of literary genres and modes like the elegy and the pastoral, as well as with the subjective dreams and nightmares of Romantic and modern writing.2

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While dreams in contemporary memoirs draw on these literary genealogies, the particular prominence of dreams in autobiographical writing is a relatively recent trend that emerged at around the same time as the popularity of the emphatically “relational” memoir. As I go on to argue, dreams are prominent in such memoirs because they dramatize the genre’s ethical and representational concerns with identification, alterity, and authority. The indeterminate meaning and evocative quality of dreams are also meaningful in contemporary memoirs in part because they mimetically capture the sense of uncertainty inherent in contemporary approaches to death, belonging, and subjectivity. As Susanna Egan observes in *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999), uncertainty and instability can be compelling sources of realism and meaning in contemporary life writing:

> Instability in perspective, narration, medium, or authority becomes not merely appropriate for expression of lived experience but also, ironically, a process that is convincing because it feels stable or real. The genres that eschew traditional realism and challenge secure knowledge become the means for moments of reality and knowing. (28)

The literary accounts of dreams in memoirs and the epistemological uncertainties that they evoke are ambiguously mimetic, reflecting real experiences of dream and interpretation while also troubling ideas of the authentic and referential in the text. For Egan, the “ironic ambivalence” created by such shifting discourses and dialogues reflects, in part, “the absence of master narratives suitable to this largely secular time” (225). The dream’s instability thus suits it to contemporary, postmodern expressions of ambivalence; yet it is important to note that critics of dreams in each period have searched for explanations of why such expressions of literary ambivalence are suited to the particular concerns of the period. While Brown notes the social transitions of the medieval period, Douglas B. Wilson similarly attributes the “mutually opposing actions” of Wordsworth’s dreams to particular tensions in the Romantic period (6). The long literary, cultural, and religious histories of vision, dream vision, and interpretation thus suggest that the dreams

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3 The dream’s ability to capture and recreate experiences of uncertainty has also been viewed positively by dream scientists. Hobson suggests that “the open-ended quality of dream content . . . prepares the individual for . . . unpredictability by instantiating a multifaceted and versatile agenda” (*Dream Life* 268).
in memoirs involve a significant literary continuity, situating contemporary forms of meaning-making and narrative within a legacy of visionary writing.

The fact that dreams are almost exclusively associated with accounts of death, bereavement, and geographical displacement in contemporary memoirs suggests that the reassuring instability of dreaming importantly participates in contemporary strategies of representing mourning and loss in literature. Indeed, their ability to represent the simultaneity and irresolvability of conflicting possibilities—such as presence and absence, continuity and rupture, and desire and detachment—aligns with what Alessia Ricciardi calls “spectropoetics,” a term she coins to describe postmodern forms of literature and film that “reinvigorat[e]” representations of mourning by finding new ways to articulate its “imaginative urgency” (8). Examining films that “investigate the past in order to raise questions regarding the future,” Ricciardi suggests that spectropoetics might . . . be regarded as a response to the contemporary search for a collective mode of memory, a mode that relinquishes the solipsistic ingenuity of certain strains of modernism. The term in this sense also designates the space in which art allows the enigma of mourning to resonate . . . [T]he spectral delimits a process of negotiation between individual and collective horizons of loss. (9)

Dreams might be considered a potent form of spectropoetics in that they create literal “space[s] in which art allows the enigma of mourning to resonate”—spaces that allow both an open-ended questioning of the enigmatic coexistence of past, present, and future, and a containment that enables the experience of loss and mourning to be embedded within broader narratives of life and social experience. This function of dreams is evocative and ambivalent in cases of both personal loss and geographical displacement, allowing tenuous forms of reconnection with the dead as well as with lost spaces that frequently function in memoirs to convey desire for the past alongside regenerative insight into the future. The tendency of dreams to locate the deceased other—rather than the self—in authentic spaces of belonging also suggests ambivalence about the possibility or desirability of cultural belonging in the present.

Dreams’ capacity to convey a desire for relationship, belonging, and emplacement alongside an acceptance or even embrace of their impossibility also parallels other
rhetorical strategies that critics have identified in contemporary Canadian life writing about displacement. Joanne Saul’s study of Canadian autobiographical “biotexts,” Writing the Roaming Subject (2006), borrows George Bowering’s neologism to describe works that articulate the ambivalence of the “roaming” Canadian subject. Discussing Ondaatje’s and Marlatt’s works alongside Fred Wah’s Diamond Grill (1996) and Roy Kiyooka’s Mothertalk (1997), Saul explores their varying levels of optimism about and desire for self-articulation and emplacement. Cynthia Sugars discusses a similar tension between conflicting claims to belonging in “(Dis)inheriting the Nation: Contemporary Canadian Memoirs and the Anxiety of Origins” (2005); she argues that Canadian memoirs reflect a new-world anxiety of origins in their ambivalent reflections on genealogy and inheritance. For Sugars, these texts, including Johnston’s memoir, “operate under a dual compulsion: a desire to conjure legitimating ancestors, and a recognition that the authentification sought in the attempt is illusory” (179). Taken together, the studies of Saul and Sugars indicate the relevance of such double-edged theories of diasporic emplacement in the Canadian context.

For Sugars, the “dual compulsion” of the memoir’s genealogy provides a way for memoirists to explore “their sense of disjunction and unhomeliness in contemporary Canadian space” (181). This association of ambivalent emplacement with Canadian identity and space echoes Linda Hutcheon’s suggestion that Canadian writers “may be primed for the paradoxes of the postmodern by their history . . . and also by their split sense of identity, both regional and national” (Postmodern 4). While the appearance of dreams in Canadian works seems particularly pronounced, I also recognize that the diasporic and bereavement experiences that give rise to these negotiations are not uniquely Canadian. While some of these works negotiate the nuances of belonging within the nation-state, the emplacement that they seek through dreams tends to be more idiosyncratic—ethnic, regional, diasporic, or transnational. Focusing specifically on Canadian work thus risks creating false distinctions between Canadian memoirs and other prominent works that engage with dreams in comparable ways, especially American parental and grief memoirs such as Philip Roth’s Patrimony (1991), Barack Obama’s Dreams From My Father (1995), Dave Eggers’s A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius (2001), and Joan Didion’s The Year of Magical Thinking (2005), some of which I
touch on in my analysis. The goals of this study, then, are twofold. The examples of dreams in this study serve to isolate contemporary concerns with bereavement and diasporic identification, as well as illustrating consistent patterns in the ways these concerns are represented in the memoir genre. At the same time, I highlight these issues as being of particular interest to English-Canadian writers.4

This project thus contributes to studies of Canadian life writing and literature as well as to auto/biography studies more generally. In her introduction to Auto/Biography in Canada: Critical Directions (2005), Julie Rak notes that “[c]urrently, auto/biography studies in Canada which is [sic] not overtly feminist in approach falls into two categories. The first is a cluster of studies on canonized texts by literary authors . . . The secondary category takes a much wider approach, and explores issues that are connected to sets of texts in different areas . . . often reflect[ing] trends in the study of literature, such as diaspora studies [and] postcolonial criticism” (7-8).5 Interestingly, these two categories are often separated, with studies of “literary” work distinguished from more theoretical and political studies of non-literary texts and autobiographical work in non-traditional media.6 In contrast to these categorizations, my study examines literary memoirs published by established authors through theoretical lenses of bereavement, elegiac writing, diaspora studies, and body and affect studies. While some critics have called for more work on non-literary texts because canonical authors already receive significant scholarly attention, with the exception of the well-known works of Ondaatje, Marlatt, and Choy, few critical studies have been done on the memoirs I consider here. The body of literary works I examine are deserving of examination because of their tonal consistency,

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4 My focus on English-Canadian work helps to limit the scope of the study and reflects the fact that English and francophone traditions of life writing in Canada are distinct from one another. However, some recent francophone works indicate a similar interest in relational representations of another’s death, such as Michel Tremblay’s autobiographical play about his mother, *Encore une fois, si vous permettez* (1998, published simultaneously as *For The Pleasure of Seeing Her Again*), and Dany Laferrière’s autobiographical novel about returning to Haiti after his father’s death, *L’Enigme du retour* (2009, published in English as *The Return* in 2011).

5 In contemporary auto/biography studies, a front slash (/) is often used to indicate the fluidity between autobiographical and biographical forms.

6 The latter is the subject of the other most recent collection of life writing scholarship in Canada, *Tracing the Autobiographical*, edited by Egan, Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, and Jeannine Perrault (2005).
as well as their recognition by the Canadian awards for non-fiction that have proliferated in the past fifteen years. Their representation in this award culture, in fact, is one way in which we might think of these works constituting a national canon. Rak posits that “Canada’ is both a physical place where auto/biography is made and a discursive construct supported and at times critiqued by the production of different kinds of auto/biographical works” (12); I would add that Canadian reception of auto/biography may also shape the geographical positioning of a work regardless of the works’ own ambivalences about belonging. For instance, Goodison is most often identified as a Jamaican writer, and her memoir *From Harvey River* mentions Canada only as the place to which her aunts emigrated in their youth. Yet Goodison’s winning of the 2009 B.C. National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction claims her memoir as a Canadian work, and many of the other works in this study have also won major Canadian prizes for non-fiction. My study thus evaluates the dream’s function in memoirs generally while also considering how the prominence of dreams in this particular set of texts may allow us to better understand the overlap between representations of death and displacement in Canadian non-fiction writing.

While I focus on literary texts, I examine them through a theoretical apparatus that is influenced by other life-writing scholarship in Canada. Besides Saul’s work on the “biotext,” which emphasizes relational subjectivity as well as concerns with displacement in recent Canadian life writing, I am indebted to Egan’s *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* and Helen Buss’s *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women* (2002). Egan’s study compellingly illustrates that contemporary autobiographical texts often pose unresolvable questions about subjectivity, representation, and death, and that they dramatize the process of

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7 Besides the Governor General’s Award for Non-fiction, which was established in 1937, more recently established national awards for non-fiction include the Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction (est. 1994), the Hilary Weston Writer’s Trust Prize for Non-fiction (est. 1997), the Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction (est. 2000), and the B.C. National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction (est. 2005).

8 Lane’s *There Is a Season* also won the B.C. National Award, and Lane, Goodison, and Choy were each short-listed for the Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction, which was won by Johnston in 2000 and Wiebe in 2007. Choy’s *Paper Shadows* won the Edna Staebler Award in 2000, and was short-listed for a Governor General’s Award alongside Johnston in 1999, as was Butala in 1994. Johnston, Lane, and Wiebe were also finalists for the Hilary Weston Writer’s Trust Award in 1999, 2004, and 2006 respectively.
interrogating these questions through “interaction[s] between people, among genres, and between writers and readers of autobiography” (12). Although Egan’s study uses the term autobiography rather than memoir, it provides an important basis for my own departure and focus on memoir and on dreams as specific forms of “mirror talk,” specular forms of interaction and dialogue. Buss’s careful theorization of the tripartite narrative voice of memoir—functioning variously as participant, witness, and “reflective/reflexive consciousness” (16)—also influenced the current study; though I do not distinguish between these voices, her distinction helps to clarify the genre’s interweaving of narrative, essayistic, lyric, and dramatic elements (2, 15, 20), and thus a range of literary traditions whose discursive assumptions and historical representations of dreams, death, and landscape intersect.

More generally, my study builds on existing autobiography criticism by arguing that the remarkable prevalence and consistency of the dream in memoir demand more critical investigation in a broader generic context than they have received to this point. With the exception of occasional discussions of the dreams in Philip Roth’s *Patrimony* and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, autobiography criticism has largely bypassed the role of dreams and visionary experiences in close-readings of contemporary memoirs. The relative lack of critical responses to dreams in contemporary life writing confirms Bert O. States’s observation that, in literature as in life, “we gradually slip into taking dreams for granted” (13), perhaps because of their verisimilitude as much as their vexed, but expected, interpretive problems. Yet, despite the dream’s apparent realism in the memoir, the topos operates in a no less constructed and complex way than the dream in fiction. In what follows, I suggest that dreams provide a lens through which to examine central concerns of tone, relationality, and representation in the memoir, arguing that dreams simultaneously draw attention to and temper the constructed nature and the monologism of the autobiographical text.

**Dream, Tone, and Genre in Contemporary Memoirs**

My analysis of the function of dreams in contemporary memoirs is an investigation both of the literary connections between dreams, loss, and connectivity, and of the memoir genre itself. While my use of the term “memoir” is partially a pragmatic choice that
reflects the adoption of the term by several of my primary writers, I also argue throughout this study that the distinctive tone, form, and focus of the memoir resonate with the overlapping concerns with family, community membership, and loss addressed by dreams in the genre. In fact, like dream narration and interpretation, the memoir genre bridges multiple discourses; as Rak notes, the term “memoir” has retained “unstable meanings that have floated between public and private, between ‘auto’ and ‘bio,’ and between literary discourse and . . . non-literary writing” (“Memoirs” 484). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term originally stems from the middle-French word “memoire” not only in its feminine form, connoting memory, commemoration, and reminiscence, but also its masculine form as a written record, account, or testimonial; thus, the term has historically been widely applied to personal experiences of events, areas of study, or individuals’ lives, focused as often as others as on personal autobiography. The varied heritage of the memoir and its partial occlusion by the more recent and more clearly defined, but also contested, term “autobiography” has led to some confusion over the term. Like Rak, G. Thomas Couser observes that the term has been applied to so many different types of writing that “[the term] has an inherent ambiguity at its core” (Memoir 15). Despite its historical variability, however, the contemporary memoir has become quite consistent in form and tone as a reflective work of autobiography, personal biography, or reminiscence that focuses on a specific historical or personal event, relationship, or time period rather than a comprehensive life trajectory. Although the genre retains, in my view, an “inherent ambiguity,” this ambiguity is a result of the reflective tone of the genre rather than the form itself. Dreams importantly intersect with and support the ambivalences of the genre, particularly through the limited resolution invited by the memoir’s selective, open-ended form and the genre’s relative orientation toward depicting familial and social relationships and socio-historical contexts.

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9 See Billson 265, as well as Lejeune, L’autobiographie en France 11; Couser 23; Zinsser 15; Larson xii; Smith and Watson, Reading 275. While there is no defining example of memoir in English, the seminal example of the genre in French is François-René de Chateaubriand’s posthumous Mémoires d’outre-tombe (1848, literally Memoirs from Beyond the Grave), which combines personal and political reflections. Jean-Louis Jeannelle argues that the form has undergone a renaissance in the mid-to-late twentieth century.
The contemporary memoir is typically characterized by a limited scope as well as a narrative form that is “incremental [and] episodic” (Buss, “Memoir” 595). These characteristics lend themselves to a reflective tone that often concludes with a limited sense of revelation and an open-ended awareness of ongoing tensions, such as unresolvable questions about another’s life, a relationship, or a particular historical event. The fact that the memoir focuses on a selective set of events that may or may not be complete means, as Couser notes, that “closure needs to be achieved in some other way” (Memoir 67-8), which is constituted by “the arrival of the individual at some sort of equilibrium” (68). The end of a memoir frequently involves a balancing of tensions in a temporary, reflective moment, after which the memoir ends and life continues for the writer as well as for the reader. This reflective approach is often dramatized as an active attempt to come to terms with past events, whether the engagement is described as “consciousness contending with experience” (Shields 38), or a “working through of the past” (Buss, Repossessing 16), a therapeutic process of writing through which writers can stage questions and also invite readers to consider them. Thus, the memoir is often described as essayistic as well as narrative, and the expectation that it will make meaning out of experience is a central aspect of the genre. David Shields asserts that the memoir writer has an “obligation to lift from the raw material of life a tale that will shape experience, transform the event, deliver wisdom” (41); similarly, Couser notes that “what I value in memoir is . . . a kind of wisdom” (Memoir 175). In many memoirs, writers convey a sense of simultaneous puzzlement and acceptance about the complexities of life that are not resolved, emphasizing uncertain meanings that can thus become aestheticized and preserved within the memoir form. As Janet Mason Ellerby suggests, “[t]he memoir helps us to embrace the ambiguities of the postmodern without being paralyzed by them” (xxi). Accounts of dreams contribute to the memoir’s sense of uncertainty by posing the promise of meaningfulness and authority alongside an ambiguity of interpretation that is paradoxically comforting and acceptable.

The essayistic and reflective qualities of memoir result in an emphasis on the complexity of existence, of memory, and of relationships as much as on the subjectivity and identity of the memoir writer. Billson argues that although memoirs are autobiographical, they do not share the autobiography’s emphasis on the evolving personhood of the writer;
although “the self undergoes changes of opinion, alterations of intellectual attitude . . . the memorialist’s sense of identity remains constant . . . whatever the solutions to his existential dilemmas, they neither give shape to his life, nor give that life as sense of wholeness or completeness” (267). Rather, the memoir writer is focused on something “outside the author’s soul” (267), conveying “the process of being-in-the-world rather than becoming-in-the-world” (261). Although memoirs may reflect on questions of subjectivity, they do so alongside the question of what it means to be a subject that grapples with issues of belonging and loss, and they can range from conservative to experimental. Many works focus on the preservation of past events, whether personal or historical, testimonial or emotionally significant, attesting to the complexity and humanness of lived experience or to “the physicality of a materially located place in history and culture” (Buss, “Memoirs” 595). Clare Kahane attributes the recent boom in memoir to interest in the “cultural consequences of loss,” calling memoir “the genre most overtly motivated by the desire to recapture, or reconstitute, the lost past in language”; it is “a memory-event . . . elaborated after the fact as a meditation that itself engages the issue of memory and loss” (49). Dreams of absent others and spaces mirror this desire of the memoir to capture the authentic moments of the past, what Billson calls a “desire to preserve the thisness, i.e. the historicity, of past historical life” (261). Thomas Larson extends this emphasis on preservation from historicity to emotion, advising in a writer’s guide to memoir that the focus should be on “immediate emotional memory, almost as if the point is to preserve the evanescent” (18). The dreamed experience of perpetual authenticity and reconnection crystallizes this desire for preservation, even as the actuality of loss is also communicated in these memoirs.

The memoir’s anecdotal and reflective attempts to capture the “historicity” of lived experience are also evident in its characteristic focus on others’ lives and on social contexts, an orientation that I follow Eakin in describing as “relational” (69). While all identity can be understood as shaped by relationships with others, Eakin reserves the term to describe autobiographical works that testify to the “decisive impact” of another person or social environment (69). Although Eakin does not adopt the term memoir, I equate his definition of “relational autobiography” with the memoir; as Buss explains, “memoir writers are more concerned with making their lives meaningful in terms of the lives of
others and in terms of their communities rather than in terms of individual accomplishments” (“Memoirs” 595). In fact, the dynamics and representation of relationships with individuals and communities are themselves a central subject in many memoirs, and the writing of memoirs is thus often seen as a form of enacting and re-negotiating those relationships. Couser observes that “in addition to immortalizing and memorializing its subjects, memoir can acquaint its author with its subject,” a process that he claims certainly “can affect—or even effect—a relationship . . . even when th[e] subject is deceased” (Memoir 181). Similarly, Buss suggests that the memoir’s ability to “bridg[e] the typical strategies of historical and literary discourse in order to establish necessary connections between the private and the public, the personal and the political,” can be mobilized by marginalized individuals who seek a “reintegration of community and individual” (Repossessing 13). Billson argues that the memoir responds to the narrator’s simultaneous alienation from and identification through a particular community, describing it as a “process of atonement with the social matrix” which “mitigates that contradiction . . . while underscoring its existential poignancy” (278). In this context, the dream’s unstable access to authenticity might be understood as a specific strategy that “mitigates the contradiction” of contemporary belonging without undoing that contradiction. In combination with the reflective tone of the memoir, the genre might be seen as an active and yet irresolvable negotiation of potential relationships, and the dream mimics the genre’s aesthetic promise, interpretational uncertainty, and hesitant connectivity.

The past fifteen years have seen a massive shift toward the publication of memoirs, both because of their immense popularity and, perhaps, the fact that their more limited scope makes them a more manageable undertaking for writers. In 2001, Leigh Gilmore noted that “memoir has become the genre in the skittish period around the turn of the millennium” (1), and in The Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs published the same year, George Fetherling asserts that there is “no doubt that Canadian writing has been undergoing such a boom” (vii). The growing recognition of memoir as a separate genre in auto/biography studies, as well as in publishing, is indicated by the recent publication of several monographs on the genre: Ben Yagoda’s Memoir: A History (2009), Couser’s Memoir: An Introduction (2012), Rak’s Boom!: Manufacturing Memoir for the American
Public (2013), and in French, Jean-Louis Jeannelle’s Écrire ses Mémoires au XXe siècle: Déclin et renouveau (2008). Yet this shift in generic terminology has been an area of both celebration and confusion for life writing critics. As the term “autobiography” has received criticism for its association of literary quality with the introspective development of the enlightenment individual, the term “memoir” has been revalorized by some critics, including Buss, for its relatively greater emphasis on relational self-development and political and social contexts. Rak argues that memoir acts like a Derridean supplement to the autobiography, a genre that “presents itself as a threat to autobiography because it points out that there is lack in the genre in the first place” (“Memoirs” 495); she observes that in order to avoid the low-brow implications of memoir’s populism, autobiography criticism has tried to absorb the characteristics of memoir—its blend of public and private discourses, autobiography and biography, reminiscence and record—into continually expanding definitions of “autobiography.”

Indeed, Egan insists that in retaining the term “autobiography,” “[w]e can use the traditional term as an originary composite that allows us to identify its numerous subgenres not as in rebellion against but as authentically of the same genre” (15), and theorizations of relational selfhood and dialogic, collaborative work have become ways in which to welcome the memoir into the fold of autobiography. As Eakin contends, “Once we begin to entertain a notion of autobiography in which the focus is, paradoxically, on someone else’s story, the hitherto neglected class of narratives we often call memoirs will emerge in quite a new and revealing light” (Selves 55-56). Yet such approaches demonstrate a continuing and limiting focus of auto/biography studies on the writer’s subjectivity; by Eakin’s logic, autobiography can embrace narratives that are “paradoxically” about the other only when we realize that writing about the other is really a way of representing the self (56; Miller “Representing” 4).10 In my view, it is more productive to consider memoirs on their own terms, recognizing the generic similarities

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10 Couser similarly claims that “[b]ecause memoir makes distinctive identity claims, we are right to focus on identity issues when reading it” (Memoir 172). Although it is important to recognize the claims that memoirs make, I disagree with Couser’s assertion that this recognition necessitates a primary focus on identity, just as I would disagree that all novel studies should focus primarily on the style of narration.
between these works. As Rak proposes, rather than revising the definition of autobiography to include the concerns of memoir, it may “make more sense to see these books as their authors described them: memoirs that are intended to combine public and private discourse as the stories of the writer entwine with the stories of others” (“Memoirs” 493).

Part of my reason for choosing the term “memoir” reflects the growing use and acceptance of the term today for the type of narratives that I am discussing—works that focus on particular experiences and tend to be oriented simultaneously toward personal, relational, and social experience. The majority of autobiographical writers publishing in Canada in the 2000s designate their works as “memoirs” including Johnston, Lane, and Goodison. Choy’s Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood (1999) adopts the memoir subtitle in its 2001 edition, changing the title to Paper Shadows: A Memoir of a Past Lost and Found, and Choy retains the term for Not Yet: A Memoir of Living and Almost Dying (2009). In applying the term to several decades of autobiographical production, however, I recognize that no one term is a perfect fit due to the fluidity both of genres of life narrative and of autobiography criticism. As Couser reflects, “attention to genre in life writing is at once insufficient and indispensable; it doesn’t always serve our purposes fully, and yet we can’t, and shouldn’t, do without it. . . . The point is to interrogate literature’s form as a means of understanding its function and its force” (“Genre” 142, 145). In the case of Canadian autobiographical writing, the shifting approaches of both writers and critics toward questions of genre make my terminology necessarily contingent and retroactive. My earliest examples, Marlatt’s Ghost Works (a 1993 compilation of the previously published Zócalo [1977], “In the Month of Hungry Ghosts” [1979], and How Hug a Stone [1983]) and Ondaatje’s Running in the Family (1982) were originally published without genre indications and incorporate poetry alongside prose. Works published throughout the 1990s into the early 2000s tended to choose alternative terms that highlighted narrativization without committing to a particular genre, such as “story.” Keefer’s Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family, Choy’s original title, Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood, and Warren Cariou’s Lake of the Prairies: A Story of Belonging (2002) are examples, while Clark Blaise’s I Had A Father: A Postmodern Autobiography (1993) is a notable exception.
While these authorial labels are important to recognize, these earlier works’ negotiations with the textual dynamics of narrativization and relationality suggest a generic transition that has gradually developed toward a more comfortable acceptance of the term “memoir” to describe these thematic characteristics. In *Paratexts*, Gérard Genette observes that genre negotiations tend to appear not in genres “that are well defined and codified,” but rather, “in the undefined fringes where some degree of innovation is practiced, and particularly during ‘transitional’ periods . . . when writers seek to define such deviations in relation to an earlier norm whose authority still carries weight” (224). The weight of traditional genre expectations is evident in the paratexts of Ondaatje and Marlatt’s autobiographical publications. When Marlatt’s “In the Month of Hungry Ghosts” and an excerpt of Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* appeared together in *The Capilano Review* in 1979, associate editor Sharon Thesen expressly declared, “These works are not memoir, nor are they autobiography. They are, rather accounts of the recovering of language and self in a context saturated with memory” (3). Yet this focus on memory and expression in Thesen’s “accounts” echoes numerous more recent definitions of memoir, as does Ondaatje’s paratextual description of his effort to “recreate the era of my parents” in a narrative that is “not a history but a portrait or ‘gesture’” (*Running* 205). Marlatt more explicitly wrestles with the expectation of traditional autobiographical genres in the preface to her compilation of travel “musings,” *Ghost Works*. While she asserts the non-fictional nature of the texts, she questions the adequacy of the term “autobiography” to describe a work infused with considerations of multiple selfhoods and with the influence of her mother. For Marlatt, “[a]utobiography would seem to occupy the opposite end of the spectrum from ghost-writing” (viii), which she defines as “[n]ot the writing of someone standing in for someone else, but writing in your own stead, . . . that forward-and-back that form . . . a place occupied not by one but many selves” (viii). Marlatt’s definition captures the “forward-and-back” relationships with both self and others that problematize any straightforward articulation of selfhood and experience. While Marlatt, Ondaatje, and Thesen move toward memoir by defining their works by what they are not—not history, memoir, autobiography, or a “standing in for someone else” (viii)—my analysis of memoir in this study emphasizes the positive and coherent generic possibilities that result. This developing relationality and the questions
of fictionalization and referentiality that these negotiations demonstrate are central to establishing the dream’s ambiguous ontology and authority in ways that I will go on to discuss in detail in the next two sections of my introduction.

Relational Dialogues: Dreams and Hauntings

Marlatt’s definition of “ghost-writing” as an autobiographical approach that underscores the interplay between the “visitants” of past and present selves and influential others (viii) suggests the productive role that dreams can play in contemporary memoirs. The dream’s ability to stage encounters with both unconscious selves and returning others is a central reason for its prevalence in the relational memoirs that have proliferated in the past few decades, particularly in memoirs that combine autobiography and biography or are framed by the death or absence of another person. Like memoirs themselves, dreams are relational in their frequent invocation of others—what Grenell calls “the use of nonpathological projective identification” (224), or the empathic role-playing in which we interact with and act as others in dreams—yet they are also inevitably subjective and solipsistic experiences, one-sided conversations. The tension between self and other in dreams thus mimics and mirrors the tensions involved in writing memoirs, which capture the overlapping subjectivities of self and other in what Nancy K. Miller calls an “intergenerational, historical, and spectral matrix of identifications” (Bequest xii). Such memoirs represent the intersubjectivity of life, experience, and identity—that is, the influential shaping that relationships with others have on individual subjects. Jessica Benjamin explains that in contrast to “the psychic structure in which one person plays subject and the other must serve as his object” (7), intersubjectivity involves two subjects meeting in recognition of each other’s independence. Yet, as she notes, the psychic tensions between subject and object remain intact in intersubjectivity; in fact, “it is only against the background of the mind’s private space that the real other stands out in relief” (21). By staging encounters with others in psychic spaces, dreams in the memoir highlight the limits of intersubjectivity within the dream as well as in the written text.

Metaphors of encounter, engagement, and dialogue are common in autobiography criticism that deals with relationality, particularly in discussions of the parent-child relationships frequently depicted in memoirs. As Miller notes in Bequest and Betrayal:
Memoirs of a Parent’s Death, “[w]ith the loss of the second parent, the child/parent dialogue moves into the space of memory and writing” (x). Dreams literalize this possibility of ongoing interaction with the absent other, in experiences that Carol Schreier Rupprecht and Kelly Bulkley note are already “inherently dialogical” in their negotiations “between consciousness and the unconscious; between individual and culture; between past, present, and future” (8). The majority of dreams in relational memoirs re-establish a connection with another person or place; some of these encounters include literal dialogue, while others, such as Keefer’s dream, are embodied or mediated encounters without direct communication. These often enigmatic encounters can be considered dialogic in the sense that they invoke the unexpected presence of the other in the text, a presence to which the memoir writers must respond. On the other hand, they also remind both dreamer and reader of the possibility of projection. Thus, dreams take on some characteristics of what Egan calls “mirror talk,” a form of interaction between writer and subject (and writer and reader) that is both dialogic and specular. Like Egan’s mirror talk, dreams may establish a corrective voice through which “(auto)biographical identification becomes reciprocal, adaptive, corrective, affirmative . . . less concerned with mimesis, however, than with authenticating the process of discovery and re-cognition” (7). The dreamed or envisioned encounters are narrated precisely because they are catalysts for adapted thinking, whether about self or the relationship.

As such, dreams shed light on the forms of exchange and dialogue that are possible in the memoir as well as on the ways in which memoirists implicitly gesture to the limitations of the memoir’s dialogism. While critical discussions of relationality in autobiography have most often emphasized how relationality can illuminate an autobiographer’s self-representation, what Miller describes as “identity through alterity” (“Representing” 4), Miller also suggests an alternative approach that is useful for considering the role of

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11 The psychological concept of the relational self was first introduced in autobiography criticism by feminist scholars who focused on the relational styles of historical women’s autobiographies as illustrating a specifically female model of selfhood, a counterpoint to the model of autonomous male identity that early critics had identified in men’s autobiographies (Buss 8-14). While the polarizing nature of these models of identity and autobiography was challenged by later critics, especially Miller and Eakin, the focus of criticism on relationality as a key to understanding the writing self often was not.
dreams in memoir: “Rather than models [of selfhood], we would do better to imagine more perplexing figures whose intimate and violent dialogues with living and dead others perform the bedrock of self-construction itself” (19). Dreams might be thought of as just such “perplexing” figures, which stage questions as often as offering answers about the nature of intersubjectivity. They align with the memoir’s efforts to express and enact relationships while also negotiating the authority and ethics of representing others. Thus, dreams are strategic devices through which memoir writers can address pressing but often unresolvable questions about how much of another’s story one can or should claim in order to tell one’s own story, and whether it is possible to represent the dead in a way that is at once personally, aesthetically, and ethically satisfactory.

Dreams’ ability to dramatize dialogue through an apparent otherness is useful in staging these questions because they allow writers to relinquish some responsibility for their content and interpretation. By seeming to create a space and voice for the other, partly through the ambiguity of what Grenell calls the “me/not me” quality of the dream (224), dreams often implicitly authorize or negotiate the methodology and representations involved in producing an intimate text. Though not all of the memoirs I consider focus on death or bereavement to the same degree, the authorizing function of dreams in such memoirs resonates with Miller’s discussions of authority in Bequest and Betrayal:

If not explicitly, the memoirs devoted to a dead parent are almost always meditations on a writer’s authority, her right to tell this story, the path she followed to telling it. The dead parents’ history, especially their family’s relation to language and writing, is made to seem inextricable from the story of the living child’s vocation. (3)

Interestingly, Miller does not reflect on the dream’s potential to contribute to these negotiations of authority, even though she concludes Bequest and Betrayal by narrating a dream of her mother that assuages her anxiety over publicly presenting her work on memoirs about parents’ deaths. After narrating the dream—a positive, though nonverbal, encounter—Miller recounts, “When I woke up, I was amazed to have had this dream, so amazed that I recounted it to the audience after reading my paper. It suddenly seemed as though I had reached closure—only the dénouement was not my doing, it came from someone else” (188). Miller’s decision to share the dream with her audience, both in the
lecture and in the book, illustrates the power of this othered “dénouement” to justify her discussion of her relationship with her mother in her academic work. Indeed, the ambiguous ontology of dream visitations and the apparent otherness of dreams—what Freud describes as their “strangeness” and their sense of being “extraneous” to the mind (Interpretation 4: 48)—seem to connect naturally to questions of authorship and authority, while providing an approach to these questions that remains enigmatic. As Freud observes in The Interpretation of Dreams, “the finished dream strikes us as something alien to us. We are so little obliged to acknowledge our responsibility for it that [in German] we are just as ready to say ‘mir hat geträumt’ [I had a dream, literally ‘a dream came to me’] as ‘ich habe geträumt’ [I dreamt’]” (48, brackets in original). The ambiguousness of responsibility and agency involved in dreaming and the resulting proliferation of interpretive paradigms offer writers ways of indirectly justifying and authorizing a representation of the other—or conversely, condemning one, as Philip Roth does through a haunting dream at the end of Patrimony.

Despite the authorizing power of Miller’s dream, she also destabilizes the sense that the dream “came from someone else” by quoting Jessica Benjamin’s statement that “the self ‘can and will allow all its voices to speak, including the voice of the other within’” (188). Miller’s final interpretation of the dream as an encounter with “the other within” renders the dream in a liminal location between other and self, external and internal to the mind. Similarly, dreams in memoirs mirror the limitations of true dialogism in the single-author text by allowing the possibilities of both objective dialogue and subjective desire to resonate in dream accounts. Egan’s discussion of dialogues and dialogism in autobiography acknowledges that “[d]ialogism provides a sliding scale between the monologic and the polyphonic . . . What is curious, however, is to see varieties of dialogism at play in a genre that has traditionally been very little given to irony or instability and rather prone to monologism” (23).

12 Priscila Uppal makes a similar

12 Egan uses the term “dialogism” more broadly than Bakhtin, who introduced the concept to discuss the juxtaposition and productive intersections between different discourses in the novel. In contrast, Egan applies the concept to “dialogues” in the contemporary autobiography, including the “dynamic and reciprocal relations between text and context[,] . . . the contestatory nature of many of these relationships; the frequent recognition and destabilizing of power relations; the common move toward decentered
argument about the use of dreams in Canadian elegy, suggesting that interacting with the
dead within a “psychic dream landscape . . . lessens the otherwise dominant control of
authorship in the mourning process,” challenging the traditional monovocality of the
elegy (44). Yet for all the corrective and authenticating features that dialogism adds to the
narrative, it is important to recognize that, like the dream itself, even a collaborative text
that is published by a single author has difficulty escaping monologism and authorial
control. As Eakin argues in a discussion of the ethics of relational life writing, “there is
no getting around the fact that ventriloquism, making the other talk, is by definition a
central rhetorical phenomenon of these narratives” (Selves 181). Dreamed dialogues and
the dream itself share these hints of ventriloquism due to the indeterminable ontology of
dreams, which evoke interpretive possibilities that rest both outside and inside the self:
transcendent visionary experience, ghostly returns, or coded expressions of unconscious
desire. The otherness of the encounter blurs the distinction between other selves and other
persons within the dream, as the incorporated voices within a text simultaneously
disguise and draw attention to its monologism.

The ontological instability of dreams and their staging of encounters with the dead also
overlap with discourses of haunting, and my analysis both draws on and diverges from
recent work on haunting and the postcolonial gothic in Canadian literature. The dreams I
examine in this study range from night dreams to waking hallucinations and visionary
encounters with spectres, and the language of haunting is used alongside dreams in
several texts, including Marlatt’s Ghost Works, Choy’s Paper Shadows and Not Yet, and
Lane’s There Is a Season. The instability that I ascribe to dreaming and the memoir more
generally also aligns with haunting and gothic modes. Egan notes that instability tends to
operate in autobiographical “genres that eschew traditional realism” (28), while Sugars
and Gerry Turcotte remark that the gothic, which is often represented through
“interiorized psychological experience,” “is a literature that both enacts and thematizes
ambivalence” (xv). I have chosen to address these instances of haunting as part of a

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heterogeneity . . . and, perhaps most important, the recognition that human beings exist within a hierarchy
of languages or ideological discourses” (23).
continuum of dreaming and visionary experience rather than a continuum of ghosting because focusing on the literary histories, psychologies, and spaces of dreams provides a new and productive angle on these encounters with the dead and with lost places.

Further, the dreams and hauntings I consider in this study are typically not disruptive or threatening moments of unease or anxiety; Lane reflects that his mother “does not haunt, for her presence . . . is not malevolent” (83). Rather, they are moments of equilibrium in which the potential representational, ethical, and generational conflicts that often inform discourses of haunting are suspended in juxtaposition with one another. These dreams and hauntings offer spaces in which conflicting demands and limiting secrets are recognized reflectively, providing the opportunity to accept and acknowledge uncertainty that often forms the limited conclusion of the memoir.\textsuperscript{13} Although the content of dreams may be enigmatic, the potential uncanniness of the dream’s instability is most often contained by the normalcy of dreaming, which identifies the experience and offers an interpretation, however inconclusive. As Laurence M. Porter argues, dreams are not fantastic because there is no ambiguity about the ontology of the dream experience itself, which is “framed in certitude in its immediate context” (45). Any instability within the dream is taken for granted as part of the dream’s extra-rationality. Like Grenell, Porter suggests that the literary dream can thus function to contain and circumscribe potentially threatening content, noting that “[t]he label ‘dream,’ like the label ‘joke,’ may actually serve mainly to allow an author to express embarrassing or controversial thoughts more safely, evading responsibility and social disapproval” (38). In dreams of reconnecting with the deceased other, the threatening possibility of an actual return of the dead is tempered by a psychological framework that locates the dream within the realm of normal experience, whether based on a personal belief system or on cultural or folk beliefs.

\textsuperscript{13} As such, these dreams and hauntings align with Sugars and Turcotte’s observation that in many contemporary examples, “the postcolonial Gothic . . . turn[s] gothic conventions on their head by converting the unfamiliar or ghostly into nonthreatening—even sustaining—objects of desire” (xi).
The more general uncertainties of identity and subjectivity that can inspire anxiety in the gothic mode are also normalized by the contemporary memoir’s embrace of relational and performative understandings of selfhood, and of the realism and meaningfulness of ambivalence. Justin D. Edwards suggests that gothic anxiety in Canadian literature arises from disruptions of “the epistemological certainties of identity” (xxiv), as the fluid nature of identity “serves as a catalyst for inquiries into the ontological status of subjectivity” (xviii). Yet such destabilizations of “one-dimensional, unicategorical” identity are familiar territory for contemporary critics and writers of autobiography. In fact, while the dream’s reassuring reconnection with authentic spaces may perhaps assuage anxieties about the instability of identity, I also suggest that writers use the dream as a mediating and containing device due to a distrust of such authenticity and stability, whether on an individual or national level. In a contemporary world in which every form of authenticity incorporates hidden and potentially haunting power relations, stable, authentic identity itself has become an uncanny experience, as is suggested by Marlatt’s mobilization of the “ghosts” of her “many selves” to haunt “the house of the self . . . breaking down its oh-so-edified walls” (*Ghost* viii). Thus, dreams and hauntings in these works are not necessarily apolitical but negotiate the implications of the gaps between uncertainty and authenticity, knowledge and alterity. By framing nostalgic desires and conservative understandings of others within dream experiences, writers are able to simultaneously express and distance themselves from potentially problematic ideals of belonging and subjectivity, with varying success. As I discuss in my final chapter, such distancing functions are not always successful in mediating the potentially appropriative claims of psychic connection. In general, however, ghost-writing and dream writing in the memoir draw on familiar instabilities to resist rigid understandings of selfhood, death, and belonging, and to create idiosyncratic narratives of relationality and adaptive identity. In many cases, memoirs are explicitly intended to address and consider these issues.

14 This broad acceptance of unstable subjectivity in autobiography studies reflects the impact of poststructuralism and postmodernism on the field. Shirley Neuman explains that poststructuralism shifted the field’s focus on how texts articulate a coherent sense of selfhood to how they “enac[t] the impossibility of the construction of a unified self” (“Autobiography” 215). Similarly, Linda Hutcheon asserts that “it is not upsetting for the postmodern to have to admit contingency, doubleness, lack of transcendence . . . since it exists precisely to put into question notions such as authority and single meaning” (“Power” 37).
Dreaming for Real? The Dream in Non-fiction

Examining dreams of the dead in Canadian memoirs invites a comparison to a number of well-known fictional works, especially fictive autobiographies, that also capitalize on the rhetorical power and ambiguity of dreamed experiences. Prominent examples are Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1972), in which the unnamed protagonist encounters several visions and dreams of her parents; Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* (1981), in which Naomi Nakane repeatedly dreams about her absent mother; and Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* (2000), in which Lisamarie Hill experiences disturbing premonitory dreams about others’ deaths. While the dreams in these novels serve some of the same relational functions as in the memoir, I have chosen to focus this study solely on memoir partly because, as I have outlined, the dream has structural resonances with the memoir genre. Indeed, the fact that similar dreams most prominently appear in these first-person, memoir-like novels indicates the extent to which they are embedded in and do significant narrative work in the memoir. However, I argue further that the rhetorical presentation and reception of memoirs as “non-fiction” adds another dimension of instability to the function and authority of dreams in these works. Dreams often function to sketch in characters’ psychological background in both memoirs and novels, but in novels they tend to provide a more directly revelatory function that catalyzes the conclusion of the novels. For instance, Atwood’s narrator in *Surfacing* returns to an attenuated form of sanity after dreaming of her parents as simply flawed human beings, rather than godly figures (188).

In contrast with this revelatory function, dreams in the memoir are left more open-ended and often provide no clear resolution. The possibility that the dreams are in fact real experiences extends their meaning beyond the idea of narrative psychologization and introduces the ambiguity of real-life dreaming into the text, in that readers may not expect the symbolism of the dreams to be clearly constructed or revelatory. Shields reflects about the difference between fiction and non-fiction that “[o]nly in non-fiction does the question of what happened and how people thought and felt remain open” (132). Similarly, Couser notes that while the people whose lives are recorded in memoirs may be constructed, “in another sense, they are not like fictional characters: they do not exist solely within the narrative” (*Memoir* 171). As a result, the ambiguous sense of authority
that the dream invokes in the genre hinges on the tension between its simultaneous properties as a putatively real, subjective experience and as a highly conventional literary motif. The expectation of referentiality in the memoir thus creates distinct interpretive conditions for dreams, rendering them, paradoxically, both more authoritative and more open-ended and unstable than fictional dreams. These interpretive conditions can be best understood by thinking of non-fiction and fiction not as ontological categories that are distinctly true or false, referential or non-referential, but rather as rhetorical distinctions that orient readers’ assumptions about texts and that are present whether they are affirmed or destabilized within the texts themselves.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that defining any form of life writing as non-fiction “confuses rather than resolves the issue” (Reading 10), since many forms of life writing, especially memoir, use novelistic conventions associated with fiction. However, the central role of referentiality even in memoirs that are evidently artful can be understood through theorizations of fiction and non-fiction as rhetorical or communicative categories. In The Rhetoric of Fictionality, narrative theorist Richard Walsh introduces a distinction between the concepts of “artifice” and “fiction” that helps to clarify the confusing use of the term “fiction” in autobiography studies. The difference between non-fiction and fiction is not that fiction is artificial, while non-fiction is not; for Walsh, “all narrative, fictional and non-fictional, is artifice” (14). Instead, the gap between the two rests on the different “interpretive assumptions” communicated to the reader by the classification of the text as either fiction or non-fiction. As Walsh elaborates, “Fictionality is . . . a contextual assumption by the reader, prompted by the manifest information that the authorial discourse is offered as fiction” (36). Walsh’s rhetorical theorization of “fictionality” is reminiscent of autobiography critic Philippe Lejeune’s “fictional pact,” a corollary to his famous formulation of the “autobiographical pact.” Where the fictional pact is established by a nonidentity between author and

15 Some scholars have positioned the memoir as less referential than autobiography, filling the need for what Fetherling calls a “third means of discourse that is neither lying nor telling the truth” (viii). Buss attributes “imaginary possibilities” to memoir (Repossessing 3), and Ondaatje admits to the “fictional air” of Running in the Family in his acknowledgments (206). However, all life writing can be considered fictive in the sense that it imposes some degree of narrative coherence onto fragmentary lives and selves.
protagonist and by a work’s explicit “affirmation of fictitiousness” through, for instance, the subtitle “novel” (“Pact” 15), the autobiographical pact is an interpretive “contract of identity” established between author and reader based on the identity between the proper names of author, narrator, and protagonist, confirming the connection between the protagonist and a “socially responsible real person” (14, 11). Lejeune’s unproblematized emphasis on the “real person” has been critiqued (Eakin, Selves 2), as has his use of the idea of a “contract” to articulate the communicative nature of fiction and non-fiction. For instance, Genette revises the contract to an idea of authorial “commitment,” arguing that the idea of the contract “is obviously highly optimistic as to the role of the reader, who has signed nothing and who can take this contract or leave it” (qtd. in Paratexts, 9). As Eakin notes, however, emphasizing the author’s commitment results in a focus on authorial intention that is ultimately unresolvable (World 35). Walsh’s more recent theory sidesteps the complications of both authorial sincerity and the “contract” and returns the focus to rhetorical cues, simply emphasizing “the kind of appeal [the text] makes to the reader’s (or the audience’s) interpretative attention” (15). As he elaborates, “[t]he fiction/non-fiction distinction is not fundamentally ontological, but pragmatic; not a distinction between referential worlds, but between communicative purposes” (128).

Approaching the referentiality of memoirs as a rhetorical expectation, rather than focusing on their relative fidelity to “real” experiences outside of the text, helps to clarify how the non-fiction status of memoirs contributes to the instability of dreams in the

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16 Lejeune revises his idea of a contract in “The Autobiographical Pact (bis)” (1982), acknowledging that “I imagined a double process in the form of a singular process: the . . . system of presentation chosen by the author, and the mode of reading chosen by the reader” (126). Eakin argues that Lejeune’s ultimately “reader-based poetics” (“Foreword” ix) importantly breaks an otherwise circular focus on authorial intention and sincerity (World 35).

17 This rhetorical approach also clarifies the difference between dreams in memoirs and in novels that also have some referential elements, such as Kogawa’s Obasan. Lejeune points out that a central point of distinction is the “field of the real” (“Pact” 22) to which each type of work is expected to refer. Obasan’s testimonial efficacy is contingent on the audience’s understanding that the internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War actually took place. However, because the novel employs an “obvious practice of nonidentity” (15) between author (Kogawa) and protagonist (Naomi), the reader does not expect all of the personal experiences of the protagonist, including dreams, to have a referential basis. Instead, the fictional context invites a reading of the dreams as constructed images whose meanings are limited to the space of the text itself, and which serve specific narrative functions—in this case, to illustrate Naomi’s repression and gradual confrontation of the truth about her mother’s experiences.
genre. The topos is effective as an ambiguously authoritative psychological experience not because the reader can be sure that the dream represented is a real experience, but because it foregrounds the question of referentiality in the first place. As Lejeune explains, in autobiography, unlike in historical or journalistic non-fiction, the work’s accuracy “has no essential importance . . . The referential pact can be, according to the criteria of the reader, badly kept, without the referential value of the text disappearing (on the contrary)” (“Pact” 23). The text’s appeal to a particular interpretive assumption leaves open a space in which the expectation can be negotiated and destabilized, but not dismissed. Whether or not the narrative meets the reader’s expectations, the reader of non-fictional memoir begins from the premise that everything in the narrative is referential, rather than the premise that everything is fictional, and, according to Lejeune, will always “look for breaches of contract (whatever the contract)” (14). Because the events of “real” dreams seem to happen independently of the dreamer’s conscious will, the report of a dream can thus be invested with authority in non-fiction texts, even if the account of the dream is clearly fictionalized or untrustworthy. Many memoir writers anticipate and play with these expectations of the dream’s authority and its referentiality in non-fiction, or they provide jarring interpretations that draw attention to the reader’s expectations.

The idea that dreams in memoirs may represent actual experiences also introduces the ambivalence of real-life dream interpretation into the text, not only invoking a wide range of interpretive possibilities but also including the possibility that—despite its apparent significance—the dream has no recoverable meaning or ultimately exceeds interpretation. The interpretive uncertainty that results is exacerbated by the fact that in many models of dream interpretation, the dreamer is not the most accurate interpreter of his or her own dreams. As the interlocutor of the dream, then, the reader is actively invited to participate in interpretation alongside the memoir writer and to accept or reject his or her own interpretation of the dream, if it is offered. While contemporary literary criticism often involves interpreting texts as if they exceed a writer’s conscious intentionality, the difference with the dream in non-fiction is that it shifts the focus of this analysis from the textual to the psychological. In other words, it redirects attention from the linguistic
unconscious contained within the text itself to the author and an external unconscious whose complications are beyond the scope of the individual text.

Interpretation(s) of Dreams: Four Approaches

The chapters that follow develop four distinct theoretical approaches to dreams to explore the nuances of dreams’ positive instability in memoirs and their negotiations of bereavement, belonging, and genre. I return to autobiography studies throughout to consider how these different critical discourses inform and provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of dreaming and relationality in contemporary memoirs. In Chapter One, “Dreams and Narratives of Dying,” I draw on recent work in bereavement studies to argue that premonitory dreams, deathbed visions, and dreams of the dead are often linked in “narratives of dying” that attempt to balance narrative control with the alterity of death by depicting the continuing subjectivity of the dying person during and after death. After illustrating how these narratives function in brief examples from Goodison’s *From Harvey River* and Johnston’s *Baltimore’s Mansion*, which I address in more detail in Chapters Two and Three, I develop close readings of Marlatt’s *Ghost Works*, a series of three travel narratives; Choy’s *Paper Shadows*, a memoir of his childhood in Vancouver’s Chinatown; and Roth’s *Patrimony*, a reflection on his experience caring for his father during a terminal illness. While the dreams in these memoirs illustrate that the loss of subjectivity is central to contemporary concerns about death, the medium of dreaming also draws attention to the inevitable solipsism of the “narrative of dying.” The range of ways in which dreams are represented—from stylized and iconic to verisimilar and bizarre—highlights questions about the ethical representation of the dead and relational forms of subjectivity.

Chapter Two, “Dreams of Recovery in Elegy and Memoir,” extends the first chapter’s consideration of dreams and bereavement by examining the similar functions of dreams in memoirs and poetic elegies. While elegy studies often emphasize the concept of recovery, both in terms of the poet’s recovery from loss and a recovery of an inherited poetic voice, I argue that dreams of the dead in poetic elegies and in elegiac memoirs problematize the recovery of the other’s voice. The chapter examines how dreams engage the elegiac trope of prosopopoeia, or speaking for the other, in Lane’s *There Is a Season,*
a memoir of recovery from alcohol addiction, and Goodison’s *From Harvey River*, a biographical celebration of her mother’s life, alongside their respective poetic elegies and Atwood’s well-known elegy sequence *Morning in the Burned House* (1995). I ultimately argue that dreams function as a limited form of elegiac compensation that redirects mourners’ attention to living with loss as itself a form of elegiac inheritance.

In Chapter Three, “Dream-Spaces, Nostalgia, and Irony,” I turn from a consideration of the dream’s role in personal bereavement to a broader consideration of how dreams in diasporic memoirs are used to negotiate relationships with the situated cultural histories of the writers’ familial pasts. Theorizing dreams as liminal spaces that have similarities to both Homi Bhabha’s performative “‘in-between’ spaces” of cultural difference and to Sarah Philips Casteel’s “critical pastoral,” a contemporary form of the pastoral that juxtaposes “idealizing and historicizing visions of landscape” (13), I argue that dreamed representations of originary spaces permit an engagement with the past that is simultaneously nostalgic and ironic. I trace the operation of these double-edged dream-spaces in three diasporic memoirs: Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes*, a memoir of her mother’s youth in the Ukraine and her immigration to Canada; Johnston’s *Baltimore’s Mansion*, which recounts Newfoundland’s Confederation with Canada in the form of a family saga; and Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*, a memoir of his search for the truth of his father’s past in Sri Lanka. While I consider how each memoir uses dreams to mediate a connection with an originary past, I also argue that these dreams of the past are regenerative experiences that inform each memoir’s conceptualization of the socio-political present and their contribution to a broader Canadian literary present.

While the first three chapters focus on memoirs that are partially biographical, the final chapter, “Dreaming Through the Body: Family, Authority, Affiliation,” turns to works that are less explicitly relational in the sense that they each focus on individual subjectivity and growth. However, all three still centrally emphasize connectivity with particular spaces and people. Wiebe’s *Of This Earth* is a bildungsroman-style memoir of his childhood in northern Manitoba; Butala’s *The Perfection of the Morning* narrates her mid-life move from urban Saskatoon to a ranch in southern Saskatchewan; and Choy’s *Not Yet*, published ten years after *Paper Shadows*, recounts a near-fatal heart attack, his
recovery and relapse. Despite the differences between the texts, all three writers use dreams and their embodied, affective interpretations to insist on their own individuality apart from the family unit while also asserting forms of affiliation beyond the family. Building on Ronald R. Thomas’s observation that literary dreams often embody “a discursive gap” between different cultural models of subjectivity and epistemology (13), I show that representations of dreams in these memoirs inconclusively negotiate between embodied and linguistic interpretations of psychic experience, empathy, and intentionality. The resulting conflicts between claims to both unique embodiment and universality are quite characteristic of autobiographical writing, and I conclude that the dream’s consistent engagement with irresolvable questions of intersubjectivity and identification exemplify its capacity to mirror the memoir’s open-ended concerns with forms of relationality and representation.
Chapter One  
Dreams and Narratives of Dying  

In *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999), Susanna Egan declares that “the spectre of death hovers over all autobiography, usually unnamed” (196). As durable records of transient experience, written autobiographies and memoirs have often been interpreted as acts of resistance against mortality; by setting down and publishing their experiences, memoir writers ensure that their uniquely situated voices and perspectives are preserved and, in a metaphorical sense, live on. The anticipation of death can also more directly catalyze autobiographical writing, since, as Egan explains, it imparts “a serious impetus to the activity of setting records straight, clearing old scores, avoiding misinterpretation, taking control of the absolutely uncontrollable—the ‘end’ of the story” (196). Yet the impact of death on autobiographical narrative is even more complex when autobiographies and memoirs overtly represent and reflect on the experiences of dying and death, whether the death of the writer or of another person. For Egan, this complexity arises in the question of how writers of terminal illness memoirs, also called “autothanatographers”—writers of their own deaths—attempt to reconcile the autobiography’s efforts at control with their own embodied and fragmentary experiences of the end of life. In this chapter, I argue that similar tensions between the desire for control and acknowledgments of the “absolutely uncontrollable” nature of death are evident in memoirs that represent the death of another person. I focus specifically on how dreams, visions, and hauntings are often central to these narratives of dying because of the ability of these phenomena to capture both the possibility and the instability inherent in the narrative desire for control, coherence, and continuity.

In the memoirs I consider here, including examples by Lorna Goodison, Wayne Johnston, and Philip Roth alongside longer readings of Daphne Marlatt’s *Ghost Works* (1993) and Wayson Choy’s *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood* (1999), premonitory and posthumous dreams, visions, and hauntings revolve around the death of the other, often staging encounters with the deceased person. To reread Egan’s quotation in this context, such dreams create a more literal confrontation with “spectre[s] of death” that “hover” over the memoir. Unlike the abstract, “usually unnamed” spectre of mortality that Egan
describes, these dreams and spectres are doubly “named,” both in their explicit speculation about the nature of death and in their tendency to portray deceased others in ways that emphasize their individuality and singularity. I argue that these characteristics of dreams reveal contemporary concerns about death’s impact on subjectivity, as well as foregrounding questions of representation inherent to the memoir: How can narrative shaping and verisimilitude coexist in representing an experience like death? How can writers ethically and aesthetically balance their own desire to hold onto the lost other with a recognition of absence and loss? Dreams allow such questions to be posed and negotiated through their status as narrative events that encompass both possibility and uncertainty.

While the experiences of dying and bereavement are central concerns in some subgenres of memoir, including memoirs of caretaking and grief as well as autothanatography, depictions of death—most often of a parent, grandparent, or spouse—are also increasingly present in the layered, relational subgenres of family memoir, personal biography, childhood memoir, and even travel narrative. Writing about death and loss is often considered a form of psychological grief work, and memoirs may centrally represent the process of reflecting on and making sense of a death—or failing to make sense of it—in ways that preserve or witness to the death or enable catharsis for the memoir writer. In literary genres of life writing such as the memoir, however, such accounts also have important narrative functions.\(^1\) The prevalent use of accounts of death to introduce or conclude memoirs has been addressed by some critics as, at least in part, a practical way to shape life narratives by providing a coherent end-point and catalyst for reflection. Timothy Baker argues that reflections on another’s death can provide “both a narrative framework and an explanatory principle” (220); above all, he suggests, the deaths of loved ones provide opportunities for closure and reappraisal, since “the writing

\(^1\) Christian Riegel captures the multiple aims of writing about death in his observation that “[f]or the individual creator, the act of writing itself often performs a psychic function and becomes the work that is required to mourn loss, and for the receptors of the text, the work provides instructive models for coping or has the specific function of public memorializing . . . [T]he work of mourning is a multifaceted literary text partaking of the processes of mourning while simultaneously being a product for public reception” (Response xviii).
subject can begin to understand at least one portion of his or her life as past or complete” (220). Similarly, Nancy K. Miller observes in *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent’s Death* (1996) that death can provide “unexpected narrative benefits” (ix) for the interrogation of self-identity, as well as a sense of urgency that “gives grief a story, loss a semblance of closure” (14).

From this practical perspective, dreams and visions that anticipate another person’s death or stage interactions after the death also offer narrative benefits in contemporary memoirs. As a natural part of the grieving process, dreams may convey the emotional impact of a death, while also providing memoirs with an intriguing narrative hook, a tenuous form of closure, or simply a dramatic scene of encounter that at once evokes and problematizes the other’s participation in the production of the memoir. This chapter posits that dreams are narratively significant in such accounts of death in part because their enigmatic imagery and their timing before, during, or after a death lend themselves to the type of personally meaningful stories that bereaved people often create in the wake of a death. Premonitory and posthumous dreams provide narrative trajectories that seem to bridge the fundamental separation of death by creating a sense of order and, in the case of the posthumous dreams that appear in many memoirs, a speculative afterlife that attests to the ongoing subjectivity and character of the deceased person. Thus, the prevalence of such dreams in the memoir indicates contemporary interests not only in representing grief and loss, but also in the uncertain impact of death and mortality on subjectivity. Dreams provide a useful device through which to address these concerns because the contradictory possibilities of dream interpretation foreground the provisionality of the resulting accounts of death.

The subjective medium of dreams also highlights questions of representation that are inherent to the relational memoir, particularly in accounts of death. The death of a close other invites reflection on mortality in general, lending a gravity and urgency to the work of memory, whether it records the other’s life or one’s own against erasure. Baker notes that “it is a familiar commonplace that the death of a parent brings a recognition of the child’s own mortality” (220), and the writing of a death may thus be an important catalyst for memoirs that are not primarily about the deceased person, such as Choy’s childhood
memoir *Paper Shadows*. Miller suggests that the resulting doubled concern with mortality is inherent to autobiographical writing; as she explains, “autobiography—identity through alterity—is also writing against death twice: the other’s and one’s own. Every autobiography, we might say, is also an autothanatography” (“Representing” 12). Yet the confrontation of mortality through the death of another person can also result in complex identifications and differentiations from the other that are evocatively captured in the psychic experience of dreaming. The tendency for dreams in the memoir to represent the figure of a dead or dying person and to create a narratively satisfactory account of their death thus has as much potential to misrepresent the actual subjectivity of the other as to preserve it.² As Clare Kahane notes, memoirs that narrate a parent’s death are apt to incorporate the ambivalences of the relationship, and she thus sees such memoirs as “an attempt both to recuperate the lost object in and as representation as well as to perform in secret the triumph of the survivor who controls that representation” (50).

The inclusion of dreams in representations of death simultaneously underscores the subjective nature of the dreamed image of the other and eschews responsibility for it by attributing the responsibility for the image to the ambiguous agency of the unconscious. Thus, dreams are a site of representation that draw attention to the problematic, subjective, and creative aspects of a memoir’s narrative of dying while also providing the opportunity to affirm transcendent narrative arcs that mitigate the threatening aspects of the encounter with death.

The dreams, visions, and hauntings that appear in memoirs’ narratives of death build upon a long literary history. Dreams and visions each have eschatological associations, by virtue both of the literary dream-vision’s access to paradisal other-worlds and of Christian traditions of revelatory deathbed visions. Dreaming about death and the dead is also a long-historied phenomenon, with literary renderings famously including Aeneas’s

² Couser argues that “[death] entails maximum vulnerability to posthumous misrepresentation because it precludes self-defence” (*Vulnerable* 17), observing that individuals in purportedly invulnerable conditions—death as well as various forms of disability—are also prone to greater abuse and exploitation (23). Although the “harm[s]” involved in misrepresenting the dead are abstract, they can include permanent changes to a person’s reputation and violations of privacy—a concept that Eakin notes is complicated by the shared experiences of relational subjectivity (*Selves* 160-169).
dreams of his father in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and the *Pearl*-narrator’s theological dream of his lost daughter in the anonymous fourteenth-century dream-vision *Pearl*. In addition to this literary history, the prevalence of the dream in contemporary memoirs also reflects recent psychological and sociological discussions of dreams as actual bereavement experiences in which ambiguous dreams about the dead are infused with personal significance. Dreams have received renewed attention in the past decade in self-help books for bereaved individuals, which offer anecdotal examples and sort dreams into various categories, including message dreams, visitations, and even intentional dreams. The latter category suggests the extent to which dreams are not only widely experienced but also expected and desired in bereavement. American writer Dave Eggers hints at this expectation to dream of the dead in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2001), explaining that he doesn’t know how to “remedy th[e] problem” of his lack of dreams of his parents after their deaths (225). Eggers’s characterization of his lack of dreams as a “problem” gestures to a desire to dream about the dead within a space that offers the possibility of reconnection, even as it destabilizes the reality of this reconnection.

The dream’s ability to encompass contradiction resonates with the ambivalent and often paradoxical balance of desire and knowledge that attends the observation of another’s death—the desire for continuity, consolation, and resolution that must be balanced with an uncertain acknowledgment of rupture and mortality, and the resulting ability to find meaning in coexisting, contradictory possibilities. In other words, parallels between the logic of dreams and the logic of loss render dreams a particularly suitable device through which to articulate and accentuate the paradoxical experience of loss. Dreams can be understood as vehicles of contradiction and conditionality in their ability to juxtapose multiple meanings and scenarios that are usually kept separate, as well as in their ability to create scenarios that differ from those of waking life. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud suggests that conditional scenarios and possibilities that contradict each other coexist in the dream because “[t]he alternative ‘either—or’ cannot be expressed in

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3 For instance, see T. J. Wray and Ann Back Price’s *Grief Dreams: How They Help Us Heal After the Death of a Loved One* (2005) and Dennis Raymond Ryan’s *Dreams About the Dead: Glimpses of Grief* (2006).
dreams in any way whatever. Both of the alternatives are usually inserted in the dream as though they were equally valid” (4: 316). This simultaneity explains one prevalent characteristic of dreams of the dead, a sense of confusion about whether the person encountered in the dream is truly alive or dead. While Freud’s discussion of condensation applies to the dream’s content, a similar coexistence of contradictory desires and possibilities has often been associated with the structure and function of dreams. In Freud’s model of interpretation, dreams are produced by the interaction of opposing psychic forces that seek to simultaneously express and repress unconscious desire. Tensions between conscious and unconscious negotiations of contradictory possibilities remain present in more recent understandings of the dream, such as Patrick McNamara’s studies of dreams as forms of “counterfactual thinking” (238). McNamara explains that “[c]ounterfactual simulations are considerations of what might have been if what actually happened could be undone” (238). Because the dreaming brain acts similarly to the brain when it is engaged in waking counterfactual thinking, McNamara posits that dreams may repeatedly generate alternative scenarios that respond to and attempt to eliminate perceived “norm violations” (237). This process “may be construed as a kind of tension reduction exercise in which we attempt to reduce the discrepancy between what is actual and what is desired” (238). Dreams in which the deceased other appears to be alive thus may offer the possibility of accessing what is desired, yet this attempt is always impacted by the awareness of a different reality either inside or outside of the dream.

The dream’s capacity to convey conditionality and contradiction is also accentuated by the ambiguity of dream interpretation. Not only does the apparent narrative significance of the dream often seem meaningful despite, and alongside, the contemporary

4 In the single dream Eggers has of his father, “I know he’s gone . . . but then suddenly it occurs to me . . . that he could very well be alive still” (226). Similarly, Jung notes that in two dreams that follow his father’s death, “I felt ashamed because I had imagined he was dead” (Memories 96).

5 While this theory resembles Freud’s assertion that every dream is a disguised wish fulfillment, the corrections of norm violations in McNamara’s theory do not necessarily accord with dreamers’ personal wishes. The wish that is fulfilled in such dreams is that the violation be corrected, regardless of how serious or trivial it is, thus allowing the dreamer to learn by testing out different scenarios. Hobson similarly describes dreaming as “a process akin to the hypothesis-testing process of science” (Brain 18).
understanding that dreaming is a physiological function of the brain, but dreams about death in particular tend to evoke explanations that exceed the psychological. This tension between possible explanations is evident even in Freud’s systematic method of dream interpretation, especially in his ongoing revisions to his discussion of dreams about the dead in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In a footnote to the second edition, Freud notes the frequency with which patients dream of the dead and posits that “the explanation of these dreams is a very obvious one” (5: 429); he argues, like McNamara, that dreams of dead loved ones simply articulate the conditional “if,” the wish to know how a person would react to a certain situation if he or she were still alive. Yet this explanation becomes only the first of several, and as interpretive possibilities proliferate in subsequent footnotes added over three separate editions, Freud eventually concludes, “I willingly confess to a feeling that dream-interpretation is far from having revealed all the secrets of dreams of this character” (431).

Jung’s perspective on dreams of the dead betrays a similar curiosity about interpretations that go beyond psychoanalysis. In his own memoir, *Dreams, Memories, Reflections*, he quickly moves from discussion of his own dreams of his father after his death to reflections about spiritualism (97). Marie-Louise von Franz elaborates on his approach in *On Dreams and Death* (1984), following Jung in interpreting some dreams “as if they referred, on the objective level, to the postmortal life of the dead person (not to the life of the dreamer)” (xxiii). She suggests that such dreams in fact do offer the possibility of insight into an afterlife: “One feels compelled to leave them in space as a symbolic statement about another reality from which we are separated by a mysterious and dangerous barrier” (157). The difficulty of determining whether dreams are objectively or subjectively meaningful, if indeed they are meaningful at all, thus renders such dreams open-ended sites of symbolic possibility and interpretive uncertainty—an uncertainty that is even more pronounced in literary contexts where the representation of the dream may be realistic, stylized, or even completely fictionalized.

The ambivalently meaningful and conditional aspects of dreams of the dead resonate with the back-and-forth logic of loss, in which the bereaved person can acknowledge a death and yet articulate a sense of continuity with the deceased person. While most twentieth-century models of grief have followed Freud’s essay “Mourning and Melancholia” in suggesting that a desire for continuity with the dead involves a melancholic and
pathological “turning away from reality” (‘Mourning’ 244), a late twentieth-century approach first outlined in *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief* (1996) draws on observations of actual mourning practices to conclude that it is normative for bereaved individuals to balance a sense of continuity with acknowledgments of loss (Silverman and Klass 18). As Robert Goss and Dennis Klass explain, “[t]he great majority of living people who continue their bonds with the dead know full well the reality of the death and the significant changes the death has brought into their lives” (5). In this context, dreams provide a way to experience and articulate a tenuous and even speculative connection to the dead. In *Death’s Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve* (2006), Sandra M. Gilbert compares this element of the psychology of loss to speculative fiction, reflecting that “[a]long with the sci-fi writer, the fantasist, and the teller of ghost stories, the griever is always on the edge of another universe, a cosmos that aches with possibility like a phantom limb” (63). Although Gilbert’s discussion focuses on speculative versions of reality in which the other has not died—a form of writing alternative possibilities into being—her idea of the mourner’s creation of “another universe” for the deceased other can also be suggestively applied to dreams of the dead.

In fact, Gilbert’s discussions of grief’s speculative possibilities are interestingly imbued with dream imagery, though for Gilbert these “dreams” can only be metaphorical, waking fantasies: “If . . . many mourners nurture dreams of an alternative universe in which the dead go on living as usual, such visions are for the most part painfully evanescent, and they often darken as the dream of life turns back into the nightmare of bereavement” (67). The mourner’s speculative gestures, like the more literal dream, thus also enact a dual motion of comfort and instability, in which “[w]hat if frays around the edges as it dissolves into if not” (74). Even if the reality of bereavement and loss must eventually be acknowledged, literal dreams of an “alternative universe” function like Gilbert’s metaphors, offering both consolatory and destabilizing possibilities that, though evanescent, can become a central part of how the survivor narrates a death. The dream

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6 While I still draw on some of Freud’s ideas about the work of mourning in this chapter, I avoid describing the resulting desire for connection as pathological, except insofar as this desire raises problematic ethical questions of representation.
thus accentuates bereavement’s oppositional dynamic between continuity and rupture, as an experience of imaginative possibility whose reality and intangibility are both acknowledged. Eggers illustrates this simultaneity in his wish to dream about his parents, explaining, “I’d love to see them walking and talking again, even if it was fabricated in a dream” (225, my emphasis).

In what follows, I argue that the dream’s ability to balance possibility and instability is integral to its role in accounts of death in contemporary memoirs. The first section, “Narratives of Dying, Narratives of Dreaming,” draws on studies of the role of narrative in bereavement to suggest that as central events in idiosyncratic “narratives of dying,” dreams offer a way to envision the possibilities of continued personhood and relationality through and after death, a function that reveals a contemporary reliance on idiosyncratic explanations of death and the afterlife and concerns about death’s impact on subjectivity. In order to theorize a broadly similar dynamic between dreams and narratives of dying in a range of memoirs, I include brief examples from two memoirs I will examine in more detail in chapters Two and Three, Goodison’s *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People* (2007) and Johnston’s *Baltimore’s Mansion: A Memoir* (1999), in which narratives of dying coexist with the concerns with voice, inheritance, and spatial belonging. The second section, “‘Just an Image, but a Just Image’: Dreams and the Ethics of Representation,” argues that the dream’s duality also offers a way to address the ethical questions that these narratives may raise by simultaneously capturing the desire to solidify a representative image of the other and the inadequacy and impossibility of this effort. This second section extends my analysis to Roland Barthes’s autocritical work on photography, *Camera Lucida* (1981), and Philip Roth’s *Patrimony: A True Story* (1996). By oscillating between theoretical and literary texts, I consider how each illuminates and complicates the other to develop a nuanced understanding of the dream’s contribution to representations of selfhood and mortality. In the final section, “Narrative Re-visions,” I apply the resulting theoretical framework in a close reading of Marlatt’s *Ghost Works* and Choy’s *Paper Shadows*. Both works centrally focus on the uncertainty, revision, and reinterpretation inherent in death narration and dream interpretation. Although Marlatt and Choy acknowledge the meaningful possibilities of narrative, dream, and haunting, their ongoing reinterpretations draw attention to the provisionality of these strategies of
meaning and consolation and to the alterity of the other, and they also embrace the ethical and epistemological indeterminacy offered by the dream’s instability.

Narratives of Dying, Narratives of Dreaming

The paradoxical juxtaposition of continuity and disconnection in both dreams and bereavement resembles the memoir’s attempt to construct a coherent story out of the fragmentary experiences of life and death, “imposing narrative order on a jumble of half-remembered events . . . [in order to] arrive at a truth that is [the writer’s] alone” (Zinsser 6). Bereavement, dream, and narrative converge in memoirs’ accounts of death, which tend to create a personally satisfactory narrative shape for the other’s death while acknowledging the contingency of this strategy of meaning and consolation. While most theoretical discussions of the connections between dreams and bereavement focus primarily on dreams of the dead, the dreams in the memoirs under consideration appear more broadly as significant events in the narratives of another person’s dying, death, and absence. Premonitory dreams that foretell death are combined with dreams of the dead in memoirs by Goodison, Roth, and Marlatt, while accounts of another person’s deathbed visions are central in the works of Johnston and Choy. In each work, these dreams contribute to narrative arcs that bridge the rupture of death, mitigating its uncertainty by unifying meaningful events and articulating the possibility of continued selfhood through and beyond the experience of death. As ambiguously meaningful narrative events, dreams provide spaces in which to engage with a range of possible understandings of death and continuity without committing to a particular interpretation or discourse.

Written accounts of another’s death in contemporary memoirs are suggestively similar to the oral “narratives of dying” often constructed by bereaved individuals, a phenomenon that has been observed and analyzed through discourse analysis by sociologists. Christine Valentine introduces the term “narrative of dying” to describe how bereaved individuals

7 Such strategies implicitly acknowledge that in representations of death, as Elisabeth Bronfen and Sarah Webster Goodwin observe, “the tidy binary opposition between a representing order and a represented chaos is unsound: politically, psychologically, aesthetically” (4). Although I find it productive to consider the role of narrative as a “representing order,” the centrality of the ambiguous dream undermines the distinction between order and chaos, control and alterity, in these narratives.
recount a loved one’s death in conversation with an active listener. Drawing on her own interviews with subjects, she observes that in reflecting on the death of a loved one, bereaved people typically create a narrative shape out of events leading up to and including the death. These “dying trajectories” (20) act as precursors to the subjects’ reflections on the personal effects of grief and loss, as the way the death is conceived narratively affects the ensuing experience of grief. Valentine observes that these narratives’ selection and creation of a sequence of events help to reduce the uncertainty of the dying process (20), even as their fluctuating negotiation of discourses and willingness to embrace contradiction attest to the ambivalence and discontinuities of the experience of witnessing death. Walter likewise argues that retelling the other’s death, or their “last chapter,” as a coherent sequence of events reflects a need to shape the ambivalent and often paradoxical aspects of the dying experience into a “credible” story integrated with the life of the deceased person (“Bereavement” 14). The similarities between these oral narratives and the accounts of death in written memoirs gesture toward a widespread contemporary engagement in this narrative response to death. As in oral accounts, the reflective tone of the written memoir might be thought of as positioning the ideal reader as an audience who, regardless of the actual reader’s response to the narrative, provides a receptive space in which the narrative of dying can be posited, reflected on, and speculatively resolved.8

Dreams and premonitions can become important events in narratives of dying because they provide an enigmatic sense of significance and purposefulness. Such events seem meaningful even if the narrator ostensibly hesitates to embrace them, as Philip Roth demonstrates in his treatment of a felicitous coincidence in Patrimony (1991), his account of his father’s illness and death. Having taken a wrong turn on the way to visit his father in the hospital, Roth finds himself at the cemetery in which his mother is buried. Although he emphatically interprets the event as a coincidence (19), he derives an unexpected sense of satisfaction from it, musing,

8 For another example of written narratives of dying, see Laurie McNeill’s analysis of published death notices, which similarly emphasize the ongoing legacy and identity of the deceased “as an individual and as a meaningful member of society” (195).
I couldn’t have explained what good it had done—it hadn’t been a comfort or consolation. . . . I wondered if my satisfaction didn’t come down to the fact that the cemetery visit was narratively right; paradoxically, it had the feel of an event not entirely random and unpredictable and, in that way at least, offered a sort of strange relief from the impact of all that was frighteningly unforeseen. (74)

Although Roth rejects any consolation from the experience, he finds relief in its establishment of a moment of narrative significance within the randomness of the dying process, a significance that he accepts even as, in his self-awareness, he finds it uncertain and even “strange.” His lengthy discussion of the event illustrates his desire to embrace the apparent “right[ness]” of the event within the narrative of dying—a rightness that stems from the sense of connection with his mother and its parallels with his father’s illness. It also hints at a concern that his arrival at the cemetery also be understood as verisimilar, since the comfort that he derives from the event depends on the fact that it is indeed a coincidence and not a distortion of the events. The representation of dreams in narratives of dying encompasses a similar tension between narrative meaningfulness and verisimilarity that they must somehow bridge in order to achieve their narrative purpose.

The narrative of dying’s selection of meaningful events and idiosyncratic creation of meaning alongside uncertainty reflects what Walter theorizes as a “postmodern individualizing of loss and a rejection of grand theory” (“Bereavement” 11). Rather than adhering to any one discourse that dictates what is meaningful about the experience of death, the narrators in Valentine’s study and in the memoirs I examine exhibit a readiness to select and interpret incidents in ways that seem meaningful in connection to the dying person’s character. Valentine observes that her subjects “negotiated available cultural frames of reference to produce highly complex, idiosyncratic accounts, reflecting individual and personal priorities and agendas. They shifted between discourses to produce a diversity of narratives that encompassed contradictory and contingent meanings” (172). That is, while contemporary narratives of dying and the memoirs that

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9 Clare Kahane notes that the incident conveys “a repetition compulsion that signifies an incomplete mourning . . . but also a kind of comforting predictability . . . that is a primary consolation of psychoanalysis itself: the lost object is there, like a concerned mother, waiting at the end of the road” (53). The sense that the lost object is never fully absent from the psyche is even more compelling when such incidents occur in dreams.
include them may be created by narrators with a range of religious beliefs and ideological priorities, what they have in common is the equivocality and idiosyncrasy of their accounts of death. These resulting individualized and ambivalent narrative negotiations of beliefs about death participate in what Egan describes as a “creative re-culturation” of death in contemporary autobiographical writing. While acknowledging that an awareness of death and mortality impacts all life writing, Egan suggests that

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\text{conemporary work would then be distinctive not for foregrounding death but for its creative re-culturation of the role of death in our lives. The autothanatographers considered here have been unable to rest on any widely held beliefs about death. They have needed to invent their own ceremonies and explanations. This ultimate crisis has challenged not only their daily living but also, quite crucially, their sense of story or of meaning. (225)}
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Although Egan proposes this argument in a discussion of autothanatographers, the negotiations of ceremony and narrative that she discusses also apply to bereavement narratives, in which personalized affirmations of meaning and continuity are balanced by acknowledgments of the contingency of these strategies. In fact, Gillian Bennett and Kate Mary Bennett observe that in cases where bereaved narrators experience phenomena in which they sense the other’s presence, narrators often alternate between discourses “in order to interpret events to their own or other people’s satisfaction” (148), and even “may prevaricate by using evasive language and letting the researcher make up his or her own mind about the nature of the experience” (154). The inclusion of dreams in such narratives has a similarly evasive effect in that dreams evoke a range of possible interpretations and possible beliefs about fate, spirituality, and the existence of an afterlife that are purposely left unresolved. The intersection of possible discourses allows for personalized understandings of their meaning that still acknowledges the uncertainty that otherwise hovers over the experience of death.

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10 Valentine notes that even religious subjects tended to use a “‘pick and mix’ approach, with the advantage of allowing people the freedom to personalise their beliefs” (30).

11 The narrative strategies in the bereavement context differ from those of Egan’s autothanatographers, who “redeem their lifetime not by narrative, and certainly not by making sense or meaning out of their experience [. . . but by] reaffirming only the moment and that, too, only as process” (224). In contrast, Valentine’s narratives of dying focus on affirming narrative, meaning, and continuity to mitigate the experience of loss for the surviving narrator.
The effect of letting the reader “make up his or her own mind” about dreams also occurs when writers report others’ dreams, even in completely fictionalized forms. Such scenes can be overtly used to offer a comforting and narratively satisfying conclusion to another’s life, while their evident fictionality leaves the reader aware of the speculative nature of the conclusion. Johnston’s memoir, *Baltimore’s Mansion*, illustrates these possibilities in its final scene, a series of deathbed visions attributed to Johnston’s grandfather Charlie. This narrative of dying, which marks the second time Charlie’s death is recorded in the memoir, emphasizes its own constructedness in the fact that the dreams narrated in the sequence are another person’s final, subjective experiences, not Johnston’s, and as such are evidently fictionalized. The scenes narrate Charlie’s transition to an idiosyncratic version of an afterlife that Johnston develops earlier in the book, an invented eschatology that nevertheless provides a poignant and meaningful end to the narrative. At the beginning of the memoir, Johnston explicates his own early beliefs about the afterlife, based on his childhood understanding of his home in Newfoundland’s Avalon Peninsula. With a father coincidentally named Arthur Reginald, the young Johnston’s interest in the *Morte d’Arthur* leads him to develop an idea of an afterlife specifically connected to his geographical home: “there were two Avalons, the Avalon where we lived and the Avalon to which, like King Arthur, we would travel when we died” (10). Johnston imagines Avalon as an afterlife that does not accord with “‘death’ as the concept had been explained to me at school” (12). Rather, creating “various hybrid images” (9) based on the Arthur legend and his grandfather’s sighting of the miraculous “Virgin Berg,” an iceberg shaped like a woman, he considers Avalon a place to which one is carried by a queen-laden barge across the sea and where, like Arthur, one can be healed of a “grievous wound” (12): “I fancied that out there, beyond what I could see, beyond the point where water and sky seemed to meet, lay the vale of Avalon to which

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12 Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* attributes a similarly fictionalized death sequence to his grandmother Lalla, who is described as spending “her last years . . . searching for the great death” (125). The day after she “heard the wild thunder and she knew someone was going to die,” Lalla is swept away by a flood in “her last perfect journey” (128). Ondaatje’s brother Christopher notes the extent of Ondaatje’s fictionalization in his own memoir, explaining that “in fact she died of alcohol poisoning . . . a sadder and more depressing account than Michael’s” (66), though he acknowledges the power of the fictional, personalized version as “a marvellous piece of literature and true to her zany character” (66).
Nan and Charlie had been borne, barge-borne by the hooded Queen and her assistant queens. Avalon was out there; it could not be as nebulously otherworldly as heaven” (20). Although this material conception of Avalon is originally only “fancied” by Johnston, this fancy becomes crucial in the final, imagined scenes of Charlie’s death. Having experienced a “grievous wound” both in the loss of Newfoundland’s independence and in his own burning secret of having spontaneously voted for confederation with Canada, Charlie is ready to cross into a perpetual, healing version of Avalon. In a visionary encounter that he experiences as a series of dreams and awakenings, Charlie envisions himself standing at the window of his forge, where he hears “four women conversing in some urgency as if together they are piloting their craft to shore” (270). Going down to the beach, Charlie steps “into the fog” and finally “looks out at the sea, [where] everything is as it was before he crossed the stream, before he crossed over into Avalon” (272). Johnston’s re-narration of Charlie’s death as a transition to this idiosyncratic, geographically and culturally specific afterlife allows for an account of death that positively reinforces the social and political context of the memoir and of Charlie’s life.13

As Johnston’s narrative illustrates, the personalization of narratives of dying in memoirs typically emphasizes the character of the dying other as well as articulating personal meaning and belief systems. Affirming the subjectivity of the other is a central concern in the narratives of dying theorized by Walter and Valentine, which suggests that these narratives respond to contemporary concerns about the loss of selfhood occasioned in the dying process and in the event of death. Walter explains that his approach to bereavement “roots contemporary grief in the problematics of identity construction that characterize this society” (“Bereavement” 20) and observes that in contemporary approaches to death, “[r]itual is replaced by discourse,” dialogue, and narration about the death and the deceased person (15).14 The narrative of dying thus becomes a discursive ritual in which

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13 I discuss Johnston’s memoir and the dream’s contribution to spatial and political negotiations of nationalism in more detail in Chapter 3.

14 The fact that contemporary responses to death are primarily discursive and cannot rely on broad social acceptance of beliefs about death are the most significant distinctions of twentieth-century approaches to grief. Bronfen and Goodwin note that several scholars, including Ariès, have emphasized the idea that death and individuality are “intrinsically connected”; however, they attribute a particular focus on this
concerns about the loss of selfhood that death entails are mitigated through a focus on continuities in the character of the dying person. Valentine’s analyses of oral dying trajectories finds that narrators “tried to piece events together to create a dying that ‘belonged’ to and was characteristic of the individual concerned” (37), a process of interpretation that she goes on to describe as “salvaging” (38) the redeeming moments from an overall process marked by uncertainty. She observes that such narratives’ emphasis on the other’s character and on “the social nature of dying” (16) is fundamentally intertwined with concerns about the quality of the death, noting that “[t]he dying experience was evaluated in terms of the extent to which it reflected the dying person’s characteristic selfhood and continuing agency, as well as affirming the relationship between the dying person and the narrator” (16). Devices that can affirm these elements in the dying process may thus also “salvage” the narrative of dying.

In their concern with reiterating the selfhood and relationality of the other during death, contemporary narratives of dying articulate a version of the “good death,” a cultural ideal whose manifestations in the West have evolved over several centuries. While earlier iterations of the ideal involved last rites, the Ars Moriendi, or the ability to put one’s material affairs in order (Howarth 133), twentieth-century versions of the good death focus more centrally on agency and personhood, including the ability to accept and to have control over the timing, location, and quality of death (134-7). Although personal conceptions of a good death may differ, Walter suggests that in general, “the good death is now where social and physical death coincide” (On Bereavement 50). Since the ideal of good death influences not only issues of care, but also how the bereaved respond to the experience of death, the “salvaging” of the dying experience as characteristic of the dying person can retroactively create a comforting narrative of good death. Dreams of the other’s continuing selfhood and deathbed visions that emphasize relationality during the final moments of life provide a crucial narrative device in this context because they allow connection to twentieth-century bereavement and representation: “[a]s that which threatens individuality, death also becomes, in the modern period, a supreme confirmation of individuality” (16).

15 The attempt to coordinate the two underlies otherwise opposing movements of hospice care, which emphasizes maintaining holistic care for the person until natural death, and euthanasia, which emphasizes personal agency in choosing the time of death (Howarth 145).
memoirists to affirm a good death regardless of whether or not the narrator witnesses the death, and whether or not the dying person is conscious. These possibilities are important because in practice, the social presence of the dying person is often elusive, whether in prolonged deaths or in sudden or accidental deaths. Valentine acknowledges that the association between personhood and embodied agency can render these narratives difficult in dying processes that involve increasing bodily incapacity. In her study, one solution of bereaved narrators is to emphasize subtle and intersubjective cues that imply that “exercise exercising agency and having an impact on one’s social environment [are] not necessarily linked to rational intentionality or a performative, bounded body” (41). Despite dreams’ uncertain agency, they can go even further than these embodied cues in affirming the ongoing intentionality, personhood, and even embodiment of the other not only before and during the experience of death but also beyond it into an afterlife.

The prominent role of dreams in Goodison’s *From Harvey River*, a biographical memoir about her mother Doris, illustrates how both premonitory dreams and dreams of the dead can attest to the other’s ongoing personhood and relationality in narratives of dying. For instance, despite living at a distance from her own mother, Margaret, Doris has a series of dreams of Margaret in a characteristic pose, which culminate in a dream on the morning of her death in which her deceased husband’s face appears in the pupil of her eye (253). These premonitory dreams allow Doris to participate in the narrative of her mother’s death while also emphasizing Margaret’s character, her continued relationship with her husband, and her social role as a wife. Such emphases are similarly present in Goodison’s own premonitory dreams about her mother’s death, which form part of a longer narrative of dying at the end of the memoir. The narrative is framed by a scene of bereavement in a market in Kingston, Jamaica, her mother’s home; while Goodison is comforted by some of the market women after they learn of her mother’s death, she recalls the days and then the years leading up to the death, emphasizing both her own relationship with her mother and her mother’s ongoing care for her family. The premonitory dream appears at the end of this sequence. Like Doris’s dream, Goodison’s dream centrally features her father, Doris’s deceased husband, who had been a chauffeur:

The night before she died, I dreamt that my father had driven up to my mother’s house in Harbour View in a big black limousine. He had driven straight through
the locked gate and up onto the verandah, and even in the dream I knew that he had come to take Doris to where her people were congregated, waiting for her to join them and enter into her rest.

The day she died, she sat up in bed and began to say her husband Marcus’s name and then the names of her parents . . . [and] of her brothers and sisters. (273)

In this passage, the premonitory dream blends directly into a deathbed scene in which not only the personhood and agency of her mother continue, but in which she affirms her relationships with both living and dead others. The afterlives depicted by Goodison’s dreams of her parents, such as this communal scene and an opening dream that depicts her mother in a personally suitable heaven, “a really palatial and splendid sewing-room” (2), complement the actual deathbed scene by affirming social relationships and central characteristics of their identities—in this case, the forms of labour that each parent had embraced to create a sustainable and celebratory life despite unexpected economic hardships.16

These affirming dreams that contribute to narratives of “good death” retain their meaningfulness even when juxtaposed with acknowledgments of their instability, which are present in varying degrees in different memoirs. In Goodison’s memoir, dreams are a reliable source of interaction with the dead, based on a cultural norm; as she explains in her preface, “[a]fter my mother’s death . . . I began to ‘dream’ her, as Jamaicans say” (2). The dreams incorporate both reconnection and rupture; although Goodison is able to speak to her mother, she is instructed not to “stay with her too long, because the living should not mix-up too much with the dead” (2). In Johnston’s memoir, the instability of Charlie’s dreams and their inclusion of relational ruptures are more pronounced. Not only is the experience a subjective vision, and the idea of Avalon Johnston’s “fancy,” but in this particular case, these scenes are also evidently fictional, since Johnston could not have had access to Charlie’s dying consciousness. Besides these layered instabilities that render Charlie’s afterlife only an imagined, though meaningful, possibility, the scene also includes poignant acknowledgments of rupture as well as continuity, especially with regards to Charlie’s relational identity as a father. Charlie’s tense relationship with his

16 I discuss the generational parallels and cultural context of Goodison’s dreams in detail in Chapter 2.
son Art, Johnston’s father, is central to the memoir, and at the beginning of his dream sequence, Charlie worries about Art, fearing that the experience is actually a premonition of Art’s death rather than his own. As the dreams continue, so does the overlap between the narratives of his damaged relationship with Art and his journey to Avalon. Going down to the beach, which is the site of transition to Avalon as well as the place where he had his last, bitter encounter with his son, Charlie senses that “[s]omeone is coming, someone he knew would meet him here if he waited long enough” (271); the ambiguity of the “someone” effectively gestures to both Art and to the barge-helming women who will guide him to Avalon. Yet this emphasis on relationality is bittersweet, since even as the wording of the dream reminds readers of its relational meaning, that meaning becomes obscure to Charlie himself. After his transition to Avalon, he recalls that “[s]omething happened on this patch of beach, but he cannot remember what” (272).

The gap between the readers’—and narrator’s—apprehension of the relational resonances in Charlie’s death, and Charlie’s own distance from them, draws attention to a question of perspective that Glennys Howarth suggests is always crucial to the ideal of the “good death”: the question of “for whom it is good” (132). The posthumous narrative of dying is shaped by the bereaved writer—the subject of loss, rather than of death. One motivation for narrating a “good death” is concern for the other, a desire for reassurance that the other’s wishes for his or her death were acknowledged. Yet these narratives’ and dreams’ emphasis on the maintenance of selfhood up to and after death also hints at a broader concern about the stability of subjectivity that affects the writer as well. Klass and Robert Goss assert that a central purpose of the narrative of dying is to bridge a rupture or “interruption” in the narrating self, explaining, “[w]e understand that death can be an interruption in an individual’s or a community’s narrative and that the goal of grief is to reconstruct the narrative in a way that includes both the fact of death and how the bond with the dead will continue” (ix). Klass and Goss’s explanation reflects a relational model of selfhood in which the event of death places the selfhood, the “narrative,” of both the other and of the self in jeopardy, not only because death prompts the bereaved survivor to confront the inevitability of mortality, but also because the self is constituted through relationships with others. In the experience of bereavement, part of the bereaved self is
lost along with the deceased other, and therefore it is important to the bereaved person to maintain some sense of that lost piece to retain his or her own identity.\textsuperscript{17}

This relational model of subjectivity is central to the recent shift of bereavement theorists toward the “continuing bonds” model of grief, which contests the applicability of twentieth-century approaches to grief that emphasize disengagement from the dead as the only way to successfully resolve grief (Silverman and Klass 5). For the editors of \textit{Continuing Bonds}, the demand to disengage with the dead and the pathologization of a desire for continued connection reflects assumptions about the “autonomy and individuation” of the self (14). In contrast, the continuing bonds model posits that relational “interdependence is sustained even in the absence of one of the parties” (16), and that in practice, a sense of continuity is sustained by many bereaved individuals, whether through dreams, “a sense of presence, memory, linking objects, [or] identification with the deceased” (Goss and Klass 5). The maintenance of bonds takes place alongside an acknowledgment of the rupture of death, constituting engagement “only, or largely, [through] mental constructs (inner representations)” of the dead (Silverman and Klass 7). In this relational model of grief, bereaved individuals deal with the rupture in their own life and subjectivity by continuing an altered and limited “relationship” with the deceased other; as recurring “mental constructs,” dreams may play a role in this ongoing sense of relationship.

Dreams of the other in memoirs’ narratives of dying thus reinforce a relational sense of selfhood. Yet if these narratives do address a threat to subjectivity for the narrating self, they do so by focusing on and even reifying the other’s continuing character. On one hand, this focus reflects a need to maintain the other as a touchstone for the bereaved relational self; on the other hand, this biographical focus and the one-sidedness of the experience of “continuing bonds” also complicate its apparent relationality. In fact, eighteenth-century scholar Terry Castle interprets similar phenomena as features of

\textsuperscript{17} As Miller notes in an analysis of relationality in Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} and Derrida’s \textit{Circumfession}, the autobiographical narrative’s “retrospective reproduction”—recreating the mother after her death, or even in the future perfect, when she will have died—is precisely self-serving. By this I mean quite literally serves to construct the self” (“Representing” 13).
individualism, not relationality, in her essay “The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*” (1989). Observing a late eighteenth-century trend in which gothic characters are haunted by nostalgic mental images of absent or deceased others, Castle similarly links this trend to new models of selfhood and to shifting attitudes towards death. Both the spectral phenomenon and the associated approach to death indicate the romantic roots of the twentieth-century “continuing bonds” model of grief; Castle draws on the work of historian Philippe Ariès to link the phenomenon with “the emergence of a ‘romantic cult of the dead’—a growing subjective fascination with idealized images of the deceased” (131). As in the dreams of the other in the memoirs under consideration, the “new fantasy of continuity” in the eighteenth century was complemented by a “theme of sentimental reunion” in the afterlife (131). Although Castle, like the proponents of continuing bonds, suggests that these phenomena “encapsulated . . . a new phenomenology of self and other” (125), she argues that they are characteristic of romantic individualism rather than of a relational model of subjectivity. The ability to imagine the other in his or her absence—or, indeed, in his or her presence—allowed relationships to be reduced to projection and contained within the self. As Castle reflects, “In the moment of romantic self-absorption, the other was indeed reduced to a phantom . . . The corporeality of the other—his or her actual life in the world—became strangely insubstantial and indistinct” (125). As a result, the process of mourning and its images of continuity primarily functioned for the benefit of the bereaved individual: “Romantic mourning gave pleasure, one suspects, precisely because it entailed a magical sense of the continuity and stability of the ‘I’ that mourned” (135).

Castle’s analysis illustrates how the subjective nature of mental images and of narratives of continuity blurs the distinction between individualism and relationality. The subjectivity of idealized images of the other risks incorporating the lost other simply as a

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18 Ariès argues that the eighteenth century heralded and naturalized a major shift in attitudes toward death, in which “[t]he fear of death . . . was transferred from the self to the other, the loved one” (610), partly because affective bonds came to focus on a few irreplaceable individuals. Fantasies of reunion focused on afterlives that, like the dreams discussed here, idealized “not so much the heavenly home as the earthly home saved from the menace of time, a home in which the expectations of eschatology are mingled with the realities of memory” (471).
part of the mourning self—the very side-effect of mourning that Freud categorized as pathological. Although this subjectivity is similarly and inevitably present in the narratives of dying in the memoir, the dreamed images of others that I consider here gesture more strongly to relationality because the experience of dreaming is itself a reminder of alterity. Hélène Cixous’s discussion of mourning and loss in her seminal essay “Castration or Decapitation?” suggests one way to understand the dream’s capacity for relationality, which is to exceed incorporation through its acknowledgments of externality and excess. Cixous posits a gendered distinction between autonomous “mourning” and relational “loss,” describing mourning as a masculine act of incorporation that rejects relationality: “When you’ve lost something and the loss is a dangerous one, you refuse to admit that something of yourself might be lost in the lost object. So you ‘mourn,’ you make haste to recover the investment made in the lost object” (54). To this autonomous idea of mourning, Cixous contrasts her concept of the feminine approach to loss, declaring, “I believe women do not mourn . . . [Woman] loses without holding onto loss” (54). That is, in this relational idea of loss, the bereaved person accepts the loss of part of the self as well as of the other, acknowledging an externalized sense of selfhood that, for Cixous, makes women’s “writing a body that overflows . . . as opposed to the masculine incorporation” (54). Although for Cixous this concept of writing is specifically feminine, the idea that a relational response to loss involves an “overflow” of expression and an acceptance of compound losses offers a suggestive way to consider the multiple ruptures and subjectivities that the dream addresses in narratives of dying.

If the dream dramatizes the desire for continuity of the writing and mourning self, it is also relational in the attention it draws to the ambiguity and limitations of its relationship to the other, as dream interpretation includes the possibilities of a subjective projection of the other and an encounter with alterity—with a paradoxically real, corporeal, and often

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19 Psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok describe the dysfunctional potential of incorporation in similar terms: “Incorporation is the refusal to reclaim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost; incorporation is the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognized as such, would effectively transform us” (127).
enigmatic manifestation of the other. The legacy of psychoanalytic models of dream interpretation suggests that the other’s appearance in a dream is simply a projection of the self, and yet this appearance still speaks to an awareness of the other. As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen explains, parsing Freud’s declaration that dreams “are completely egoistic,”

This “egoism” [of the dream] is clearly rather peculiar. For though the ego is everywhere in the dream . . . we still have to recognize that it is nowhere properly itself, given that it never avoids yielding to an identification and always confuses itself in some way with another . . . This egoism can thus in no case be reduced to the frank and brutal affirmation of an ego that would refuse to give in where its own pleasure is concerned. To achieve its own pleasure, the ego has to take a detour, one that causes its own pleasure to pass through that of another. (21)

The dream’s duality offers a way to articulate both the identification and the alterity involved in the construction of a “good death” and the narrative of dying. The dream of continuity is thus about the self and about the other, recognizing the influence of the deceased other on the bereaved self as well as his or her separateness and inaccessibility. As I discuss in the following section, the dream’s resulting balance between projection and alterity provides a crucial space in which the ethics of representing the deceased other can be negotiated.

“Just an Image, but a Just Image”: Dreams and the Ethics of Representation

While the dream’s emphasis on the deceased person’s character and relationality articulates the possibility of a contemporary good death, biographical concerns with capturing and recording the other’s life—and the ethics of these processes—are also important factors in the narrative of dying’s focus on character. For Walter, the death narrative is simply the “last chapter” of a longer auto/biographical impression of the other’s life, the telling of which is prompted by a biographical impulse inherent to the experience of bereavement; as he puts it, “bereavement is part of the process of (auto)biography, and the biographical imperative . . . is the motor that drives bereavement behaviour” (“Bereavement” 20). In “Bereavement and Biography” (1994), Walter argues that the very purpose of the grieving process is “the construction of a durable biography

that enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into their ongoing lives” (7). Rather than focusing on feelings of loss, Walter’s biographical approach to bereavement emphasizes the central need of the bereaved to articulate the other’s character, to “reconstruct what the dead was actually like, what they actually did and how they actually died” (19), creating an internal representation based on the other’s individual values, activities, and contradictions as well as on the affirming or destabilizing nature of their death. Although Walter emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the resulting “biography,” he also repeatedly describes it as a “picture” or “image” of the other, suggesting that the complex biography is often encompassed by a more singular, representative idea of the other. Dreams of the dead function in memoirs to provide, and sometimes to deconstruct, such representative images of the dead. The dream’s ability to layer projection and alterity, capturing tensions between the comforting possibility of representing the other as a known quantity and continuous subject, and the more threatening spectres of death, alterity, and unintelligibility, also provides a way to posit a representative image of the other while acknowledging the dream’s inherent inadequacy as a form of representation.

Walter notes that a representative, internalized image of the other is often developed as a result of the narrative of dying. In On Bereavement, he notes the consistent biographical importance of deathbed accounts, despite the discursive shifts of such narratives “from a religious to a medical to a psychological/personal growth version of the last chapter” (86). Walter traces the historical shift from Puritan “accounts of the deathbed performance” (85), in which the centrality of faith and the possibility of last-minute conversion or repudiation meant that “[t]he last chapter either sums up, or invalidates, the rest of a person’s life” (85). Although shifts to more medicalized discourses of dying and to the psychological discourses emergent in hospice care lessen the focus on the religious impact of the final moments of life, Walter maintains that death narratives are still depended upon to make “a definitive statement of the character of the person’s death and therefore of his or her life, each made in the language of the time, and each comforting those left behind” (86, my emphasis). While he cautions that these death narratives may not be comforting, recognizing the romanticism of this idea, Walter also emphasizes the representational potential of the narrative of dying and its capacity to install an
internalized image of the other. The dream’s role in the narrative of dying, then, may well be the provision of such a representative image, in its frequent tendency to depict a singular scene, whether of Goodison’s mother perpetually at her heavenly “big-woman business” (Harvey 2), Johnston’s grandfather in his forge and in Avalon, or Keefer’s grandmother, “holding out a basket of provisions: bread, cheese, a jar of the strawberries she’d preserve each June” (Honey 16). In Patrimony, a dream Roth has before his father’s death is similarly interpreted as distilling his father’s life and their relationship into a single representative image. In the scene of an empty warship floating away, leaving a younger version of Roth forlorn on a dock, Roth finds that despite the metaphorical nature of the dream, “just about every major theme of his life was encapsulated there, everything of significance to both of us” (237). Even as dreams emphasize the character of the other to affirm a “good death,” then, they also provide biographical details.

Barthes poignantly captures the desire of the bereaved to grasp a representative image of the deceased other in his treatise on photography, Camera Lucida (1980), which also reflects on the death of his mother. Quoting French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard’s famous words about the political inexpediency of film, “‘Not a just image, just an image,’” Barthes rephrases them to address the experience of bereavement: “But my grief wanted a just image, an image which would be both justice and accuracy—justesse: just an image, but a just image” (70). For Barthes, the desire for a just image reflects a deeper desire to capture the essential individuality and subjectivity of the other, a quality that he considers the “truth” of the other. He affirms these qualities in a single photograph of his mother as a five-year-old child, an image that he claims “achieved for me, utopically, the impossible science of the unique being” (71). The just image transfixes the unique individuality of the other not simply in a record of life, but in a “utopic” perpetuity.

21 Hans Belting suggests that dreams can be considered images, which he theorizes as constituted through an interaction between viewer and medium. He explains that “[m]ental images . . . cannot be separated from physical images by means of any clear-cut dualistic scheme. Dreams, visions, and visual memories illustrate the close interaction between the internal and the external in the realm of images” (36). Belting also argues that images and death are historically associated, since “the image conveys a contradiction between presence and absence, and that contradiction has its roots in the human experience of death” (84).
analogous to the dream’s imagining of the other in a perpetual afterlife. It thus addresses the loss of individuality and character that Barthes identifies as the precise qualities that are lost in the process of bereavement, not reducible to generalities or archetypes:

In the Mother, there was a radiant, irreducible core: my mother . . . my suffering proceeds from who she was . . . To the Mother-as-Good, she had added that grace of being an individual soul. I might say, like the Proustian Narrator at his grandmother’s death: “I did not insist only upon suffering, but upon respecting the originality of my suffering”: for this originality was the reflection of what was absolutely irreducible in her, and thereby lost forever. (75)

While the other’s subjectivity is “irreducible,” Barthes’s discussion also hints at the way that its central representation in the just image might instead “add” and proliferate with potential, archetypal meaning. It is this simultaneously biographical, irreducible, and excessive quality of being that Barthes seeks to feel and represent through the just image. Although Barthes’s choice of a just image is ultimately a photograph in which he does not recognize his mother, he reiterates its importance as a record of perpetual subjectivity in his quotation of a line of poetry by Mallarmé: “it was also at this moment that everything turned around and I discovered her as into herself . . . ( . . . eternity changes her, to complete Mallarmé’s verse)” (71, ellipses in original). In Barthes’s just image, the encounter with eternity transforms and crystallizes subjectivity.

The desire of the bereaved to preserve the deceased person’s individuality and relationality may thus be expressed in efforts at representation, whether narrative, dreamed, or imagistic. Yet the very zeal to record or create a characteristic image or a “just” representation, especially in a published work, raises questions about the ethics of representation and the danger of over-writing the deceased other—or, to return to Castle’s analysis of idealized mental images, the danger of incorporating the imaginary other. The idea of an “image which would be both justice and accuracy” (Barthes, Camera 70) involves inherent conflicts between different demands for justice and different understandings of accuracy. The image may be “narratively right” (Roth 74), just to the narrative rather than to the other, or it may be only partially accurate due to a limited understanding of the other. Even in the oral narratives of dying with which I began this discussion, the desire to articulate the other’s character through his or her death shows the potential to overwrite and thereby elide the other. For Walter, accuracy
and multiple perspectives are central to the informal “durable biography”; to establish an inner representation of the other that is durable, he posits, “the image of the dead normally has to be reasonably accurate, that is, shared by others and tested out against them” (“Bereavement” 20). Yet critics of Walter’s approach have drawn attention to the limitations of this accuracy and to the inevitable subjectivity of the resulting “image”—a subjectivity even more pronounced with the unverifiable and ultimately personal dream. Arnar Árnason asserts that “we need to emphasize that the ‘durable biography’ which bereaved people construct of the deceased is a creative achievement . . . rather than a history” (194). The inevitable role of creativity and desire in shaping the “just image” of the other indicates that such an image is, as Barthes reflects, “utopic” (Camera 71). Barthes implicitly recognizes that his just image is simply “the truth—the truth for me” (110), and his selection of his mother’s childhood Winter Garden Photograph rather than a more recent image gestures to the impossibility of capturing the other. Rejecting the idea that the many facets of identity can be captured through mimesis, he explains, “Likeness leaves me unsatisfied and somehow skeptical . . . [T]he only one which has given me the splendor of her truth is precisely a lost, remote photograph, one which does not look ‘like’ her” (103).

Given the ethical questions of representation inherent in the idea of the “just image,” the dream offers a usefully inconclusive medium in which to posit an image of the other that rests uneasily on a fault line between iconic image and uncanny alterity. Both the dream’s ontological instability and the memoir’s replication of the interpretive processes and contradictions involved in dreams allow the memoir to gesture to a desire of knowing the other as well as its impossibility, thus becoming one of many strategies in which memoirists can address the vexed politics of representation. While Barthes disparagingly compares dreams to photographs that are “likenesses” (66) based on the expectation of the viewer, the dream’s very ability to capture this subjective projection renders it meaningfully reflexive in the memoir. In critiquing the idea of “likeness,” Barthes

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22 Shirley Neuman posits that Barthes’s decision to choose this photo and to withhold it from his readers are ethical in the sense that “he not only keeps his mother’s ‘essence’ for himself, but he keeps as the subject of his representation, not her ‘essence,’ but his own filial mourning and quest” (“Mothers’ Bodies” 58).
explains that the identity sought in a photograph is “imprecise, even imaginary” (100). Even when looking at a photograph of a stranger, he declares, “I can spontaneously call them ‘likenesses’ because they conform to what I expect of them” (102). Barthes’s examples, from Félix Nadar’s photographic portraits, are interestingly similar to the characteristic dreams of the memoir. As the viewer reads his or her own understanding of the individual into the photographs, so the writer of the memoir projects his or her understanding of the other into the dream and simultaneously encourages the same expectation in the reader through the biographical parts of the narrative. Barthes elaborates: “Guizot is ‘like’ because he conforms to his myth of austerity; Dumas, swollen, beaming, because I already know his self-importance and his fecundity . . . Kropotkin has the bright eyes of anarchizing idealism, etc” (102). This conformity to the expectation of the viewer—and in the case of the dream, the expectation of the bereaved person—is the factor that makes representations of both likeness and dreams ethically suspect; yet dramatizing that conformity in the unstable and solipsistic medium of the dream draws attention to that very ethical instability.

If, as Barthes suggests, the dream is the site of “almost” capturing the other, it is the staged gap between the almost and the essential that renders it ethically legitimate:

The almost: love’s dreadful regime, but also the dream’s disappointing status—which is why I hate dreams. For I often dream about her (I dream only about her), but it is never quite my mother: sometimes, in the dream, there is something misplaced, something excessive . . . I dream about her, I do not dream her. And confronted with the photograph, as in the dream, it is the same effort, the same Sisyphean labor: to reascend, straining toward the essence, to climb back down without having seen it, and to begin all over again. (66)²³

The crucial distinction in Barthes’s complaint about dreams is that he dreams about his mother, a dynamic that happens on the level of representation rather than of ontology or incorporation. The dream can only circle his mother, not able to speak for her or capture

²³ Barthes expresses a similar sentiment in Mourning Diary: “Each time I dream about her (and I dream only of her), it is in order to see her, believe her to be alive, but other, separate” (233). I discuss this elegiac sentiment of simultaneous continuity and separation further in the next chapter. Notably, the diary also includes a more mimetic, comforting dream on September 2, 1979 (after Barthes had already completed Camera Lucida): “Nap. Dream: exactly her smile. Dream: complete, successful, memory” (243).
her subjectivity. At the same time, the dream’s unstable representation also provides a reminder of her alterity in its inclusion of “something misplaced, something excessive.” Although the dreams in the memoirs I have discussed so far dramatize subjective expectations of the other, the ethical gap between projection and alterity can also create an uncanny, unsettling space of misrecognition, as is the case in Marlatt’s *Ghost Works*, which I discuss in detail in the next section. Barthes explains the unsettling role of the “almost” with reference to his photographs of his mother, suggesting that the slightness of the gap between the medium of representation and the original exacerbates the problem of mourning: “To say, confronted with a certain photograph, ‘That’s *almost* the way she was!’ was more distressing than to say, confronted by another, ‘That’s not the way she was at all’” (66). In the memoir, the potentially distressing shortcomings or excesses of the dream’s image of the other are implicit acknowledgments—to the reader as well as to the narrating self—that the deceased other can be neither entirely reconstructed nor incorporated.

The dream of the other in the memoir thus acts as a self-reflexive form of representation that draws attention both to its constructed, one-sided nature and to its inability to adequately grasp the alterity of the other. Because such dreams often involve an encounter with the deceased other, they can also more overtly dramatize scenes of confirmation or confrontation about the representation of the other. In Goodison’s memoir, the opening dreams of her mother provide a way to check for biographical accuracy with the subject herself, for “in those dreams I continued to ask her questions about her life before and after she came to Kingston” (2). In contrast, the final uncanny dream of Roth’s *Patrimony*, the second of two dreams that act as a postlude to the narrative of his father’s death, is a site of confrontation about Roth’s representation of his

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24 This acknowledgment is ethically important because it recognizes, to borrow Jacques Derrida’s words, “that the other resists the closure of our interiorizing memory” (*Memoires* 35). Derrida suggests that paradoxically, in mourning, “failure succeeds: an aborted interiorization is at the same time a respect for the other as other . . . which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us” (35).
father’s character and death.²⁵ Despite his father’s own self-perception as a staunch Jewish-American businessman, Roth depicts his father’s role in the family and his attitude toward work, mourning, and death as “primitive and slavish” (180, 33); he wonders at his father’s actions, which he describes as “inspired by a personalized symbolic mythology as eccentric as Beckett’s or Gogol’s” (94). Roth undermines this depiction of primitivism at several points throughout the memoir by including his father’s own perspective, creating a self-aware negotiation of these issues of representation that culminates with his internal struggle over the type of clothes in which to bury his father.

Having found two prayer shawls in the house on the day of his father’s death, among only a few personal items that he had kept, Roth and his brother decide that Herman Roth will be buried in one of them. To Roth, burying his father in a suit is “senseless”; “[h]e’s not going to the office,” he tells his brother (234). Yet Roth is haunted by the issue of appropriately characterizing his father in his death, both during the decision and in his final dream of his father. As he makes the choice, based on his father’s cultural heritage as well as his own sense of his primitivism, Roth wonders whether

a shroud was any less senseless [than a suit]—he wasn’t Orthodox and his sons weren’t religious at all—and if it wasn’t perhaps pretentiously literary and a little hysterically sanctimonious as well. I thought how bizarrely out-of-character an urban earthling like my insurance-man father, a sturdy man rooted all his life in everydayness, would look in a shroud even while I understood that that was the idea. (234)

Torn between the possibilities of defamiliarizing his father’s personality in death by dressing him “out-of-character,” and of affirming it, Roth opts for the shroud.

However, the dream that concludes the memoir reverses the decision, as Roth’s father returns to dispute Roth’s representational choice:

one night some six weeks later [. . .] he came in a hooded white shroud to reproach me. He said, “I should have been dressed in a suit. You did the wrong thing.” I awakened screaming. All that peered out from the shroud was the displeasure in his dead face. And his only words were a rebuke. . . . (237)

²⁵ The memoir as a whole reflects the conflict between Roth’s desires to justly represent both the character of his father and the indignities of illness and death. The two demands are ironically juxtaposed in Roth’s statement that “Dying is work and he was a worker. Dying is horrible and my father was dying” (233).
This final dream dramatizes the tensions involved in the ethics of representation. Roth’s interpretation deflects from the manifest issue of his final representation of his father through his choice of burial clothes, turning instead to the ethics of the book as a whole and its depiction of private details of his father’s illness; Roth explains that his father’s condemnation “had been alluding to this book, which . . . I had been writing all the while he was ill and dying” (237). Yet in the dream’s manifest meaning and in Roth’s interpretation, the dream is ultimately identified as a space of conscience and of preserved character and relationship, as suggested by his final interpretation: “The dream was telling me that . . . at least in my dreams I would live perennially as his little son, with the conscience of a little son, just as he would remain alive there not only as my father but as the father, sitting in judgment on whatever I do” (238). Like Barthes, Roth emphasizes how the image of his father includes both individual and symbolic layers. In addition to his unique subjectivity as Herman Roth, the dream resonates with allusions to the Hebrew god, “sitting in judgment,” and to the phallic authority of the father. As Paul John Eakin observes in his analysis of this scene, the final command—“You must not forget anything” (Roth 238)—originally appears in a scene in which Roth sees his father’s penis for the first time since childhood (Eakin, Selves 185). With Roth’s layered interpretation, the dream of his shrouded father becomes, if not a just image, an image of justice, in which the excessive representation of the father dramatizes the stakes of the memoir’s representational ethics. For Roth, the dream is the only space in which his relationship to his father and its ethical obligations can continue and in some sense be contained; he concudes, “if not in my books or in my life, at least in my dreams I would live . . . with the conscience of a little son” (238). At the same time, his concern with ethics evidently exceeds the dream. Not only does Roth place this accusatory dream at the very end of the memoir, but the multiple ethical questions it raises are central to Roth’s proliferating interpretations of the dream. As I discuss in the next section, such

26 While I read Roth’s interpretation as a deflection from the manifest issue—his representation of his father’s character—Eakin reads it as an accurate interpretation of the dream. Noting that Roth, in his dilemma about the burial clothing, regrets that he “hadn’t the audacity to say, ‘Bury him naked’” (Roth 234), Eakin connects this wish with the intimate work of the memoir itself: “He had, in effect, buried Herman Roth naked in a memoir of apparently total candor—this is the heart of the dream—and he interprets the father’s ‘rebuke’ as an allusion to [the book]” (Selves 182).
proliferating interpretations also draw attention to the subjectivity and contingency of the dream’s meaning.

Narrative Re-visions in Choy’s *Paper Shadows* and Marlatt’s *Ghost Works*

While dreams themselves may stage the questionable ethics and stability of representation, some memoirs also foreground the instability of representation and relationality in the wake of another’s death by emphasizing the ongoing processes of reinterpretation and revision that are shared by the dream and the narrative of dying. The memoirs that I discuss in this section, Marlatt’s *Ghost Works* and Choy’s *Paper Shadows*, rely on revision and dialogue to highlight the provisionality and contingency of both dream interpretation and the narrative of dying. Although these two memoirs are very different in style and content, each includes narratives of dying that are repeatedly revised and reinterpreted, as the narrators confront gaps and elisions in their understandings of their parents through dreams that are re-interpreted both subjectively and in dialogues with others. In her discussion of the contemporary autobiography’s tendency to foreground process, Egan observes that in such texts, “neither the person nor the text can reveal any single or final truth, but both can provide activities of interpretation, in which the reader is compelled to join” (226). By sharing their gradual, revisionary accounts of dream interpretation and narratives of dying, Marlatt and Choy’s works draw the reader’s attention to the way that the meanings of dream and bereavement shift over time, and to the dialogic potential of these interpretive processes. Unlike Roth, whose interaction with his father involves not so much a dialogue as a command that remains ensconced in the dream world, Marlatt and Choy bring their dreams into dialogue with other characters to reflect on their meaning. Like the dreamed image of the other and the narrative of dying itself, this dialogism at once captures the verisimilitude of interpretive process and enacts a practically creative, at times novelistic technique through which the reader is invited to share in gradual revelations over the course of each memoir.

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27 My use of the concept of dialogism follows Egan’s model in *Mirror Talk*. See above, page 25, n.15.
Revision and dialogue are central features of the narrative of dying as Valentine conceptualizes it. The oral narrative of dying is a provisional retelling of events, “characterised by a reflexivity in which nothing was set in stone, but rather represented one’s relationship with one’s experience at a particular point in time” (38). In written memoirs, this reflexivity is evoked through moments of reconsideration, reinterpretation, and revision in the memoir’s combination of retrospective narrative and metanarrative. The provisionality of the narrative of dying reflects an emphasis on growth and change in the “continuing bonds” model of grief, in which “[a]ccommodation is a continual activity, related both to others and to shifting self-perceptions as the physical and social environment changes and as individual, family, and community developmental processes unfold” (Silverman and Klass 19). Dialogues with others also form part of this gradual process of accommodation, and despite the monologism of the memoir, the inclusion of dialogues that shift each narrator’s understanding of dreams or of their parents gestures to the ethical and epistemological inadequacy of singular interpretation. Walter describes the construction of narratives of dying as an external and “intrinsically social process in which we negotiat[e] and re-negotiat[e]” the life and death of the other (“Bereavement” 13), checking and correcting it through conversational and “reflexive monitoring” (15).

Although dreams are a subjective experience that cannot be corroborated, Choy and Marlatt each include scenes in which dreams are discussed with others, dialogues that can lead to new insights (in Choy’s case) or to an awareness of the isolation and inadequacy of dreaming (in Marlatt’s). These dialogues and the ambiguity of the dreams themselves fit into an open-ended process of narrative meaning-making rather than gesturing to any “final truth” (Egan 226) about death or about the other.

Dreams are central to the gradually developing narrative of dying that Marlatt articulates in the preface to *Ghost Works*, a collection of three travel narratives that were originally published over the course of six years. *Zócalo* (1977) narrates a journey to Mexico; “Month of Hungry Ghosts” (1979) journals a visit to Malaysia, Marlatt’s childhood home; and *How Hug a Stone* (1983) reflects on a visit to England and her mother’s family. While each work has its own concerns with the phenomenological and political experiencing of place, relationship, and family, Marlatt foregrounds their mutual engagement with her mother’s death by collecting them in *Ghost Works*, ten years after
publishing *How Hug a Stone*. In the explanatory preface, Marlatt retroactively situates all three texts in a narrative of dying by emphasizing the bereavement that had influenced their production, explaining that she had “travelled . . . always, it turned out, in the company of my mother who had died in 1975, a few months before that first journey” (vii). Following this explanation, Marlatt outlines a narrative trajectory that traces the influence of bereavement on each text, including dreams and hauntings that bridge the death of her mother:

My New Year’s trip with my then-partner to the Yucatan in Mexico, a culture where death is very present, was prefaced by a dream that March before my mother’s death and closed with a dream-visit to her in the underworld. On the second journey, in the month of her death a year later, my sister and I [sic] accompanied our father in our mother’s stead . . . to Penang, where they began their married life and where we had lived as children. Our visit coincided with the Chinese festival month of Hungry Ghosts when the ghosts of the inadequately remembered dead return to haunt the world of the living. The last journey, five years later, was to England, always referred to by my parents as “home” . . . I took with me the words of the English medium I visited in Vancouver who relived my mother’s death and brought me messages from her. (vii)

In retroactively tracing this trajectory in her three travel narratives, Marlatt draws attention to both the structuring power of narrative and the revisionary quality of bereavement. The ongoing process of reformulation and revision is evident in the image of return with which she ends the preface. While the preface goes on to discuss issues of genre, space, and subjectivity, Marlatt ends with the relational image of “her eclipsed mother whose shadow she has difficulty escaping,” noting that “this fraught relationship has yet to receive the attention it deserves. […] And ghosts, who are hungry for recognition as we know, return, return . . .” (viii). Despite the coherence of the opening narrative of dying and bereavement, this closing image suggests the endlessness of the repeated process of “return, return,” as the inability of the narrative of dying to adequately recognize the deceased other renders it constantly open-ended, in process.

Choy’s first memoir, *Paper Shadows*, similarly begins by juxtaposing a narrative of dying with the ideas of return, revision, and haunting. Choy’s memoir is prompted by the revelation that he had been adopted as an infant, an unexpected epiphany in late middle age that provokes reconsiderations both of his parents’ roles in his life and of his
narratives of their deaths. When, in the opening lines of *Paper Shadows*, Choy receives a phone call from a stranger who claims to have seen his mother on the streetcar, his first response is to mentally reiterate his deceased mother’s narrative of dying, rejecting the possibility of haunting or return:

Not possible. This was 1995. Eighteen years earlier I had sat on a St. Paul’s Hospital bed beside Mother’s skeletal frame while she lay gasping for breath . . . Suddenly, the last striving for breath shook her . . . The silence deepened, the room chilled. The mother I had known all my life was gone. (3-4)

While the stranger actually means that she had seen his biological mother, Choy’s immediate interpretation firmly invokes and rejects the possibility of haunting and of a revision of the past, reiterating the finality of death as the end of his mother’s story. Despite the news of his adoption, Choy is convinced that “[n]othing would change” (278) in his understanding of the past or of death. Yet Choy finds that after this revelation, inevitably, “[t]he past, as I knew it, began to shift” (5), and hauntings come to represent possibility and openness rather than impossibility. Hauntings and revisions become a part of his narratives of both parents’ deaths as well as of the childhood narrative that constitutes the greater part of the book. By the end of the memoir, he affirms that life, “[l]ike a good mystery novel . . . should always be read twice, once for the experience, then once again for astonishment” (332). This comparison between his own life and a novel—and the idea that the whole can only be understood upon a retrospective re-reading—implicitly acknowledges that the reader of his memoir is positioned to share the experience as well as the astonishment through the replication of his gradual revisions and revelations, and also implicates the reader in the ongoing process of interpretation.28

Choy and Marlatt incorporate revision into their narratives by juxtaposing perspectives from different times and places and by foregrounding the processes of reinterpretation. While Choy does so by including a metanarrative in which he discusses the results of his research with family, making new discoveries in the process, Marlatt’s interest in the

28 Choy’s comparison of this revisionary style of memoir to the genre of mystery, in which details are gradually uncovered until the case is solved, gestures to the compelling narrative belief that meaning will eventually be recovered. Marlatt similarly reflects that “mystery appeals to our belief that things do make sense, this plot we’re in, wrapped up like knife fork & spoon” (131).
ongoing revision of narrative and interpretation is evident in the way that her travel writings, each written in the present tense, simultaneously record and retroactively shape her experiential processes of travel, bereavement, and dreaming.\(^{29}\) The speaker’s opening dream in \textit{Zócalo}, for instance, becomes significant in retrospect both because its vaguely Mexican landscape resonates with her journey to Mexico, and because this dream “preface[s]” her mother’s death (\textit{Ghost} vii). Miriam Nichols uses the term “process poetics” to describe Marlatt’s works, explaining that this poetics of immersive experience is characterized by the “retrospective nature of form; form unfolds behind the poet as s/he moves through a poem or a life, rather than before her as a thesis to be explicated” (116).

As experiences unfold, they can be reviewed and understood both in and out of narrative sequence. Marlatt’s speaker meditates on the necessity and the limitations of narratives of life and death in \textit{How Hug a Stone}; considering the fragility of life aboard an airplane, she muses, “we feed ourselves stories to dull our sense of the absurd. fed a line so as not to imagine the end—linear version of our lives unravelling in a look, back” (131). If narrative continuity bridges a fear of “the end,” it is also undermined and “unravell[ed]” by the continuous process of revision and revisitation of the past. In “Month of Hungry Ghosts,” realizing that her camera’s film has not been winding and that her pictures have been taken over one another, the speaker reflects on the cyclical superimpositions of present, past, and unconscious, acknowledging “the strange conjunctions of past & present, a past that undermines the apparent newness of the present, a present that unlocks the hidden recesses of memory or dream that have also coloured it—& do i see what i haven’t in some sense dreamed?” (105). In contrast with the linear nature of narrative, Marlatt emphasizes the interconnectivity of different experiences, implying that the unconscious always prefaces experience.

The palimpsestic layering of experience is evident in Marlatt’s provisional narrative of her mother’s death and her own bereavement. While her preface situates a medium’s

\(^{29}\) In “‘Perform[ing] on the Stage of Her Text,’” Marlatt identifies this shifting of tense as part of the performativity of her autobiographical work, explaining that “[a]lthough much of [\textit{Zócalo}] is written in the present tense, it was all composed in a sustained effort to remember a trip to Mexico months after it happened” (201).
account of her mother’s death in Marlatt’s final journey to England, the encounter with the medium is in fact recorded as a memory; the section is titled “six years earlier in Vancouver the English medium began [sic]” (154). Although her consultation with the medium actually happens years before the trip, its resonances are delayed in the narrative of dying until Marlatt herself, visiting her mother’s family in England, is able to relate to and process the medium’s account of her mother’s death and psychic afterlife. This account suggests a “good death” in which her mother is reunited with her own family in England: “she said it was wonderful. . . . it couldn’t have happened better. . . . suddenly she said that i was walking down an English lane with my father . . . there are an awful lot of her people over there” (154). With her own journey to England to meet her mother’s “people,” Marlatt revisits this account of her mother’s death, making it a part of her own narrative of bereavement and accommodation as well as of her mother’s experience. The re-visioning of the narrative of dying illustrates how such narratives resemble Nichols’s process poetics, which “offer a point of view, rather than ironic reflexivity” (117)—a provisionality accentuated by the gradual publishing and republishing of Marlatt’s three works. Although the preface in Ghost Works creates a more coherent narrative of dying than each of the individual texts, this preface too is simply a singular and temporary “point of view.”

A similar re-visioning takes place in the first chapter of Choy’s Paper Shadows, in which Choy’s narrative of his mother’s death prompts him to reconsider his earliest childhood memories, or “first hauntings” (6). These “hauntings” are transcendent experiences that resonate with Choy’s early fear of losing his mother. In the context of the revelation that he had been adopted, some of these scenes, which he recalls through “dreams, mere fragments” (12), are inflected with new meaning, especially the memory of visiting an unknown, ill woman, possibly his biological mother, as a young child. While Choy’s mother attends the sick woman, the idea of replacement resonates as “another lady came and took Mother’s place” at the store counter (14). Two other “hauntings” take place in a bedroom as Choy, in bed with his sleeping mother, hears a milk wagon coming down the street. In the first, Choy has a vision of fireflies in the mirror, associated through a folk tale with the rescue of “lost children” (6), but the experience is dismissed as “only a child’s dream” by his family. In the second, longer scene, he experiences an uncanny fear
as he comprehends the possibility of his mother’s death: “My heart thumped against my chest. But I was not afraid of the milk wagon. It was something else I feared. I turned my head and glimpsed, in the dresser mirror, my mother . . . Suddenly, I could not breathe: she seemed too still‖ (9). This affective apprehension of the possibility of his mother’s death becomes a suspended and poignant memory following the narrative of her actual death, effectively beginning the memoir with a complex knot of loss and attachment that the revelation of Choy’s adoption can only slightly alter.

The haunting fear of these childhood memories also retroactively become part of Choy’s overall narrative of his mother’s death. The second haunting, resonating with him as a “vision of that moment . . . [that] has not left me” (10), seamlessly introduces the final pieces of that narrative, becoming incorporated into it as a kind of premonition: “Years after that moment, at the age of thirty-seven, I was at my mother’s funeral” (10). A dialogue with his aunt at the funeral itself also sparks a new understanding and re-vision of the memory, just as Marlatt’s presence in England brings new meaning to the words of her medium. Fifth Aunty reminds Choy of the first time he had seen a hearse, at age five, and had its purpose explained to him:

“Oh, you looked so surprised that people died, just like your goldfish.”
“What did I say?”
“You cry out [sic], ‘Mah-ma won’t die!’”
I think of that . . . haunting that has never left me. . . . As Fifth Aunty gets into the car, I know now why I stood there at the window, unable to speak. (11)

As Choy’s new bereavement changes his understanding of his childhood vision, the last lines of the section return him to the experience of that early “haunting” while incorporating his new apprehension of its meaning. While in the original vision, Choy experiences a sense of a hush in which, “[e]xcept for Mother’s breathing, and a scattering of birdsong, there was no sound” (9), his reconsideration of the vision after the funeral is slightly altered:

I listen.
There is birdsong.
There is silence. (11)
Even as the narrative of dying incorporates re-vision and its possibilities, Choy reiterates the finality of death and the absence of his mother’s life and breath.

Fifth Aunty’s role in prompting Choy’s reinterpretation of his early “hauntings” illustrates the significance of dialogue and collaborative interpretation in these revisionary narratives of dying. In both Choy and Marlatt’s narratives, coherent and comforting interpretations of deathbed visions and dreams are destabilized by dialogues with others, which provide unexpected factual or interpretive perspectives that draw attention to the open-endedness and alterity of the dream and of their deceased parents. Choy’s narrative of his father’s death and deathbed visions, for instance, initiates a series of dialogues and revelations that destabilizes his understanding of his father. These dialogues take place within the memoir’s metanarrative as Choy completes the research for his memoir. While sharing his results with his father’s sister, he also relates to her his personal narrative of his father’s death, confidently explaining its relational meaning: “Mother had died five years before Father died, and Father’s last words, I explained to Aunty Freda, were to call out to my mother, invoking the endearing term he used whenever the two of them had shared a tender moment: ‘Mah-ma . . . Mah-ma . . .’” (283, ellipses in original). Choy’s confident interpretation of his father’s final words as a visionary encounter with his wife, an affirmation of a decades-long relationship encompassing both love and tension, is part of a comforting narrative of a good death in which Toy Choy, having rejected additional surgery for his stomach cancers, ultimately retains the agency to decide that he “had had enough of living” (319). Choy reiterates in a longer retelling of the narrative of dying, “I was at peace to think that he had called out his final endearment to my mother” (320). Yet Choy’s relation of this narrative to Freda results in a dialogue that destabilizes his understanding of his father, as Freda, looking “surprised,” asks about Choy’s knowledge of their family history. Freda eventually reveals his father’s family secret of childhood abandonment by his mother, who had run away after being accused of adultery. This revelation necessitates adjustment in Choy’s sense of his father as well as in the narrative of dying. He retells the narrative of dying in more detail, revising the final point:

Now, sixteen years after my father’s death, as I consider everything Aunty Freda has told me about his history, I think of my father’s dying words differently. As I
kissed him goodnight and he tried to raise his head, I believe that Father saw not one woman, not just my mother, who never deserted him, but . . . two. After all, did he not say, ‘Mah-ma . . . Mah-ma . . .’? (320, ellipses in original).

Even as Choy recognizes the possibility of a different interpretation of his father’s final words, Choy doubles his own original interpretation, revising and reinterpreting his original narrative of dying to accommodate the more complex understanding of his father within it.

Choy’s interpretation of his father’s deathbed words as part of a vision or haunting, rather than simply an exclamation, reflects the impact—and again, the reinterpretation—of an uncanny incident earlier in his father’s illness. In an effort to learn about his family history, Choy questions his aged father about his childhood, using a tape recorder to record the conversation. When he casually asks his father about his grandmother, his father hesitates for a long moment, an unexpected reaction that Choy interprets through a series of lenses—as a physical effect, a sudden memory, and finally a haunting:

Perhaps his throat was still dry. Clenching his fists, his eyes widened. For a moment, I panicked—a stroke? All at once, I had the oddest sense that someone—something—was standing before him. The sensation made me feel queasy. To see what Father was staring at, I turned my head. There must have come to him without any warning—as can happen to anyone at any time—so exact a remembrance that something took hold of him. His lips were trembling; his pupils focused on nothing but air. Yet something—someone—had stood before us. (313)

Choy’s inability to see anything “but air,” and his suggestion that the encounter is with a vivid “remembrance,” emphasize his interpretation of the incident as psychological. Yet after learning about his father’s mother, Choy more firmly interprets the event, like his father’s deathbed vision, as a haunting. Recalling that the tape recorder had recorded only static during that part of the conversation, Choy explains, “I was convinced that his mother had not entirely left him. Father had not expected her to return . . . [but] I believe she came back to him, a penitent ghost” (318). For Choy, this reinterpretation and idea of return is crucial to his understanding of his father’s death, despite a personal skepticism about ghosts that he discusses both in Paper Shadows and in his memoir of his own medical crises, Not Yet: A Memoir of Living and Almost Dying (2009). Near the end of Not Yet, Choy articulates the possibility inherent in the idea and the alterity of haunting,
explaining his sense of respect for “something I couldn’t quite explain. . . . I still do not believe in ghosts, but I confess that I talk to them. I write about them. They haunt me. I will not let them go” (171). For Choy, ghosts offer connective and narrative possibility despite their intangibility—a perspective that implies that despite his reinterpretation of his father’s vision, the final interpretation of the vision as either remembrance or haunting is less important than the tension and possibility it adds to the narrative of his death as well as his life.

Indeed, Choy initially uses the revelations about his father’s childhood to provide new forms of closure about his father’s character. Understanding his father’s abandonment helps him to understand his father better, he thinks, concluding that “this private sense of loss had made him into the man who was to love and care for me: he never, never deserted me” (318). Yet further revelations, corrections that again take place through dialogue, undermine this understanding and the durability of his characterization of his father. In another dialogue with an aunt, Choy discovers that rather than being abandoned by his mother, Toy Choy had been taken away from her and from his two sisters, whose existence Choy had been unaware of. This discovery initiates yet another reinterpretation of the tape-recorded haunting, as Choy reflects: “I thought there had been only the two of them, mother and son. Now, suddenly, four ghosts drifted into view . . . Now I knew other ghosts had come back to him that afternoon, not only his mother but also the two sisters who had sheltered him” (335). The proliferation of ghosts and possibilities causes Choy, finally, to accept the inaccessibility of his father’s character and history, realizing that in ongoing bereavement, as Silverman and Klass suggest, “a concept of closure . . . does not seem compatible” (19).30 Instead, Choy finds meaning in the open-endedness and inconclusiveness of experience at the end of Paper Shadows, affirming that “There’s nothing to be done about the unknowable . . . except to pause and be astonished” (338). The line resonates with his earlier discussion of life as a “mystery novel” (332) in which the second reading provides cause for astonishment; yet this conclusion also refuses the

30 Huai-Yang Lim argues that Choy’s acceptance of the silences in his father’s story also reflects an ethical respect for what the previous generation chose not to share, and rather than acting as “inadequacies or lacks that must be filled and explained . . . they constitute a heritage or lineage that Choy inherits” (255).
possibility that the mysteries left by death and alterity can ultimately be solved. Instead, the memoir embraces this unknowability and leaves the reader, refused a conclusion to Toy Choy’s story, no choice but to accept the uncertainty of the conclusion.

Dialogue and reinterpretation of dreams are also central features of Marlatt’s Ghost Works, especially in Zócalo, in which the acknowledgment of death and absence occurs primarily through dreams. The narrative of dying in Marlatt’s preface retroactively clarifies what is otherwise a more subtle and gradual confrontation with her mother’s death. Joanne Saul observes that in Marlatt’s personal notes on Zócalo, Marlatt reflects that “there was ‘no mention, nothing of her death in my [travel] journal—it’s incredible how I couldn’t look at what was most important to me head on, wouldn’t ‘face’ it” (qtd. in Saul 75). Instead, Marlatt’s unnamed protagonist gradually comes to a realization of the impact of her mother’s death, “what she had wanted to overlook” (73), through the two enigmatic dreams that frame the death and whose imagery is returned to and reinterpreted throughout her encounters and dialogues with others in Mexico.31 The lengthy opening dream, which precedes the trip to Mexico related by most of the book, is not introduced as a dream but as a “Journey,” in which the protagonist and her companion drive at dusk through a Mexican desert. The narrative only gradually reveals that this sequence is a dream, both through repeated confusion about the logic of its events—“But how could that be?” (5), the narrator asks at one point—and by later references to its events as part of a dream (17, 30).32 The reader’s gradual apprehension of the fact that this episode is a dream parallels the protagonist’s gradual interpretation and re-interpretation of its details, which come to resonate with images of death. The dream’s

31 The centrality of dreams in Zócalo is evident in paratexts as well as the narrative itself. The original 1977 printing notes that parts of the work had originally appeared in All My Dreams of You: A Community Dream Suggestion, and the chapter outline is illustrated with a visual map of the chapters that sets the dream in the centre, with each of the other chapters placed at cardinal points around it. The epigraph also indicates the importance of dreams in its citation of a passage from Dreams: Visions of the Night: “Among the Aztecs, dream interpretation and divination by dreams were the prerogative of the priestly class . . .” (1). The epigraph speaks both to Zócalo’s concerns with cultural translation and to the text’s subversion of the traditionally gendered work of dream interpretation in Aztec culture (41).

32 Some critics have not interpreted this opening as a dream (Godard 490), but its status as a dream is clear in Marlatt’s paratexts and in later references to its words and images. For instance, in the chapter “Isla Mujeres,” the narrator reflects on the “‘power of the sea’—o the dream, its power [sic]” (30).
terrifying ending, in which the protagonist and her companion flee from an accidental encounter with “huge iron heads like jack-o-lanterns” (7) that rise out of the ground, is clarified as a confrontation with death later in the trip when the protagonist sees a Mexican cemetery, filled with “low buildings like round heads or native houses rising out of the dark” (35). As her actual travels in Mexico continue, the protagonist also reinterprets the meaning of a native family that she encounters in the twilight of the dream, reflecting, “she’d thought they simply marked the ground of her dream . . . [N]ow she knows who they are[:] . . . lords of the turning of light to dark who live where absence is, at the mouth” (62). With these reinterpretations of the first dream, she comes to understand that something about her actual journey is as personal as the dreamed version, not shared with her travelling companion, Yo: “now she is here it is something else, her journey not theirs” (67).

In the narrative’s second, central dream, which is recounted first as a private, fragmented experience and then in dialogue with Yo, a similarly revisionary process of interpretation accentuates the tensions between the protagonist’s desire for a comforting coherence and the alterity of dreamed and dialogic encounters. This dream shares some imagery with the first, as it opens with a visit to a shallow cemetery filled with coffins. After falling through one of them, she finds herself running “home,” only to find that the “house (no house i recognize) is full of relations—mother!—& the place is dark” (64). This underworld offers a reconnection with her mother, but it is an uncanny one, terrifying in its combination of home with misrecognition and of continuity with darkness and rupture. A mixture of desire and dismay marks the moment in which the protagonist sees her mother, “pushing by to reach her, mother, who is busy with them all who come [sic], i see from the doorway, who stay here, the dead, she queens it over them, this is her house & i have come in error” (64). The protagonist struggles to confront this image of her mother as both herself and as completely other, belonging in the space of the dead. When she retells the fragmented dream to her travel companion Yo a few pages later, she elides the moment in which she sees her mother, instead claiming that “I didn’t want to see anyone so I turned to go” (68). Her revision imposes a coherence on the dream that betrays the alterity at its centre.
Although the protagonist recognizes this betrayal, realizing that “now she has told it it isn’t like it was, the telling fixes it in a way that wasn’t felt then, a map that doesn’t quite fit the terrain” (68), she dismisses it because her very purpose in narrating the dream is to receive affirmation of its coherence and triviality. She expects Yo to laugh, “placing it thus in a waking perspective she might also enter. She has wanted him to say . . . it was only a dream” (68). Instead, bringing the dream into dialogue opens it up again to proliferating, revisionary meanings. Yo suggests an interpretation that complicates her perception of the dream, requiring her to reconsider her unconscious motivations: “so you went to visit your mother, he says. She hadn’t thought of it as voluntary, as a ‘visit,’ but as a descent, perhaps she had sought out?” (68). She further reconsiders the dream in the final scenes of the narrative, a dialogue with Mexican hammock salesman Manuel. His interest in learning English words and the protagonist’s realization that “they have the same words, unrecognized” (72) remind her of the simultaneity of shared meanings and inevitable misrecognitions involved in encounters with others. This epiphany and Manuel’s different perspectives on the world and on family—“you are the child of your mother,” he states matter-of-factly, contradicting the patriarchal system of family against which she has been struggling—contribute to her ongoing mental processing of the dream, and she comes to a momentary, scattered recognition that the dream relates to her mother’s death and influence.

The protagonist’s shifting interpretations of her dreams’ ambivalent content force her to accept an uncertain liminality between connection and separation, and between alterity and identification, which she initially resists. An anxiety about alterity resonates throughout Zócalo’s meditations on the tourist gaze and on relationships, as the protagonist repeatedly articulates a desire to feel like a part of the other and to share others’ perceptions. In the absence of identification, she feels separate and alone, confronted by the “unreadable” signs of the landscape (16), the dream (17), and her lover (41), in which the only recourse is “not knowing for sure but conjecturing,” as she

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33 Marlatt uses similar diction to depict her son’s account of a heroic dream in How Hug a Stone: “(are you making this up as you go along? I’m telling it you like it was)” (169), and later, “(hearing out this train of thought, the dream, is recognizing the terrain)” (170).
describes her approach to navigating the Mexican landscape (16). Resisting this inherent uncertainty of interaction with others, she playfully suggests to Yo one night, “you can be in my dream if I can be in yours” (49), hoping for a sense of mutuality and connection. Instead, he sleepily responds by referring to a character she has dreamed of before: “the shoeshine man’s busy dreaming himself” (50). The protagonist is disconcerted, even frightened, by this assertion of the solipsism of dreams:

she knows what he intends—you too, likewise [will dream yourself]—but does he know what the words imply, in that one dreamily decisive comment, you mean, we only dream ourselves? & she is frightened because it is there, the absence she wants to stay this side of. (50)

Her interpretation of Yo’s statement doubles its implications, suggesting both that dreams can only feature projections of ourselves, and that subjectivity and selfhood themselves are dreams, constructions underwritten by instability and absence. The “absence” the protagonist fears is thus also doubled. On one hand, it gestures to the fundamental alterity and inaccessibility of others and the loneliness it creates. She pushes aside a thought that her first dream is connected to death and absence by claiming that “she isn’t ready, no not yet, she will cling to . . . any evidence of their presence to each other” (62). With Yo’s serious response to her dream of her mother, she is forced to confront “the horror of falling into, earth, into that we are alone” (68), conflating isolation with death itself.

Yet if death and its alterity create a lonely sense of separation, her dreams imply that the other extreme of complete identification with the other is no less frightening, revealing the instability of individual subjectivity. Her reflections on death at a Mayan ruin acknowledge the fact that subjectivity is contingent on material contexts, as she imagines that “those underground mock those who would come, aha you have stepped out of place, you have stepped out of time, you will lose your face” (47). Her subsequent dream of her mother in an underworld similarly reflects the fragility of subjectivity by dramatizing the threat of overidentification. After seeing her uncanny mother as “queen” of the dead (64) and fleeing from the house, the protagonist hears her mother call, “‘I don’t want to lose
that one too’” (64). These words and the feeling of the dream inspire a dread, not only of becoming caught in her mother’s underworld house where she does not belong, but also of becoming her mother. As she runs, she thinks, “I know who it is I run from through the dark . . . [T]hick with will, it pulls me . . . to get to, upward, to become . . . up from the dark to be her” (64). The dream is at once a space of alterity and a space that blurs the boundary between self and other, and the protagonist wakes with relief as “into the day we live in I’ve become—myself” (65). Yet with her gradual interpretation of the dream as a passage through “that other self she has fought up through . . . through mother & up” (73), an experience akin to literal birth, she recognizes that both mourning and individuation involve ongoing negotiations of relationality and of the simultaneous influence of and separation from the other.

The protagonist’s gradual embrace of the dream’s balance between alterity and identification is reflected in her uncertain approach to representations of her mother in Zócalo and in the subsequent texts in Ghost Works. For instance, the protagonist’s discussion with Yo about her uncanny dream brings up both uncertainty and possibility, as she wonders, “& was that her mother? . . . She’s everybody’s mother, he says, mother earth. She laughs, oh but who is that? she was definitely someone” (68). Like Barthes and Roth, Marlatt’s protagonist emphasizes her mother’s individuality, complexity, and inaccessibility while also entertaining the representative possibilities of archetypes of motherhood. Barbara Godard’s articulation of this addition of the archetypal to the individual in the central image of How Hug a Stone is even more reminiscent of Barthes’s language: “Hug the gravestone (birth mother), hug the sacred stone (Mother Nature)” (494). Although Marlatt’s use of archetypes throughout her corpus has earned accusations of feminist essentialism, the uncertain, dialogic nature of these representations draws attention to their provisionality, and Marlatt’s tendency to acknowledge inaccessibility alongside archetypes dramatizes the way that these

34 The fact that Marlatt’s mother does not speak directly to her is significant; like Roth and Choy, she cannot engage in an actual dialogue with the dead, a mediation that I go on to discuss in detail in chapter 2. Sherill Grace draws on Frederick M. Keener’s work to note that “the true ‘dialogue of the dead’ is overheard; the dead are talking amongst themselves, not to the living” (134).
universalizing images inadequately fill in the unknowable elements of the other’s alterity. The dedication to *How Hug a Stone*, “for Edrys who was also Tino” (*Ghost* 129), gestures to the multiple versions of her mother that the speaker discovers through dialogue with family members; later in the text, the speaker turns to archetype in an acknowledgment of the inability of language to capture these versions in a just image of her mother’s relational subjectivity:

> we have forgotten parts, we have lost sense of the whole. . . . we find ourselves enacting . . . the endless struggle to redeem them, or them in ourselves . . . to speak what isn’t spoken, even with all the words.

although there are stories about her, versions of history that are versions of her, & though she comes in many guises she is not a person, she is what we come through to & what we come out of, ground & source. the pause (between the words) of all possible relation. (182)

When approached in a bereavement context, the archetypes of the mother as “ground & source” paradoxically gesture to the inaccessibility of the “person” of the other. As the speaker continues in the next section, “*she lives* stands for nothing but this longstanding matter in the grass, settled hunks of mother crust” (184). Yet, as *Ghost Works*’ recurring dreams and multiple narratives of dying indicate, these representations that circle around absence can only be part of an “endless struggle” to reconcile the possibilities and ruptures of loss.

Marlatt and Choy’s revisionary accounts of dreams and hauntings illustrate the range and complexity of dreams’ contributions to narratives of dying, and speak to the reasons that dreams have become so pervasive in these framing narratives in the memoir. The dream’s paradoxical ability to balance possibility and uncertainty, coherence and instability, and alterity and identification makes it a reflexive device through which memoirists can address the uncertainties of death and loss as well as the questions of representation and relationality that emerge in the writing of a loved one’s death. Through their typical focus on the figure of a deceased other, dreams articulate a simultaneous desire for continuity and resignation to rupture, foregrounding their limited access to the other both through the dream frame and through exaggerated mimesis, uncanny alterity, or proliferating interpretations of the dream’s meanings. As I show in more detail in the next chapter, this limited access is also evident in the way that dreams treat the possibility of dialogue
within dreams of the dead. Turning from this chapter’s concerns with narrative, I examine how memoirs that include dreams of the dead also share intriguing similarities with the poetic genre of elegy, including concerns with recovering the other’s voice and the transmission of creative forms of inheritance. In this context, dreams both offer and mediate the possibility of communication with the dead.
Chapter Two
Dreams of Recovery in Elegy and Memoir

While the previous chapter focuses specifically on the narrative role of dreams in representations of death and mourning, the dreams of the dead that were my starting premise also suggest important connections with the poetic genre of elegy. Indeed, in *We Are What We Mourn: The English-Canadian Elegy*, Priscila Uppal notes that dreams of reconnection are also a prevalent device in Canadian poetic elegies, particularly in elegies that address the deaths of parents (42). In this chapter, I examine how dreams contribute to a shared elegiac impetus in the poetic elegy and the memoir. Although dreams in the elegy may also be used to construct “narratives of dying,” I argue here that the dream’s significance as an elegiac device is more overtly connected to the elegy’s concern with the recovery and inheritance of poetic voice. In the poetic elegies and memoirs that I explore in this chapter, dreams and hauntings tend to simultaneously invite and complicate the possibility of recovering the voices of deceased others by mediating or deferring their ability to speak. By disallowing explicit dialogue with the dead, these dreams and hauntings point memoirists toward more limited forms of inheritance and voicing, often in the form of remembered words that provide insight into creative methods of accommodating and adapting to loss. I examine the corpus of two memoirists who have also published poetic elegies for family members, Lorna Goodison and Patrick Lane, considering how dream, vision, and haunting intersect with imagery of voice and song both in their memoirs and in poetic works that feature elegy sequences: Goodison’s *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People* (2007) and *Turn Thanks* (1999), and Lane’s *There Is a Season: A Memoir* (2005) and *Mortal Remains* (1992). I argue that recent memoirs tend to embrace the gaps and absences that are often seen as failures of elegiac consolation because these gaps allow for greater awareness of the ethical limitations of memoir writing, and I demonstrate that these writers position the resulting sense of loss and absence as itself a form of consolation, inheritance, and creative inspiration.

The intergeneric links between memoir and poetry have been explored by a number of Canadian critics in recent decades. Several relational memoirs from the late 1970s and
early 1980s, including Marlatt’s *Ghost Works* and Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*, include poetry alongside prose, and Joanne Saul convincingly argues that contemporary life writing genres such as the “biotext” share formal and thematic concerns with the Canadian long poem (16). Likewise, Helen Buss suggests that the “reflective and reflexive” tone of the memoir is akin to the voice of lyric poetry (*Repossessing* 15).¹ However, both within and outside of the Canadian context, few critics have seriously explored the links between the memoir and the elegy—perhaps because such connections seem too obvious. The term “elegy” has shifted over time from a formal term, initially referring to a metre of verse, to a term broadly denoting content that in some way encompasses an act of mourning. Thus, Sandra Pouchet Paquet’s study of Caribbean autobiography unproblematically identifies a comparable “conjunction of elegy and autobiography” in poetic and prose texts, locating their similarity in a “lyric outpouring” (228) regarding “elegiac themes of loss, mourning, and melancholia” (233). Nancy K. Miller’s brief comparison of the genres also simply aligns the trajectory of the memoir with that of the traditional elegy and, by extension, with Freud’s work of mourning:

Memoirs that write a parent’s death share many generic and thematic features of the elegy. Traditionally, the performance that elegy entails for poets is the act of taking up and revising the precursor’s task in their own voices. This is a part of the mourning process and requires a break with the past, a separation, and a replacement. (*Bequest* 7)

In this chapter, I expand on Miller’s assertion that elegists and memoir writers engage in “taking up and revising the precursor’s task in their own voices,” specifically attending to concerns about the recovery and transmission of voice—the absent voices of the dead as well as the voice of the writer—that are central to the elegy genre. While my analysis acknowledges the parallels that are often drawn between a psychological “mourning process” and elegiac form, I also identify formal similarities between elegies and memoirs that reflect on the death of another person, whether that death is central or

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¹ G. Thomas Couser also applies the term “lyrical memoir” to memoirs that “have some of the qualities of poetry: brevity . . . and reliance on imagery, rather than narrative” (*Memoir* 143). My study focuses on works that employ formal elegiac devices, rather than poetic qualities in general. However, the two converge in some Canadian elegiac memoirs, such as Kristjana Gunnars’s *Zero Hour* (1991), which Tanis MacDonald describes as “[p]art prose poem, part elegy, part philosophical treatise” (172).
Peripheral in the text. I focus in particular on the role of dreams and hauntings as limited vehicles of voice, with the view that the way these elegiac devices operate in memoir can illuminate an understanding of the memoir’s shape, its negotiations of questions of inheritance, loss, and recovery, and its assuredness about accommodating absence and loss.

Although overtly elegiac concerns are often subtexts rather than the primary focus of memoirs, the genre often includes, reworks, or capitalizes on motifs associated with the English elegy, including eulogies to the dead, affirmations of the reassuring cyclicity of the natural world, moments of discovery or revelation (anagnorisis), and images of ascension or departure that depict a deceased other’s transcendence into a heavenly world (apotheosis); as we have seen in the previous chapter, the latter often appear in dreams in the memoir. While the formal uses of such motifs in prose memoirs and elegiac poems have important differences—not least because, as Tanis MacDonald points out, the poetic speaker in an elegy should not be read naively as autobiographical—the work of scholars who have applied elegiac criticism to modern and late modern fiction provides useful models for such a comparative analysis. For instance, John B. Vickery identifies an “elegiac temper” in a wide range of American fiction, insisting on the pervasiveness of an elegiac framework of lamentation, confrontation, and consolation, while recognizing that “the examination of prose works poses a different set of critical demands and expectations from those of poetic elegies” (1, 2). Karen Smythe’s theorization of the

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2 I emphasize formal elements because they clarify the similarities between memoir and elegy, and because the dream’s ambivalent forms of continuity with the dead complicate the Freudian models of mourning and melancholia that have strongly influenced elegy studies. Jahan Ramazani adapts his use of genre criticism and psychoanalysis by clarifying that “[i]deally, these paradigms should not only complement but also correct each other, genre criticism restraining the psychoanalytic tendency to reduce all elegiac artifice to emotion, pathology, or biography, and psychoanalysis restraining the generic tendency to reduce all elegiac feeling to trope, code, or convention” (23). MacDonald similarly suggests that “studies of the elegy that assume a purely confessional (or rigidly psychoanalytical) motive in the poem miss the literary vitality of elegiac convention and the political potential of elegiac inquiry” (29).

3 MacDonald explains that “the elegist offers a self-consciously constructed mourner by offering the narrative ‘I’ in an elegy, [and] the reader must also understand that elegiac convention irrevocably, and intentionally, ruins autobiographical fidelity in order to explore the place of mourning in the world” (29); that is, “the poet must balance the often varying emotional truth against the demands of elegiac convention” (132). Of course, her point that formal conventions distort referentiality can also be applied to memoir.
“fiction-elegy” in the short stories of Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro similarly offers a useful approach for considering the role of elegy in the memoir, as she defines the fiction-elegy as not simply fiction with an elegiac theme or tone, but as “fiction written in an elegiac form” (5). Thus, she considers how traditional devices of the poetic elegy, such as anagnorisis and prosopopoeia (the inclusion of another’s voice) are incorporated, reworked, or parodied within fictional forms. In their attention to the trajectories and devices shared between elegies and prose writing, Vickery and Smythe each provide models through which to apply elegy criticism to “extended narrative, and a physically larger text” (Vickery 2), which fit even more aptly with non-fictional, relational memoirs that share the first-person voice of lyric poetry, a subjective engagement with experiences of mourning, and an association with recuperative writing.4

As Miller suggests, the memoir’s affinity with the elegy is particularly pronounced in both genres’ concerns with poetic or familial succession and the transmission of voice. Celeste Schenck identifies these concerns as a “vocational subtext” in the elegy, observing that the traditional structure of elegy stages a “drama of succession, the very ‘narrative’ or ‘plot’ of elegy itself. By ritually celebrating the death of a fellow poet or master, a new poet separates himself from the forebear and simultaneously offers himself as a successor at singing” (Mourning 2, 34). As a result, she sees the “very purpose” of elegy as being “to generate voice out of the silence left by a predecessor . . . to guarantee future poetic production” (179). Such concerns with voice and succession are often at stake in the memoir as well, whether the memoirist considers his or her own ability to “sing” a communal past, to represent the past of a friend or relative, or to claim a poetic or familial inheritance. While the traditional elegy is collegial and vocational, a familial plot of succession often replaces or accompanies this plot in the contemporary elegy, as in the memoir. Jahan Ramazani traces this shift toward family elegy in postwar American poetry, arguing that the genre’s emphasis on succession and replacement naturally

4 Although both work with fiction, they note the elegiac potential of non-fictional prose. Smythe focuses on fictional autobiography, while Vickery reflects that “[t]he very emergence of a prose form of the traditional elegy in the twentieth century . . . may be followed by yet other transformations of the genre in the postmodern era. One possibility is the defictionalizing of the elegy by making its focus the lives of actual historical persons” (167).
transfers to the “displaced family romance at the heart of the elegy” (222). Despite the complexities that arise from merging poetic and familial forms of inheritance, Ramazani posits that the elegy’s structure facilitates “a narrative of generational transmission” (254).

Within family memoirs, the use of elegiac motifs tends to both invoke and trouble the ideas of poetic succession and inheritance, as well as their associated gendered roles. Feminist elegy critics have observed that the traditional elegy’s concerns with poetic succession reflect its patriarchal and homosocial heritage, including an oedipal desire for elimination of the poetic precursor or father. As Schenck elaborates in “Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-Constructing the Elegy,” echoing Ramazani, “[i]n modern poems, the Freudian model of sons succeeding their poetic fathers by violent means replaces the Greek homosexual pattern, but in all cases the elegiac initiation scene is a masculine one” (13). While gender thus affects the connotations of the elegy’s narrative of succession, the patriarchal connotations of the genre may also be acknowledged and subverted by writers. The vocational elements I discuss in this chapter are adapted by male and female writers, and my two central examples are memoirs that incorporate and parody elegiac elements to eulogize a deceased mother. As well as subtly engaging some of the questions of gender that are introduced by the elegy and its criticism, elegiac motifs also offer ways for writers to negotiate forms of inheritance and generational continuity that are more concerned with creative behests than with material property or genealogy. While Cynthia Sugars convincingly argues that recent Canadian memoirs tend to represent “genealogical inheritance” as destabilized by gaps and aporias (“(Dis)inheriting” 181), the elegiac subtext of such memoirs often embraces these gaps by depicting the ability to creatively adapt to absence and loss as itself a form of artistic vocation.

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5 Ramazani’s use of the term “family romance” seems to refer to an Oedipal plot of the son replacing the father, rather than the Freudian family romance in which a child imagines a noble parentage.

6 MacDonald’s *The Daughter’s Way: Paternal Elegies by Canadian Women* focuses on examples of this gendered subversion; she argues that elegies written by daughters for their fathers problematize the question of inheritance, “[producing] elegies that assert a variety of feminist positions that are negotiated within and beyond the parameters of the male elegiac tradition” (7).
Viewing the memoir’s concern with inheritance as elegiac and vocational also illuminates the recuperative trajectory that is associated with both elegy and life writing. The elegy’s “plot” of succession operates within the genre’s traditional trajectory toward consolation, wherein the poet, having sung a lament and experienced the weight of mourning, is consoled by some reassurance of continuity, whether an apotheostic reassurance that the other’s life continues in some other form, an emphasis on the continuing cycles of nature, or a more compensatory sense that the poem itself—and the inherited ability to sing—acts as a lasting memorial to the other. Such consolatory figures are often associated with a kind of psychological recuperation. As William Watkin suggests, “elegy is to be seen as treatment, a salve, or balm applied to the psychic wound” (54), a healing trajectory that however involves an “infamous paradox” in the sense that “[o]ne wants to testify as to the nature of the loss, but one also wants to get over the loss by destroying it” (54). Melissa Zeiger identifies psychological recuperation and succession as two of the central threads of elegy criticism, astutely observing that
two powerful models have dominated the discussion of elegy: an anxiety-of-influence model derived from Harold Bloom, and a work-of-mourning model based on Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia.” While the first model conceives elegy as a rivalrous attack on a dead but still overwhelming precursor figure, the second conceives the genre as a translation into literature of the grieving process following a death, leading to resignation or consolation. (3)

Zeiger’s distinction between the elegy’s emphasis on poetic succession and its frequent psychoanalytic reading is useful, but these two threads are often intertwined in practice, especially in the use of the concept of recovery. The term can refer either to a psychological recovery based on the therapeutic interpretation of elegy, or to the recovery of a voice that represents poetic inheritance; most often, it encompasses both at once if the recovery of voice is depicted as enabling the psychological recovery and consolation. Schenck describes the elegy’s “first premise [as] the recovery of poetic voice from ritual burial of the past” (Mourning 181), a description that illustrates the fascinating ambiguity

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7 Often, these consolatory forms coexist; Eric Smith posits that English elegies typically involve a “double consolation” made up of “two strands . . . the memorial and the apotheosis” (13, 14). The sometimes facile nature of the consolation achieved by elegy has been addressed by both poets and critics. Ramazani in particular focuses on a trend of “anti-consolatory” and melancholic elegy in the twentieth century (2).
with which the word “recovery” is used in elegy criticism. Most predominantly, the idea of a recovery of voice refers to the surviving poet’s recovery of his or her own poetic voice after a period of silence and mourning, but this recovered voice is also doubled in its association with both the deceased poet and the poetic successor. The idea that the voice is recovered both from and due to the burial of the past implies a recovery of the other’s voice and a therapeutic recovery that takes place only because of the closure involved in burial.

This duality is also expressed in Schenck’s description of “the orphic task” as “the search for literary rebirth by means of an initiatory descent,” in which “[t]he subsequent recovery (and continuance) of voice is a guarantee of literary immortality” (2). In a sense, the orphic task is thus to collect a poetic voice that transcends the mortality of each individual who embodies it—a fantasy of poetic transcendence or intergenerational connectivity. Yet such a task becomes more complex, and its illusory nature becomes more evident, when voice is also understood to be an attribute of individual personality, agency, experience, or desire. The “recovery” of voice must always invoke troubling questions about whom and what is being recovered and how death limits and inhibits voice, questions that are central to both the memoir and the elegy. David W. Shaw more explicitly refers to the recovered voice as that of the deceased other, describing elegy as a “drama” in which “the poet is often inviting the reader to help him elicit a voice from beyond the grave” (106). Similarly, in her recent analysis of contemporary Canadian elegy, Uppal foregrounds the concept of recovery as a literal re-gathering of what is lost, a process through which elegists “seek multiple voices, including the voices of the dead” (13). Especially when such elegiac works include dreams and visions in which the dead speak—or, often, in which they refuse to or cannot speak—the possibility of recovering and including the voice of the other is crucial to each genre.

Given the centrality and complexity of questions of voice, recovery, and inheritance in the elegy and the memoir, the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia provides an important way to understand the affinities between the two genres and the role played by dreams and hauntings in both forms. Prosopopoeia, a form of personification in which a voice or face is attributed to an absent, dead, or inanimate person or object, has long been
associated with literatures of mourning. The trope can operate either through apostrophe—an elegiac address to an absent other which gives the other a voice in the sense that it anticipates a response—or by attributing an actual response to the inanimate object. J. Hillis Miller describes prosopopoeia as “the trope of mourning” (4), while Smythe asserts that “[g]iving voice, which is the function and effect of prosopopoeia, is a fundamental trope of elegy” (170). While prosopopoeia is thus often associated with elegy, Paul de Man also identifies prosopopoeia as “the trope of autobiography” in his seminal essay “Autobiography as De-facement” (926). Significantly, the context of this declaration is de Man’s analysis of a particular set of autobiographical texts, Wordsworth’s “Essays Upon Epitaphs”; in his discussion, de Man likens the epitaph and autobiography, bringing the two together with the declaration that “[t]he dominant figure of the epitaphic or autobiographical discourse is . . . the prosopopoeia, the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave” (927). For de Man, prosopopoeia exemplifies the paradox of autobiography as a literary genre, which cannot avoid the inevitably figurative effect of rendering a life in language. Even if the writer consciously avoids prosopopoeic forms like rhetorically speaking for the dead, he argues, “the advocated ‘exclusion’ of the fictional voice and its replacement by the actual voice of the living in fact reintroduces the prosopopoeia in the fiction of address” (928). That is, the entire work of autobiography is a form of prosopopoeia in the sense that it will eventually become a posthumous text.8

While the possibility of prosopopoeia thus hovers over the memoir in general, its implicit presence is further complicated by the elegiac memoir’s dual effort to voice the deceased other as well as the surviving self. In this context, dreams and hauntings are fascinating forms of prosopopoeia because the range of possibilities for the dreams’ source and interpretation obscures their function as rhetorical devices. In other words, dreams hold

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8 Watkin notes that elegy shares this posthumous function, noting that elegy operates “not only to preserve that lost, beloved thing, but also to lay the groundwork for our own survival beyond the grave” (9). Similarly, in Memoires for Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida reflects that prosopopoeia is inevitable: “I believe that this voice already haunts any said real or present voice. . . . And everything that we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave” (26, 29). (The final phrase, used by both de Man and Derrida, alludes to Chateaubriand’s posthumous Memoirs d’outre-tombe [1848], well-known in the French autobiography tradition).
out the possibility of true interaction with the dead and hints at the problematic doubling of this interaction; as Smythe explains, “the prosopopoetic ‘voice’ is a *double* voice in elegy: the voice of the absent as well as the voice of the survivor is figured in the performed and performative text” (8). Yet dreams and hauntings do play important rhetorical roles in both evoking and often denying the possibility of a true “voice-from-beyond-the-grave” (de Man 927). The communication between the living and the dead is frequently deflected or mediated in dreams and hauntings, as I discuss in detail in the following section. Where communication is possible, its uncertain origins and its status as a potential fiction are frequently foregrounded, allowing memoirists to acknowledge the fantasy of continued interaction. Rather than allowing the fiction of prosopopoeia to stand, the deflected voices within dreams and hauntings direct readers toward the more limited, aesthetic forms of prosopopoeic consolation through remembrance that writers tend to embrace in the conclusions of their memoirs.9

In the following analysis of the poetry and memoirs of Goodison and Lane, I explore the compensatory functions of dreams in elegy and memoir, examining the role of dreamed prosopopoeia in discourses of recovery, inheritance, and gendered relationships. In the first section, I argue that dreams tend to deflect rather than recover voice in the poetic elegy, briefly examining elegies from Atwood’s *Morning in the Burned House* alongside a more extensive reading of the elegy sequences in Goodison’s *Turn Thanks*. I suggest that the longer text of elegy sequences and memoirs allows for more extensive attention to the paradoxically consolatory nature of life as constituted by absence. In the final two sections, I develop more detailed readings of Lane’s *There Is a Season* and Goodison’s *From Harvey River*. Lane’s addiction recovery memoir invokes and subverts a range of elegiac devices, including failed prosopopoeic hauntings, to trouble his engagement with and representation of his mother. In contrast, Goodison’s memoir exuberantly capitalizes on prosopopoeic dreams as vehicles of voice, establishing dreams themselves as an

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9 The turn to remembered words instead of ongoing, dreamed interactions reflects a recognition that even when the dead are given a voice, “the voice represents not so much the dead as the once living, juxtaposed with the needs of the yet living” (Bronfen and Goodwin 7).
important creative inheritance that contributes to a depiction of adaptation to loss as a familial and national vocation.

Deferred Voices: Dreams and the Elegiac Compensation

In *We Are What We Mourn: The Contemporary English-Canadian Elegy*, Uppal posits that English-Canadian elegies are characterized by a focus on recovering the past and using it to create a future. As she explains, “[r]ecovery is not merely inheritance of the past, as in conventional rites of passage, but a creation of the present and future through dialogue and active engagement with the past” (13), a process that she suggests can take place through dreams. While the writers I discuss in this chapter do engage the past to creatively adapt to the demands of the present and future, the role of dreams in this process is, I argue, more complicated than Uppal’s optimistic reading of dreams as an active form of recovery and engagement. Although some limited interaction with the dead is allowed within elegiac dreams, dreams often deflect, mediate, or disallow a recovery of speech, drawing attention to the doubling and limitations of prosopopoeia. I argue that dreams may be more productively understood as a limited form of elegiac compensation, the traditional mode of elegiac consolation that simultaneously figures reassurances of continuity and confirmation of absence. In this compensatory role, the frequently denied prosopopoeia of dreams reiterates the absence of the other and redirects dreamers out of the dream of reconnection, toward a philosophical and consolatory understanding of life itself as marked by absence.

My reading of dreams as a form of compensation departs from a more optimistic interpretation of elegiac dreams as a topos that rhetorically recovers the other. Uppal positions dreams specifically as an active, ritual mode of recovery, emphasizing their potential for new interactions and conversations with the dead within a “psychic landscape where the past, present, and future, or in other words, the living and the dead, can continue to interact” (41). While Uppal’s approach interestingly converges with the “continuing bonds” model of grief discussed in Chapter One, it is also reminiscent of Schenck’s observation that in elegies that reanimate the dead in earthly, rather than heavenly, settings, “consolation by means of compensation, the genre’s standard mode of accommodating loss, is rendered unnecessary by the act of recuperation itself”
“Feminism” 20). Although Uppal depicts this recuperation as taking place in an “alternative” consolatory landscape, the recovery of interaction and voice she describes is complete. She posits that dreams “introduce spaces for interaction [with the dead] that welcome polyphonic voices within the elegy form” (44), depicting this interactive quality as a positive development in the elegy that “reduces Orphic superiority and elegiac authority and allows for as much listening on the part of the mourner as it allows for speaking” (44). While Uppal’s suggestion that the lost other can simply be recovered or recuperated within the confines of a poem or dream is appealing, a closer consideration of the dream’s role as a vehicle of voicing and restoration illustrates that the elegiac dream tends to simultaneously offer and confuse or disallow the possibility of voiced interaction.

For instance, in one of Uppal’s primary examples, Atwood’s elegiac collection *Morning in the Burned House*, a series of dream poems that frame the death of the speaker’s father reflects both the desire for and difficulty of what Uppal describes as the “recovery” of the dead. Indeed, these poems imply that the desired recovery cannot be effectively enacted either in dreams or in poetry. Uppal interprets the dreams in Atwood’s poetry as a positive alternative to traditional forms of consolation, arguing that “[a]s the traditional rituals available for the work of mourning have failed to bring consolation for the speaker’s loss, she embraces the active engagement the dream landscape allows” (53). Yet the interactive engagement Uppal underscores is importantly denied in the poems’ descriptions of the dreams. In “Two Dreams,” the speaker’s dreams preceding her father’s death anticipate the imminent impossibility of restoring the father after death. In the first dream, the father wades into a lake fully clothed, apparently ready to be restored to life, but is unreachable by the speaker when she dives into the lake. The second dream seems more promising, as a burned cabin is resurrected despite the potentially

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10 Ronald R. Thomas offers a similarly optimistic reading of an elegiac dream in Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Citing De Quincey’s dream of being reunited with his childhood friend Ann (De Quincey 127-8), Thomas declares that “[s]he is restored to life . . . by the dreamer’s own words” (109). In Thomas’s interpretation, Ann’s inability to speak in the dream does not affect its restorative possibility.

11 This imagery is reminiscent of the “pivotal scene” of diving in *Surfacing*, as Janice Fiamengo notes in her analysis of how Atwood’s elegies build on her previous work (146).
mediating effects of the dream: “each log restored, / not blurred or faded by dream, / but exact, the way they were” (97). In contrast, however, her father’s presence in the dream is not “exact.” He stands “with his back turned to us / in his winter parka, the hood up. / He never had one like that” (97). The imperfect restoration of Atwood’s father in the dream is joined by an absence of communicative intent and language. Without turning, her father departs, as “[t]he bright leaves rustle, we can’t call, / he doesn’t look” (97). Within the dream, the speaker’s potential apostrophe to her father and his prosopopoeic response are inhibited, the two different auxiliary verbs—“can’t” and “doesn’t”—indicating the absence of ability on the speaker’s part and of desire on her father’s part. Instead of allowing a consolatory reunion, then, the difficult or mediated transmission of voice in dreams acts as a reminder of the continuing absence of the other, resulting in an ambivalent understanding of dreams’ healing potential. As Atwood’s speaker asks in “Two Dreams 2,” “Who sends us these messages, / oblique and muffled? / What good can they do?” (100). The second question gestures to the expectation and apparent absence of a utilitarian motive for the dream’s appearance, an expectation that the “messages” should do some “good,” along with the implication that they do not. In fact, dreams are depicted as troubling, frustrating, and difficult to interpret, the dead represented as “slurred guests, never entirely welcome” (100).

Though the “muffled” nature of dreamed communication complicates its potential for recovery of the other’s voice, such dreams can still be understood as more limited forms of consolation through compensation. Dreams’ ambiguous depictions of posthumous life and, in the work of poets like Goodison, their association with creative work such as song, interestingly align with traditional figures of compensation, whether heavenly apotheosis or an aesthetic replacement in the object of the poem. The traditional elegiac trajectory toward compensation and consolation has been treated dubiously by some

12 In Negotiating With The Dead, Atwood notes that this motif of the dead turning away from the living is common in literature that represents a descent to the underworld. She notes that in Dante’s Divine Comedy, Dante “finds the beloved again, only to lose her once more, this time forever. As Dido turns away from Aeneas, as Eurydice turns away from Orpheus, thus Beatrice turns away from Dante” (172).

13 Goodison associates dreams with therapeutic art in “Angel of Dreamers,” a dramatic monologue spoken by the proprietor of a “dreamshop” who mixes dreams in a crucible for customers who “stumble in weary, having tried various health schemes / and bush medicines and ask me for a dream” (Turn 76).
contemporary critics, due in part to twentieth-century elegists’ resistance to the idea that consolation in the face of death is possible in any form. Ramazani argues that the majority of “[c]ontemporary elegists . . . refuse a facile poetic therapy—namely, the transfiguration of the dead into consolatory art or heavenly beings” (7). However, Ramazani concedes that some modern and contemporary elegists “have reclaimed compensatory mourning by subduing its promise” (30). In its limited, ambivalent recovery of the dead, the dream offers such a subdued form of compensation. While the dreamed interaction may be felt as uncanny and disturbing, it can also be reassuring, and the transient, partial recovery of the other in dreams acts as an ongoing reminder of the dead other’s paradoxically simultaneous presence and absence in the life of the survivor. In fact, the dream’s temporary, limited interaction with the dead might be thought of as compensatory precisely because the interaction maintains the necessary boundary between life and death and reminds the dreamer of the nature of what is lost. While the very concepts of compensation and prosopopoeia are predicated on the absence of the other, and thus the compensating figure or poem is often understood as standing in for or replacing the lost other, it only does so, in Peter Sacks’s terms, as “a consoling sign that carries in itself the reminder of the loss on which it has been founded” (5). As Sacks elaborates,

Of course only the object as lost, and not the object itself, enters into the substitutive sign, and the latter is accepted only by a turning away from the actual identity of what was lost. Consolation thus depends on a trope that remains at an essential remove from what it replaces. (6)

Like other forms of compensation, the dream is necessarily distanced from the lost other. In its staging of a mediated and transient encounter with the dead from which one must inevitably awake, the dream both provides a sense of continuity and redirects the mourner away from the possibility of reconnection and toward an acceptance of the loss.14 In this sense, the dream’s function is redirective; it offers an incomplete, but partial restoration that enables the mourner to adapt to the present.

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14 I do not necessarily see this waking separation from the lost other and the resulting acceptance of the loss as a complete detachment from the other. As I explain in Chapter One, dreams of the dead may be recurring experiences that allow mourners to maintain a sense of “continuing bonds” with loved ones.
Goodison’s elegies for her parents in *Turn Thanks* illustrate, in a more comforting way than Atwood’s elegies, how the compensatory function of dreams is accentuated and made more poignant by the limited and doubled nature of dreamed prosopopoeia. *Turn Thanks* opens with two elegiac sequences about family members, most prominently engaging with dreams in the title poems of the two sections, “My Mother’s Sea Chanty” and “This Is My Father’s Country.” “My Mother’s Sea Chanty,” the second of two elegies for Goodison’s mother that open the collection, relates a dream that initially seems to enact a more complete recovery of the dead than do Atwood’s poems. The poem begins immediately with the dream’s multiple recoveries of body, voice, and breath:

I dream that I am washing
my mother’s body in the night sea
and that she sings slow
and that she still breathes. (6)

The elegy conjoins the elegiac imagery of water with a scene of ritual washing, a healing motif in much of Goodison’s poetry, while also invoking her mother’s voice in her slow singing; the poem’s repeated syntax dramatizes the slow, accumulative nature of the ritual recovery. Yet the mother’s voice remains unrecovered in the poem itself, doubled even in the title, “My Mother’s Sea Chanty,” which might refer either to the mother’s song or to the poem about her song. Although the mother speaks in the poem, her words are untranslatable and unrecordable:

I hear my dark mother
speaking sea-speak with pilot fish,
showing them how to direct barks
that bear away our grief and anguish. (6)

The speaker’s hearing of her mother’s voice is one of five instances of syntactic repetition that begin each stanza—“I dream,” “I see,” “I watch,” “I hear,” and “I pray”—and the words, like her mother’s directions to the “pilot fish,” are healing in nature. At the same time, the mother’s “sea-speak” separates her use of language from that of the poet and is not addressed to her. While the mother’s voice in the dream is consolatory in the sense that it directs an attenuation of “grief and anguish,” it is comforting both despite and because of the fact that it also remains, in Sacks’s words, “at a remove” from the speaker. The poem ends with a prayer for the mother’s ability to live a more exciting and
agential life in the afterlife—“I pray my mother breaks free / from the fish pots and marine chores . . . and that she rides a wild white horse” (6)—acknowledging the reality of her lived experience as well as providing a compensatory, if unvoiced and as yet unachieved, apotheosis.

While “My Mother’s Sea Chanty” reflects on how Goodison’s mother’s life might be transformed in the afterlife, the longer poem “This Is My Father’s Country” focuses primarily on how dreams foster treasured remembrances of the other. The poem’s emphasis on compensation is layered with a generational context of cultural loss and recovery, evident from the first section, which reflects on Marcus Goodison’s experiences of dispossession due to his mother’s victimization by the colonial legal system in Jamaica. At the end of the section, Goodison’s grandmother prays to St. Elizabeth to “‘grant us consoling strength / to bear our wounds and losses’” (28). Indeed, the dream and vision that close the poem offer such a “consoling strength” through silent images of Goodison’s father, acknowledging but rejecting a negative interpretation of his limited voice:

They say that if you dream your father
and he does not speak that is an ill omen.
And I dream my father, he does not speak,
he does not speak, there is no need.
He smiles so, and the room is filled
with stillness, high transcendent peace. (31)

While Goodison’s emphasis on her father’s smile is still a form of embodied prosopopoeia—as de Man notes, the word’s etymology stems from a concept of “masking”—it does not insist on new or ongoing interactions in which the father contributes new insight or knowledge. Instead, the lack of speech, though emphasized with the triple repetition of the phrase “he does not speak,” is dismissed as insignificant to the form of memorialization and “peace” experienced in the dream.

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15 Earlier in the poem, the speaker rejects another apparent form of prosopopoeia. Though she invokes a posthumous story in the lines, “I hear now my spirit father, raconteur,” an earlier line implies the wishfulness involved in this calling up of her father’s voice and face: “And as I write this I swear I see him smiling” (29).
In the vision that closes the elegy, a version of elegiac transcendence, Goodison’s father shares an experience of listening to songs rather than singing them, again suggesting that his legacy of song has already been transmitted in life. Appearing in an apotheosis as a “ball of light” that “burst through the doors of the funeral home / and rapidly ascended the fire escape,” he

glow[s] over the music issuing out the window,
he and I serenaded by his favourite singer,
Harry Belafonte, crooning “Jamaica Farewell”
and “Shenandoah” and “Sleep Late My Lady Friend.” (31)

In these final lines, her father’s voice is deflected into Harry Belafonte’s songs, attesting to the adequacy of this remembered, lived, and aesthetic inheritance as a form of compensation. Notably, in this scene the “ball of light,” which alludes to the folkloric figure of the Old Hige—a feminized, vampiric spirit with the ability to turn into a fireball
participates in the scene safely only because it remains outside the window. Goodison thus repeatedly acknowledges not only the ethics, but also the personal dangers of emphasizing ongoing communication with the othered dead; by representing her father through an inhuman and feminine cultural figure, she renders him an other as well as a foreigner who bids farewell to the country memorialized in the poem—“This Is My Father’s Country”—and to life itself. Her combination of apotheosis and an emphasis on a consolation through remembrance illustrates how, according to Watkin, apotheosis and memorial frequently coexist as consolatory forms. As he explains, “[a]potheosis is a means of packaging death and of packing the dead off into some other realm which, convenient due to its nature as radically other and literally life-threatening, is off limits to the living subject. The memorial is the method of commenting on this” (74).  

By emphasizing the “literally life-threatening” nature of death but safely containing it

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16 See Davies, ed., Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora 728. The figure is known as a soucouyant elsewhere in the Caribbean.

17 Smith similarly emphasizes the ethical importance of maintaining this boundary, arguing that “[w]hen, by way of consolation, the apotheosis of the beloved, or the prospect of jumping the hateful boundary between life and death so as to make renewed contact, is the final triumphant impression, human life is liable to be diminished” (2).
outside the window or under the sea—and further, within the dream—Goodison provides moments of apotheosis that inspire memories and reflection on the other’s life.

Goodison’s emphasis on memories of her father, rather than on posthumous dialogue and interaction, suggests that the complex ethics of representing the dead partially explain why the dream’s limited interactions become consolatory in contemporary elegies, despite their refusal of recovery. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, elegists have become reluctant, in Sacks’s terms, to “tur[n] away from the actual identity of what was lost” (6). Further, the act of replacing the dead through compensation attempts to fill a gap that contemporary mourners are also more reluctant to fill; as Watkin reflects, “[w]hat you lose . . . when you administer a thanatrope to speak up for the missing element or piece, is any real sense of absence” (68). Thus, the dream’s partial compensation might be seen as consolatory specifically because it forces the dreamers to recognize that only the lived reality of the other remains, remembered, recorded, and often incomplete. In an analysis of Atwood’s poems, for instance, Janice Fiamengo asserts that the dreams’ elusive attempts to recover the father, “because they cannot substitute for the father, . . . are truer—in the sense of more faithful—representations, testifying to loss without achieving consoling substitution” (158). Similarly, Sara Jamieson argues that Atwood uses elegiac devices in order to specifically problematize the “substitutive economy” of the elegy, positing that “[s]he accepts the poem in place of the dead man, but not without pointing out what an unsatisfactory substitute it is . . . She uses the convention of elegiac address . . . but not without drawing attention to how the gesture effaces him by emphasizing instead the constitution of her own voice” (44-5).

While such ethical questions of representation thus suggest one reason behind the dream’s problematization of prosopopoeia, the dream’s limited compensation can also reflect the importance of embracing absence more generally as a constitutive element of life, foregrounding a sense of acceptance of the limited forms of recovery and inheritance imposed by experiences of mourning.

In de Man’s analysis, the problematic effects of prosopopoeia are inherently linked to the limited qualities of language. As he famously declares at the end of his essay,
As soon as we understand the rhetorical function of prosopopoeia as positing voice or face by means of language, we also understand that what we are deprived of is not life but the shape and sense of a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding. Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopoeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores. (930)

De Man suggests here that the potentially restorative quality of prosopopoeia is doomed to fail because it replaces life with language, “not the thing itself but the representation” (930). By rhetorically recovering the voice of the other (or the self), prosopopoeia distorts the conditions of absence. Ramazani observes this potentially paradoxical dynamic in the elegy as well, arguing that “modern poets have indicated that, contrary to the traditional generic wisdom, elegies may deface the dead more than they recuperate them” (220). The elegies and memoirs that I explore here attempt to circumvent this double bind of simultaneous restoration and disfigurement of the dead by rejecting overt prosopopoeia in favour of a celebration of what de Man describes as “the shape and sense of a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding”—that is, an understanding of the world marked by the ongoing presence of loss, built on the very state of being deprived of the absent other. These works acknowledge, embrace, and even celebrate the limited forms of recovery and compensation available in the face of loss. Reflecting on the contemporary tendency to disallow consolation altogether and the impact of critical theory on this approach, Watkin asserts that “[a]bsence, loss, otherness and death have become the fundamentals of a new, quasi-metaphysical, philosophy of being . . . a new ethical, anti-humanism is being born” (14). Based on this influence, he identifies a contemporary “poetics of mourning based on the material conditions of life and the ontological foundations of being founded . . . on what we are not” (14). Within this negatively defined understanding of life, “[w]hat the subject inherits from loss [is] the process of figuration as legacy, in other words, language . . . They inherit a part of loss” (77). In the elegies and memoirs I examine here, this inheritance of language and loss becomes itself a celebratory legacy.

18 Similarly, MacDonald argues that “a productive melancholia is not only possible but necessary to the postmodern present” (149).
In this context, dreams provide reminders of loss that also guide the dreamer toward an experience of life itself as a form of compensation. Rather than offering a complete form of compensation in themselves, the dreams point toward the recovery of life outside the dream and beyond the losses that have been sustained. The dream’s ability to point toward a new mode of living with loss is even more pronounced in longer works such as the elegy sequence and the memoir than in individual elegies. The elegiac memoir’s emphasis on the privative nature of life and mourning, rather than on death, is due in part to the open-ended and selective nature of the memoir form, in contrast to the extended life narrative of autobiography; the episodic nature of the memoir means that some kind of conclusion must be effected by the end of the memoir, despite the inconclusive nature of mourning and of life. Like the elegy, the memoir thus ends with an eye to the future. Notably, the works that Smythe focuses on in her study of “fiction-elegy” are fictional autobiographies, in which she sees the narrative and autobiographical elements themselves as a form of elegiac digression. Smythe argues that “forms of life writing serve a fundamental purpose in elegy: as a trope of consolation, this use of autobiography distances the speaker from the scene of death and reminds the reader that life does indeed go on” (7). Because of the focus on the self in autobiographical scenes, she explains, “the autobiographical effort both subtextualizes the elegiac and accomplishes the purpose of the work of mourning” (7). Mark Allister identifies a similar function for autobiographies that, like Lane’s There Is a Season, juxtapose grief work with nature writing. Allister asserts that in such works, “writers reframe and work through their grief by focusing on external subjects that absorbed each writer as a replacement for their loss” (1). In the elegy sequence and the elegiac memoir, life itself—in its “privative” form—becomes a mode of consolation for the memoirist, and both biographical and autobiographical

19 This emphasis on turning toward life interestingly resonates with Jung’s theory of the compensatory function of dreams. Arguing that dreams have a regulatory function that enacts a “psychological adjustment” to compensate for imbalances in an individual’s waking psychic life (“General Aspects” 31), Jung suggests that dreams not only draw on the past but “also have continuity forwards . . . since dreams occasionally exert a remarkable influence on the conscious mental life” (24); as he observes, “[a] compensatory content is especially intense when it has a vital significance for conscious orientation” (38).

20 Notably, Vickery speculates that the appearance of autobiographical forms of prose elegy “would . . . depend on history continuing to be regarded as episodic narratives composed of selected anecdotes” (167).
details similarly act as forms of compensation. Significantly, then, one of the main forms of prosopopoeia that is allowed and celebrated at the conclusion of many memoirs is remembered words of advice about living with and through loss that are adopted by the survivor as a form of inheritance.

The elegy sequences and memoirs addressed in this chapter suggest that the “privative way of understanding” established by the dreams’ often incomplete forms of prosopopoeia points to an understanding of loss not as a problem that needs solving but as the very condition of life, of art, and even of beauty. In Goodison’s poem “Winter Dreams,” the speaker dreams of going to sleep clutching an earthen vase on which, “[i]nscribed in raised letters / . . . is the word ‘life’” (Turn 80). As a consolatory sign, the vase points to the ongoing nature of life but also contains a reminder of loss and generational absence; within the dream, the potter who makes the vase “is now my father / [who] regains youth and vigor / and rows me in a reed skiff past danger” (80).

Goodison’s imagery interestingly parallels the final poem of Atwood’s elegiac sequence, “The Ottawa River By Night,” which similarly presents a vision of lived consolation alongside a dreamed image of her father, restored to health, canoeing away down the Ottawa River toward “the other sea, where there can still be safe arrivals” (Morning 104). While this apotheostic image is at the heart of the dream itself, the poem’s account of the dream is framed by reflections on the dreamed river that emphasize remembrance and lived consolation. In addition to remembering her own canoe trip with her father on the same river, the speaker recalls an accident on the river in which a group of children drowned; she imagines that the children

... all held hands
and sang until the chill reached their hearts.
I suppose in our waking lives that’s the best

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21 Gilmore notes that “biography begins in mourning. Even its upbeat version, the tribute, recognizes that something is absent. Thus biography’s work is compensatory: biography, and autobiography, work to give voice to the dead, even as the dead place limits on the relationship” (93).

22 See Jamieson 60, MacDonald 138-143. MacDonald argues that “Atwood seems not the least tempted to translate paternal apotheosis into consolation for the daughter” (143); while the father is safely transported, the daughter is left to “explo[re] not grief but emptiness, not melancholia but an abandonment of language, not mourning but the linguistic void that surrounds mourning” (138).
we can hope for, if you think of that moment
stretched out for years. (103)

While Atwood’s poem is less celebratory than Goodison’s, reflecting on the aesthetic response to life as “the best / we can hope for” rather than a satisfying compensation, the poem still hints at the role of song as an aesthetic, elegiac mode of living in awareness and anticipation of death. Fiamengo suggests that the scene evokes “more than bleak solidarity; it is a celebration rescued from suffering” (160). Notably, however, Atwood makes clear that both this vision of life and the memory of her father are only gestured to implicitly by the dream’s landscape: “None of this / is in the dream, of course” (103). Instead, the temporary dream of her deceased father, like Goodison’s dream, finally points toward an elegiac acknowledgment of absence within “waking lives.”

A similar emphasis on the importance of absence is expressed in Goodison’s and Lane’s articulations of their poetic philosophies, which each combine metaphors of gardening with acknowledgments of generational loss. In “The Mango of Poetry,” Goodison compares poetry to the desire to sit in a tree, consuming a juicy mango. The embodied joy and abundance of this experience contrast with the loss at its root. Specifying that the mango she imagines would come from the mango tree planted by her father before his death from cancer, the speaker declares, “The tree by way of compensation / bears fruit all year round / in profusion and overabundance / making up for the shortfall / of my father’s truncated years” (Turn 43). While Goodison emphasizes the role of artistic compensation in “making up for” the absence of the other, Lane underscores the central importance of absence to both gardening and poetry. Reflecting on the garden that he nurtures over the course of his memoir, he explains, “Done well, a garden is a poem, and the old lesson of gardening is the same in poetry: what is not there is as important as what is. . . . Eyes that wander the garden should be able to rest occasionally. There are no empty spaces in a garden. You also see what isn’t there” (Season 202). Lane’s reference to seeing the absent not only conveys his philosophy of gardening and poetry but also

23 Unlike Goodison, Atwood represents this awakening in the poem: “Only a dream, I think, waking / to the sound of nothing. / Not nothing. I heard: it was a beach, or shore, / and someone far off, walking” (104). Although the awakening prompts a potential dismissal of the dream, what is left of the dream is “not nothing,” but a faint residue that retains the compensatory continuity and separation of apotheosis.
alludes to his repeated encounters with the spectre of his mother, who despite her absence inflicts his experiences of gardening. In expressing this privative sense of beauty and poetry, then, Lane and Goodison emphasize the compensatory functions of poetry as well as the centrality of absence.

In the memoir, this emphasis on the consolatory function of absence is often captured at the end of the work in the form of epigrammatic, remembered words that become an adaptive form of prosopopoeia. The epilogue of Warren Cariou’s *Lake of the Prairies* (2002), for instance, features the author walking in an abandoned cemetery, reflecting on his father’s behest of storytelling and cultural recovery with his affirmation that “places have voices. . . . I seek them out, especially the ones that might have been forgotten” (313). The closing lines of the memoir, however, emphasize the limitations of that recovery as Cariou wonders “what stories [his father] told himself about these people and their place. For a moment, I thought I could hear his voice” (315). This briefly consolatory moment reiterates the centrality of story to place and continuity; yet in its syntax—“I thought I could hear his voice”—the presence of his father’s voice is deflected as his own wish. Despite this deflection, the device remains a gesture of hope and consolation. This kind of limited prosopopoeic consolation is evident even in grief memoirs that emphasize the ongoing nature of mourning, such as Joan Didion’s well-known celebration of melancholic mourning, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005). Concluding her grief memoir for her husband, John, with the reflection that “there comes a point at which we must relinquish the dead, let them go, keep them dead . . . [but] knowing this does not make it any easier” (225-6), Didion enables her consolation through the prosopopoeic use of John’s own words. Recalling a swimming cave in which safe passage requires perfect timing with the crashing waves, Didion adapts her husband’s approach to the cave to form the concluding lines of her memoir: “You had to feel the swell change. You had to go with the change. He told me that. No eye is on the sparrow but he did tell me that” (227). Rejecting a religious consolation in favour of this secular, adaptive form of prosopopoeia, Didion’s consolatory conclusion demonstrates the creative inheritance of adaptive approaches to living that many memoirs celebrate.
Longer elegiac works also often involve compensation through an embrace of cultural recovery and community; rather than remaining in the isolated dream of reconnection, the bereaved individual must awaken into the social rituals and possibilities of community. A renewed association with a community is part of the traditional elegiac consolation. As Schenck explains,

[t]he language and imagery of elegy reverse in the consolation. The initiate’s exultation at his mastery of death causes mourning to spill over into its opposite: spring follows on the heels of winter; the sequestered ones seek reintegration with the community; literary appearance suddenly calls for an appropriate audience of witnesses. (Mourning 46)

Although the consolations involved in elegy sequences and elegiac memoirs are more subdued than an “exultation at [a] mastery of death,” the renewal of community and a return into social life is indeed celebrated in Goodison’s Turn Thanks and Lane’s There Is a Season. This emphasis on communal interaction interestingly, for both authors examined here, also involves a marriage that celebrates the potential for new life. Despite the apparent opposition between elegy and the epithalamium, the lyric genre that celebrates the ritual of marriage, Schenck’s Mourning and Panegyric makes the case that “the elegy and the epithalamium are companion genres, invested in similar ways of managing loss and guaranteeing continuity” (11). As she elaborates, each form of poetry establishes “a ceremonial poetic economy designed to defer closure by ritually marking passage from one state to another” (11). However, she also notes the different social orientations in the often reflective mode of elegy and the “communal ritual” of marriage, declaring that “[e]pithalamium survives as a lyric genre only as long as the poet remains central—poetically and politically—to his world” (15). Both the poetry collection and the memoir offer ways in which this political and social centrality can be established despite and alongside the reflective qualities of elegy. For instance, Goodison’s elegies appear in the significantly titled Turn Thanks, a poetic version of a communal ritual described in From Harvey River:

The newlyweds attended church in Malvern on the first Sunday after their wedding to “turn thanks.” It was and remains the custom in rural Jamaica that the bride and groom should always go back to church on the Sunday after their wedding to show themselves to God and the community and give thanks for the blessings of their new life. (133)
By titling the work *Turn Thanks*, Goodison positions her elegies and her tributes to other poets and artists as public rites of thanks that look toward a new future. Within the work, love poems also intersperse the elegiac poems and make up a majority of the final section; notably, these poems reflect on a second marriage and have a compensatory bent. As one poem ends, “we need to make up / for all our honeyless years” (17).24

Like Goodison’s work of poetry, Lane’s *There Is a Season*, which I discuss in detail in the next section, also develops a sense of futurity through the inclusion of Lane’s marriage to his partner of twenty years, poet Lorna Crozier. Describing the sense of trepidation developed from his own childhood and two failed marriages, Lane depicts this fear about marriage as an inability to speak, reflecting that “love of another . . . raises fear, and silence reigns when I should speak” (210). For Lane and Crozier, marriage involves a ritual that includes both the partners’ speech and a “committee of voices” (215) who support the marriage. The sense of possibility established by the ritual also fosters two of the most positive dreams of recovery and recuperation recorded in the memoir. Recounting a “dream where my dead brother spoke to me and I heard his true voice for the first time in almost forty years” (231), Lane suggests that the dream reflects his own growing peace: “I thought it was because I was happy and that my brother must know that, so he came from spirit to bless me” (231). Crozier also has a dream that speaks to the recovery of a social world:

[S]he told me of the dream that woke her in the night and it was a good dream. She was a child in her dream, a child playing among the tall trunks of prairie lilacs where no one could find her. And I listened and was happy for her. . . . And my wife said she thought her lilac dream was a good dream, for at the end of the dream she had stepped out of her hiding place for the first time and entered the world. (231)

The compensatory dream thus points the dreamer toward the social world in a paradoxical conjunction between the privacy of dreams and the social rituals and possibilities of community; here, the opportunity for dialogue and receptive listening guides and mediates the positive interpretation of the dream. The risks and

24 While *From Harvey River* puts less emphasis on marriage, it also ends with a communal scene of mourning that I discuss in the final section of this chapter.
responsibilities of this turn toward adaptive living are engaged with differently in Lane’s and Goodison’s memoirs, however. While Lane’s memoir embraces this social recovery for himself, his representation of his mother in private episodes of haunting reflects his anxieties about transforming her character and contradictions into therapeutic art. In contrast, Goodison’s memoir positions dreaming itself as a communal and cultural inheritance.

“The Poem of You Will Never Be Written”: Elegy, Silence, and Gender in Lane’s *There Is A Season*

The paradoxical forms of recovery allowed by compensatory mourning are central to both Lane’s elegies and his recent memoir. Lane concludes his partially family-focused elegy sequence, *Mortal Remains*, with an afterword on the limited, retroactive efficacy of consolatory art. He reflects:

> My brother’s early death and my father’s murder changed my life in the Sixties. It was only recently, twenty-five years later, I felt capable of approaching that time with poetry. *Mortal Remains* is a dark title yet it is somehow appropriate. Poetry cannot save us but it can provide us with some small redemption. (n.p.)

Lane overtly rejects the consolatory possibility of the elegy, allowing it to provide “some small redemption” but not, in itself, a compensation for or healing of the wounds of the past. A similar approach to the healing potential of art is evident in Lane’s memoir, *There Is a Season*, which might be considered a scriptotherapeutic text in its chronological, month-by-month account of Lane’s gradual recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction. While primarily chronicling his day-to-day reflections in his garden, featuring detailed, minute depictions of the natural world, the memoir also addresses the losses of Lane’s father, brother, and mother and revisits some of the traumatic events of his working-class youth. Although the memoir articulates Lane’s renewed experience of life through his writing, his garden, and his marriage, Lane expresses his skepticism about

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25 Suzette Henke coins the term “scriptotherapy” in *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life Writing*, comparing autobiographical writing to a written version of a Freudian talking cure in which “the narrator plays both analyst and analysand” (xvi). Lane himself notes in an interview with Margaret Atwood that the therapeutic possibilities of non-fiction writing were among his reasons for writing a prose memoir: “I knew I’d just begun the process of healing my body and my spirit. I wanted to write, but I was afraid to start writing poetry or fiction . . . Non-fiction seemed a safe place to go” (n.p.).
any final healing by twice repeating a line by poet Weldon Kees: “Whatever it is that a wound remembers, after the healing ends” (49, 217). In each text, then, Lane emphasizes the remainder—and reminder—left by experiences of trauma and loss. Lane’s ambivalent approach to elegiac consolation is most pronounced in his representations of the haunting, silent figure of his mother, who repeatedly appears in waking visions in *There Is a Season*. Lane’s contradictory approach to elegiac consolation allows for an articulation of his ambivalence about his mother’s life and death as well as an exploration of the possibility of poetic succession despite her silence as a victim of sexual and domestic abuse. In the memoir and in his poetic elegies for her, Lane both capitalizes on and subverts the function of elegiac motifs to emphasize his ethical quandaries about his representation of his mother.

The elegiac subtext of Lane’s memoir is clear in the work’s concern with the impact of death and the ritual succession of voice. The epigraph is taken from Lane’s elegy “Fathers and Sons”; the line asserts that “if you listen you can hear me / my mouth is open and I am singing” (n.p.), gesturing to the memoir’s elegiac concerns with the contingency of communication and with the possibility of praise and renewal. Accordingly, Lane’s memoir establishes a plot of poetic inheritance alongside a narrative of recovery, which in this case includes Lane’s addiction recovery as well as his gradual process of mourning after many familial losses. Within the memoir, both of Lane’s parents and his brother, Dick (Red) Lane, also a poet who died at age twenty-eight of a brain hemorrhage, are figured as poetic muses and predecessors. Shortly after the unexpected deaths of his father and brother, Lane’s grief-stricken and furious wanderings are accompanied by their spectres, as “[m]y dead brother with his bloody brain sat beside me and my dead father with the hole in his chest where the bullet had blown apart his heart sat behind me, both of them whispering in my ears the lyrics to poems and songs I didn’t want to hear but wrote down anyway” (51). Haunting imagery surrounds all three, including his brother, who after his death “suddenly appeared inside me, his face inside my face, his laugh . . . I could hear him talking to me” (238). Yet Lane’s mother is the most central and recurring ghost throughout the memoir, partly because of the stark contrast between the poetic inheritance of her reading voice and the troubling silences that mark her later life due to traumatic experiences of sexual abuse by her own father.
and to a domestic silence enforced by her husband. Recalling his mother’s practice of reading him and his brothers to sleep at night, Lane relates, “My mother’s voice was a soporific. It insinuated itself into all of our hearts and brought us to a waking sleep. It was a treasure of words, their rhythms and patterns, she was giving me and I have never forgotten it” (33). In positioning his mother’s voice as the source of a healing, compensatory poetic voice, “the only stay we had against the darkness that surrounded us” (34), Lane also establishes the basis for one of the only forms of prosopopoeia available to him. Considering the healing that lies ahead of him, he declares that “[m]y laughter will return and my mother’s voice, gone forever now, will also come alive in me again, for the art of reading aloud is part of my poetry” (33). Yet Lane’s poetry and memoir also reflect on the conflicted nature of his mother’s poetic legacy.

Lane’s ambivalence about representing his mother reflects both his own troubled relationship with her and her personal struggles to manage her gendered experiences of abuse. Confined to an isolated farm for much of Lane’s teenage years, her association with silence is solidified in a period of months in which she does not speak to the family, a silence enforced by a patriarchal family structure and a familial acceptance of silence. Lane is instructed by his father not to speak to her, with no explanation; he relates, “I was mostly afraid during her silence. There was an impenetrable barrier between us . . . It was six months before I spoke aloud to her and even then she reciprocated with a deep silence” (85). A sense of repression of grief and of past events also permeates the other communications between mother and son, even when she begins to speak again after her long period of silence. As Lane notes, “I know I lived in a family of words where nothing was said” (214). After his father’s death, his mother does relate much of her past to Lane, telling him “the story of her life through the dreary mask of rye whisky and television test patterns . . . It was all a long monologue, ramblings, anecdotes, and snatches from her past” (60). Yet this mediated excess of confessional honesty also fails in the sense that she omits her childhood-long experiences of sexual abuse by her father, which he learns about in a posthumous revelation after which “every story . . . became something a little
bent” (60). While Lane allows that “[t]he silence in our home and the denial of any kind of trauma was how we understood things” (85), he also insists upon the importance, for himself, of confronting the past rather than repressing it, a conflict between himself and his mother that is repeatedly played out in his writings about her. In his elegies as well as his memoir, Lane’s use of elegiac motifs reflects his conflicting desires to capture his mother’s contradictions in writing and to respect her silences by refusing to overwrite them.

In “Mother” and “The Last Day of My Mother,” Lane expresses his difficulty with representing his mother in poetry, resulting in a contradictory movement from denial to acceptance in both poems. In “Mother,” Lane recalls his mother gardening in a red headscarf or “babushka” (Mortal Remains 20), a memory that becomes a repetitive scene of haunting in his garden memoir. Although the poem is part of an elegy sequence, it centrally rejects the premise of an elegiac eulogy, perhaps suggesting his own—and others’—skepticism about the limitations of the genre. As Uppal observes, “mother elegies written by mourning sons are practically non-existent” in Canadian writing (100). Yet Lane’s hesitance about recovering his mother in elegy also reflects the particular instability of their relationship. The poem, like his other elegies, reflects on the efficacy of sound and poetic voice:

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The wind searches among the leaves  
and your face returns, a shape that swells in the mouth  
until it becomes a single sound, a strange happiness mostly pain.  
The poem of you will never be written.  
Each time I try to create you I fall into  
intricate lies, a place of vague light, uncertain brooding. (20)
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The apostrophic address to his mother recovers her face, a form of prosopopoeia, but it is transformed only into a “single sound”—a voice not her own, but one originating in the mouth of the speaker. Yet the speaker insists that this unitary sound can never be

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26 The memoir does not reveal how Lane finds out about the abuse after his mother’s death.

27 Although Uppal reads “Mother” and a related elegy, “She,” as idealizing the figure of Lane’s mother, “either as a goddess who nurtures or as a goddess who rejects but not, one might say, as an actual person” (104), I disagree with this reading. Lane’s depiction of his mother in There Is a Season more clearly situates both nurturing and rejection as elements of his individual relationship with his mother.
communicated as poetry, undermining the poem in which this idea is presented. Rather than offering a celebratory elegy, the poem insists upon its own impossibility and uncertainty. Further, the poem also overtly rejects an elegiac trajectory or consolation, ending with the lines,

This poem goes nowhere
like a tree whose leaves are stripped by worms.
The wind blows, the branches move, inconsequential, fragile and forgiven. (21)

The image of a static, worm-eaten tree—truncated, like Goodison’s mango tree—suggests the impossibility of continuing growth, thus rejecting the elegiac consolation of seasonal regeneration. At the same time, the final line allows an ostensibly “inconsequential,” small, and natural redemption in the final image of forgiveness, the concluding words accentuated by the gradual lengthening of the final lines that implicitly contradict the assertion that the “poem goes nowhere.”

Lane uses a similarly contradictory approach toward representation and consolation in his later poem “The Last Day of My Mother.” Recalling his mother’s final day in a nursing home, the speaker reflects, “Tonight I don’t know how to take these lines and make them / poetry, any more than I could change my mother / who still looked upon me as a child” (Collected Poems 370). His reluctance implicitly conveys a critique of poetry itself as an idealized, aestheticized, and figurative version of hard truths, whether of the indignities of his mother’s bodily functions in the nursing home or the reality of her detached approach to their relationship; he asserts as he goes on, “I don’t want to turn this into metaphor” (370), leaving “this” importantly ambiguous and undefined. In line with this refusal to aestheticize his response to her death, he also rejects the conventional elegiac expectation of the poem, asserting that “I don’t want to turn this / into a lament. Death is in us, it’s how we’re born” (372). By the end of the poem, however, Lane acknowledges an elegiac inheritance and a kind of prosopopoeic consolation with the reflections that

I carry her in my flesh, can smell her if I try . . . and there, I’ve made this into poetry.
What else can I do? . . . There’s more than just the dark, she’d say, and it was as if she’d said, There is no death, as I write and break these lines again and again, letting them fall where they lie. (372)
By emphasizing the impact of inheritance and succession, the speaker succeeds in creating poetry, turning to his mother’s own words to close the poem with a compensatory view of life. The consolation is bittersweet, even angry, but still present in both poems; in “The Last Day of My Mother,” the consolation is even presented as inevitable—“What else can I do?”—despite the ongoing “break[ing]” of explicit refusal to shape the long lines of free verse. The poems’ contradictions resonate with the representational concerns and the elegiac form of Lane’s memoir, which similarly ends with a prosopopoeic turn to his mother’s final words.

Lane’s concerns with representing his mother in poetry and his ambivalent use of an elegiac trajectory are even more marked in the longer form of his memoir, which accentuates the problems of recovery through haunting appearances of his mother after death as well as a recurring depiction of her as ghostly in life. The images of haunting reflect a central conflict in the memoir between Lane’s desire to recover his past and his mother’s insistent silences and repression of past traumas. These hauntings, which replicate the gardening imagery of the elegy “Mother,” both invoke and problematize the appeal of the vision as a form of consoling prosopopoeia. Appearing on several occasions over the course of the memoir, the spectre of Lane’s mother becomes a frequent, but always unspeaking, presence in his garden. The possibility of communication is especially evocative in a haunting near the end of the memoir, in which “she kept raising her fingers to her mouth as if a word or sentence there could be pulled out and left to speak on its own” (Season 247). Although Lane wishes to ask, “Tell me the story that brought you here” (248), the series of hauntings gradually leads him to the conclusion that these encounters embody his own desire for story, recognition and reciprocity. The repeated image of his mother kneeling in the garden suggests that it is in fact a recurring, resurgent memory; as Lane reflects, “I must have somehow fixed her in my mind in some past moment for she is always the same” (247). He finally acknowledges the monologic

28 This imagery is reminiscent of the dream sequences in Atwood’s Surfacing, in which the spectres of the narrator’s parents appear in a garden, and in Kogawa’s Obasan, in which Naomi dreams of her absent mother attempting to speak, her mouth linked by a thread to a package of letters. While Naomi’s mother’s story is eventually recovered through a letter, Lane ultimately accepts that his mother’s silence and opacity can not be spoken through.
source of the visions with the acknowledgment that “[i]t is me who brings her back. She
does not come because she wants to . . . Where did I lose her that now I want her found?”
(248). This positioning of the hauntings as manifestations of his own memory and desire
implies Lane’s rejection of prosopopoeia. Their imagery also underscores his own desire
for his mother to recover and voice the past, a desire that is manifested in an earlier
haunting scene in which “[s]he was trying to dig something up and I could see the
frustration on her face” (225). With the ghost’s inability to voice a story, Lane must
simply accept the gap that exists between them.

Importantly, the memoir associates ghostliness and silence with Lane’s mother not only
in death but also in life. In one scene during her period of silence, his mother catches him
masturbating in the long grass outside a window, but he cannot read her response; she
simply “gazed down at me, a paint brush in her hand. There was no expression on her
face. She was there and not there, a ghost in an empty room. . . . Something passed
between us at that moment, but exactly what I did not know then and do not know now. . .
[she] had a kind of woman’s knowing that was alien to me” (172). The opacity of
gender to Lane as a young man influences his understanding of, and literally his
alienation from, his mother. While this ghostly depiction partly works to convey a sense
of an ongoing communicative barrier, the gendered, ghostly imagery is problematic given
the work’s invocation of elegiac devices. Feminist elegy critics have pointed out that the
traditional elegy developed as a male homosocial or patrilineal form that “excludes the
feminine from its perimeter except as muse principle or attendant nymph” (Schenck,
“Feminism” 13); when women do appear, feminist critics have argued, they have often
been associated with death or division through what Louise O. Fradenburg calls “elegiac
misogyny” (185). Zeiger observes that feminine figures regularly appear in English
elegies in the form of “threatening or abandoning women” (7). The primary response of
critics to this complexity of gender representation in the elegy has been to explore how
women’s writing of elegies establishes a counter-tradition, rather than to examine how
men’s elegiac writings might also trouble these associations. Zeiger’s suggestion that the
problem can be partly resolved by focusing on real, rather than mythological, female
figures, as Thomas Hardy does in his elegies for his wife, is an important starting point
(19). Yet in Lane’s case, the problematization of voice in his elegiac poetry and his
memoir primarily reflects concerns about the representability of a mother whose relationship to himself and to the past are obscured.

Although the depiction of his mother’s silence as ghostly risks replicating the “elegiac misogyny” that associates women with death (Fradenburg 185), the imagery of ghostliness also contributes to a broader pattern in the memoir that more generally associates silence with death and dissolution and voicing, in contrast, with life and existence. This pattern establishes questions of voice, representation, and prosopopoeia as central issues in the memoir. While de Man declares that in the written form of autobiography, “[d]eath is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament” (930), this idea is also reversed in Lane’s ghostly imagery; that is, the linguistic predicament of voicelessness becomes represented as a form of death. By establishing death as a linguistic predicament, Lane allows ghostliness to penetrate life as well, representing those who are unwilling or unable to speak. Recalling his own early life as a labourer and young father unable to reflect on and comprehend his own place in the world, Lane recalls being teasingly called a “ghost” by a Native lover. Although the name is a teasing comment on his race and pale skin, his retrospective interpretation infuses the term with the lack of voice and self-understanding he now associates with ghostliness: “I think perhaps I was a ghost back in those days” (196). For Lane as a young man, poetry seems to be the solution that restores life and control. With the advent of poetic writing, he recalls, “I was certain that with language I could heal myself and control what surrounded me . . . Death’s only dominion was in a poem” (169). Although the writing of the memoir enacts this recovery of control for Lane himself, he confronts questions of representability and the limitations of healing language in applying this paradigm to his mother’s life of silence. Lane’s reluctance to employ prosopopoeia conveys this paradox of representing the life and poetically succeeding a woman whose life is characterized, for him, by a deep silence; he cannot establish her voice as a marker of her existence.

20 In this allusion to Dylan Thomas’s “And Death Shall Have No Dominion,” which emphasizes the residue of humanity left after and beyond death, Lane limits death’s power to the realm of poetry—the very site in which, according to his belief in language, death can be contained and transcended.
Both in his elegies and in his memoir, Lane’s ambivalent use and reversal of elegiac devices embodies this central paradox. Toward the end of *There is a Season*, the ghostly imagery of Lane’s mother culminates in a troubled parody of an elegiac scene of transcendence, which again reflects the conflict between his own and his mother’s approaches to voice and the past. The chapter narrates an episode in which Lane convinces his mother to return to his childhood home with him, against her wishes. In an evocative image of recovery that mirrors his mother’s haunting act of digging in his garden, Lane spends the day digging in the dump below the house, looking for signs of his previous existence. Drawing attention to the depth of his desire for the past by narrating the scene initially in the third person, he reflects, “[h]e is thinking that if he can only dig deep enough and far enough he will find something that will explain his life to him. He has forgotten his mother” (289). Although Lane does find a toy truck that may have belonged to him, the moment of this discovery also reminds him of his mother’s presence and her inaccessibility. Wishing to confirm that the truck had belonged to him, he looks up to see her in a transcendent image above: “He looks up and he sees his mother floating among the weave of branches, high above the ground. For a moment he thinks she has died and is now, at this moment, ascending toward some heaven only she knows” (293). The image of ascension is a traditional device in the elegy, which Schenck suggests is in fact “the most important convention of elegy . . . the deification of the dead one in a process that lifts him out of nature, out of the poem, and, conveniently, out of the inheritor’s way” (*Mourning* 34). This scene of shrouding (in the “weave” of branches) and ascendance at once invokes and problematizes this traditional convention by applying it to Lane’s living mother, who Lane later discovers is standing on a clothesline platform. The scene complicates the elegiac transmission of vocation from Lane’s mother to himself, suggesting that rather than replacing his mother to take on his poetic vocation, Lane must succeed her without overwriting her voice and without her acknowledgment of his inheritance. At the same time, the memory of the scene also enables a more conventional, posthumous scene of ascension, as Lane’s reflections on it at the time of writing allow him to release her haunting figure from the garden by “quietly open[ing] the hands that grip her here. As I do I can feel her vanishing” (295). Paradoxically, releasing his mother also entails an acceptance of her distanced approach to the past.
In his lengthy narration of the scene, which recounts the floating image three separate times, Lane shifts between third-person and first-person narrative voices, exploring and finally rejecting the possibility of rhetorically speaking for his mother through prosopopoeia. The initial third-person narration of the scene includes a description of his mother’s thoughts about her return to her former home, a place that she had hated. In line with his mother’s discomfort with memory, Lane’s narration imagines the sense of erasure that she may have felt: “The day she left here she swore she’d never come back. Now she is here and it is as if she had never lived here. All the mine buildings are gone, hauled away by the company” (291). Yet after Lane first narrates the scene of transcendence in the third person, he returns to first person voice, rejecting these imagined thoughts. He reflects,

What I remembered for years when I thought of that journey was finding the toy. Now, ten years after her death I remember best her floating in the sky . . . I don’t know what she was looking at or what she was thinking. It would be easy for me to say she was lost in time and had gone back to those early years, but I don’t know that. I don’t know if what she felt was bitterness or joy, happiness or grief. (295)

By acknowledging the limitations of his own narrative voice, imagination and insight into his mother, Lane rejects the possibility of speaking for her, even rhetorically. His mother is to him like a found poem, an “indecipherable text, an unreadable code that once declared what was inside . . . The words are there and not there” (288). At the beginning of the chapter, he explicitly comments on the question of narrative voice, implicitly acknowledging the duality of prosopopoeia which, like his hauntings, reflects his own point of view. He writes, “[t]here are times I want to be in the second or third person. Like any writer, I’d rather be a he than an I. It’s simpler to be a fiction. . . . Yet even when I try to create the past using a point of view not my own, it is still and always mine” (287).30 By drawing attention to the personal desire in his visions and the monologic nature of his narration, Lane rejects the consolation of a prosopopoeic voice.

30 In “Autobiography in the Third Person,” Lejeune notes that a third-person pronoun can function as “a figure of enunciation” that is “often used for internal distancing and for expressing personal confrontation” (28). As with the doublessness of voice in prosopopoeia, the figure can be understood as a “way of realizing,
Although Lane uses elegiac forms to problematize this question of voicing, he also capitalizes on the episodic and chronological structure of his memoir to develop a gradual sense of recovery and acceptance over the course of the narrative, which ultimately does culminate in a limited but significant scene of vocational transmission. Like his poetic elegies, Lane’s memoir overtly rejects the elegiac trajectory toward revelation or consolation, declaring that “[t]here are no accidents, there are no serendipitous moments. There are only fragile interludes of clarity and sometimes I don’t understand them fully when they happen” (305). Despite this mistrust of serendipitous moments, the final scenes of the memoir are presented as an “answer” to a question that Lane poses himself about the significance of the word “sorrow” in his early poetry. The memoir presents this answer through the revelation of his mother’s final words to Lane, which emphasize the possibility of beauty and futurity even as they each exist in liminal states between sleep and waking, life and death:

When my mother lay on what would be her deathbed I read to her from The Old Curiosity Shop by Charles Dickens. She was asleep in a morphine dream. I was awake in the bottom of a bottle of vodka. I was reading quietly in the hope that she might hear the words from a book she had dearly loved. Halfway through a paragraph she suddenly sat up in her bed, tubes dangling, reached out, and gripped my wrist. . . . She held my wrist and stared into my eyes and said, At every turn there’s always something lovely. She let me go and fell back on the bed. Those were her last words to me. Three days later she died. (306)

Although his mother’s words chronologically precede Lane’s year of recovery, Lane’s choice to relate this narrative of dying and his mother’s final words at the end of the memoir allows the reader to cathartically share in their sense of limited consolation. Although they do not provide the sense of recognition that Lane desires to truly act as her successor—he regrets the fact that “[m]y life as an artist didn’t seem a disappointment to her, rather my life seemed irrelevant, my art of no import whatsoever” (248)—the final words and this scene of passing on something of importance focus on the possibility of in the form of a doubling . . . the ineluctable duality of the grammatical ‘person’” (29). Although the third person may be used for entire texts, Lane uses the pronoun only in one chapter to illustrate the sense of “confrontation” and conflict he feels about this interaction with his mother.
beauty within and despite the turns of life, a deflection away from loss that is passed on through the quotation of his mother’s own words.

With this gradual sense of consolation also comes a renewed ability to “praise” and to write poetry. Lane includes three poems in the narrative, the first two by others, his friend, Brian Brett (55), and his wife, Lorna Crozier (183). Only toward the end of the narrative does he include a poem of his own, which attests to the cyclical and unifying effect of nature, or what Uppal describes as “the pastoral elegy’s consolatory trope of the cycle of the natural seasons as continuity of time and regeneration” (50): “When I sleep the birds come to the garden / with their gifts of seeds. Out of ice / last year’s leaves of grass lift into night. / All my songs have been one song” (273). The memoir also ends with a declaration of presence and community in a shared act of voicing. Suggesting that “[p]erhaps it is enough to stand there with Lorna and praise the rain and our lives together,” Lane includes this form of praise in his closing words: “There were three bees in the ivy today. Lorna and I were in the garden when we saw them. We both said, Look, look at the bees!” (307). By concluding with this shared quotation, which is also the first time that Crozier is quoted directly, Lane signals his emergence from the reflective elegiac mode into a celebratory experience that is more concerned with observation, community, and futurity than with the past. This final act of vocalization inserts his renewed ability for voice and intimacy into the silences of the past, while also adapting his mother’s present-focused perspective, represented by the bequest of her final words, into a sense of revelation and recovery in his own life.

Dreams as Adaptive Inheritance in Goodison’s From Harvey River

While Lane’s complex use of hauntings illustrates the contradictions and representational questions involved in elegiac uses of prosopopoeia, Goodison’s From Harvey River capitalizes on prosopopoeic dreams to celebrate the possibility of generational continuity and adaptation despite the ruptures caused by death, displacement, and dispossession. In contrast with Lane’s memoir and Goodison’s own poetry, the dreams in From Harvey River are able to transmit the voices of deceased others, but they continue to have a compensatory function. Like the epigrammatic words that Lane celebrates at the end of his memoir, the words in these dreams provide advice on living within and despite loss,
and the experience of dreaming itself, alongside the literary talent bestowed by Goodison’s mother, is celebrated as a form of creative inheritance. Over the course of the memoir, Goodison depicts adaptive dreaming as not simply a personal inheritance and vocation but a national one, characteristic of Jamaican experience. Despite their subjective and individualized nature, dreams are thus depicted as allowing forms of limited recovery and identification in both personal and public contexts.

Unlike Lane’s personal and meditative memoir of recovery, Goodison’s memoir is primarily biographical, offering a chronological account of her mother’s heritage, childhood, marriage, and adult life. Although this biographical format in a sense functions as an extended eulogy for her mother, Goodison’s memoir has not predominantly been read as elegiac. Donnette Francis notes, for instance, that “Goodison’s grief only becomes evident in the final chapter” (162), which alternates between an account of Doris Goodison’s decline and death and a scene of communal grieving in a Kingston marketplace. The final chapter is indeed the most overtly elegiac, but the framing dreams of the memoir also foreground elegiac concerns with loss, poetic inheritance, and adaptive living that intersect with Goodison’s earlier poetry. In a special edition of Small Axe that features a discussion of the memoir, Goodison notes this elegiac influence in a response to Francis and Sandra Pouchet Paquet, commenting that

I am grateful to have Paquet’s and Francis’s acknowledgement of the beginnings of From Harvey River in my early poems about my mother. And all that I would add is that the elegies I wrote after my mother’s death and after the death of my cousin Joan, which came out in Turn Thanks and Controlling the Silver, also found their way in a different form into this memoir—not deliberately, but by the kind of osmosis that all writers and critics are familiar with. (“Reporting” 183)

The dreams in Goodison’s prologue and epilogue are one “form” of elegiac reflection in the memoir. They frame the biographical text with an awareness of the deaths of Goodison’s parents and of the displacement that they experienced from their rural family homes to urban Kingston, two distinct forms of loss that are ultimately addressed with the same strategies in the memoir. The prologue concludes with an elegiac dream, a scene that depicts Goodison’s mother in a heavenly “sewing room” (2). The dream foregrounds crucial questions of vocation and prosopopoeic voice that are revisited throughout other dreams over the course of the memoir, concluding with the final dream in the epilogue.
The memoir’s length also allows for an extended elegiac ending; the privacy of the closing dream contrasts with the public contexts of mourning in the final scene of the biographical section, suggesting multiple forms of consolation.

In the prologue, reflecting on her lifelong interest in her parents’ rural origins, Goodison depicts herself as listening to and recalling their stories during their lifetimes and, in her mother’s case, after death through dreams. As she elaborates, “[a]fter my mother Doris’s death nearly thirty-five years [after my father’s], I began to ‘dream’ her, as Jamaicans say, and in those dreams I continued to ask her questions about her life before and after she came to Kingston” (2). This depiction of the dream as a site of factual recovery interestingly destabilizes Goodison’s earlier assurance of her reliability (“I listened carefully to her stories, and repeated them to myself” [1]), implying that the dreamed recovery of certain events makes its way into the memoir. The second dream account of a “very vivid visitation” (2) takes this prosopopoeic scene even further. An encounter with a heavenly version of her mother “in her new residence, a really palatial and splendid sewing room . . . where she was now in charge of sewing gorgeous garments for top-ranking angels,” the visitation encompasses both the life-and-death chiasmus of prosopopoeia and the doubled paradox of the recovered voice:

She said she could not tell me more as she did not want me to stay with her too long, because the living should not mix-up too much with the dead. But as I was leaving the celestial work-room, she handed me a book. This is that book. (2)

Goodison’s provocative use of the prosopopoeic dream to present her memoir foregrounds fascinating questions of voice in a text that Paquet describes as “a shared poetic arrangement in which Goodison slips in and out of her mother’s voice and persona” (“Sewing Up” 174). While retaining elements of first-person voice in its repeated description of Doris Goodison as “my mother,” the majority of the memoir is presented in a third-person voice focalized through various perspectives. By overtly and
somewhat ironically declaring her mother’s authorship of the memoir, Goodison positions the issues of voice, recovery, and vocation as central to the narrative.

The memoir’s emphasis on vocation is also emphasized in the opening lines and closing eulogy for Goodison’s mother. Immediately after the opening dream, Goodison’s biographical narrative begins with a description of Doris’s birth, naming, and anointing with sugar for “the gift of sweet speech” (5). The final words of the memoir’s closing eulogy echo this beginning, claiming the generational passing on of this voice as a kind of birthright:

My mother’s hands always smelled of onions. My mother had a bottomless cooking pot. She could sew clothes to fit any shape and the first word that all her children learned to read was SINGER. . . . She dipped her finger in sugar when I was born and rubbed it under my tongue to give me the gift of words. (274)

In listing several creative undertakings, including culinary arts and sewing alongside oral poetry, Goodison establishes a multifaceted creative inheritance that goes beyond an affinity for poetic speech. In a sense, her behest is an elegiac vocation of creativity that stems from loss; just as the words of the elegiac poet speak into the silence left by the other, Doris’s domestic skills are also established in the memoir as adaptive in situations of loss and difficulty. It is significant in this closing eulogy that “the first word that all her children learned to read was SINGER” (274). Referring to the brand name of the sewing machine that brings Doris financial stability and community after her family’s financial collapse and move to Kingston, the line also plays on the links between the creation of textile and texts and on the compensatory role of song, which, along with the symbolism of water, creatively responds to and staves off the fear and despair of loss.

The two dreams that bookend the memoir further extend this concern with vocation to the realm of dreaming, which is positioned as a similarly adaptive and creative act.

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31 As Paquet notes, “Goodison situates the responsibility for naming her mother’s world as a sacred behest (that is, not without a suggestion of parodic excess in the dream visitation’s extravagant details)” (173).
32 For instance, after learning that her son has been in a catastrophic train accident, Doris sings “over and over in an unsteady watery vibrato the same hymn, ‘God Is Working His Purpose Out’. . . . Over and over she rides the calming current of the hymn’s words” (259).
The clearly vocational framing of the memoir reflects Goodison’s interest in matrilineal inheritance, which numerous critics have addressed in her poetry, as well as offering an important example of a vocational thread in women’s elegiac writing. Both autobiography critics and elegy critics have associated relationality with women’s experience and thus also associate women’s writing about mourning with a backlash against men’s perceived emphasis on separation and individuation. In “Feminism and Deconstruction,” Schenck argues for a clear historical distinction between “masculine” and “feminine” forms of elegiac inheritance, claiming that “women inheritors seem to achieve poetic identity in relation to ancestresses, in connection with the dead, whereas male initiates need to eliminate the competition to come into their own” (15). While Schenck’s emphasis on “ancestresses” accords with a notable matrilineal theme in Goodison’s writing, this clear distinction between female relationality and male individuation has been problematized by autobiography critics and elegy critics alike. Uppal observes that Canadian elegists in general, rather than solely female elegists, privilege a sense of connection with the dead. The gendered roles of traditional elegies are also problematized by writers themselves, as we see in Lane’s reversal of a desire for posthumous connection with his mother, father and brother. In Goodison’s memoir, too, elements of what Schenck calls “masculine” elegy are incorporated alongside relational encounters. For instance, Schenck’s reading of two elegies by Anne Sexton as prototypical examples of women’s elegy positions several central elements of Goodison’s introduction as features of masculine elegy. Schenck claims that “[n]ot in the mode of the masculine elegiac, but rather ‘without praise or paradise’—those two conventions of the traditional elegy—the mother . . . comes near to make the poet-daughter into an ‘inheritor’” (18). For Goodison, in contrast, praise, paradise, and eulogy—which Schenck also categorizes as masculine (20)—are central features of her memoir’s incorporation of elegy, as is a sense of vocation.

Zeiger’s more recent evaluation of women’s elegiac writing astutely recognizes the more complex nuances of the form. Noting that under Schenck’s model, women’s elegies “tend to reject a career-driven, masculinist model in which the main goal of elegy is poetic inheritance,” she insists that
women poets do not in turn unambivalently value continuity with the dead, do not only refuse to let the dead go. Nor do they necessarily reject careerist preoccupations: elegy will often remain, for women, a way of organizing, or reorganizing, poetic agendas, and of claiming creative entitlement. (63)

As Zeiger reflects, the elegiac mode offers a way to claim creative inheritances that can resonate in memoir as well as in elegiac poetry. For Goodison, this ability to establish a creative lineage is a one reason for her use of elegiac motifs. At the same time, her inclusion of dreams themselves as a significant form of creative inheritance reflects what Schenck calls “new or alternative elegiac scenarios” that provide “the potential for achieving identity by preserving those very relations [with poetic successors] in a kind of continuous present” (“Feminism” 24). Even in their more emphatic scenes of prosopopoeia and recovery, these ongoing dreams offer both Goodison and her mother forms of connectedness that enable them to creatively adjust to difficult circumstances in their own lives.

While the dreamed presentation of the “book” foregrounds questions of voice and poetic transmission, Goodison’s opening “visitation” with her mother and her closing dream also mirror the compensatory dreams that her mother experiences in the biographical portions of the memoir. After a financial crisis forces the family to move from their rural home to the tenements of Kingston, Doris experiences prosopopoeic dreams of absent and deceased family members that enable her to face the struggles of her new life in Kingston, experiences to which Goodison attributes a life-giving function: “for the rest of her life my mother lived by these visitations” (203). In each dream, the visiting family member imparts words of advice to Doris to facilitate her new life in Kingston. Nana Frances Duhaney tells Doris to remove her shoes to better manage on the “‘hard work ground’” (205); her father, David, encourages her to have compassion for the often harsh city dwellers, who “‘are no better or no worse than people anywhere’” (207). These dreamed lessons, which enable Doris to bear her new life with dignity, are joined by

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33 Schenck considers how this elegiac continuity operates in women’s autobiography in “All of a Piece: Women’s Poetry and Autobiography,” arguing that “it is continuity with the presence of the re-created maternal voice that makes writing at all possible for these daughters who would write” (300). The “alternative elegiac scenarios” she discusses thus involve ways of recreating this maternal voice.
healing daydreams of Harvey River, both of the community and more specifically of the river itself. Noting in the prologue that Doris spent her life “in two places at once,” Goodison later elaborates, “[m]y mother would dream of life in Harvey River on [difficult] days . . . While she was under its [the river’s] smooth, cool surface, she took some of the hurts and disappointment life had dealt her . . . and lodged them in the eel holes and crayfish dwellings in the river” (186). These dreams are crucially adaptive. Though Goodison introduces Edenic imagery to depict her parents’ lost ancestral home, she focuses on the hope and futurity involved in their story: “Over the years Harvey River came to function as an enchanted place in my imagination, an Eden from which we fell to the city of Kingston. But over time I have come to see that my parents’ story is really a story about rising up to a new life” (1).

The dreams that Doris experiences are passed on as not only a personal, but also a cultural inheritance. Like the memoir as a whole, Doris’s adaptive dreams feature visitations from each of her cultural ancestors, including her father and her Irish grandfather, George O’Brian Wilson, as well as her two maternal Afro-Caribbean grandmothers. Her dream of her grandmother Leanna particularly emphasizes the national vocation for adaptation in the memoir. On an early morning in the hostile Kingston tenement, Leanna arrives on a horse to ferry Doris across the tenement courtyard to the kitchen, where she “used her riding crop to clear away a space for her grand-daughter’s stove” (205). During their brief ride, however, Doris “close[s] her eyes” and experiences a pastoral journey through Jamaican history; the two women ride past sleeping slave communities, sharing the compensatory power of dreams during the “grace hour when they existed in dreams as ordinary men and women . . . before they rose to meet cane” (204). The dreamed landscape ultimately creates a national vision, as the women ride further back into the time “when Jamaican people planted mostly corn and cassava, hunted wild boar and coneys, and went to sea in magnificent boats . . . till three leaking ships filled with lost men came towards them bearing Hard Life” (205). This description of the Arawak as the first “Jamaicans,” and of their peacefully productive society before colonial contact, invokes a national continuity paradoxically based on the disruption—in reality, displacement and genocide—of colonialism’s introduction of hard life. Dreams become a central element of the memoir’s celebration of adaptability, which
over the course of the memoir comes to represent not only personal strength but also a
Jamaican national identity based on resilient responses to “Hard Life,” which Paquet
describes as a “complex cultural legacy of ‘making life’ in a transformational and
generative struggle for social betterment that is at once personal, familial, and collective”
(“Sewing Up” 169). Drawing on the history of Jamaican slaves’ efforts to earn their own
land by collecting silver coins, Leanna instructs Doris about adapting to difficult
conditions, explaining that “‘you are going to have to study patience and take what you
get till you get what you want . . . You will never get any big money in this life. Massa
will always hold that, so learn to control the silver’” (205). While these adaptive words
convey an important historical and nationalist context, the anecdote also concludes by
returning to Doris’s personal circumstances: “it was after [that ride] . . . that the women
in the yard all started to befriend her” (205). Goodison’s own inheritance of this
combined national and personal legacy in her own poetry is reflected in the adaptation of
Leanna’s words into the title of her tenth collection of poetry, *Controlling the Silver*
(2005).

Goodison’s inheritance of her mother’s practice of dreaming is confirmed in the waking
dream of Harvey River that closes the memoir. Awakening in a dark room “in a place
solid with darkness which smells like the rusting interior of a brass trunk” (276),
Goodison draws on her mother’s words to cope with her panicked sense of displacement:

“Say the Lord’s Prayer, say the words ‘Our father’ over and over, if you can’t
remember the whole prayer, shorten it,” my mother would say. This is urgent,
chant Our father, our father, our father, our father, our mother, our mother, our father. (276)

Adapting her mother’s religious admonition to prayer, Goodison instead turns to a chant
of generational connection and to a dream-song of Harvey River, a song that holds off the
suggestion of death and “darkness” through its association with life and identification:

“And so I sing slow enough to do what I need to do next, to identify myself, to myself.
Here is what I say to myself in that tomb place” (276). The ability to transform fear
through dreams and imagination is positioned as a form of vocational transformation, as
Goodison declares, “I am a writer. I can turn this darkness into the river at night” (277).
Dreaming, like her mother, of Harvey River, Goodison emphasizes both the pain and the
healing possibility in the river dream. Though “watching out for the pincers of the crabs that can bite” (277), she emphasizes the adaptive function of the dream:

As long as I swim in it, I will be borne to safety. And so I swim until morning comes and reveals that I’m sleeping in a small baroque hotel room . . . after giving a poetry reading in Hanover, Germany, and immersing myself in the waters of the river named for the Harveys calmed my night fears. (277)

Goodison’s adaptation of her mother’s dreams to her own experience of displacement—importantly, in a space whose name, Hanover, recalls the name of the county in which Harvey River is situated—affirms the significance of the dream as a form of inheritance and continuity, understood as a generational and national inheritance.

Unlike the dreams of Goodison’s mother, the dream of Harvey River is not a prosopopoepic dream, but it is a dream of attenuated recovery: “I dive and under the surface of the water, I know what I’ll find. The evidence of my generations” (277). In scenes similar to those in the poem “My Mother’s Sea Chanty,” Goodison uses underwater imagery to convey the recovered presence and the transformed nature of her deceased loved ones, declaring that “[t]he small schools of fish will flutter by like my mother and her sisters and brothers” (277). Alongside these images of mediated presence, however, Goodison also uses the dream to emphasize the accumulation of cultural history, with the recovery of “lost pearls and hopeless cases and the bones of runaway Africans . . . as well as wedges of iron-hard brown soap which the women of Harvey River used to wash acres of clothes” (277). The closing dream’s potential for a mediated restoration of the past resonates with Paquet’s argument that the memoir’s use of dreams to frame the biographical narrative creates a problematic “mythic space” that separates the past from the present. Paquet claims that the dreams act as a “primary distancing mechanism” that distinctly separates the memoir’s biographical narrative from the present, “strategically seal[ing] off” Goodison’s representation of her mother from her own distinct life experience (“Sewing Up” 173). Emphasizing the dream’s ability to circumscribe and separate, Paquet argues that the dream frame isolates [the narrative] from the present as a vision of human experience in the past, which occupies a mythic space in the present to which the dreamer is restored. The narrative frame in fact isolates her mother’s world in an absolute
past and registers that world in epic terms of settlement and beginning, foundations and ancestry. (175)

However, the idea that the memoir’s dream-frame contains an “absolute past” that no longer impacts the present ignores the influential adaptive role that dreams play elsewhere in the memoir. Paquet supports her argument by observing a tonal contrast between the closing dream and Goodison’s afterword, in which “Goodison is restored to the business of autobiographical self-fashioning and the singular trajectory of her life as a writer, one-time aspiring painter, and teacher” (175). For Paquet, the contrast demonstrates that the adaptive idea of “making life as a Jamaican ethos” (173) no longer applies to Goodison, whose cultural work distinctly separates her from her mother’s domestic forms of “making life.” Yet as I have demonstrated, Goodison’s cultural work positions her as her mother’s heir, despite—or even because of—her differences. As MacDonald observes, “the inheritor must be enough like the granter to be named as inheritor, and enough unlike the granter to receive the inheritance in the proper cultural and social spirit” (188). Further, Goodison aligns her own transnational journeying as a writer and teacher with an ongoing Jamaican condition in a poem appropriately entitled “Making Life,” reflecting that “we never call ourselves exiles. / We see our sojournings as ‘making life’ / . . . Not really exiled you see; just making life” (Controlling 71). The closing dream in From Harvey River thus articulates not absolute separation but a flexible continuity that illustrates that elegiac inheritance and national identity are comprised of the complex intersections of past and present experience.

While Goodison’s celebration of elegiac inheritance and the adaptive potential of prosopopoieia seems to contrast with Lane’s conflicted approach to elegy, the two memoirs operate similarly in that both strategies draw attention to the representational questions involved in the prosopopoieic invocation of the other’s voice. The two extremes each offer ways of evading what de Man calls the “defacement” of the other, as well as ways of adopting and adapting a parent’s own perspective on living with loss and hardship alongside beauty and art. The two memoirs also involve recognitions of the significance of community in this adaptive form of living, whether a small community of poets or a national community in which mourning can be shared and consoled. The final scene of Goodison’s memoir before the epilogue involves her mourning with vendors
who knew her mother in a Kingston square; as they comfort her with “the Jamaican Om: ‘nuh mine nuh mine nuh mine nuh mine,’” she “allow[s] their sounds of consolation to push back [her] grief” (266). The juxtaposition of this communal market scene with Goodison’s isolation during her final dream also emphasizes a tension between private mourning and public belonging that I examine in the remainder of this thesis. As the tangible spaces of Doris’s posthumous “sewing room” and the healing landscape of Leanna’s dream suggest, dreamed spaces can have socio-political connotations that recall the dream-vision’s historical connections with nationalism and the pastoral. Dreams’ compensatory mediation of loss is also significant in their negotiations of geographical spaces and landscapes, creating a reflexive distance that allows memoirists to articulate the complexities of diasporic belonging.
Chapter Three
Dream-Spaces, Nostalgia, and Irony

While my first two chapters have examined the role that dreams play in memoirs’ representations of personal grief and loss, the final example in Chapter Two—Lorna Goodison’s depiction of dreaming as a national vocation that overcomes the ruptures of displacement as well as death, providing a healing imaginative recourse to her mother’s rural home in Harvey River—demonstrates that the spatial and temporal elements of such dreams also contribute to writers’ negotiations of geographic displacement and social belonging. At first glance, the experience and representation of ancestral landscapes in dreams might be thought of as another form of the “continuing bonds” model of grief introduced in the first chapter. In the diasporic family memoirs I explore in this chapter, including Janice Kulyk Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* (1998), Wayne Johnston’s *Baltimore’s Mansion: A Memoir* (1999), and Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* (1982), dreams provide mediated encounters with originary spaces from which the dreamer has become detached, whether through physical displacement, political change, or personal alienation.1 Yet the complex political and writerly contexts of diasporic memoirs, as well as the unique spatial and temporal qualities of dream-spaces, complicate an understanding of these spaces as sites of psychic continuity. Instead, the dreams in such memoirs ultimately convey ambivalence about the kinds of reconnection that are possible and desirable with sites of cultural memory. While dreams may evoke landscapes associated with an originary past, they also embed and frame these landscapes within the memoirist’s present experience. As such, dreams are reminiscent of the strategic spaces of cultural negotiation that Homi Bhabha describes as “the ‘past-present’ [that] becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living” (*Location 7*)—that is, recurrences of the past that enable orientation in the present. In this chapter, I

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1 Although *Baltimore’s Mansion* is about Newfoundland’s Confederation with Canada, I identify it as diasporic because it articulates many Newfoundlanders’ profound sense of displacement after Confederation, an event that is metaphorically compared to geographical displacement. Since Johnston now writes from Toronto, the memoir may also be considered as writing from the Newfoundland diaspora; Jennifer Bowering Delisle convincingly argues that the term “diaspora does usefully describe the phenomenon of Newfoundland out-migration” (65).
consider dreams through the double lens of Bhabha’s theory of liminal, performative spaces and of contemporary theorizations of the “critical pastoral” to argue that the unique spatiality of dreams provides an ambivalent space in which ancestral landscapes and cultural or national identities can be at once mourned, celebrated, and critically circumscribed. As spaces that express both nostalgia and critical distance, dreams articulate tensions between desire and detachment—affective and reflexive impulses, respectively—that I argue are central to the memoir genre.

The vivid, spatial, and enigmatic experience of dreaming has historically been associated with the transmission of cultural knowledge and divinely bestowed insight as well as with unconscious desire and archaic drives, a multiple and often contradictory set of associations that renders dreams powerful devices for articulating personal, cultural, and national authority. In Canadian literature, dreams have become usefully ambiguous metaphors for investigations of identity, as well as literal experiences that evoke psychic connections to other spaces; in Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill*, for instance, a vaguely remembered “[d]ream-knot to Asia, dark and umbilical, early morning on the Pearl Delta” (3) overlays early-morning rituals in Canada, initiating a “muffled dialogue of place, person, and memory translated” (3). My decision to explore issues of cultural and national identification specifically through dreams’ spatiality and landscape representation reflects this tangible importance of dreams as spatial experiences in Canadian memoirs, particularly in diasporic family memoirs. In these works, a primarily biographical account of a parent or grandparent’s experience of and displacement from a social and national community is coupled with metanarrational reflections on the writer’s relationship to the social past captured in the biography. These memoirs include dreams attributed to the biographical subjects as well as the writers themselves, and these dreams are nearly always situated within these originary communities. Moreover, they often represent a specifically rural landscape, whether Doris Goodison’s Harvey River, a small Ukrainian farm, a blacksmith’s forge in Newfoundland’s Avalon Peninsula, or the

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2 For instance, in Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* (1966), I. accuses his visionary friend F. of “turn[ing] Canada into a vast analyst’s couch from which we dream and redream nightmares of identity, and all your solutions are as dull as psychiatry” (133).
jungles of colonial Ceylon. If, as Sarah Phillips Casteel argues, rural spaces “are traditionally the site and source of authentic national identity” (1), these dreams place the deceased other in both the site of generations of a familial past and in conservatively political spaces that are no longer accessible to the diasporic memoir writer.

The diasporic memoir thus balances a sense of familial identity and loss with ambivalence about social identification and belonging in the present, a function that is well served by the memoir genre’s emphasis on social roles and relationships. Helen Buss observes that the genre “is increasingly used to interrogate the private individual’s relationship to a history and/or a culture from which she finds her experience of her self and life excluded” (Repossessing 3). At the same time, these interrogations are often self-aware and equivocal. As Joanne Saul observes, contemporary Canadian “biotexts” tend to exhibit tensions between an “impulse to write one’s self into place, while, at the same time, recognizing the various and complex modes of belonging—and not belonging—that are linked to racial, ethnic, national, and gendered subjectivity” (12). Within the diasporic memoir, dreams attributed to family members as well as those experienced by the writers themselves provide evocative renderings of landscapes that implicitly represent and negotiate the genre’s tensions between a desire for geographic emplacement, an acknowledgment of creative distance, and a critical awareness of the problematic exclusivity of discourses of geographic belonging and nationalism.

In this chapter, I explore how dream-spaces articulate these simultaneous and often contradictory claims to connection and detachment by suggesting a structural similarity between the dream’s liminal and ambiguous spatiality, the “‘in-between,’” performative spaces of cultural identification theorized by Bhabha, and the “critical pastoral,” which Casteel theorizes as an ironic juxtaposition of idealized and historicized landscapes. Considering these three structurally similar spaces together elucidates the complex connotations and motivations that converge in the memoir’s representations of originary spaces through dreams. While dream landscapes may evoke nostalgic visions of a cultural or national past, they also influence waking negotiations of a relationship with
the past, capturing the simultaneity of loss, critical distance, and performative identity that are central to both diasporic experience and to memoir writing. The framing of these landscapes within dream experiences also problematizes the agency involved in the memoirists’ overt and implicit negotiations of identity by hinting at the uncanny forces of the unconscious and of history. This introductory section briefly outlines the parallels and differences between dream-spaces, Bhabha’s conceptualization of liminal spaces, and the critical pastoral, arguing that the dream’s framed, transient engagement with rural landscapes introduces an ambivalent, often unresolved “double edge” that allows for simultaneous expressions of irony and nostalgia. In the sections that follow, I explore dream spaces in three diasporic memoirs to examine how dreams’ spatiality complements the memoir genre by framing, distancing, and reinscribing the landscapes of the past.

As mental spaces that are at once separate from and complementary to the spaces of waking life, dreams provide detached sites of cultural negotiation and a complex frame for landscape representation. Spatio-temporal experience in dreams often transcends the limitations of space and time in waking life, possessing an uncanny fluidity as unfamiliar spaces interchange with familiar ones. Dreams are at once tangible and transient, as Ondaatje implies when he describes his opening dream in *Running in the Family* as “the bright bone of a dream I could hardly hold onto” (2), and this transience also frames the dream as a space separate from the waking world. Psychologist Gary Grenell observes that “[s]patially driven metaphors of ‘containment’ abound in dreaming and waking” (231), and he thus defines the dream-space as “denot[ing] the dreamer’s unconscious experience of the dream narrative unfolding in a boundaried spatial context” (231) that allows potentially transgressive experiences to be circumscribed. This sense of separation is further accentuated by the feeling of suspension and timelessness that often accompanies dreams; as Ronald R. Thomas asserts, a “sense of the eternal present is a

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3 The memoir is performative in the sense that, like all life writing, it can be understood as constructing an identity in and through words rather than articulating a pre-existing or essential selfhood. I emphasize performativity because it contrasts with and destabilizes the authentic notions of identity evoked by the dreams’ idealized originary landscapes. For more on auto/biographical performativity and performance, see Smith and Watson, eds., *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance*; Hinz, “Mimesis: The Dramatic Lineage of Auto/Biography”; Grace, “Performing the Auto/biographical Pact”; and Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situations of a Literary Genre*. 
characteristic of dreams” due to their tendency to juxtapose disparate experiences within an “absence of narrative time” (58). Although dreams thus feel separate from waking life, they can also complement the dreamer’s waking negotiations of space and geography, for each experience of space is navigated by a subject conscious of spatial logic and politics. For instance, Freud conceives of the dream as “merely a form of thought” (Interpretation 4: 64) that projects an understanding of space as thought does. As he explains, “there is a spatial consciousness in dreams, since sensations and images are assigned to an external space, just as they are in waking” (51).4 In effect, the mind creates dreams’ liminal spaces, in which physical dimensions of place are shaped by personal and political beliefs, affects, and wishes, and can be negotiated in ways not possible in the waking world.

The complementarity between dreamed and waking spaces suggests that dreams can be productively read as politicized as well as psychically meaningful spaces. Spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre includes the dream in a discussion of “lived” or “representational space,” an experiential category of space he defines as distinct from either purely physical or purely mental engagements with space. As a passive processing and experiencing of both physical and cultural elements of space, representational space evokes “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols. . . . It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (39).5 Thus, lived experiences of space are inseparable from the ideologies that shape physical space, and Lefebvre warns that those who study representational spaces like dreams “nearly always forget to set them alongside those representations of space which coexist, concord or interfere with them” (41). The idea that dreamed representations of space complement waking spatial experiences is important for understanding the dream’s role in the family memoir, a genre so often

4 Freud is less interested in this projected space itself than in the way that dreams “‘dramatize’ an idea” (43) within it. The resulting theatrical image of the dream as a “displaced stage” remains a pervasive psychological metaphor for dream-spaces (Borch-Jacobsen 23, 26). Lefebvre similarly describes the dream as “a theatrical space even more than a quotidian and poetic one: a putting into images of oneself, for oneself” (209). However, this chapter is more concerned with the dream’s “set” than with its action.

5 Cultural geographer Edward Soja suggests that the term “spaces of representation” is a clearer expression of Lefebvre’s “third space,” which he argues is distinct from and all-encompassing of the other two types of space (68). I do not use Soja’s description of “third space” in this chapter because I theorize dreaming as a uniquely structured liminal space rather than an all-encompassing hybrid space.
concerned with cultural and personal memory. For Lefebvre, the symbology of lived space is at once collective and individual, combining cultural and personal imagery that illustrate the cumulative effects of the past: “Redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements, they have their source in history—in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people” (41). Although extending such a cultural symbology to dream experience might at first glance suggest a similarity to Jung’s notion of the collective unconscious, the body of “symbolic elements” that Lefebvre invokes is more flexible, more personal, and yet also more ideological, thus providing a useful intersection between dream spaces and the simultaneously political, familial and creative orientation of family memoir.

Bhabha’s theorization of “‘in-between’ spaces” as performative sites of cultural identity provides an equally useful analogy for dreams’ liminal negotiation of social identity. In his introduction to The Location of Culture (1994), Bhabha argues that the late-twentieth-century unease with narratives of fixed origins impels cultural critics to consider the ways in which “‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (1). Bhabha explores this concept of performative, liminal spaces of cultural representation in several essays, arguing that these “‘in-between’ spaces” are products of an ambivalent conflict or “split” between the mythic and homogeneous narrative past of a culture or nation and the performative, disjunctive present of its actual lived experience (35). That is, he claims that articulations of cultural and national identities are always affected by an inevitable gap between the ostensibly essential, narrativized past and the ongoing recreation of the resulting identities in day-to-day life. According to Bhabha, this gap manifests itself in the form of liminal, doubled moments which, like the dream that invokes an originary landscape in the diasporic present, “problematiz[e] the binary division between past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural
representation and its authoritative address‖ (35). Although Bhabha’s engagement with this concept is often abstract, his introduction uses spatial and temporal metaphors, evocatively reminiscent of the structure of dreams, to illustrate the functions of these “interstices” of cultural engagement. Bhabha conceptualizes these metaphorical spaces as liminal and separate from a performative present, taking place between and “beyond” the borders between different subject positions (4) and creating “an imaginary of spatial distance” that provides a renewed sense of the present’s disjunctions and inequalities (4).

Importantly for my analysis of literary dreams, Bhabha argues that in literary works, such liminal spaces are often evoked by psychic and supernatural phenomena. In an earlier version of the essay, he posits that representations of psychic experiences create a form of “‘aesthetic’ alienation, or ‘privatization’” that simultaneously articulates and conceals the political valences of everyday life through “a kind of unconsciousness that obscures the immediacy of meaning” (“World” 143, italics in original). In other words, the apparently subjective and unconscious nature of dream-spaces obscures the politics inherent in their representations of space; yet, as Bhabha explains later, “[t]he unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of a political existence” (Location 11). His illustration of how this privatization operates in politically fraught, oddly suspended domestic spaces in Nadine Gordimer’s My Son's Story also offers a suggestive way to think of dreams, which, like domestic spaces, are sites where “[p]rivate and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy” (13). For Bhabha, such moments of liminality are crucial in literary narratives because they produce a critical, “double edge[d]” distance that encompasses both psychic and political hybridity:

These spheres of life are linked through an “in-between” temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of

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6 In other words, the authority of cultural representation is problematized by this intersection between the apparently authentic past and the performative present. Bhabha sees this intersection as occurring in general enunciations of cultural difference and, more specifically, in writing in a national context: “In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation” (Location 146). The dream’s literal rendering of this tension can play an important role in this undertaking.
history. This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge, which like the coloured South African subject represents a hybridity, a difference “within”, a subject that inhabits the rim of an “in-between” reality. And the inscription of this borderline existence inhabits a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing that creates the discursive “image” at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world. (13)

This dense passage describes in-between spaces as sites where psychic and political hybridity intersect, a description that resonates with the diasporic dream both because of its emphasis on a discursive “image” that connects home and history, and because of its depiction of these layered forms of hybridity as represented within “a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing.” Bhabha describes the domestic scenes under analysis as captured in parenthetical frames, an image that I take up in the first section of this chapter.

Bhabha’s interest in these “‘in-between’ spaces” lies primarily in their performative origin and their radical potential to reveal hybridity and heterogeneity by destabilizing the myth of an essential past. Although he acknowledges that “there is no reason to believe that . . . marks of difference cannot inscribe a ‘history’ of the people” (157), he also holds that these spaces present an “insurmountable ambivalence” in cultural representation through their invocation of “the past as an anteriority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity into the present” (157). While the diasporic dreams I examine can certainly be read in this uncanny and political sense, their content also importantly—and, at first glance, paradoxically—evokes connections with the more conservative pastoral mode, frequently featuring rural landscapes, a slowed or static temporality, and a blurring between the pastoral past and an idealized afterlife. Indeed, literary dreams have historical similarities with some features of the pastoral mode, despite the fact that the two have different literary histories and conventions. The literary dream has historically been associated with both apocalyptic and idealized, often rural, landscapes; medieval dream visions, for instance, often feature gardens either as the context or content of the

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7 The quotation above parallels Bhabha’s assertion that “[i]n place of the polarity of prefigurating self-generating nation ‘in-itself’ and extrinsic other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the ‘in-between’” (148). That is, the conflict between the essential past and the performative moment in which cultural identity comes into being create this metaphorical “space.”
dream, scenes that “have a marked tendency to be idealized, to resemble paradise” (Brown, “Borders” 27). The tranquil gardens that are central to medieval and early modern dreams, drawing on the influence of the earliest love visions, such as Romaunt de la Rose (Garber 11, 64), go on to become pastoral landscapes in the late seventeenth century (Gifford 66). More significantly for my purposes here, the dream’s liminal structure and circumscribed intervals of access to idealized spaces also resonate with theorizations of the pastoral that emphasize the mode’s contrastive and ironic functions. The dream’s temporary, revelatory access to an idealized rural landscape parallels the idea of pastoral as a form of oppositional retreat, an alternative space that offers reflection, insight, or renewal that carries into the urban reality of its observers (Gifford 2). At the same time, the inevitable awakening and separation that circumscribes dreamed pastoral spaces might also be compared to what Leo Marx, in his theorization of a “complex pastoral,” describes as a “pastoral design” that introduces irony or qualification into the pastoral scene. Marx defines the pastoral design as a “larger structure of thought and feeling of which the ideal is a part . . . [which] brings a world which is more ‘real’ into juxtaposition with an idyllic vision” (25). Just as the dream’s transience frames the dreamed experience of an originary landscape, “[t]he pastoral design . . . always circumscribes the pastoral ideal” (72).

Casteel builds on Marx’s theory to develop her theory of the “critical pastoral,” one of several landscape aesthetics that she identifies to illustrate how rural space and emplacement remain important elements in diasporic writing. In Second Arrivals: Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writing of the Americas (2007), Casteel argues that diaspora studies has tended to privilege mobility and urbanity over rural space because of “anxieties about the politics that adhere to it” (2), including conservative nationalist politics and ideologies that have traditionally been linked with place and

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8 Although idealized images of landscape are central to many contemporary theorizations of pastoral, including Casteel’s, pastoral has historically been defined by its focus on representative rural figures, particularly shepherds. In What is Pastoral?, Paul Alpers argues that “we will have a far truer idea of pastoral if we take its representative anecdote to be herdsmen and their lives, rather than landscape or idealized nature” (22). Clearly, my analysis draws on broader interpretations of pastoral that locate its efficacy in its landscape aesthetics rather than its central figures.
territorialization. As she observes, the pastoral mode has widely been regarded as a conservative discourse “complicitous in the exploitation of the working class” (4), following Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City*, or as a colonial strategy of domestication and appropriation (25). However, Casteel claims that negotiations of rural emplacement and landscape politics can still be crucial to the ways in which diasporic writers understand their identity within communities, positing that diasporic writers’ engagement with place “signals an insistence upon geographical places as both meaningful and compelling, a move that should not be dismissed too hastily as merely nostalgic” (3). She thus theorizes the critical pastoral as a form of engagement with landscape that “capitalizes on pastoral’s capacity for emplacement” (12) while also qualifying and ironizing the pastoral so that it “encompasses both a utopian and a historicizing dimension” (13). For Casteel, this form of pastoral offers an ambivalent approach to place that allows writers to express its personal value alongside the difficulties and risks of emplacement:

In its contemporary, complex form, then, pastoral is defined not so much by a strict adherence to classical convention as by the manner in which it brings into tension idealizing and historicizing visions of landscape. Diasporic writers exploit this double-edged quality of pastoral so that they may assert the need for place while simultaneously registering the historical realities of displacement. (13)

The dream’s juxtaposition of originary landscapes with the waking reality of displacement and transnationalism interestingly aligns with this “double-edged” critical pastoral, articulating an affective connection to place alongside the diasporic distance of history. Like Bhabha’s liminal spaces, which he also describes as introducing a “double edge” into the narrative (*Location* 13), the dream’s use of critical pastoral represents a framed and fraught intersection of “the home and the world” (13) in which connection and loss, affect and critical distance, the personal and the political exist in tension.

Casteel and Bhabha each emphasize the political potential of “double-edged” spaces of cultural negotiation, pointing out how such spaces allow for critical reflexivity and politicized re-visions of national identities. As such, they distance their discussions of the resurgence of the past from the concept of nostalgia and its associations with conservative, exclusionary forms of nationalism. For instance, Casteel’s study focuses on
diasporic writers who use critical pastoral in an adopted country in order to disrupt homogeneous national narratives, and she expresses doubt about the “viability” of the critical pastoral (49). Autobiography critics dealing with contemporary diasporic texts are similarly wary of the concept of nostalgia, praising memoirs that emphasize performative, reflexive negotiations of space over those too focused on loss and displacement. However, the powerful draw of nostalgia and of forms of nationalism based on emplacement and inheritance remains significant in the diasporic memoir. The “double edge” of dreamed spaces makes them usefully equivocal topoi that balance the memoir’s tensions between nostalgic longing and reflexive diasporic identity. As Linda Hutcheon observes in *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, “[t]here is nothing intrinsically subversive about ironic skepticism or about any such self-questioning, ‘internally dialogized’ mode; there is no necessary relationship between irony and radical politics or even radical formal innovation” (10). The critical pastoral, with its combination of idealized pastoral devices and irony, idealization and historicization, offers a way to understand the functioning of diasporic dreams as truly double-edged, simultaneously preserving and distancing idealized landscapes. Like the pastoral in its many forms, dreams blend temporal and spatial components and a central movement of retreat, return, and regeneration. As such, identifying dreams as a form of critical pastoral recognizes their potential to express both loss and regeneration through images of the idealized past, while the implicit ironies and dualities of the dreams’ structure ensure that they do so with a “double edge” that acknowledges their potential complicity in exclusionary discourses.

In an essay reconsidering her omission of nostalgia from her work on postmodern irony, Hutcheon argues that nostalgia and irony often operate in tension. Using postmodern

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9 Egan describes Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger of Memory* as filled with “poignant tensions . . . [that] are individual, even solipsistic, finding safety in monologic certainties rather than risking the unfinishable business of dialogic discourses” (125). Similarly, Sugars remarks that Johnson’s memoir is “unsettled by . . . too poignant a sense of place, which in turn contributes to a nostalgia that becomes debilitating” (188).

10 Elsewhere, Hutcheon similarly asserts that irony often encompasses a “structural recognition that discourse today cannot avoid acknowledging its situation in the world it represents: irony’s critique, in other words, will always be at least somewhat complicitous with the dominants it contests but within which it cannot help existing” (“Power” 36).
architecture as an example, she suggests that postmodern art engages with the past “with the kind of ironic double vision that acknowledges the final impossibility of indulging in nostalgia, even as it consciously evokes nostalgia’s power. In the postmodern, in other words, (and here is the source of the tension) nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited, and ironized” (“Irony”). Similarly, the idealized imagery of diasporic dreams simultaneously invokes nostalgia about originary spaces and frames these spaces in a way that destabilizes their meaning, without negating their power. Hutcheon’s conclusions about the function of this tension between nostalgia and irony are, therefore, important for understanding the role of pastoral dreams in the memoir. She argues that “[t]he ironizing of nostalgia, in the very act of its invoking, may be one way the postmodern has of taking responsibility for such responses by creating a small part of the distance necessary for reflective thought about the present as well as the past” (“Irony”). In memoir, the use of dream experiences to frame pastoral representations of originary spaces provides a way for memoirists to acknowledge and embrace the complexity of a relationship with a cultural or political past, creating a reflective and ironic distance from these spaces while attesting to their psychic and affective importance in the present.

In the three sections that follow, I explore the ambivalent spaces of cultural negotiation that dreams represent by focusing on their complementary relationships to each memoir’s landscape politics. In the first section, I elaborate on the dream frame’s double-edged juxtaposition of pastoral and historicized landscapes to argue that the resulting balance of nostalgia, critical distance, and creative departure mirrors the ambivalent relationship to the past inherent in the memoir genre. In close readings of Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes* and Johnston’s *Baltimore’s Mansion*, I also illustrate that the dream provides a “strangeness of framing” that asserts the power of historical determinism and irony in the creation of social identity. In the second section, I posit that the dream is a useful motif for expressing diasporic negotiations of landscape because of its resonance with pastoral themes, both of lost landscapes and of a temporary retreat into a recreative space. Applying this idea to Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*, I argue that the parallels between Ondaatje’s opening dream and his subsequent journey to Sri Lanka provide a way for the memoir to investigate a personal experience of loss while acknowledging a problematic relationship to the Sri Lankan landscape, purposely demonstrating the ambivalence of the
memoir’s connection between public and private discourses. To close the chapter, I reflect on the ways in which dreams’ pastoral landscapes impinge on the present, returning to Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes* to illustrate the dream’s contribution to a performative interaction of past and present that allows the creation of hyphenated and hybrid national identities.

“A stillness of time and a strangeness of framing”: Dreams’ Double Edge

The dream’s capacity to represent nostalgia alongside critical distance is evident in two recent family memoirs, Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes* and Johnston’s *Baltimore’s Mansion*, in which dreams layer originary spaces with depictions of liminality that introduce powerful images of hybridity and duality into the scenes. These dreamed spaces are equivocally or “provisionally” ironic (Hutcheon, *Irony* 51) in their ability to express both critical reflexivity and historical loss. Further, their duality that emerges specifically in landscapes that, to borrow Bhabha’s terms, exhibit “a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing” (*Location* 13). Their “strangeness” is conveyed in the circumscribed quality of the dream experience and in the dream’s psychic alterity, which troubles a clear attribution of agency to both the idealized landscapes and the historical displacements represented by dreams. While the dream’s liminality and “strangeness of framing” allows for critical reflexivity in Keefer’s memoir, her memoir and Johnston’s also enlist the resulting hybridity as itself a more conservative form of familial and national inheritance, capitalizing on the dream’s uncanny agency to connect the dream with the historical ironies of displacement and detachment.

As I outline above, the dream’s representation of mediated or “framed” landscapes of the past resembles the critical pastoral in its ability to simultaneously evoke and circumscribe nostalgic and idealized images of the cultural past. The ancestral dreams I consider here tend to juxtapose images of timeless, transcendent, and affectively powerful rural landscapes with the waking reality of “historicizing” experiences of separation, disjunction, or liminality (Casteel 13), either by layering multiple temporalities within dream experiences or within the limited time frame of the dream itself. As Peter Brown argues in an analysis of Middle English dream visions, the necessary inclusion of borders and separations in dreams facilitates the exploration of uncertain social relationships:
Dreams, by their nature, are able to express a sense of fragmentation, a loss of continuity between the self and the outer world, since they operate through striking juxtaposition, distortion, displacement, condensation, and apparent incoherence. A dream is therefore well suited to the representations and analysis of alienation, of a sense of lost authority, or of a searching for connections that have become hidden, tenuous, or problematic. (44)

The dream’s juxtapositions of different temporalities, whether within the dream or between sleeping and waking, offer useful ways to articulate alienation alongside various forms of tenuous connection with the past, connections that tend to be idealized through pastoral landscape imagery. In Doris Goodison’s visionary ride across her hostile urban tenement with her grandmother Leanna in From Harvey River, for instance, Doris mentally travels back into her own rural county in a temporally transcendent and healing vision: “She closed her eyes and time slowed down so that the short ride across the courtyard felt as if they were riding forever over the green pastures of Hanover and Westmoreland” (204). The sense of timelessness and the healing intervention of the landscape are thus framed within the reality of her displacement and urban environment in Kingston. A similar juxtaposition of emplacement and displacement occurs in the deathbed vision that concludes Johnston’s Baltimore’s Mansion. As Johnston’s grandfather Charlie rests in his blacksmith’s forge after a heart attack, reposed within a space that represents a mythology of Newfoundland nationalism, he dreams of travelling into a new, untouched version of the Avalon Peninsula, its landmarks “fixed in a moment that for him will never pass” (272). The scene alternates between Charlie’s prone body and his dreamed journey, juxtaposing two scenes that incorporate elements of emplacement, displacement, and liminality. At the same time, these scenes resonate with the pastoral’s tendency to conflate an irrevocably lost past with a utopian future or afterlife.  

The dream’s ability to frame encounters with these ancestral landscapes within moments of displacement and even death might be thought of in terms of “provisional” irony.

11 Susan Snyder describes this elegiac function of pastoral as a lament for a past and innocence that in the present is “lost forever. It survives only as a frustrating memory, a marker of present alienation—or at best as a foreshadowing of life after death” (3).
(Hutcheon, *Irony* 51). To some extent, the dream frame undercuts the potentially appropriative or transgressive elements of the dream’s idealized landscape. Just as dreams of the dead contain potentially dangerous or pathological interactions with deceased others, representing ancestral landscapes in dreams offers a critical qualification. Yet, positioned within the memoir genre’s typical celebration of the past and offering the possibility of identification and renewal, the evaluative edge of the dream often remains unclear. Hutcheon’s concept of provisional irony suggests one way in which dreams can convey critical reflexivity while also keeping multiple possibilities open. Although it has similarities to “distancing” or “self-protective” forms of irony, provisional irony obscures its own evaluative stance by “always offering a proviso, always containing a kind of built-in conditional stipulation that undermines any firm and fixed stand” (51). Indeed, Hutcheon notes that provisional irony has been associated with “the evasiveness of equivocation” and with “fence-sitting,” negative evaluations that can, however, have a positive function: “irony’s doubleness can act as a way of counteracting any tendency to assume a categorical or rigid position of ‘Truth’ through precisely some acknowledgment of provisionality and contingency . . . an undogmatic alternative to authoritative pronouncements” (51).¹² The ambiguous “built-in” frames of dream experience provide just such a form of provisionality and contingency. For memoir writers negotiating a relationship with a familial and political past, such forms of irony are indispensable in allowing negotiations of connection and emplacement alongside reflexive recognitions of the problematic nature of originary belonging. Rather than adopting a particular critical stance, then, the dream dramatizes the tensions between multiple possible relationships to the past.

The tensions between nostalgia and historicism and between belonging and alienation that are elucidated by the dream’s juxtapositions are central to the memoir as a genre, and in fact, the dream’s framing of the idealized past mirrors the metanarrative structure of

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¹² This provisional irony might also be compared to Bhabha’s concept of “splitting,” which he defines as “a form of enunciatory, intellectual uncertainty and anxiety that stems from the fact that disavowal is not merely a principle of negotiation or elision; it is a strategy for articulating contradictory and coeval statements of belief” (*Location* 132).
family memoir. The genre seeks to capture a social past that is affectively significant alongside acknowledgments of historical change and separation. According to Marcus Billson, the memoir articulates “the memorialist’s strong sense of loss for a past which he reveres and misses” (261), and it is driven by a desire to “fix in form and imbue with significance” the major and minor social events of the past (268). In an image interestingly reminiscent of the dream’s structure, Billson describes the memoir as framing the past in a “fix[ed],” irrevocably separate interval in which “[t]ime is no longer chronos, or mere succession, but rather kairos, an interval fraught with significance, which will never happen again” (269). Yet the memoir’s affective attachment to the past is also inevitably accompanied by a sense of alienation created by temporal distance and social change. Some ironic distance is always present in retrospective life writing because of the temporal gap between the self-as-writer and the self-as-participant (261, 275), but Billson argues that this subject-object division remains particularly “unresolved” (277) in the memoir because of the complex relationship between individual and social identity. Because memoirs primarily focus on the memoirist’s role in or exclusion from a social community, he explains, “the memorialist forfeits much of his subjectivity and consequently feels alienated from the very social construct that supposedly gives him his identity . . . [T]he participant desires to define himself as in society, and yet paradoxically to see himself also as against it” (277).

Billson’s discussion is problematic in its implication that individual and social identity can be clearly distinguished from each other. However, his idea that memoir involves an unresolved division between subject and object is certainly pronounced in the family memoir, in which subject and object are further separated by generations and in which, paradoxically, the very historical separation that alienates the memoir writer often creates the conditions and desire to undertake the writing project. As a result, the memoir in general and the diasporic family memoir in particular are marked by an “ambivalent struggle” between alienation and the desire to reconnect with and preserve a formative social context (277). While Billson argues that “the memoir itself becomes a process of atonement with the social matrix” (277), it only does so as a double-edged process that “mitigates that contradiction [of desire for and against the outer world], while underscoring its existential poignancy” (278). The double-edged element of memoir thus
has several layers. While the ironic distance in the memoir—or what we might call its “historicizing” elements—reiterates separation and displacement, this distance is not solely a critical reflex. It may also reflect a profound acknowledgment of personal and familial losses as well as creative distance. The prominent use of dreams in diasporic memoirs is significant because the detached spaces of dreams replicate this fundamental ambivalence at the heart of the memoir genre, capturing the simultaneity of desire for and distance from the past.

The ability of the dream’s juxtapositions to articulate and dramatize the memoir’s tensions is particularly pronounced in Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes*, a memoir of her mother Natalia’s childhood in the rural Ukraine and her immigration to Canada as a teenager. Much of the memoir is concerned with Keefer’s attempts to reconcile her mother’s beloved stories of her “Old Place,” an impoverished farm in Staromischyna, with her own spatial remove from the Ukraine and her awareness of the historical contexts that shaped both her mother’s experiences and the Ukraine she left behind. A dream of the “Old Place” bridges the two sections of the memoir, appearing alongside several other framed images that articulate her simultaneous desire for and critical distance from the “timeless, self-sustaining world” that she imagines from her mother’s stories (4). She conceptualizes and frames this rural space through a number of distancing images, comparing it to a vivid image of a farm on an Easter egg (11) and imagining herself seeing it “through the wrong end of a telescope: a world brilliant, precise, impossibly small” (4).

In addition to these diminutive, controlled images, Keefer implicitly evokes pastoral imagery by conflating the lost rural past with a version of paradise: “I’m approaching the site of my grandmother’s house the way my mother, as a child, approached the priest’s egg-shaped glass through which she knew she’d see the whole of heaven” (278). Alongside these contained and distanced images of the “Old Place” appears a central dream, a descent into an underground space that combines features of Keefer’s own childhood basement and the root cellar or *lyokh* of her mother’s childhood farm—as she describes it, “the magic place of the faraway house” (159). “I dream of going underground,” Keefer declares, and the scene of searching through the basement to find a way of accessing the *lyokh* frames the rural, nostalgic scene of her mother’s home with images of psychic depth, reminiscent of Jung’s image of the psyche as a house with gradually deeper levels
of unconsciousness. In the narration of the scene, it is also difficult to tell which parts are dream and which are memory, since Keefer describes the contents of the basement in detail and recalls her experiences of practicing piano there—a blurring that highlights the intersections of desire and historical fact throughout the memoir.

In addition to connoting psychic depth, the root cellar operates as a crucial metaphor for both cultural memory and historical alterity. As “the heart of the Old Place for me—its heart because hidden, mysterious and thus alive” (279), it offers a compelling metaphor for the ongoing impact of familial stories despite separation from the past; it is a space of nourishment that “lies apart from the house, and yet the life of the house depends on it” (27). In Keefer’s imagery, the lyokh also provides another spatial metaphor for the way that nostalgic memory is circumscribed by the realities of pain, poverty, and historical trauma. Returning to the pastoral image on the Easter egg just before relating the dream, she associates the dark background of the scene with the lyokh, musing, “Although there’s no image of the lyokh drawn among the sunny shapes of house, tree, bird, I see now that its darkness captures and contains them all” (157). In effect, the lyokh and its dreamed reincarnation frame the pastoral image with the “darkness” of historical trauma. The dream thus offers a space in which the coexisting and often contradictory impulses and demands of the memoir can intersect.

Keefer’s central dream dramatizes the tension between critical distance and the affective appeal of a nostalgic, uncritical understanding of the past by acting as a transition between the two halves of her memoir, which deal separately with nostalgic family memory and its political contexts, or what she calls respectively “story” and “history.” In her preface, Keefer explains that “story,” to her, is a version of the past idealized by desire. She quotes her childhood Anchor Book of Stories to compare the wish fulfillment of stories with that of dreams: “A story, it’s been said, ‘is a wish, or a truth, or a wish modified by a truth.’ Children listening to a story will . . . ask of it ‘what they ask of a dream: that it satisfy their wishes’” (4). In contrast, “history” exceeds wish fulfillment;

13 In fact, on the page before the dream, Keefer notes that “[m]emory is a house” (157). Jung describes his dream of the psyche as a house in Memories 159-161.
she presents history as a form of alterity and uncanniness in which the unknown and suppressed elements of “story” resonate (5), a force that reveals “not just the delight, but also the tyranny, of wishes” (4). That is, Keefer suggests that history has the capacity to reveal the alterity not only in idealized stories of the past but also within the very experience of desire, when what is wished for may take on an agency of its own. Significantly, the “history” section of Keefer’s memoir includes a narrative of her first journey to the Ukraine, relating her own experience of the way in which diasporic return often exceeds expectation and desire.

The imagery of the dream and the lyokh provide an apt vehicle for Keefer’s transition between story and history because both spaces encompass desire or wish fulfillment and a capacity for alterity. In fact, the space of the lyokh originally appeals to Keefer because it combines familiarity and otherness, home and its historical context. Although the lyokh is a traditional root cellar at her mother’s home, it also plays a role in broader historical events as “a place of safekeeping, a hiding place” (160) where neighbours, fleeing political instability in the Ukrainian province of Galicia, store valuable dishes and other treasures. The juxtaposition of these treasures with the poverty of Natalia’s family creates a powerful image of duality that Keefer draws on as she mobilizes her dream of the lyokh, representative of a cultural space “where she’s never been” (162), to reflect on the demands of her family narrative. Recalling her mother’s stories of playing with the treasures in the lyokh, she muses,

The children who played in that cool, dark hollow under the ground, did they ever cross the borders between desire and need, placing on a Limoges plate an onion or whiskered carrot, joining two worlds in that one act? Will I cross the same kind of border, now that this stage of my journeying’s done? (162)

Keefer’s reflections on the lyokh bridge her accounts of two worlds, one encompassing the stories of her mother’s impoverished childhood, the other involving the lives of others who, like the Limoges plates in the lyokh, do not belong to her. In confronting the uncanny presences of those who lived alongside her mother in Staromischyna, Keefer acknowledges the duality and alterity that marks this apparently authentic site of cultural memory. Yet her use of the dream to bridge these worlds—a subjective, non-agential experience through which, she declares, “[b]orders take you under as well as over”
(162)—troubles the corrective and critical potential of the gesture by linking private and public in an irresistible conflation of “desire and need.”

Keefer invokes the ambiguous agency associated with the experience of dreaming as a reminder of the limits of personal agency and narrative control over memory and history. As she begins her reflections on “that larger public world holding my family’s private stories,” Keefer declares, “Here I am, at the border between story and history, personal desire and a shared reality over which I have no more power than I do over my dreams” (163). By likening the alterity of the public, political world with the subjective alterity of dreaming, she acknowledges that the stories she records cannot ultimately be controlled or contained by her own desire or nostalgia. Bhabha argues that psychic phenomena such as dreams can capture the repercussions of historical events while also gesturing to the displaced sense of agency and control that these events can enact. In “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” Bhabha quotes John Berger’s metaphor of the experience of migration as resembling “‘a dream dreamt by another’” (Location 175). Yet the use of dreams to articulate experiences of displacement can also convey the sense that the narration of historical and political events is also beyond the control of the person who narrates them.14 For Bhabha, the strange alterity of psychic phenomena represents an awareness of hybridity and heterogeneity—both interpersonal and intrapersonal—that allows for a radical revisioning of the present social moment, “a translational and transnational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities” (13). In Honey and Ashes, Keefer’s equal weighting of family story and external history does demonstrate a concern with the heterogeneity of the cultural past. In exploring the political contexts of her maternal family’s past in rural Staromischyna, Keefer offers a corrective to the potentially exclusionary family stories that have been handed down to her, revising the imagined landscape of her mother’s childhood home with the understanding that this personally meaningful place is “a place that belongs not only to my family but to those who hover ghostlike at the edges of storytelling, who materialize

14 Dionne Brand similarly reflects that “[t]his existence in the [Black] Diaspora is like that—dreams from which one never wakes . . . One is not in control in dreams; dreams take place, the dreamer is captive . . . you are constantly overwhelmed by the persistence of the spectre of captivity” (Map 29).
in the differences between Staromischyna as it is now and the Old Place as memory fashions it” (17). By invoking a dreamed space that represents not only the intersection of private and public discourses but also a sense of uncontrollable historical forces beyond the borders of familial stories, Keefer acknowledges the alterity inherent in her stories of the “Old Place.”

However, this parallel between historical and dreamed losses of agency blurs Keefer’s distinction between the private and public discourses of “story” and “history,” suggesting that the dream’s “strangeness” also provides a justification for exploring that public space for personal reasons. In her dream, Keefer travels deep into her parents’ basement, cataloguing the personal objects found there and seating herself at a piano to practice. Yet she only accesses the deeper cultural memories of the lyokh in a moment when she loses her own agency; her sister suddenly catches her from behind, putting her hands over her eyes. In this moment, Keefer accesses the space of the lyokh within “the black behind my eyes, the black that’s made by my . . . not seeing the outside anymore” (159). She enters the space only through a forced experience of blindness to her own present, in which her own desire and personal agency are overcome by another’s will and a resulting sense of external control. Yet this external agency also enables her desired access to “a place full of objects that I’ve only to hold out my hands to grab onto” (159). The dream facilitates her access to the treasures of “history,” like the treasures of the lyokh. In the memoir, this blurring between private and public stories results in and apparently justifies some occasionally problematic scenes. For instance, while Keefer explores the historical and ongoing conflicts between Ukrainians and Jews in both Ukraine and Canada, her personal investment in the topic becomes clear during the narrative of her Ukraine trip, when she reacts with panic to the revelation that her great-uncle may have had “conflicts with Jews” (291). Her reaction seems disproportionate until she reveals the family secret that this great-uncle had been her grandmother’s lover, suggesting that her primary concern about his actions involves determining his character: “If only I had something to compare [his] image with, if I had a photograph of that Carpathian farmer who took milk and bread each day to people hiding in a forest—because he was a decent man” (320). Keefer’s inability to determine whether her uncle was “a decent man” becomes just one more element that de-romanticizes her family history, ultimately personalizing her
concern with the ethnic conflicts of the Ukraine and highlighting the difficulty of recording public history within the subjective genre of the memoir.

Keefer’s dream of the lyokh indicates that the historicizing frames of dreamed landscapes may gesture to a nation’s heterogeneity, providing a critical corrective—however limited—that acknowledges the presence of different and, in some cases, incommensurable understandings of past events. Yet dreams’ uncanny invocations of external historical forces can also lend them to more conservative forms of “hybridity,” ones that still balance private and public, emplacement and separation, and loss and creativity by recasting diasporic or transnational experience as itself a kind of originary inheritance. Keefer, for instance, interprets her dream by linking the lack of agency she experiences with the power of inheritance and generational connection. Imagining her great-grandfather’s motives for storing treasures in the lyokh indefinitely despite not knowing whether their owners would ever return, she also imagines his unawareness of the events that will unfold in future generations, when “his great-granddaughter dreams of playing a set of black piano keys, a skein of music leading her down to that place where she comes from” (162). The dream involves a sense of being drawn into cultural memory by an experience of “black[ness]” that, like the “darkness” that frames the pastoral image on her Easter egg (158), represents the inevitability of heterogeneity and displacement—but also a personal claim and connection to “that place where she comes from.”

This sense that the dream captures an inherited experience of connection and detachment also appears in the other memoirs I examine in this chapter. For instance, Ondaatje dreams that his hybrid, colonial family is balanced in an acrobatic pyramid that, while moving across a room, ignores the door and instead slowly walks through the wall, “[w]ithout discussing it” (Running 27). The dream suggests a familial inheritance of liminality and of a transgression of expected routes that is beyond the control of Ondaatje himself, who within the dream is positioned “quite near the top” of the pyramid (27). A similarly fateful inheritance of hybridity and displacement is evoked by the closing dreams of Johnston’s grandfather Charlie in Baltimore’s Mansion. As I have noted, the fictional dream sequence juxtaposes Charlie’s death in his blacksmith’s forge with his
dreamed journey to a pastorally untouched, heavenly version of the Avalon—an inevitable departure that parallels his son and grandson’s literal experiences of exile, displacement, and departure. By ending the memoir with this dream sequence and his grandfather’s final visionary glance at the landmarks of Ferryland, Johnston insists on a sense of loss, distance, and poignancy, but also on the fatalistic passing down of a doubled relationship to Newfoundland. Each member of the Johnston family inherits an existence between two countries: a Newfoundland that could have been, and a Canada that Johnston’s family, who firmly opposed Confederation, is reluctant to accept. Charlie’s simultaneous emplacement and separation from Newfoundland illustrates this inherited duality that, like the storms off Newfoundland’s coast that move both toward and away from Newfoundland, contain “[a] simple but maddening paradox . . . Everything the storms contained moved two opposing ways at once” (237).

The inheritance of hybridity expressed by Johnston’s narrative and its final dream allows for a sense of loss, continuity and creativity that, like Keefer’s doubled story and history, takes responsibility for its own nostalgia. However, it does so through intertextuality and the fictional dream’s embellishment of historical irony and determinism, rather than through a critical corrective like Keefer’s recognition of heterogeneous claims to her mother’s space. Although Cynthia Sugars includes Baltimore’s Mansion in a discussion of memoirs that explore origins and inheritance alongside a sense of the “impossibility of the postcolonial quest for legitimating ancestors in Canada” (181), this postcolonial sense of a need for legitimation and its corrective—“a recognition that the authentification sought in the attempt is illusory” (179)—sits awkwardly with the memoir’s poignant treatment of landscape, loss, and creative distance. Johnston may “deconstruct[ ] the teleological and ancestral drive of national narratives” (190), but he also capitalizes on this imagery. While Sugars builds her analysis on Lois Parkinson Zamora’s theorization of a New World anxiety about origins and belonging, Zamora’s work also suggests a different angle that might be more appropriate for Johnston’s work, a recognition that a writer’s “search for origins may be ironic and at the same time ‘authentic,’ simultaneously self-doubting and subversive. What it is not is ahistorical” (6). Zamora argues that many works of fiction from the Americas deal with the problematic elements of their search for origins “not [through] caution or constraint . . . but rather [through]
narrative complexity and linguistic exuberance” (5) that implicitly acknowledge heterogeneity and multiplicity by using narrative devices such as intertextuality. In Johnston’s memoir, the intertextuality in the memoir’s treatment of landscapes, culminating in the final dream, reflects the simultaneity of mythologizing and historicizing tendencies. As Zamora explains, these texts’ “sometimes-virtuosic interplay of texts and traditions may create an aura of (originary) myth, but it also encodes the historical interactions of sign systems and social formations. Their intertextual strategies self-consciously propose that origins are multiple and indeterminate, never fixed or fully decided” (6). In accordance with Zamora’s argument, Johnston uses intertextual strategies and evident fictionalizations to implicitly acknowledge the impact of history and the ironies of its construction, or what Zamora calls the “dialectic between historical determinations and literary intentions” (ix).

Johnston’s conclusion of the memoir with a fictional dream sequence that narrates his grandfather’s inevitable separation from Newfoundland draws attention to the memoir’s teasing emphasis both on historical determinism and on the curiously doubled and contingent effects of this determinism. Over the course of the memoir, Johnston reveals a series of family secrets and betrayals which, passed down through the generations, creates “a symmetry . . . that it would be pointless for us to resist” (196). Indeed, far from resisting the symmetry, Johnston contributes to it in several fictional episodes that invoke the power of external forces, whether history, fate, or providence. In addition to the final dreams, another fictional anecdote depicts the central historical trauma of the memoir, Newfoundland’s referendum and subsequent Confederation with Canada, as an uncanny and entangled mess of fate and personal choice. A dark family secret convinces Johnston that his grandfather Charlie may have been a “closet confederate,” a proclaimed nationalist who had secretly voted for Confederation with Canada. Describing the scene in the voting booth from Charlie’s perspective, Johnston imagines that “[a] solitary impulse makes him choose . . . He will wonder later if his hand was God guided to do what to him seemed and always will seem wrong, if others were likewise moved” (245). Not only Charlie’s betrayal, but the referendum itself, which had passed by a very small number of votes, thus exceeds intentionality. These fictional episodes intertwine in the narrative with real historical ironies, such as those that await Johnston’s father Arthur; a
staunch anti-confederate who had studied agriculture to escape a family tradition of fishing, he ends up working for the federal fisheries as a representative of the Canadian government. By adding fictional support to these ironies, and by concluding the memoir with a fictional dream that establishes his own inheritance of hybridity, Johnston both underlines and destabilizes the memoir’s sense of historical determinism.\(^{15}\)

Johnston also develops a sense of fatalism and historical irony through his intertextual use of landscape aesthetics and the originary mythology of his grandfather’s forge, each of which contribute imagery to the fictional dreams that close the memoir. He overlays his family’s experience of Confederation with Arthurian and Edenic intertexts by capitalizing on a series of historical coincidences, including Lord Baltimore’s 1627 landing in Ferryland and his decision to name the Avalon Peninsula after a paradisal island from Arthurian legend. While these intertexts invoke an intensely mythological past, they are also inherently ironized, both because these constructed intertexts contain real historical ironies (resonating, for instance, in the fact that Johnston’s father is coincidentally named Arthur Reginald), and in their occasionally ill-fitting application to the New World landscape. Expanding on the pastoral and idealized nature of the name’s origin, the young Johnston reflects that “this Isle of Apples sounds very much like a pagan Garden of Eden” (10), a name that is implicitly deserved, as “we lived in a place thought by Baltimore to be so much like it . . . to be worthy of bearing its name” (12). Yet the irony of the name becomes clear in its mismatch with the Newfoundland landscape, evident in Johnston’s empathy for the man who had named the peninsula: “Poor Baltimore. He thought it was a heavenly haven he was going to when he set sail with his family in the 1620s” (10). A similar combination of irony and sincerity emerges in depictions of pre-Confederation Newfoundland as a prelapsarian dream, with the

\(^{15}\) In a 2009 lecture, Johnston reflects on the role of fiction in relating “[f]amily, memory, and myth” (Lost Land 43). Musing on the inevitable gaps between these concepts, he declares, “All that remains, is fiction, yet fiction that is inextricably bound up with the other three. . . . And fiction is always, and sometimes blessedly, ‘our story of last resort’” (44). Johnston’s description of fiction as a “blessed” solution to the quandaries of historical memory, like the fictional scenes in Baltimore’s Mansion, implies that writing the past is simultaneously a creative act of agency and an act subject to irresistible historical—or even divine—influence. Like Keefer’s historical speculation, his use of fiction is also potentially appropriative in its articulation of his grandfather’s private experiences.
province’s first premier, Joey Smallwood, playing a central part in the Edenic drama of the referendum: “Confederation had entered the world with Joey; he had led Newfoundlanders to it and tempted them to partake of it as surely as the serpent had led Eve to the apple. And we had thereby fallen from a state of grace that could never be recovered, been banished forever from the paradise of independence” (183). Despite their inherent irony, or perhaps crucially enabled by it, the paradisal intertexts provide evocative metaphors for the loss that Johnston’s family experiences in the trauma of Confederation.

In the dream sequence that concludes the memoir, Charlie Johnston simultaneously inhabits two landscapes marked by this historical irony: his blacksmith’s forge—linked to Baltimore’s arrival in Ferryland—and a paradisal version of Avalon. Like the lyokh, the forge where Johnston’s final dream sequence takes place is a site of both cultural importance and liminality. The forge is central to the family’s sense of heritage and of Newfoundland nationalism. As a family with a longstanding, generational tradition of blacksmithing, the Johnstons trace their trade’s history in Newfoundland back to the first forge in Baltimore’s original colony, which had itself been situated near the location of Charlie Johnston’s forge. The Ferryland forge thus links the Johnstons’ history with an originary myth. Its rural location and archaeological origin are part of its contribution to nationalist ideology. The town of Ferryland is not only “impossibly remote” from St. John’s in Johnston’s childhood memory (16) but feels to the young Johnston like “a crossing-over in both place and time” (17), a place in which “[i]t was as if no time had gone by there since [his father] left it” (17). Further, Ferryland is the founding place of the colony of Avalon, which remains the primary base of anti-Confederate activism (13).

While the forge is thus a site of fixed, authentic, and celebrated identity, it is also inherently a site of transformation and duality. These features are especially pronounced in winter, the time of Charlie’s death. Johnston’s father Arthur observes early in the book that “[t]he forge in winter is a strange meeting place of warm and cold, water and ice . . . From the eaves of the forge hang icicles that, like the snow, somehow freeze and melt at once” (31). The forge invokes a liminal “meeting place” of opposing states, a fitting place through which to articulate the simultaneous fixedness of emplacement and the movement and exile of political displacement.
Significantly for the memoir’s concern with Newfoundland’s shifting national identity, the forge is also a place in which changes of state occur, not only in the freezing and melting icicles but in the forging of metal objects. Arthur is mystified by the way that these transformations occur; as his father plunges molten nails into water, “a sudden hiss briefly brings the water to a boil, a cloud of steam rises from the vat, obscuring the instant when the light within goes out and the transformation from ember to object occurs” (28). Just before the final dream, a similar obscurity envelopes Charlie at the moment of his heart attack. Drinking water to calm a burning throat, he accidentally drops the bucket, creating “a cloud of steam so thick it fills the forge” (268) and obscures his own final transformation—a change of state that is also linked to the political change of state in Newfoundland. Although Charlie’s death occurs in the liminal time between the referendum and the actual date of the Confederation, the family feels that it is “with Charlie’s passing that the old Newfoundland cease[s] to be” (202). In this moment, then, Charlie dies between states, a liminality that he shares with his son Arthur, who “saw himself as a man without a country” (176) after Confederation dashes Newfoundland’s hope of independence, and ultimately with Johnston himself.

The deathbed visions that Johnston attributes to Charlie during this moment of transformation add an additional layer of departure and displacement to the scene. As Charlie lies on the floor of the forge, he first falls into a “dwall,” described earlier in the memoir as “a slumberous sleep during which . . . he was always at least dimly aware of his surroundings and circumstances” (163). Charlie initially does sense his surroundings, feeling himself lying on the floor of the forge and trying to interpret figures in the mist, identified in an earlier account of his death as his wife Nan and his daughters (261). Yet as Charlie experiences a series of awakenings from the dwall, he travels deeper into the dream, as if the dream itself is a form of travel that transcends time and space. Even as “[t]he last blow of the hammer on the anvil still echoes back and forth between Hare’s Ears and the Gaze” (271), Charlie moves first to the forge window, then down to the beach, and finally across the sea to an otherworldly, perfectly preserved version of Avalon that Johnston conceptualizes as “a material place, the ability to travel the great distance to which was made possible by death” (20). Notably, Charlie’s journey is linked to experiences of exile and displacement by parallel imagery in the book. For Johnston,
Charlie’s journey across the sea to a mythic paradise is not qualitatively different from other Newfoundlanders’ journeys across the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Canada, requiring the same kind of imaginative faith. As a child, Johnston reflects that the crossing of the physical Gulf is beyond imagination: “This other crossing I was contemplating I could not imagine. The other side of this Gulf was remoter than the moon . . . Only on TV and in photographs had I ever seen the world alleged to exist beyond the shores of Newfoundland” (94). Experiencing death as just another form of displacement, then, Charlie settles into the otherworldly Avalon with a final memory of the place as he left it: “everything is as it was before he crossed the stream, before he crossed over into Avalon” (272).

While these final scenes of the memoir complete an elegiac and fitting narrative of dying for Charlie, their articulation of the simultaneity of displacement and geographic continuity also indirectly reflects on the memoir’s concerns with writing the past and with Johnston’s own role as an expatriate writer. Johnston’s imagery repeatedly suggests that the definite ruptures of death, exile, and displacement are the only experiences that allow—or demand—a fixed hold on the past. When Johnston’s father Arthur returns to Ferryland after Confederation and his father Charlie’s death, he experiences a profound sense of simultaneous displacement and stasis; he feels as though “[a]ll of Newfoundland had been resettled in his absence, its destiny as profoundly changed as if it had been floated on a raft across the Gulf” (252). The metaphor of displacement recalls the experiences of the “resettlers,” island dwellers who had been resettled on the Newfoundland “‘mainland’” in the 1960s. Although the metaphor is anachronistic in Arthur’s reflections, it evokes the profound and unhomely sense of displacement that the anti-confederates feel after Confederation; as Johnston describes the experience of resettlement earlier in the memoir, “[m]any people moved to places from which they could see their old homes a few miles of water away . . . [b]ut the sudden shift in perspective was too profound. They might as well have been marooned astronauts looking back at the moon from planet Earth” (214). Paradoxically, however, for Arthur this sudden shift in perspective also results in a crystallization of landscape. The forge, like an embodiment of Charlie himself, seems to have “achieved its final form” after his departure, and it also “seemed to my father, looking about, that all of Ferryland had
achieved its final form, been heated, hammered, doused in the tub, tempered in brine and hardened into fact that would endure like rock” (252). With Newfoundland’s change of state, Ferryland’s national history stops, interrupted but also preserved at an iconic moment. The memoir repeatedly emphasizes this preserving function of loss and distance, not only in Arthur’s reflections but in Johnston’s as well.16

Despite their differing approaches to the critical function of dreams, Johnston and Keefer each use dreams to depict an inheritance of hybridity and separation as itself a form of continuity. For both writers, the distance and displacement that frame the diasporic past are also necessary for its preservation in writing. The dream’s juxtaposition of idealized landscapes and historical realities thus mirrors the memoir’s structure, reflecting the affective influence of the past and the ambivalence surrounding creative engagements with it. Like the memoir itself, the dream mitigates an anxiety that the past will fade out of existence by offering a resurgent connection to the past; the dreamed past constitutes an “archetypal topography,” like the landmarks of Ferryland for Arthur, who “recited the[m], invoked them as if he still oriented himself in space and time by his relation to them” (17). At the same time, the liminal nature of the dreamed landscapes also reflects a distance that Johnston and Keefer acknowledge is at once necessary and risky in their writing of the past. Empathizing with his father’s sense of loss, Johnston reflects that only he might understand

[t]hat I have chosen the one profession that makes it impossible for me to live here. That I can only write about this place when I regard it from a distance. That my writing feeds off a homesickness that I need and that I hope is benign and will never go away, though I know there has to be a limit. (235-6)

While Johnston takes responsibility for his work’s nostalgia by acknowledging and embracing his distance from Newfoundland past and present, Keefer does so by questioning her distance and ultimately undertaking the journey to Ukraine that unsettles her illusions of the past. In doing so, she reflects on the possibility that the treasured ideal

16 Herb Wyile describes Johnston’s position as “a literal exile, his situation paralleling his father's metaphoric exile. That literal exile, though, is portrayed as a much more constructive and positive ambivalence” (“Historical” n.p.).
of her mother’s past may be lost in the process, wondering, “The Old Place I know by heart and carry in a fold of memory—what if I can only hold onto it by staying at the farthest possible remove? What will happen when the actual displaces what I have imagined?” (227). Her journey does indeed destabilize her nostalgic reflections, but her inclusion of both perceptions of the past allows her to both express and ironize the power of this distanced, affective relationship to the past. While the two memoirists address the experience of diasporic distance in different ways, each employs the powerful juxtapositions of dreams to express the tensions surrounding the representation of an originary past.

Pastoral Dreams, Diasporic Journeys: Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*

Although Keefer and Johnston’s memoirs ironize the ideal, suspended landscapes of dreams by juxtaposing them with an awareness of temporal distance and displacement, Johnston’s creative reliance on “homesickness” implies that the landscapes provisionally invoked by dreams also have important creative and recuperative functions. The pastoral mode offers a way to understand these dreamed spaces’ simultaneous functions of mourning and creativity. While critical pastoral provides an analogue for the dream’s double-edged ironies, other theorizations of the pastoral mode suggest that the spatial experience of dreaming may also be read as a temporary journey into another space. For instance, in *Pastoral Process: Spenser, Marvell, Milton* (1998), Susan Snyder distinguishes between a temporal, “Golden Age” mode of pastoral, which laments an idealized landscape existing only in the past, and a spatial or “Arcadian” mode. In contrast to the temporal mode’s emphasis on alienation and loss, the spatial mode involves a temporary sojourn in a “recreative pastoral space” that offers distance, reflective space, and alternative values that inform a return to a “temporarily distanced civilized life” (4). Like this regenerative pastoral function of “retreat and return” (Gifford 2), the dream’s temporary access to originary spaces offers a restorative reconnection with cultural and familial history and identity. Yet, as Snyder explains, the distinction between temporal and spatial pastoral “is one of inflection rather than exclusive categories” (3). Although she develops a tonal distinction between the two, suggesting that “[w]ith its stress on recreation and re-creation, spatial pastoral participates in the
comic; temporal pastoral, predicated on irrecoverable loss, moves toward the tragic‖ (3), re-creation and loss ultimately coexist in the diasporic memoir. The diasporic dream journey that evokes an ancestral scene renders the pastoral, in Snyder’s terms, both “back then” and “over there” (3). In this section, I outline the dream’s possibilities as a form of spatial pastoral and demonstrate how spatial and temporal elements are inseparable in Ondaatje’s Running in the Family. By opening his memoir with a dream of the Sri Lankan jungle and depicting his subsequent waking journey to Sri Lanka as dreamlike, Ondaatje uses the dream journey to explore the simultaneously regenerative and dangerous potential of recovering the past, dramatizing the risks of addressing political belonging and identity through the subjective lens of the dream and of personal writing.

The concept of a recreative pastoral space is a useful analogy for the dream space and the personal and cultural revelations that diasporic dreams provide. The dreamer’s sojourn in a dreamed space and return to waking life are structurally homologous to the pastoral dynamic of “retreat and return,” which Terry Gifford describes as the “fundamental pastoral movement” (2). Gifford argues that pastoral texts historically include this movement, whether internally, when a character in the text experiences a journey into and back from a pastoral space, or externally in the work’s address to a primarily urban audience. This “movement” provides a contrast to the urban life familiar to the character or reader, offering a reminder of an alternative value system that promises renewal and yet is elegiac in its inaccessibility. The dream’s parallels to the pastoral motif of revelatory retreat and return suggests that diasporic dreams might productively be seen as creatively accessing a cultural past, a function clearly illustrated in Goodison’s From Harvey River, in which pastoral dreams provide temporary regenerative experiences that inform both urban and transnational displacements.

The dream’s temporary retreat into a pastoral space associated with the cultural past has an important cachet in the diasporic context because of its parallels to journey metaphors and the diasporic return itself. In her seminal work on dreams in Shakespeare’s plays, Marjorie Garber argues that the device of dream inherently contains a movement of journey, return, and regeneration, “taking the dreamer momentarily out of time and leading him toward a moment of supernatural enlightenment, an accession of knowledge
which is frequently self-knowledge” (4). Similarly, both Brown and Kathryn Lynch discuss medieval dream visions in terms of pilgrimages that involve revelatory journeys through liminal space (Brown, “Borders” 46, Lynch 47).¹⁷ Gifford explicitly links this journeying structure of the dream with pastoral in a discussion of John Keats’s unfinished dream poem “The Fall of Hyperion,” arguing that the structural similarity between pastoral retreat and “the shamanic journey into the dream world” evokes an inherently social form of pastoral. If the dreamed journey is undertaken in a solitary trance, Gifford argues,

[t]o fail to return is . . . to have been self-indulgent and to have failed the tribe. Indeed, the whole purpose of negotiating the dream journey is to return, not with social solutions, but with strange stories that mysteriously have the power to heal. For Keats, as for Shakespeare, Blake and Ted Hughes, this is the purpose of art and it describes what happens when the pastoral is working at its most powerful and enigmatic. (94)

In Gifford’s obliquely psychoanalytic description of the dream journey, the dream functions like the pastoral retreat in providing access to revelatory “strange stories” that contribute to creative regeneration and, indirectly, to a social engagement with art.

Gifford’s discussion inadvertently underlines the ambivalences of the dream’s pastoral role in a diasporic context. His implicit binary between self-indulgence and socially-oriented, healing storytelling draws attention to the often conflicting, ambiguous demands of personal and social desires for a diasporic memoir and to the precarious balance between healing and appropriation. Indeed, the dream frame itself hints at solipsism and self-indulgence, and in some memoirs, such as Keefer’s Honey and Ashes, dreamed connections to diasporic origins are problematized through juxtaposition with historically grounded and often disillusioning diasporic journeys. In Ondaatje’s Running in the Family, in contrast, the dreamlike nature of Ondaatje’s actual journey to Sri Lanka, which parallels his opening dream of his father in a Ceylon jungle, itself conveys and dramatizes the tensions between a personal need for diasporic writing and its potential for

¹⁷ Lynch describes the dream vision as an “otherworldly journey” (46) that resembles a “rite of passage” (47). Drawing on Victor and Edith Turner’s work on pilgrimage as a liminal rite of passage, she proposes that “the function of liminal experience is not simply to reflect the paradigms that govern mainstream thought, but also to reflect on them—to reformulate them, as it were” (50).
solipsism and appropriation, partly by emphasizing the isolation and subjectivity of both dreaming and writing. The dreamlike qualities of the memoir have troubled critics because they forestall a recognition of the cultural heterogeneity and political turbulence of Sri Lanka; Arun Mukherjee critiques the ahistoricism of Ondaatje’s work, reading his “elliptical,” “paradisal” depictions of Sri Lanka through Raymond Williams’s conceptualization of the pastoral as an ideological mode that obscures class relations and labour (57). While other critics recognize the “solipsism” of Ondaatje’s portrait of Sri Lanka (Kanaganayakam 36), they also consider how Ondaatje’s formal choices constitute “a careful balancing act” (38) in his engagement with the desires and risks involved in representing the past. Graham Huggan convincingly argues that Ondaatje’s choices ultimately result in a critical balance between the healing and indulgent potential of memoir, suggesting that his memoir might be seen as a “recuperative elegy” (119) in which “Ondaatje negotiates this double bind by striking a delicate balance: between the recuperative mythologies of ethnic autobiography and the pseudonostalgic longings of exoticist travel memoir” (118). Ondaatje’s use of dreams and dream imagery to frame the memoir accentuates the memoir’s efforts to balance healing and loss, personal and political, and necessary and appropriative. The opening dream implies the psychological necessity of the journey as a revelatory encounter with the past, while the dreamlike quality of the actual journey reflects the subjectivity, solitude, and risk of appropriation that results from the writing project.

Offered as a justification for the journey it inspires, the opening dream in Running in the Family itself mimics a return journey into the tropical Ceylon of Mervyn Ondaatje’s past. While staying at a friend’s house, Ondaatje dreams of his father, “chaotic, surrounded by dogs . . . screaming and barking into the tropical landscape,” awakening to find that this dream landscape extends into waking experience: “I sat up on the uncomfortable sofa and

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18 Ondaatje’s memoir takes artistic liberties with both political and familial facts, evident in comparison with his brother Christopher Ondaatje’s later book, The Man-Eater of Punanai: A Journey of Discovery to the Jungles of Old Ceylon (1992). Man-Eater is more explicit about the political turmoil between Tamil and Sinhalese populations, and the more detailed context extends to clear, vivid colour plates that contrast with the blurry and uncaptioned pictures in Running in the Family. While Christopher Ondaatje’s book is still solipsistic in his determination to retrace a personal journey despite the dangerous political climate, he signals the absurdities of this contrast less subtly than Michael Ondaatje does in Running.
I was in a jungle, hot, sweating” (21). Although Ondaatje implies that the tropical dream is inspired by a contrast with the Canadian winter, the artificially tropical decor of his friend’s home, with its “hanging vines and ferns . . . A fish tank glow[ing] in the corner” (21), implies that the dream’s mental journey occurs in more gradual, liminal steps. The foreign, humid space of his friend’s home mediates between the wintry outdoors and the jungle dream, facilitating both his entry and his awakening from the dream. Ondaatje’s return to consciousness of his Canadian context takes place in a series of steps; his sense that “I was [still] in a jungle” captures the psychological residue and the embodied effect of the dream. Sitting on his friend’s sofa, Ondaatje waits for hours “as the heat gradually left me, as the sweat evaporated and I became conscious again of brittle air outside the windows” (21). Ondaatje’s dreamed encounter with his father, an epiphanic and elusive moment that inspires his journey back to Sri Lanka, thus itself mimics the journey there and back again—and the enigmatic nature of the revelations that result.

This opening episode’s clear allusion to Henri Rousseau’s painting “The Dream” (1912), in which a nude woman reclines on a red sofa, surrounded by a jungle scene, reinforces the implicit structuring of this opening dream as itself a journey. Ondaatje’s interest in Rousseau’s art is evident in his early poetry, and he specifically references “The Dream” in several poems. Like Ondaatje’s own dream, the painting represents a dream as an involuntary journey that connects two worlds. Rousseau responded to critics’ questions about why a sofa was represented in the painting’s jungle scene by explaining that “[t]he woman sleeping on the sofa dreams that she is transported into the forest, hearing the music of the snake charmer’s instrument. This explains why the sofa is in the picture” (qtd. Scobie 46). Ondaatje’s opening allusion to Rousseau’s painting captures not only

19 “Burning Hills” and “The Vault” (Rat Jelly 56, 66). Ondaatje also refers to Rousseau more generally in “Henri Rousseau and Friends” (Trick 10) and “To Monsieur le Maire” (Rat Jelly 40). This opening scene, detailing Ondaatje’s journey out of his jungle dream while on a sofa, is so reminiscent of the painting that Stephen Scobie describes the image this way: “After the manner of Alfred Hitchcock, who in his later films put in his famous ‘personal appearance’ as early as possible so that audiences could stop waiting for it . . . Ondaatje inserts the Rousseau reference on the first full page of Running in the Family” (43).
20 Scobie describes the effect as “the coexistence, amounting to interpenetration, of a domestic scene and a jungle” (47). Winfried Siemerling builds on the same idea, reflecting that “[t]he unmediated juxtaposition of two worlds that touch briefly between dreaming and waking invites the imagination to travel the space in between, and thus create a text as the spatial and temporal extension of a brief moment’ (144).
the resulting sense of the dream as journey, but also the duality of the dream’s psychological and political functioning. Ondaatje’s dream of his father implicitly introduces a psychological imperative to seek out his father’s past, rendering Ondaatje, like the dreaming woman, an object that is “transported” by an external drawing force. At the same time, the allusion to Rousseau also hints at Ondaatje’s awareness of the problematic, exoticist, and colonial implications of this psychological impulse, since the painting represents a colonial perspective of a landscape that Rousseau had never actually seen.

A similar duality is present in the image of the jungle that the dream invokes. In Ondaatje’s poetry, the jungle often evokes the unconscious, the chaotic desires and impulses that underlay everyday life (see Ondaatje, Rat Jelly; Matthews 362), and yet the jungle he sees here is also the specific socio-political site of his father’s past. The opening dream thus self-reflexively overlays physical and political spaces with a sense of unconscious and subjective loss and desire, and this subjective approach to landscape continues in Ondaatje’s depictions of his actual journey to Sri Lanka as dreamlike. As Garber suggests, dream journeys can provide a metaphorical analogy for the experience of an actual journey: “The pattern of the journey, so consistently related to the borderland of dream and the dream figure, is a larger structural form in which the same transformation occurs; the individual dream is transmuted by means of metaphor into an enduring dream state, the subjective condition of man in the world of dream” (4). By opening his memoir with the account of the dream that “began it all,” Ondaatje introduces such a structural metaphor for the “subjective condition” that informs his travel, experience, and writing of his journey.

The memoir’s parallel between the dreamed journey and the real-life return to Sri Lanka that ensues, actually a pair of journeys that Ondaatje weaves into one story of return (205), is strengthened by the fact that he repeatedly describes his experiences in Asia in terms of sleep, dream, and the related image of drunkenness. Both the dream and drunkenness, which links Ondaatje to his alcoholic father, represent states of mind that are simultaneously revelatory and solitary; they also represent experiences of limited agency and dampened inhibitions, and thus play similar roles in providing a personal,
psychological imperative for the journey. Directly after relating the opening dream, Ondaatje moves seamlessly to the other dimension of unconscious revelation: “Once a friend had told me that it was only when I was drunk that I seemed to know exactly what I wanted. And so . . . in the midst of the farewell party in my growing wildness . . . I knew I was already running” (22). With the dream and drunkenness each compelling his journey to Sri Lanka, Ondaatje also imagines his actual trip as a revelatory journey into sleep and into the past: “Asia. The name was a gasp from a dying mouth . . . The vowels took over, slept on the map with the S. I was running to Asia and everything would change” (22). This depiction of the journey as sleepy, temporally slowed, and inevitably revelatory continues throughout the memoir in metanarrational sections in which Ondaatje reflects on his experiences in Sri Lanka. Trying to capture his sense of the exuberant landscape, he writes in the section “Monsoon Notebook (i)”: 

I witnessed everything. One morning I would wake and just smell things for the whole day, it was so rich I had to select sense. And still everything moved slowly with the assured fateful speed of a coconut falling on someone’s head, like the Jaffna train, like the fan at low speed, like the necessary sleep in the afternoon with dreams blinded by toddy. (71)

Ondaatje’s narration of the experience as slow, fateful, and comparable to sleep and the influence of alcohol reinforces the parallel between dream and journey. Further, this passage reinforces the sense that there is an inevitable, but unknown plot to Ondaatje’s journey, with dreams “blinded” to their own significance—an image reminiscent of Keefer’s inadvertently covered eyes in her dream of practicing the piano. In each work, the image of dreaming thus conveys a sense of externalized agency and fatalism that gestures to the overwhelming agency of history but also hints at an implicit justification for the appropriations enabled by the romanticized journey into the past.

Both the initial dream and Ondaatje’s dreamlike journey centre around a particular rural landscape, the jungle of colonial Ceylon, but the framing of this landscape with dream imagery emphasizes the inseparability of pastoral notions of “back then” and “over there”

21 The dual importance of both states of mind is also reflected in his repeated diction; if “[w]hat began it all” is the elusive dream journey, he also declares that “[i]t began with that moment” at the farewell party.
in the diasporic context. Ondaatje conceives of his journey to Sri Lanka as “travelling back” not only to the place of his childhood but into its past, “the family I had grown from” (22). As Saul observes, “Ondaatje purposefully refers to Sri Lanka by its former name, Ceylon, throughout the text as a way of drawing attention to the specific historical time that his text recalls . . . a place preserved in the memories of his sources” (41). The colonial spaces of Ceylon’s jungles are central to the past that he seeks to rediscover and record, especially the many tall tales, rumours and stories about his father’s generation of colonial Burghers. While the jungle is representative of the generation that Ondaatje hopes to capture in the memoir, he also depicts it as a transformational, hybrid space separate from the urban world and its concerns. He imagines his father describing it as “[a] mid-summer dream. All of them had moved at times with an ass’s head, Titania Dorothy Hilden Lysander de Saram, a mongrel collection part Sinhalese part Dutch part Tamil part ass moving slowly in the forests with foolish and serious obsessions” (189). The carnivalesque space of confusion, transformation, and renewal offered by the forest is replicated in some of the tales that Ondaatje records, including those involving his father’s antics on the Ceylon Railways. His opening dream recalls one of these stories, in which his father runs off into the jungle and captures several stray dogs, while another story—his father’s hijacking of a train while British officers slept on board—also links the jungle with the wild, disorderly spaces beyond sleep: “They slept on serenely with their rage for order in the tropics, while the train shunted and reversed into the night and there was chaos and hilarity in the parentheses about them” (154). By reversing the usual association of sleep with extra-rational behaviour and waking with order, instead displacing sleep’s disorderliness into the jungle’s “parentheses,” this passage further underscores the representation of the jungle and the “tropics” themselves as a kind of waking dream.

While Mervyn Ondaatje’s allusion to A Midsummer Night’s Dream locates a possibility of comic renewal in the transformative spaces of the forest, the context of the allusion, in a section in which Ondaatje imagines his father remembering his own past and grieving his failing marriage, also heavily reinforces the sense of tragic loss surrounding these spaces. As Mervyn looks for a book he has put down, his reflections suggest that if it is possible to journey back into the forests of the past, it is only with pain: “It was not
Shakespeare, not those plays of love he wept over too easily. With dark-blue bindings. You creaked them open and stepped into a roomful of sorrow. A midsummer dream” (189). In Ondaatje’s imaginative reconstruction of his father’s later life, the journey into the past offers nothing of relevance for the tragedy of the present, nor to the Sri Lankan context. Sitting in a bare room with his bottle, Mervyn Ondaatje rejects the possibility of renewal through the past or through the natural world: “No, he looked around the bare room, don’t talk to me about Shakespeare, about ‘green hats’ . . . No sweeper for weeks. And nature advanced . . . If you stood still you were invaded” (189). Mervyn’s use of the expression “don’t talk to me about Shakespeare” is a clear allusion to a political poem by Lakdasa Wikramasinha included earlier in the memoir, which begins, “[d]on’t talk to me about Matisse” (86). The parallel with this poem’s rejection of Western artistic models for the extreme violence of Sri Lanka’s civil wars implies that Shakespearean intertexts are also inapplicable to Ceylonese nature as well as, perhaps, Mervyn’s life. In the scene, then, Ondaatje imagines his father’s resistance of stasis and reflection as destructive rather than transformative.

The inextricability of revelation and loss in the jungle spaces of Ondaatje’s dream and journey problematizes Snyder’s distinction between the comic and tragic “inflections” of pastoral and underscores the complexity of Ondaatje’s engagement with the past. Ondaatje’s portrait of his father, whose funeral he describes as a “tragi-comedy sort of business” (197), suggests a recognition of the inevitable simultaneity of loss and creativity, of healing storytelling and risky appropriation. Thinking about his father’s life and alcoholism, Ondaatje muses, “I keep thinking of the lines from Goethe . . . ‘Oh, who will heal the sufferings / Of the man whose balm turned poison?’” (198). Although the lines refer to his father’s alcoholism, Ondaatje’s depiction of the “range” in his father’s emotional life is also resonant for his memoir, with its tensions between the healing properties of his rediscovery and writing of the past and the potentially poisonous personal and political repercussions of this writing process. While his opening dream

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22 Ondaatje’s awareness of the appropriative and “poisonous” potential of writing is famously captured in his earlier poem “Spider Blues,” in which he compares the poet to a murderous spider: “And the spider in his loathing / crucifies his victims in his spit / making them the art he cannot be” (Rat Jelly 64).
introduces a psychological imperative to discover his father’s history, the details he uncovers are not necessarily healing. For instance, the episode from his father’s life that inspires the dream, related in the section “The Bone” (181), remains an enigmatic story that Ondaatje “cannot come to terms with” (181), and its narration follows a section in which Ondaatje compares himself to King Lear’s Edgar, “[w]ho if I look deeper into the metaphor, torments his father over an imaginary cliff” (179). Similarly, Ondaatje’s journey to Sri Lanka, described in one anecdote as a “paradise, [that] had a darker side” with “at least fifty-five species of poison easily available” (81), ends with a recognition of the problematic qualities of the journey.

As I argued in the last section, dream imagery serves a distancing function that articulates several layers of ambivalence. While the parallel between dream and journey depicts the journey as an experience of fateful recovery that is at once comic and tragic, necessary and mournful, the frequent use of dream imagery also emphasizes the subjectivity and solitude of the writing project, an implicitly self-critical stance that also highlights the potential for quietism and appropriation in the memoir’s depictions of the landscape as sleepy and temporally suspended. The solitude of both the act of dreaming and the desire to write are implicitly linked throughout the narrative. Ondaatje dramatizes the solitude of the dream’s personal revelations when, in one of his descriptions of his time in Sri Lanka, he dismisses a dream narrative related by one of his children: “After twenty minutes . . . we are exhausted, feel drunk. One of my children talking about some dream she had before leaving Canada” (72). The comment implies that the dream’s search for the past is, like the writing of memoir as he describes it, “[a] perverse and solitary desire” (22). The metanarrational accounts of writing included in the memoir always emphasize solitude, and like the parenthetical chaos of the forest, they take place while others are sleeping. In the governor’s house, he writes “in the noisy solitude of the afternoon while the rest of the house is asleep” (25), while in “Monsoon Notebook (iii),” he writes at midnight, when “this hand is the only thing moving” (190). Like the forest space, these moments of writing are akin to waking dreams, transcending a “rage for order” to embrace the involuntary and unconscious. Ondaatje depends on this self-distancing, the automation of his hand, to find meaning through writing; as he instructs, “Watch the hand move. Waiting for it to say something, to stumble casually on perception, the shape of an
unknown thing” (190). As in the opening dream experience, in which Ondaatje finds upon waking that he “had been weeping and my shoulders and face were exhausted” (21), Ondaatje relies on his body to reveal the affects of the unconscious. Ondaatje thus emphasizes the power of alterity in his writing process, as Keefer and Johnston do, but his emphasis on psychic alterity rather than a sense of historical determinism draws attention to the problematic implications of this subjective, isolated approach to an account of a social past and populated landscape.

Ondaatje’s affective and solitary approach to dreaming, writing, and even experiencing catalyzes the memoir’s acknowledgments of the potential solipsism, exoticism, and quietism involved in its implicitly subjective approach to the past and to landscape. In one of the most dreamlike, romanticized scenes of the memoir, Ondaatje and eight companions bathe in a sudden rainstorm while staying in a retreat in the Wilpattu jungle. Although the exoticism of the site is punctured early on, with the ironically corrected depiction of “fresh ‘elephant droppings’ around the place, which turn out to be buffalo shit” (140), the nine companions experience the place as if they are each in a solitary dream: “We are slightly drunk with this place . . . All of us are in our solitude. Not really concerned about the others, just revelling in a private pleasure. It is like communal sleep” (141). The dream is interrupted by a wild boar, however, who takes the place of an idealized other and whose gaze “mak[es] us aware of each other” (141). Although this presence of otherness punctures the scene’s sleepy solipsism, the ensuing reflections on the scene dramatize the tensions of this encounter with otherness rather than overtly performing a critique. Ondaatje’s initial, romanticized description of the boar, which alternates between empathy and fear, is followed by a more ironic vision. Having lost his soap at the end of their time in Wilpattu, Ondaatje responds to the boar now with irritation: “The wild pig has taken it. My wild pig. That repulsively exotic creature . . . This thing has walked off with my bar of Pears Transparent Soap?” (143). Ondaatje’s envisioning of the boar using the soap “in a foul parody of us” (143), a colonial image of subversion, is both implicitly ironic and risky. By including his sentiments of irritation and his dependence on his “aristocratic” soap (143), Ondaatje dramatizes and accepts the risks of writing another space.
If Ondaatje’s use of dream imagery draws attention to the solitude, subjectivity and privilege of his journey back, while not always explicitly making use of this distance for critical reflection, the memoir does ultimately acknowledge the risks inherent in his desire to portray the past as sleepy and synchronic and to imagine that a past time can be captured by returning in the present. If he desires to maintain the landscape in an imaginative synchrony to facilitate his search for meaning in his father’s life, such as the “sleepy green landscape” of his parents’ marriage that is “almost unchanged” in forty years (165), by the end of the memoir he recognizes that this desire is personally untenable as well as politically problematic. The surreal nature of the fantasy of retaining the social past in the present is evident when Ondaatje visits his father’s former friend John Kotelawala, whose massive estate retains the trappings of colonial power and control: “It is a Victorian dream” (157), Ondaatje remarks. The dream exists in the blurring of times, as if they can all exist at once, for at the estate “[t]he dream-like setting is now made more surreal by Sinhalese actors wearing thick velvet costumes, pointed hats, and chain mail” (159). The dream-like synchrony and slowness of Kotelawala’s estate and of Ondaatje’s Ceylon replicate what Johannes Fabian, in his landmark analysis of anthropological discourse, *Time and the Other* (1983), describes as “allochronism”: “not mistakes, but devices (existential, rhetoric, political)” (32) that distance observed societies from those of the observer by rhetorically placing them within a different time frame. Fabian argues that the common attribution of timelessness to another society depends on a depiction of that society as unchanging, which, by removing any notion of sequential time or causality, seems to render the events that take place within it as essentially contemporaneous (18, 99), and that society, as a result, as not contemporary or “coeval” with the observing society.

Although Ondaatje’s dreamlike journey into Sri Lanka’s “past” depends on this kind of synchronicity, as does storytelling itself—Ondaatje describes his family’s repetitive oral storytelling as “th[e] way history is organized” (26)—the book’s final section acknowledges that this synchrony contains both the desire for connection and a dangerous illusion. Significantly, the section is called “Last Morning”; it records the scene just before day begins and before Ondaatje departs from Sri Lanka, an important parallel given the imagery that links sleep and dream with his journey. As he looks out
his window on this final morning, Ondaatje acknowledges that “[w]hen I turn on the light, the bulb on the long three-foot cord will sway to the electrical breeze . . . But I do not turn on the light yet. I want this emptiness of a dark room where I listen and wait. There is nothing in this view that could not be a hundred years old” (203). The imagined synchrony connects him with his parents, with his sister who has remained in Sri Lanka, and with his own childhood self. While Ondaatje’s ending to the memoir is poignant, however, it is also ambivalent. As a cassette begins to play in the next room, separating him implicitly from his past—the cassette, at the time of the memoir’s publication, a marker of modern technology—he ends with the reflection, “[h]ere where some ants as small as microdots bite and feel themselves being lifted by the swelling five times as large as their bodies. Rising on their own poison” (203). For Ondaatje, the recovery of the past allowed by the dream and the diasporic journey is simultaneously a balm and a poison, at once comic and tragic, personally indulgent and politically problematic. By framing his memoir in terms of a pastoral dream journey, Ondaatje dramatizes these inherent tensions in the diasporic memoir.

Dreaming New Nationalisms

The previous sections emphasize the pastoral dream’s ironic and implicitly reflexive framing of a familial past, suggesting that dreams offer provisional spaces in which the desire to reclaim diasporic origins can be circumscribed, negotiated, and ironically juxtaposed with the realities of displacement and detachment. I have compared these dreams to the diasporic memoir itself, which records a located familial past—and often a journey to seek the remnants of that past—within a metanarrative framework that testifies to the writer’s ambivalent relationship to the originary space. These spaces thus articulate the power of the diasporic imagination and a recognition of the problematic implications of identification with ostensibly authentic national or colonial sites. Given the narratives’ interest in the politicized landscapes of the past, however, the peripherality of Canada in these memoirs is intriguing. In Ondaatje’s memoir, for instance, the pastoral journey ends just before the moment of his return to Canada; the focus remains on the gap between colonial Ceylon and independent Sri Lanka. Canada is cast as the space that facilitates dreaming, drinking, writing, and remembering, but the relationship of the dream to the
Canadian landscape is not explicit, except in the sense that the “brittle air” of Canada, in revealing its difference from Sri Lanka, inspires the return (21). Indeed, it is also interesting to note the contrast between Ondaatje’s dreams in Canada and Sri Lanka. While the Canadian dream evokes the distant past of his father, a dream he has early in his time in Sri Lanka—the dream in which his family pyramid transverses the wall of the old governor’s house in Jaffna where he is staying—is more performative and recursive, presented in the present rather than the past tense: “That night, I will have not so much a dream as an image that repeats itself” (27). Ondaatje’s repeated movement through the walls of the colonial house in this experience that is “not so much a dream as an image”—implying, perhaps, that its space is not felt as completely separate in the same sense as the jungle dream—raises questions about the relationship of dreams to the diasporic present. If dreams allow a liminal crossing of borders, which borders are crossed? If Bhabha argues that the “‘in-between’ space” emerges in the conflict between the mythological past and the performative present of a nation, how does this liminal space change when the mythological past is that of a different nation?

I address these questions by returning to Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes*, a work that reflects on the implications of the liminal relationships between and within present and past nations that dreams so evocatively represent. Keefer’s work presents a tonal contrast to Ondaatje’s and Johnston’s memoirs in the sense that her diasporic journey confronts the continuing existence of a Ukrainian nation. *Running in the Family* and *Baltimore’s Mansion* might be thought of as elegiac memoirs in the sense that both negotiate relationships to political communities that no longer exist: colonial Ceylon and pre-Confederation Newfoundland. Perhaps, like the elegiac dreams I discuss in the last chapter, these dreams point toward a waking present built on loss, but such a reading implies that this present—Canada—must be defined negatively by the fact that it is not the community that has been lost. In contrast, *Honey and Ashes* engages with the gaps and continuities between the histories and the presents of the contemporary nations of

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23 S. Leigh Matthews argues that Ondaatje’s entire memoir is a performative work “that is ritual in nature—a reiterative therapeutic act” concerned with “reintegrating self and social context through performance” (352).
Canada and Ukraine, each with their own complexities. Rather than disentangling herself from the concept of nationhood, which, like the pastoral mode, has conservative associations, Keefer emphasizes the continuing meaningfulness of nationalism and emplacement, insisting on the importance of borders while positing new understandings of national identity through creative, liminal, and dreamlike crossings and re-crossings of such borders. For Keefer, the dreamed sites of the past do impinge on the present to produce “a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities” (Bhabha, Location 5), in which she recognizes the productive discontinuities that shape the relationships between and within nations.

Keefer’s interest in the intersection between past and present is evident in her closing reflections on the painted Easter egg which, like her dream of the lyokh, represents both the pastoral and historical elements of her family history. In the passage, she insists that revisiting the past within the context of a political present, including the nationalist struggles of Ukraine, is crucial for its creative and critical engagement in the present. She compares the egg to the Chinese tradition in which a buried egg becomes a delicacy:

If I were to bury that egg painted with the house in which my mother was born, I would never want to dig it up again. I would want something new to grow from it, something marked by the past, but shaped by the pressures, the possibilities of the present. For without these borders of the only home I know—a home that is open, conflicted, uncertain—no departures can occur at all. (329)

Keefer’s emphasis on the necessity and yet the “open[ness]” of borders recalls her concern throughout the memoir with various kinds of separation, including the “border between story and history” that the dream of the lyokh allows her to cross. In place of her childhood desire to have a singular identity, one of Keefer’s central discoveries in the memoir is of the inevitable multiplicity of immigrant identities; shortly before the conclusion of the memoir, she observes that the lines on the old glass of a family cabinet “seem to divide my reflection, making it shift and blur, as if it were crossing border after border” (327). While this discussion of border-crossing reflects Keefer’s awareness of discontinuities in her personal identity, it also resonates with her conceptualization of Ukrainian-Canadian identity as a “nationally-inflected hyphenation” in which distinct forms of national identification productively intersect (“Ghost-National” 198).
In her writings on Ukrainian-Canadian culture, Keefer repeatedly emphasizes the “new” possibilities that stem from interaction between Ukrainian-Canadians and contemporary Ukrainians, an emphasis evident in the title of an anthology she published in the same year as her memoir: *Two Lands, New Visions: Stories from Canada and Ukraine* (1998). Keefer’s insistence on both the connection and the borders between the two identities is clear in her theorization of the concept of “hyphenation,” which posits that “the hyphen in ‘Ukrainian-Canadian’ links us to today’s and tomorrow’s Ukraine as well. . . . We Ukrainian-Canadians are hyphenated, not hybrids” (*Dark Ghost* 22). For Keefer, the maintenance of borders is crucial for truly understanding the vexed relationship between a contemporary nation and its diaspora. Explaining her interest in “an evolving dialectic to replace the fossilized dichotomy between old world and new, tradition and history, past and future” (50), Keefer explores these possibilities in a 2005 lecture series, published as *Dark Ghost in the Corner: Imagining Ukrainian-Canadian Identity* and reworked in the essay “Images of a Ghost-National Society: Pumpkins, Orange Tents, and Chornobyl Coiffure” (2009). In the latter, Keefer suggests that ideas of nationalism remain important for Ukraine and its diaspora because of Ukraine’s lengthy struggle for national recognition. She argues that the struggle has impacted the way in which Ukrainian-Canadians understand their ethnic identity, noting that Ukrainian-Canadian visual art depicts ethnicity differently when the Ukraine is conceived as an ongoing, contemporary nation rather than a vanished past. Focusing her contrast on two artists, she notes that “[u]p till 1991, such Ukrainians of the Diaspora as William Kurelek . . . persisted in registering the ghost of that country loud and clear; post-independence . . . Natalka Husar has represented her uncomfortable awareness of how the ghosts of the past inhabit the present and shape the future” (194).24 These observations about the relevance of the ongoing nation help to clarify the differences between a text like Keefer’s, which

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24 Lindy Ledohowski similarly traces an evolution in depictions of ethnicity and nationalism in Ukrainian-Canadian literature. She argues that in early Ukrainian-Canadian literature, ethnicity is represented as an undifferentiated attribute of an underclass, whereas later literature—especially that written after 1980—reflects more specifically Ukrainian elements and “a specific kind of ethnicity focusing on the nation” (107). While Keefer suggests that this shift reflects a renewed awareness of Ukraine’s existence as a nation, Ledohowski attributes the change to the impact of Canadian policies of multiculturalism (107).
emphasizes contemporary connections, and those of Johnston and Ondaatje, who like Kurelek are invested in capturing “the ghost of that [former] country.”

In *Honey and Ashes*, Keefer exhibits a present-focused awareness similar to the awareness she locates in Husar’s work, interspersing ekphrastic descriptions of Husar’s paintings among her own anxious reflections about her impending diasporic journey to the Ukraine. In Husar’s work, Keefer sees a “crazy mirror” (229) of her own concerns about reconnecting with a country whose hardships have transformed it unrecognizably from the place it was in her mother’s childhood. Like Keefer’s memoir, Husar’s art chronicles a return to Ukraine in search of her mother’s home, “which she found still standing, ‘romantic, with big fat peaches against the blue-washed walls’” (228). Yet in Husar’s attempt to paint this nostalgic image, a painting called *Pandora’s Parcel to Ukraine*, the image of the house is juxtaposed with and nearly obliterated by grotesquely combined images of contemporary Ukraine and the proliferating parcels that have linked families in the distinct worlds of Ukraine and Canada (228). For Keefer, the simultaneous disappearance and maintenance of borders in Husar’s juxtaposed images constitute a crucial function of art that takes account of the present. In her lecture series, Keefer describes this juxtaposition in terms of dream-work: “the line between image and reality disappears exactly as it does in dreams where, as Freud has shown us, the most unlikely objects—objects that reason insists on keeping in separate compartments—join forces in the process called ‘condensation’” (*Dark Ghost* 43).25 Keefer insists on maintaining the compartmentalization of nations partly because the distinction recognizes real cultural and historical differences that allow this border-crossing creativity of condensation to ensue. Like Husar’s artworks, Keefer’s dream of the lyokh connects, juxtaposes, and condenses the nostalgic, past-focused and historical, present-focused halves of her memoir. Though inevitably marked by personal desire, this juxtaposition creates something “new” while also allowing an expression and exploration of the “fossilized dichotomy” between her Old Place and its new reincarnation as a part of contemporary Ukraine.

25 The ability of visual art to capture these provocative spatial juxtapositions may explain the prominence of artistic intertexts in both Ondaatje’s and Keefer’s memoirs.
While Keefer’s later work focuses on the relationships between distinct nations, Bhabha uses similar metaphors of dreaming to describe the creative potential of hybridity within nations. He argues that recognizing the differences and discontinuities internal to cultural and national identities is important because the resulting hybridity creates innovative “newness” out of its composite elements, creating the opportunity to “redescribe our cultural contemporaneity” (Location 7). In a discussion of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, Bhabha uses the metaphor of dream, in the wishful sense, to explain the potential of the concept of hybridity; he declares, “If hybridity is heresy, then to blaspheme is to dream. To dream not of the past or present, nor the continuous present; it is not the nostalgic dream of tradition, nor the Utopian dream of modern progress; it is the dream of translation as ‘survival’. . . the act of living on borderlines” (226). Extending his analysis to discuss the properties of this dream of cultural translation, he explains, “Rushdie translates this [borderline living] into the migrant’s dream of survival: an initiatory interstices; an empowering condition of hybridity; an emergence that turns ‘return’ into reinscription or redescription; an iteration that is not belated, but ironic and insurgent . . . The focus is on making the linkages through the unstable elements of literature and life” (227). Like this abstract function of hybridity, the literal dream’s embedding of images of the past within the experience of the present creates an ironic, interstitial and unstable space that re-shapes the meaning and “linkages” of past and present.

Within the Canadian context, both the nostalgic dreams of former countries and dreams that underscore the ongoing relationships between nations might be thought of as liminal spaces that also redescribe the Canadian present in which they coexist. If, as Bhabha suggests, narrating the nation involves a constant tension between the mythic past and the performative present, then the Canada that these works implicitly depict—and whose cultural present they produce through their publication—is one in which the national present is informed by a multiplicity of individual dreams of different homogeneous pasts.

26 Imagining such spaces as sites “of intervention in the here and now” (7), Bhabha argues that the resulting “borderline work of culture . . . does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of living. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living” (7).
that exist alongside but not necessarily in dialogue with each other. As intervening spaces that re-frame the past through the simultaneously ironic, nostalgic and creative lenses of the present, dreams—and the memoirs that employ them—enact performative negotiations of belonging that articulate hybridity and multiplicity within the individual pasts that they narrate, but only in the circulation of these texts do these narratives actually begin to “redescribe” the contemporaneity of Canadian dreams. In “‘Coming Across Bones’: Historiographic Ethnofiction” (1995), Keefer reflects on how writing can effect this communication and connection between “particularized, differentiated, historically situated sel[ves] . . . situated in the present” (99). She notes that although her journey to Staromischyna catalyzed her acceptance of her Ukrainian identity, this acceptance occurs “also because of where I was headed: back home, to a Canada that defined itself as multicultural, a haven for hyphens, and yet that in so many ways was falling into the rhetoric and practice of separatism rather than connection” (98). By foregrounding her return to Canada and the constitution of Canadian space, Keefer illustrates the significance of return from both the pastoral journey and the dream. Her discussion also implicitly suggests the roles that memoirs, like dreams of the past, might play as a medium for resurgent, coexisting, negotiations of a situated past and present that that remind readers of the inevitable tensions between personal and public histories, nostalgia and critique, and alienation and creativity.
Chapter Four
Dreaming Through the Body: Family, Authority, Affiliation

In the previous chapters, I examined how the multiplicity of dreams—their roles as narrative events, their mediation of voices, and their idealized and politicized landscapes—offers memoir writers a usefully ambivalent approach to mortality and mourning as well as to questions of inheritance and futurity, belonging and identification. Each chapter thus far has addressed some form of authority, whether the authority to write about the other, the authority to recover and represent the other’s voice, or the authority to assert and claim cultural identification with a particular geographical space. In this final chapter, I explore how memoirs’ accounts of dreams, visions, and hauntings also overtly and inconclusively negotiate different discourses of authority, faith, and embodiment, as they search for appropriate ways in which to reconcile individual and collective forms of subjectivity. I begin this investigation, perhaps paradoxically, by examining the tendency of the dreams in memoir to stage encounters with parents or grandparents much more prominently than encounters with other deceased family members. To some extent, this emphasis reflects the fact that parental deaths are among the most common Western forms of bereavement at the turn of the twenty-first century, as well as an important source of generational identity. As Nancy K. Miller points out, “memoirs are documents about building an identity . . . and a crucial piece of that development takes place in the family” (Bequest xi). However, the emphasis on parents in dreams is still notably present in texts in which other losses frame the narratives. For instance, Rudy Wiebe’s memoir of his childhood in northern Saskatchewan, Of This Earth: A Mennonite Boyhood in the Boreal Forest (2006), repeatedly returns to a formative loss that shapes that time period—the death of his older sister Helen—but a prominent dream in the final section of the memoir features Wiebe’s parents rather than his sister.

Examining Wiebe’s memoir alongside Sharon Butala’s The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature (1994) and Wayson Choy’s second memoir, Not Yet: A Memoir of Living and Almost Dying (2009), I argue that the dream’s invocation of parental relationships and parental authority provides a catalyst for memoirists’
negotiations between the authority of received cultural and spiritual discourses and their own experiential and embodied perspectives, which seem to offer forms of empirical and affective understanding that undermine and challenge received discourses. The uncanny role of the body during dreams and hallucinations inspires the writers to reconsider their understandings of subjectivity, individuality, and affiliation. In these three very different texts, questions of authority and epistemology centre around issues of embodiment, and all three writers search for forms of affiliation beyond the family that more clearly accord with their subjective corporeal experiences. While I demonstrate that each writer’s depictions of their dreams tend to focus either on the unconscious autonomy or on the conscious intentionality of the physical body, each approach illustrates the tensions between individual subjectivity and collective experience which, though a feature in all autobiographical writing, particularly come to the fore in the relational memoir. The works I look at in this chapter are less obviously relational than the memoirs I have examined in previous chapters in that they do not contain explicitly biographical sections. However, they are relational in the sense that they centrally consider the influence of social and material environments and attempt to develop each writer’s affiliations with the broader social world. This chapter thus concludes my consideration of how the prominent dreams in recent memoirs convey some of the central ambivalences and contradictions of the relational memoir.

The centrality of parental relationships in both personal and family memoirs often foregrounds the memoir writers’ attempts to differentiate their own identities, values, and beliefs from those of their parents. Even in memoirs that are primarily biographical accounts of a parent’s life, the memoir writer’s own reflections nearly always conclude the narrative. In this sense, the memoir as a whole often depicts an ongoing negotiation between different claims to authority—not only to authority over the story, but also the authority to choose, delineate, or reclaim the cultural and epistemological discourses by which to interpret and depict lived experience and subjectivity. Contemporary life writing criticism, especially in its feminist iterations, has insisted on the authority of individual lived experience in the face of historical discourses of subjectivity that have not matched
the actual embodied experiences of women.\textsuperscript{1} As Jan Campbell describes them, memoirs that emphasize the central role of the body in personal experience operate as spaces “where personal narratives arising from an autobiographical space dislodge and disrupt more central discourses of knowledge and interpretation” (56).\textsuperscript{2} While many autobiography scholars have emphasized the significance of this dynamic in women’s writing, the conflict between empirical embodied experience and “central” received discourses characterizes both men’s and women’s memoirs that seek to articulate personal experiences, particularly when that articulation involves a bildungsroman form or a more general discovery of personal values. Mikhail Bakhtin posits that “an individual’s becoming, an ideological process, is [frequently] characterized precisely by a sharp gap” between an “internally persuasive” discourse and an “authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.)” (342).

While the experience of one’s own body may contradict the “authoritative word,” it also takes on its own authority for the individual because it is empirically verifiable. The intersection of different discursive possibilities comes into particular tension in relational memoirs, wherein memoirists often attempt to do justice to multiple perspectives while also asserting the primacy of their own experience. Yet both the family memoir and the individual memoir seem designed to stage this clash of authorities, and these genres frequently position the family as a starting point for a more general negotiation of personal and cultural values.

Dreams often become a focal point for the memoir genre’s emphasis on intergenerational relationships and for its negotiation of different models of authority and belief, for several reasons. One is that the legacy of psychoanalysis has engendered an association between dreams and parent-child dynamics, which retains its resonance even when writers ignore or reject psychoanalysis as an interpretive discourse. Another reason is simply that

\textsuperscript{1} This chapter draws in particular on Sidonie Smith’s \textit{Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body}; see also Smith and Julia Watson’s collections, such as \textit{Interfaces}. In a Canadian context, see Shirley Neuman’s “Your Past . . . Your Future: Autobiography and Mother’s Bodies,” Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli’s \textit{A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing}, and Helen Buss’s \textit{Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women}.

\textsuperscript{2} Smith similarly describes the embodied autobiography as “a different ‘experientially based’ history of the body that breaks the old frames, the old discourses of identity” (4).
dreams are experiences that can reveal the uncertainties inherent in models of subjective knowledge and personal authority, including the ambiguous relations between body, mind, and language. Thus, literary dream reports often showcase how different discourses of authority and subjectivity come to bear on limit cases. As Ronald R. Thomas argues in *Dreams of Authority: Freud and the Fictions of the Unconscious*, “the ways [in which literary works] give voice to dreams most often are symptomatic of a discursive gap, a cultural sense of strain between opposing models of interpretation and different conceptions of the self” (13). Thomas’s analysis, which examines the parallel discourses used to describe dreams in late-Victorian English novels and in Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, illustrates how literary dreams can reveal emergent forms of and beliefs about personal authority—partly because of their very instability. As he argues, nineteenth-century dream narratives “invent[ed] new fictions of personal authority to replace the structures of divine and social authority which were rapidly being dismantled” (46), turning to discourses such as politics, medicine, and economics in order to assert control over the troubling and often ambiguous phenomena of dreams. Similarly, the dreams I examine here and their interpretations emphasize personal and embodied experiences as an alternative to parental values.

Although Thomas’s study focuses on novels and is intended to illustrate the historical “interdependence between literature and psychoanalysis” (2), his conceptualization of the way that literary dreams illustrate issues of subjective authority and discursive negotiation is useful for the memoirs I consider, particularly because Thomas focuses solely on first-person fictional autobiographies. Thomas locates a “double valence” in the way that dream reports deal with issues of authority (2). He argues that both the contents of dreams and their interpretive methods in the nineteenth century “revolve around questions of authority” (2), often reflecting attempts to master the “indecipherability” of the dream through language (1). However, he also suggests that the resulting intersection of interpretive discourses results in a representation of subjectivity that is “fundamentally ambivalent,” partly because of the use of public discourses to describe private experiences (2). The three major discourses he identifies variously position “the unconscious mind . . . [as] a participant in a marketplace, as a state divided against itself, and as a diseased body in need of a cure. The individual was not an immortal soul but a
patient, an entrepreneur, a political agent” (23). As he puts it, the resulting ambivalence of the dream occurs due to the fact that

These dreamers wish, on one hand, to affirm individual control of psychic materials and, on the other, to appeal to larger fictional patterns in order to justify a discourse of subjectivity. The result is a characteristic nineteenth-century compromise: an appeal to plots of wider authority than the particular self—plots such as the “family romance”—balanced with a narrative struggle to appropriate that authority as a bolster to private self-fashioning. (2)

In their use of political and medical metaphors, the interpretive models of late-nineteenth-century dreams testify to the interconnection between private and public experience, while also essentially privatizing the resulting desire for authority within the narrative of the individual subject and family. As Thomas compellingly illustrates, the many personal dreams that Freud analyzes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* combine concerns with authorship, ownership, and public recognition with repeated conflicts with his own father or another figure that represents parental authority (24).

Like the dreams in the novels that Thomas discusses, the language used to describe and interpret dreams in contemporary memoirs betrays a “discursive gap” that reveals epistemological tensions in memoirists’ conceptualizations of subjectivity. In the contemporary memoir, this tension revolves centrally around a conflict between the felt affect and embodiment of dreams and their expression in language. In their efforts to articulate their felt experiences, memoirists weigh and often reject received discourses of interpretation handed down both by previous models of dream interpretation and by parents’ linguistic and cultural understandings of subjective experience. Instead, dream narratives tend to emphasize the inability of language to articulate the affective imagery of dreaming and the unconscious agency of the dreaming body. As a result, they take on the paradoxical task of recognizing the limitations of linguistic authority over the dream while also capturing these limitations—and the imperfectly rendered dreams—in written form. Although this focus on subjective, felt interpretation of dreams reflects the ostensible project of autobiographical writing to capture the experience of an individual subject, it also resonates with Thomas’s articulation of the ambivalent balance between private and public discourses in that the dream narratives betray “the desire to resist the imposition of master plots from an authority outside and the conflicting desire to
surrender to the sense of order and meaning that such plots provide” (47). While the memoir writers that I discuss in this chapter resist the authority of psychological interpretations and parental discourses, they also look for ways to position their felt dream experiences within broader spectrums of human experience.

According to Sidonie Smith, this paradoxical desire to articulate both individual uniqueness and human similarity is at the heart of autobiographical writing, which she describes as historically constituting “a discursive arena in which individuals worked to coordinate the colorfulness of their specific experiences with the bland neutrality of a universal selfhood” (19). Smith takes a negative stance toward this pattern of universalization to champion the differentiating possibilities of autobiographies that focus more specifically on the “colorfulness” of embodied—and therefore materially and historically situated—experience. Contrasting representations of embodied subjectivity with the conventional, rational subject of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century autobiography, Smith argues that depictions of rational subjectivity tend to be more universalizing because “everyone shares this common source [of rational thought], one individual can share, understand, and identify with another. All ‘I’s are ontologically identical, rational beings—but all ‘I’s are also unique. This is the stuff of myth, imperious and contradictory” (8). However, the memoirs that I examine in this chapter suggest that a similarly contradictory connection between the individual subject and a universal humanism often attends the contemporary memoir’s turn toward embodied concepts of subjectivity. At the level of basic physiology, embodiment can also be depicted as universally “identical,” particularly when this embodiment is depicted as preceding and exceeding language; thus, depictions of prelinguistic embodiment and rationality can both underpin forms of universalism. As Smith notes, “a certain ideology of language accompanies the notion of universal selfhood. The self so understood is both prelinguistic and extralinguistic” (17). That is, the concept of selfhood becomes universalized when it

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3 Leigh Gilmore similarly examines “the paradox that the autobiographer be both unique and representative” (8), noting that “[t]here is a long tradition in autobiography of representing the self as utterly unique and, on precisely this basis, able to stand for others through acts of self-inspection and self-revelation” (19).
is understood as an essentially shared human experience that is articulated imperfectly in various different languages, rather than as a cultural construct that is shaped in and through language. In narratives of psychic experiences like dreams, where dream perception and embodiment are granted an affective and aesthetic authority, the unconscious processes of both body and mind are often represented as prelinguistic and thus universalizing. Embodiment comes to replace the commonality of rational thought in its ability to produce empathy and similarity. This chapter explores the implications of the models of subjectivity, affiliation, and humanism that result.

The contemporary tension between felt and verbally articulated understandings of dreams is most evident in memoirs that overtly address and reflect on their approaches to dream interpretation. In recording and interpreting a dream experience, memoir writers often dramatize the choice between two or more possible discourses, as is the case in Joan Didion’s reflections on her grief and dreams after her husband’s death. Asking how feelings of anger and responsibility intersect in grief, Didion reflects on psychological explanations but ultimately prefers an uninterpreted dream as a meaningful “answer”:

I know the answer a psychiatrist would give to that question. . . . I do not disbelieve this answer but it remains less suggestive to me than the unexamined image, the mystery of being left alone on the tarmac at Santa Monica airport watching the planes take off one by one. (161)

Didion’s preference for the affective suggestiveness of her “unexamined” dream of abandonment reflects both a reluctance to delve into the complex interpretations of psychiatry and psychoanalysis—even in Jungian forms, which prioritize the manifest

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4 The question of whether selfhood—the capacity to act as and recognize oneself as an agential subject—can exist in a prelinguistic state has been debated by theorists, since most contemporary theories of subjectivity see it as performed and constituted through language. Giorgio Agamben argues that the idea of a “prelinguistic” humanity is a paradox that highlights the constructed separation between human and animal; a prelinguistic human self would always be defined negatively by the absence of language, simply “a shadow cast by language, a presupposition of speaking man, by which we always obtain only an animalization of man” (36). However, J. Allan Hobson draws on Rodolfo Llinas’s work to suggest that selfhood is rooted in the capacity for movement rather than language, positing that dreams “reactivate the brain basis of self-hood that is embedded in our built-in capacity to generate movement. . . . In other words, my sense of agency is first linked to movement; only later is it elaborated in thought” (Introduction 75-6). In my analysis, I am simply interested in how embodied sensations that are depicted—in language—as being prelinguistic are used to develop models of subjectivity, collectivity, and universality in memoirs.
dream image rather than the convoluted and disguised meanings of Freudian analysis—and the power of the image on its own. Dream representations in memoir tend to reflect a sense that the felt resonance of dreams is simply more meaningful than psychological explanations that can be articulated verbally. For instance, Butala describes a significant dream as “a product of this perfectly unnameable thing I felt stirring inside me” (17), insisting that despite her exploration of different forms of dream interpretation,

what little I felt of the vision was the ambience that permeated it. Meaning had not been given to me in words and the words I was reading seemed trivial and disconnected in the face of the magnitude and beauty of the dream itself. (19)

Butala’s sentiment echoes creative-writing mantras that position the sensory and experiential as more compelling than expository language (distilled in the expression “show, don’t tell”), and she repeats this emphasis on the limitation and triviality of language—and of higher-level thought—in a later dream narrative, reflecting that “whatever its significance was, I felt it rather than verbalized it or assimilated it intellectually” (37). In their mutual emphasis on the felt importance of the dream, Didion and Butala emphasize the possibility that the true significance of the dream may be lost in the attempt to reduce it to linguistic meaning—even as they capture this conflict in their written reflections.

While some memoirists overtly reflect on their interpretive models, others simply present the experiences of dreaming and waking without explicitly offering an interpretation or meaning. By privileging the “unexamined image,” such dream narratives invite the reader to experience the affective and aesthetic resonance of the dream and to participate in the work of interpretation. The aesthetic function of such dream narratives prioritizes the enigmatic imagery and tone of dreams over their interpreted value. As Richard Russo articulates the distinction between literary dream writing and therapeutic dream interpretation, “the purpose of dream writing is to create a work of art . . . the end result of dream writing is a poem, whereas the end result of the process of dream interpretation

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5 See Jung, “General Aspects” 49.
6 Butala repeatedly emphasizes her literally visceral reaction to dreaming: “Even now, remembering it, something in my viscera opens into an infinitude that frightens me” (57).
Russo compares this process to one stage of Jung’s dream interpretation, the “active imagination,” which similarly “does not involve interpreting the meaning of the dream” (16). Like Russo, Thomas associates the aesthetic approach to dream writing primarily with poetry, in contrast to prose, which “demands that such imagery be translated into the prosaic language of the everyday” (14). However, Thomas also locates a trend toward aesthetically charged dream-writing in twentieth-century prose, attributing this emphatically non-interpretive approach to a reaction against Freudian psychoanalysis.

Noting the effect of this trend on literary modernism, Thomas observes that post-Freudian works “seek to reclaim the dream as art by subverting Freud’s distinction between the dream work and the dream interpretation” (14). Interestingly, Thomas notes that “the inclination of these post-Freudian novelists was to idealize the authenticity of a prelinguistic unconscious. They sought to gesture toward the ‘sensation’ of the dream rather than to reveal its hidden syntax” (259). While the modernists’ emphasis on subjective authenticity and sensation resonates with the unexplained dream narratives in contemporary memoirs, Thomas sees this modernist approach as a complete alternative to the psychoanalytic attempt to secure “control over the processes of the unconscious through a set of mastering discourses” (259).

In contrast, I suggest that the dreams in memoir still enact negotiations of authority through a search for appropriate discourses and linguistic control, even as writers aver their preference for the aesthetic and affective resonance of the “unexamined image.” Instead of incorporating the dream’s “hidden syntax” into their narrative technique, memoirists dramatize the process of confronting and reflecting on the paradoxes of the dream’s meaning.

The forms of non-interpretive dream representation and felt dream interpretation that appear in the memoir parallel recent scholarly turns to both affective and embodied apprehensions of meaning. The sense that the dream’s meaning is communicated through its “ambience” or its felt authority powerfully calls up the philosophical and psychological concept of affect, which Eric Shouse defines as a “non-conscious experience of intensity . . . [which] cannot be fully realised in language” (n.p.). While affect is often defined rather abstractly as a form of embodied responsiveness that is “autonomous, pre-personal, non-intentional and a force that exceeds the psychological
subject” (Blackman 16), the concept is associated with particular basic, physiological
human drives and responses that have been differentiated by psychologists such as Silvan
Tomkins. Although some of the bodily responses I discuss may indeed align with
particular affects, and while I will be drawing on affect theory for some theoretical
context, the analysis that follows will more generally consider the concept of “embodied”
experience and knowledge for two reasons. First, the concept of affect does not capture
the full range of the role of the body in the works I consider here. While the body’s felt
response to dreaming is significant to how these memoirists understand dreams,
unconscious bodily actions that occur during sleep and dreams, such as sleepwalking, are
also an important element of the discussion that follows. In my analysis of Choy’s work,
I additionally consider how experiences of vision and haunting where there is an absence
of embodied response fit into my writers’ formulations of meaning. Second, although the
term “affect” is used quite variously in humanities scholarship, in psychological dream
studies it is used specifically to articulate the dreamer’s emotional experiences within and
after the dream—what one study calls the “emotional quality” of the dream (Simor et al
369). To avoid confusing multiple different uses of the term, then, this chapter bypasses
a specific affect theory lens. Instead, I consider how the body’s role in dreaming and
dream interpretation more generally is represented in memoirs, and how the resulting
embodied perspectives are integrated with writers’ resistant formulation of personal
beliefs, forms of knowledge, and ultimately social affiliations beyond the family.

I have chosen to use the term “affiliation” to describe the memoir writers’ efforts, in
Thomas’s words, to “justify a discourse of subjectivity” by situating the individual body
within a larger human context, both because the term captures the diffuse connections,
affinities, and occasionally one-sided agencies that I discover here, and because it
provides a resonance with and a movement beyond the familial context. In his work on

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7 See E. Virginia Demos, ed., Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins.
8 See also Gary Grenell, “Affect Integration in Dreams and Dreaming.” Studies of affect in dream
psychology primarily focus on dreams’ contributions to emotional regulation.
9 Marianne Hirsch posits that “[t]he ‘family’ is an affiliative group, and the affiliations that create it are
constructed through various relational, cultural, and institutional processes” (Family 8). Such affiliations
can thus also be constructed outside of the family.
memoirs about absent fathers, G. Thomas Couser introduces the term “narratives of filiation” to capture how such memoirs exhibit an important “relationality—their being rooted in a sense of entitlement and their intent or tendency to assert or enact some kind of engagement with the father, whether good or bad, legitimate or illegitimate, living or dead” (“Fathers” 635). As a result, Couser suggests, the narratives tend to make “public claims to, and about, the relationships” (639). In the memoirs considered in this chapter, memoirists enact a similar sense of engagement and claim both within and beyond the parental relationships that partially shape their memoirs. However, the basis of their affiliative claims is considerably more vexed. Couser observes that in narratives of filiation, memoirists “feel that their testimony has particular authority—significantly, not just in cases in which they were directly victimized. There is a powerful sense of filiation implicit in this belief” (637). In other words, the authority of a genetic and familial connection with the father provides what many memoirists—and readers—consider to be a legitimate claim to authority and relationship. In contrast, the claims of affiliation that I discuss are unable to rest on either of these authoritative grounds. Instead, the memoirists seek to construct claims to affiliation through empathic connections of shared experience, landscape, or embodied touch.

In the discussion that follows, I examine how Wiebe’s *Of This Earth*, Choy’s *Not Yet*, and Butala’s *The Perfection of the Morning* depict the embodied experience of dreaming and its influence on the writers’ conceptions of subjectivity and affiliation. The first section outlines the ongoing interpretive tension between the metaphor of the dream-as-text and the bodily aspects of dreaming, demonstrating that Wiebe and Choy each capitalize on this tension to establish the body as a site of experiential knowledge. However, they mobilize this embodied awareness to develop opposing understandings of the openness and agency of the subject. The second section examines how Wiebe’s attempts to clarify and justify his sense of embodied affinity both with his own ancestors

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10 Cynthia Sugars argues that genetic connections are often problematized in contemporary Canadian memoirs, thus destabilizing the filiative authority that I describe here (see “(Dis)inheriting”). However, the writers’ attempts to claim or somehow reconstruct that connection is legitimated by the idea that such a filiative connection *should* be possible.
and with Russian writers results in a depiction of psychic and biological affiliations as mediated through shared landscapes. I compare Wiebe’s depiction of an externalized psyche to Butala’s *The Perfection of the Morning* to illustrate the complications and appropriative potential of their similar models of dreams and subjectivity.\(^{11}\) In the final section I address Choy’s *Not Yet* in more detail, demonstrating how Choy responds to his dreamed experiences of vulnerability by emphasizing the power of embodied gesture. In contrast to Choy’s *Paper Shadows*, which only briefly gestures to his adult life, Choy’s second memoir overtly acknowledges Choy’s homosexuality and his efforts to develop new parameters of family and affiliation through gesture and intentionality.

**Dream, Body, Language**

In two prominent scenes in Choy’s *Not Yet* and Wiebe’s *Of This Earth*, resistance to parental discourses converges with an interpretive tension between linguistic efforts to record and master the content of dreams, and bodily experiences that problematize these efforts. The two memoirs are quite different in content; Choy recounts two near-death experiences during his late middle age, while Wiebe depicts his 1940s childhood in Speedwell, Manitoba. However, the two scenes demonstrate remarkable similarities in the writers’ search for appropriate languages, discourses, and intertexts through which to articulate their respective dream-like experiences: Choy’s experiences of ICU psychosis, a form of delirium often caused by the stress and sensory stimulation of an intensive care unit, and Wiebe’s recurring tendency to sleepwalk during his final years in Speedwell. Although the scene I discuss from Choy’s memoir is technically a waking hallucination rather than a dream, I find it a useful counterpoint to Wiebe’s account of sleepwalking because both scenes depict forms of hallucinatory mentation that are interrupted by unexpected and uncontrolled actions of the body.\(^{12}\) While the embodied, cognitive, and

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\(^{11}\) Although discussions of embodiment in auto/biography have been associated primarily with women’s writing, I look at two men’s memoirs and one woman’s memoir to illustrate the similarities between them. As Eakin notes, “[w]hatever the case may have been historically, there is widespread evidence in biography and autobiography today that living as bodies figures centrally for both men and women in their sense of themselves as selves” (*Selves* 37, original emphasis).

\(^{12}\) Freud posits that “dreams hallucinate . . . they replace thoughts by hallucinations” (*Interpretation* 4: 50); that is, they involve “transformations of ideas into sensory images” that are perceived and experienced (5:
linguistic elements of these experiences are not necessarily separate or mutually
exclusive, Choy and Wiebe each emphasize the apparent separation between the mental
and bodily aspects of dreaming to underscore the inexplicable autonomy and authority of
the body, which influences their understandings of subjectivity and conflicts with the
cultural and theological beliefs represented by their parents. Notably, Choy and Wiebe
respond to their revelation of vulnerability in opposite ways; Choy reinforces his own
sense of personal authority and agency, whereas Wiebe expresses an openness to the
altery that the experience of sleepwalking introduces in his own body. Both ultimately
use the experience to emphasize a need for broader networks of connectivity and
relationality.

Wiebe and Choy dramatize moments when an involuntary action of the body creates an
apparent dichotomy between the sensory body and the thought processes of dream and
hallucination, despite the fact that dreaming itself can also be understood as embodied in
several ways. At the most basic level, dreams have been theorized as by-products of
fundamentally embodied neurological processes, most famously in J. Allan Hobson’s
“activation-synthesis” hypothesis. Hobson posits that dreams are produced by the natural
activation of the brain during sleep and by the brain’s efforts to synthesize the resulting
“sensory and motor information,” which is especially vivid during REM sleep (Brain 15). As Hobson and other scientists suggest, dreams and other cognitive processes
cannot be separated from embodiment; autobiography critic Paul John Eakin similarly
notes that “[i]f . . . we approach subjectivity in ‘corporeal’ terms . . . we must deal as well
with the ‘corporeality’ of the ‘inside’ or ‘psychical interior,’ the structure of the brain” (Selves 12). In addition to their inextricability from the “dynamic and self-sustained
organ” of the brain (Hobson, Brain 15), dreams can be influenced by somatic stimuli on

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535. Hobson uses similar terminology to explain that “[d]reams are characterized by vivid and fully
formed hallucinatory imagery with the visual sense predominant; auditory, tactile, and movement
sensations are also prominent in most dream reports” (Brain 5).

13 REM is an acronym for “rapid eye movement,” a state of sleep that recurs several times per night in all
mammals. During this state, the brain’s visual and sensorimotor circuits are active, while the body is in a
state of “sleep paralysis” that prevents the dreamer from acting out the dream (Hobson, Brain 253). Thus,
the state has also been called “paradoxical sleep” (150, Siegel 118). Most dreams occur during REM sleep,
though Siegel notes that it is also possible to dream in non-REM (NREM) sleep, as Wiebe does (108).
the sleeping body, and the mental experience of dreaming itself has also been theorized as embodied. Katharine Young outlines an approach to dream interpretation that employs gesture alongside language in recognition of the fact that mental imagery “can be tactile and kinaesthetic,” taking the form of “a body shape, a postural experience” (48). Young supports this gestural approach by drawing on the clinical practice of body psychotherapist Stanley Keleman, who

describes [the dreaming body] as “partially somatized” . . . The brain waves of a dreaming body, Keleman notes, resemble those of a waking body more than either of them does the brain waves of a body in the deepest stages of dreamless sleep. That is to say, we experience ourselves in dreams as embodied; we undergo dreams in our own bodies . . . Or more precisely, we dream what Keleman thinks of as a possible body. Dreams, like other acts of the imagination, offer us alternative embodiments. (47)

The experience of dreaming thus draws on the bodily memory and awareness of embodied reality of the dreamer at the same time that the sleeping body maintains itself through a range of physical and neurological processes. The somatic and mental aspects of dreaming cannot be easily separated.

Despite this inherently embodied nature of dreaming, the accounts of hallucinations and dreams in Choy and Wiebe’s memoirs position their imagery and content as solely mental forms of sensation and thought, separate from the body as well as from conscious control. This distinction may reflect the fact that on a practical level, dreams and other forms of visionary experience are not understood to be embodied in the same way as concrete perceptual and sensory experience, partially because the dream experience often precludes an awareness of the physical body. Although dreams involve what Hobson calls “fictive” or “illusory” senses of movement, the actual “somatic muscles are, in non-REM sleep, inactivated and, in REM sleep, paralyzed” (Brain 253). Andrew Leder compares this aspect of dreaming to waking processes such as daydreaming and abstract

14 Keleman is currently working on a book on dreams and the body. A study by Occhionero and Cicogna similarly suggests that “the hallucination of Self and own body image is present during dreams and differs according to sleep stage. Specifically, the representation of the Self in REM dreams is frequently similar to the perception of Self in wakefulness, whereas in NREM dreams, a greater polymorphism of Self and own body representation is observed” (1009).
thought in which the body is experienced as being recessive, that is, not prominent in conscious awareness. Leder thus describes the dream-state as “a vivid flow of perceptual experience, yet coupled with a recessed embodiment” (59). In both Wiebe’s sleepwalking experiences and Choy’s hallucinations, which similarly involve mental activity alongside a “recessed embodiment,” the body’s involuntary actions are startling and destabilizing because the sudden awareness and recognition of the physical body disrupts the apparent coherence of the dream. Further, such incidents draw attention to the body’s ongoing ability to function without conscious awareness or intention, which lends a sense of uncanny autonomy to the body’s movements. The writers’ emphasis on the dichotomy between the mental and physical components of their dreamed and hallucinatory experiences effects a form of mind-body dualism within the unconsciously motivated experiences themselves, creating a kind of doubled mental and physical unconscious that has the potential to be both threatening and authoritative. If dreams in the Freudian paradigm introduce dreamers to the frighteningly uncontrollable nature of their psychic unconscious, in the case of these embodied dreams, the unconscious processes of the body itself come to take on similar threatening qualities, destabilizing the sense of locatedness and felt truth often ascribed to the body. Yet Leder’s description of the differing epistemological functions often ascribed to body and mind also suggests the authorizing potential of unconscious processes; he notes that in phenomenology, the lived body has often been identified primarily with one’s immediate sensorimotor grasp upon the world, as contrasted with faculties of abstract cognition . . . Such sensorimotor abilities are not merely a form of conception; they do not depend on explicit judgments, categories, or rules. Rather, they exhibit a more primordial intentionality, which must be accorded its own logic. (7)

The idea that the agency and logic of the sensorimotor body is “primordial” takes on an important resonance and authority in memoirs. The apparently universal and primitive functioning of the body is appealingly authoritative because it operates beyond conscious control and offers access to sensory knowledge and memory; as Wiebe puts it, “bare feet and hands know things too . . . [T]hey are the four opposite corners of your always inquiring body and they can know things far beyond your hard head” (366). Yet the resulting determinism and essentialism attributed to the body also problematize the
memoirs’ attempts to incorporate their dream experiences into conscious and self-reflective understandings of their own subjectivity. The uncanny movement of the body in dreams establishes a sense of vulnerability because it destabilizes the idea of individual volition.

The potentially threatening nature of the body’s autonomy during dreams and its separation from the more clearly imagistic and narrative elements of dream experiences results in a paradoxical attempt by writers to simultaneously capture the sensory residue of the dream experience and to neutralize the threat of the unconscious—both mental and physical—by articulating its activity in language. As Thomas argues, recording a dream provides a sense of authorial participation in and control over the dream narrative. He posits that in fact, “the project of dream interpretation as Freud defined it is to master the dream by converting its hallucinations into words” (34)—a project of mastery that is even more pronounced when the dream’s hallucinations are accompanied by equally uncontrolled embodied experience. In the scenes that follow, both Choy and Wiebe decline to overtly interpret their dreams, yet they still dramatize their own attempts to articulate and control their vulnerable experiences through language, with varying success. Their struggle to articulate and assert mastery over the dreams occurs in two stages, first in the dramatized encounter with the body at the time of the experiences themselves, and second, in their retrospective rendering of the conflict in writing. Interestingly, they each actively turn from their mother tongues to English within the scenes, while also searching for appropriate cultural discourses and intertexts through which to understand their experiences. Their linguistic experimentation positions both the mental and physical aspects of the experiences as prior to language, not constructed in

15 Despite Hobson’s emphasis on physiological causes of dreaming, he notes that “subjective experience, including dreaming, tends to be organized by the linguistic faculty of our brain-minds as a narrative-scenario. And we are so intensely involved . . . that we tend to adopt an interpretive literary stance when reacting to our dreams” (Brain 203). This narrative impulse may explain the long-standing metaphor of dreams as texts that can be ciphered or translated. Thomas notes that in the nineteenth century, “[t]here was a widespread tendency . . . to conceive of the dream as an unfinished book, as a fragmented experience that required conversion not simply into language, but into a book—into an object that was complete, that told a story” (21). Rupprecht similarly traces metaphors of text and translation in the works of Freud and Jung. However, she emphasizes the limitations of a linguistic approach to dreaming, reflecting that “[t]o speak of the ‘language’ of dreams, of course, is to speak metaphorically . . . Unfortunately, the metaphor has degenerated into a cliché by habitual and unexamined use” (“Translation” 71).
and through language—an understanding of dream experience that contrasts with Freud’s perspective that for the purposes of interpretation, the linguistic dream account is inseparable from the dream itself. As Carol Schreier Rupprecht observes, a footnote in Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams notes that “[i]t is impossible as a rule to translate a dream into a foreign language” (4: 99, qtd. Rupprecht, “Translation” 73). Rupprecht offers some interesting analysis of this problem from the perspective of translation theory. For my purposes, I simply see this negotiation of different languages as another example of the way in which memoirs represent dreams and embodiment as prior to and not fully captured in language. As Wiebe declares about himself and his sister, who unlike his parents, takes on the role of his poetic mentor by teaching him to read English, “[f]or Helen and me anything can have as many names as it wants” (41).

Early in Choy’s memoir, in the sections that recount his first serious illness, several dreams and hallucinations reflect the vulnerability he feels as a result of his hospitalization, including his attempts to find appropriate discourses through which to understand and cope with his illness. As he enters the hospital for the first time, the experience of hospitalization is aligned with the bodily and discursive passivity of childhood, as it reminds him of a surgery he underwent at the age of five:

I closed my eyes to the squeaking of the metal gurney wheeling me away. The squeaks turned into my mother’s voice. I was five years old again, being prepared by a medical team to have my tonsils removed; Mother cried out in her Toishanese, Now, now, just you be brave soldier. (18)

The sense of helplessness in Choy’s recollection is accompanied by the care and authority of his adoptive mother, who, using her own language, provides Choy with a discourse through which he can imagine his mastery of the situation—an imaginative game based on Choy’s early love of Chinese opera. While Choy briefly imagines the “fluttering banners” of his childhood games again in his adult hospitalizations (12), his later series of hallucinations demonstrates his efforts to choose his own set of discourses to explain and thereby master his near-death experience.

In this lengthy and surprisingly amusing scene, Choy’s narration illustrates both his desire to master the uncertainty of his medical condition and the unexpected intersection
of abstract hallucinations and involuntary bodily experience. In keeping with Thomas’s association between authority and writing, Choy—this time, feeling “on guard, but not like any child soldier” (27)—seeks his own discourses through an imagined process of writing and interpretation, attempting to impose his own meanings upon the experience: “My fingers turned phantom notebook pages, and my right hand began twitching, as if I were writing down my Rules of Dying” (28). Having established his rules and enlisted his involuntary twitches into his “writing” process, Choy also relies on literary and cultural intertexts to identify and dismiss a series of hallucinations brought on by ICU psychosis. Momentarily startled by the sight of “a gaunt, hooded rider astride a moon-pale horse” approaching, Choy asserts control by naming the apparition, as his “literary instincts twigged to it all: Aha! The classic symbol for Cervantes’ Father Death . . . Identified, horse and rider vanished” (29). Expecting other “signs,” Choy is not surprised by the simultaneous appearance of Chinese orchestra music and a “Heavenly Choir” (29). Despite Choy’s calm identification of each sign, his mastery of the situation—and the significance of the signs themselves—are destabilized when a sudden physical convulsion interrupts his reverie. After Choy struggles against his medical team and then succumbs to fatigue, the sudden absence of the expected signs establishes a sense of uncertainty. Choy’s confident, authoritative interpretation of his visions is challenged by his lack of control over his body and the confusion of the medical crisis, which force him to recognize his own vulnerability.

While the scene as a whole humorously depicts the breaking down of Choy’s “signs” as he approaches the experience of death, Choy retrospectively maintains control both by recording the scene in his characteristically light-hearted style, and by allowing himself the final “scribbled” word in the scene. Even as the envisioned signs disappear, Choy continues his imagined writing, imposing his perspective and personality on the events by evaluating the situation:

As my mind sailed into emptiness, my brain rattled on: *Is this dying? Could I be dying now? No sunset vista? No music?*
My clutching fingers scribbled into the air a brief comment: *Dying—is—boring.* (29)
By concluding the scene with this joking statement of disapproval, Choy’s narration replaces the authoritative power of signs, a belief from his Chinatown upbringing, with two more powerful discourses: embodied experience, which subverts the expected sequence of events, and the strength of personality. Choy prizes his personality throughout the text, and it lends a kind of determinism to his narration of events in the sense that his stubborn continuation of unhealthy personal habits contributes to his illness. At the same time, as I will discuss in the final section of this chapter, Choy’s emphasis on the autonomy of the body speaks to its vulnerability and his ultimate inability to control every aspect of his life, a revelation that leads him to affirm a sense of human affiliation and intentionality based on compassionate touch and trust in others’ caretaking.

While Choy’s conclusion to this hallucination sequence emphasizes the continuity of personhood despite the unpredictable responses of his body, a dream account that appears late in Wiebe’s *Of This Earth* does the opposite, suggesting the powerful pull of forces beyond the body. Like Choy’s hallucinations, Wiebe’s account of his experiences of sleepwalking dramatizes a linguistic and discursive tension between himself and his parents, especially his mother, who is presented as an authoritative figure in the closing section of the memoir due to her inscription of dates on the backs of photographs—dates which, otherwise, Wiebe would have forgotten (335)—and to her rigid Mennonite faith. The tension between the two is dramatized in an anecdote that appears shortly before the dream narrative, in which a teenaged Wiebe argues with his mother over the relative value of storytelling. Having been scolded for claiming that he was reading the Bible instead of a novel, Wiebe and his mother discuss the merits of his lie:

> I laugh. “It’s not lying if you know it’s not true.”
> “What is it then?”
> “A joke,” I tell her, and add in English, “a story!”
> She absolutely refuses “joke”; she will not so much as permit herself to smile, though her lips twitch. “Du enn diene Jeschijchte. You and your stories. Sometimes I don’t know if that’s what they are.” (364)

By positioning his claim as a creative, even humorous fiction, Wiebe offers an abstract and nuanced alternative to his mother’s “black and white” perspective of the world (364); like Choy’s humorous interpretation of his visions, Wiebe’s “joke” advocates a more
indeterminate and fluid understanding of truth that juxtaposes religious and creative forms of authority and meaning. By noting Wiebe’s turn to the English word “story,” the scene also illustrates his efforts to find a concrete language different from his parents’ in which these concepts can be articulated. At the same time, his mother’s reflection that “[s]ometimes I don’t know if that’s what they are” (364) underscores the shifting and indeterminate quality of all language.

A similar searching for language appears in Wiebe’s introduction of one of his childhood nightmares, which he claims to have spontaneously remembered as he reflected on “the psychic and physical evanescence” of memory (369). As in the sequence with Choy, Wiebe’s attention to linguistic difference highlights his search for language that will appropriately describe his embodied experiences, which are memorable because of his childhood tendency to sleepwalk. Rejecting the Low German name for a nightmare, which is simply “Droom” or dream, Wiebe declares that “English knew better: ‘nightmare,’ a gigantic horse that suddenly burst with you into darkness, you were clinging to its bare back, no reins or even a halter shank . . . Like Bell, always uncontrollable and now gone suddenly berserk” (370). With this description of the experience of nightmare, Wiebe emphasizes both the terrifying embodiment (and animality) of the experience and the impossibility of mastering it. Like his choice of the English word for “story,” his suggestion that “English knew better” emphasizes his concern with finding a language through which to capture and understand inherently pre-linguistic experiences.

In the particular dream that Wiebe narrates, the only one that “came back clearly” (370), the embodied sense of urgency felt in the dream is ascribed an importance and authority that Wiebe insists on despite his parents’—and his own—inability to understand it. The dream’s urgency is conveyed in a series of breathless phrases joined by commas: “I had to do something, Right now! and it was of course already too late, I would burn in Hell from all ages to endless ages for this, fire and ice burned the same . . . something tried to stop me, someone and someone else, but I was fighting them—I have to do this!” (371). The dream experience is invested with an authoritative sense of importance, belatedness, and judgment; yet Wiebe’s narration of the dream also underscores the fact that this
authority is felt rather than articulated, as the “something” that he urgently tries and fails to do in the dream is never clear either to him or to the reader. As Wiebe dreams of rushing out of the house, onto the porch and toward the family’s barn, the sense of authority remains with him even as the urgency of the dream dissipates. Although Wiebe does not overtly signal that this dream is an instance of the sleepwalking he mentions earlier, the body’s determination of his actions becomes clear as he gradually awakens from the dream to find himself in the yard:

But it is my mother, out there. Even as I lunged from the house I had sensed something double, I both knew I had to! and also that there would be nothing to do—there never had been—and my mother clasps me tight around the shoulders and I am afraid and enraged at the same time, I should have done something but there is nothing, I am barefoot in the cold night yard in my spring underwear, my warm Mam murmuring in my ear and I shake her off and walk back past Pah at the slab gate doing nothing as usual, just watching . . . (371)

Wiebe’s sense of confused resentment at his parents’ intervention in his dream—by this point, it is clear that they are the “someone and someone else” whom he resists during the dream—concludes with both a feeling of shame for the bizarre conduct of his body and a subtle insistence on the affective truth of that bodily experience. Although his parents’ presence emphasizes that, like his father, Wiebe has “nothing” urgent to do, he still retains the embodied feeling of urgency. The conclusion of the dream ends with this ambivalent juxtaposition, expressed in alternating phrases: “I hate them for seeing me act so stupid again, I love them, there was someone and I had to and I’ll show them, I’m Tüss, home, I’ll go upstairs and sleep. And I do it” (371). While his use of the Low German word Tüss for “home” suggests an acceptance and integration of his parents’ discourse and perspective on the dream, the unclear referent of the final phrase also emphasizes Wiebe’s attempts to differentiate his own discourse and beliefs from those of his parents. Although “[a]nd I do it” most clearly refers to Wiebe going back to sleep

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16 This gradual awakening resonates with Jung’s observation that “the very dreams which disturb sleep most . . . have a dramatic structure which aims logically at creating a highly affective situation, and builds it up so efficiently that the affect unquestionably wakes the dreamer” (38). This typically occurs when the dream counteracts an experience from waking life, “when the compensatory contents are so intense that they are able to counteract sleep” (38). I suggest in the next section that the urgency with which Wiebe leaves the house in his dream counters his anxiety about his imminent departure from Speedwell.
following the dream, it could also refer to the phrase “I’ll show them,” that is, will prove the importance of the dream’s bodily urgency. Although Wiebe does not explicitly interpret the dream, then, his narration of the scene captures the discursive tension between his own empirical certainty about his felt experiences and his perception of his parents’ interpretations.

While Wiebe’s insistence on his experience involves a differentiation from both parents, the differing reactions of his parents in the sleepwalking scene also constitute a family romance that illuminates his effort to connect his experience to places and individuals outside his nuclear family, which I discuss in detail in the next section. Wiebe’s depiction of his awakening constructs an Oedipal triangle between himself, his mother, and his father—the classic Freudian fantasy in which the male child rejects his father in order to claim his mother. Earlier in the memoir, Wiebe reflects that as a child, he had viewed his father’s pacifism as rendering him “hopeless, maybe even a coward” (105); in contrast, “our mother did what needed to be done, always” (61). Although Wiebe acknowledges his adult awareness of the historical circumstances that influenced his father’s passive attitude, noting that “I knew nothing then about the centuries Mennonites had searched to find a peaceful community” (106), he ultimately concludes these reflections with his childhood conviction that “our Pah had no backbone” (106)—a statement that in the Freudian context might be read as connoting not only cowardice but also impotence. Thus, it is significant that in the scene of awakening from the dream, Wiebe finds his “warm Mam murmuring in [his] ear,” intimately comforting him while his father stands apart, “doing nothing as usual, just watching” (371). Yet Wiebe also tears himself away from this Oedipal scenario. Rather than claiming his mother, he continues to differentiate himself from both parents by insisting on his sense of embodied urgency and actively seeking affiliations with others based on similar embodied experiences, such as the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose lines Wiebe borrows to articulate his sensation of a “split image” just as he awakens into the awareness of his sleepwalking.

17 Wiebe’s perspective of the differences between himself, his mother, and his father is also foregrounded in his opening reflections on his childish view of heaven: “God lives in such light eternally and so far away I may never get there beyond the stars. Though my mother certainly will, and also, perhaps, my father” (2).
body (371). Wiebe’s efforts to validate his embodied convictions through connection with others thus extends beyond an Oedipal dynamic to a broader family romance, which Marianne Hirsch compellingly describes as a “discursive” and “imaginary interrogation of origins” in which “the developing individual liberates himself from the constraints of family by imagining . . . his ‘real’ parents to be more noble than the ‘foster’ family in which he is growing up” (Plot 9). By describing his resistant, embodied experience through a validating intertext by someone outside his family, Wiebe makes a case for his legitimate belonging in a broader community of writers who, unlike his parents, share similar aesthetic convictions about the power of the body and the meaning of story.18

The three lines by Mayakovsky that Wiebe uses to articulate the experience of his dream convey both the belated effort to articulate the felt sensations of the body and Wiebe’s resulting conception of subjectivity as extended and porous. After concluding the dream narrative, Wiebe turns not to an interpretation of the dream itself, but to a discussion of the intertext, which he notes that he “came across as an adult.” The scene joins several others in the memoir in which retroactive knowledge establishes a kind of determinism—for instance, in Wiebe’s interpretation of family photographs as foreshadowing familial deaths.19 Similarly, the belated intertext in this case suggests that the dream is a prelinguistic experience that can be named and mastered once the appropriate words are found. The intertext depicts the uncanny automatism and split subjectivity involved in Wiebe’s embodied experience of sleepwalking:

And I feel that ‘I’ is too little for me!
There’s somebody fighting his way
Out of me! (371)

Wiebe’s use of the quotation associates the involuntary action and urgency of his body, through the doubling of the dream, with a larger sense of selfhood that extends beyond the personal confines of the conscious, first-person “I” and, in fact, violently “fight[s]” its

18 The fact that Mayakovsky is Russian is also significant; I return to this point in the next section.
19 For instance, noting that a shadow cuts through his sister Helen’s leg in one photo, Wiebe remarks, “Helen will be the first of us to die . . . thirty years before our father . . . who will be next. The shoulder bulge of the long shadow barely misses Pah’s left foot . . . but his large worker hands lying on his knees are already balled into fists, and ready” (26).
way out in a metaphorical birthing scene. Where Choy closes his dream account with an affirmation of individual will and personality, Wiebe embraces not only the personal and resistant nature of his embodied knowledge but also the sense that this embodiment paradoxically extends his identity and identification (“me”) beyond the self (“I”). The lines capture a recognition not of his own body fighting to emerge from the split image of the dream but of “somebody,” an internalized otherness recognized in the moment of uncanniness. Wiebe’s intertext thus situates his embodied experience in an odd space between personal conviction and alterity.

While Wiebe and Choy each negotiate a “discursive gap” between the embodied alterity of the dream and linguistic control, they come to different conclusions about the integrity and agency of the individual subject. Their resulting understandings of subjectivity affect how they depict their personal experiences as well as the forms of affiliation that they claim, since both writers express the conviction that their embodied experiences mediate relationships that transcend the individual subject. For Wiebe, the sensation that “‘I’ is too little for me” articulates an open, porous subjectivity that depends on extended and empathic experiences outside the self; as I will show, these empathic experiences are often mediated through affective responses to particular landscapes. For Choy, in contrast, the body’s vulnerability does not open it up to external influences but simply necessitates a greater dependence on the continuing physical support and care of others. Interestingly, Choy similarly articulates this dependence on others as constituting an extended and even spiritual network beyond his own subjectivity. In response to an interview question about his religious beliefs, Choy responds, “I’m very cautious about having spiritual convictions. What I have is a sense that something greater than myself exists . . . We need each other to see things we cannot see ourselves. If that’s spiritual, then that’s probably what I am” (Helm H14). 20 Both writers thus emphasize the extended

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20 Both writers’ words also parallel Butala’s depiction of her first revelatory, embodied experience, which occurs during her first communion. Though she describes the sensation as “a cloud of white light lit in my chest, swelling till it filled it” (17), she reflects that “those words fail to give the miraculous sense of it. It was not myself, it was both within me and bigger than me” (18). Butala’s experience further results in a conflict with her mother over the validity of the experience: “My mother was an unwilling Catholic, having converted from Anglicanism to marry our father. ‘You’re only lightheaded from fasting,’ she snapped
and transcendent nature of their embodied experiences, which provide the sense of authority needed to articulate their affiliations with others. However, they illustrate very different “conceptions of the self” (Thomas 13) as they seek to position their own experiences within a wider network of relationality and belonging. In essence, Wiebe locates his efforts at affiliation in implicit, empathic connections with material landscapes, which might be thought of as a kind of external psyche, whereas Choy emphasizes the active, compassionate role of other people and other bodies in supporting the vulnerable self.

Wiebe and Choy thus align themselves and their desired affiliations with opposing poles of the body-mind dualism that they experience in their dreams and hallucinations. Wiebe emphasizes the enigmatic, involuntary power of the body, whereas Choy insists on the ability of the mind to guide embodied action. Leys points out the implicit political assumptions that exist in such approaches that “thematize the body and embodiment as purely material and distinct from cognition” (Leys and Goldman 675). The idea that the body functions apart from and prior to higher cognition implies that affiliation and political choice can be reduced to “subliminal or sub-personal material-affective responses” (668) that are universal and instinctive. Like the belated application of language to the dream, theories of affect often postulate, as Leys points out,

> a gap between the subject’s affects and his or her appraisal of the affective situation, such that cognition or thinking come “too late” for intention, belief, or meaning to play the role in action and behaviour that is usually accorded to them. The result is that action and behaviour are held to be determined by material-corporeal affective programs or dispositions or systems that are independent of the mind. (668)

For Leys, this assumption of belatedness is problematic because it ignores the impact of conscious intention, as well as cultural learning and performance that differentiates one body’s actions from another’s. Yet Wiebe and Choy foreground their experiences of belatedness and embrace opposing poles in the resulting body-mind dichotomy,
strategically building on these opposing assumptions about intentionality and identification to justify their claims to affiliation and transcendent forms of humanism. Wiebe—along with Butala, whose memoir I introduce in the next section—associates the body with involuntary, prepersonal knowledge that elides his own agency, using primarily material and organic metaphors to naturalize his experiences and his resulting affiliative claims. In contrast, Choy mitigates the threat of his body’s autonomy by repeatedly emphasizing the intention involved in choosing to care for others, and by acknowledging the affective gaps created by cultural difference.

The centrality of dreams, hallucinations, and hauntings to these memoirists’ negotiations of embodiment and affiliation complicates the apparent dualism in their approaches to intentionality. While the scenes I have discussed involve dreamed or hallucinated mental imagery that is interrupted by an unexpected action of the body, the content of the dreamed imagery and the occurrence of the dreams themselves are also presented as non-intentional. Even when the writers do not draw on psychoanalysis themselves, the dreams act as reminders of psychological and psychoanalytic discourses that join the writers’ resistance against parental authority and their theories of universal forms of empathy based on embodied experiences. Leys argues that the idea of a “psychic reality or unconscious” is an important “third term” that is often dismissed in dualistic theories of affect (675). Although the turn to affect theory is in part a reaction against psychoanalysis, Leys posits that understanding drives and desires as primarily bodily responses reduces the more complex understanding of interpersonal relationships allowed by an integrated approach to embodiment and consciousness. Intriguingly using sleepwalking as a metaphor to describe the implicit assumptions of affect theory, she reflects that

It’s as if there is a deep, almost somnambulistic cultural trend that favours the body and the biological sciences at the expense of any notion of the psychical unconscious. In my view what goes missing . . . is precisely the question of the relation to the other . . . that is inherently conflictual and ambivalent, a relation that is at once immersive and identificatory and non-immersive (or specular) and rivalrous. (673)

That is, Leys suggests that psychic and psychological dynamics illuminate the individual’s ambivalent desire to both resist and claim identifications with others—an
ambivalence that is evident in the simultaneity of Wiebe and Choy’s “rivalrous” desires to differentiate their values from their parents’ and their efforts to articulate forms of “immersive and identificatory” connection to other cultures and individuals. Their focus on embodied experience does not preclude an ongoing interest in how those bodies enable relationality with others, and the forms that relationality takes through the body—such as felt senses of resistance and empathy—replicate some of the relational dynamics typically associated with the psyche. The resulting explorations of embodied, shared psychic experiences on the one hand, and the integrity and privacy of the individual psyche on the other, reveal the potential for empathy and appropriation involved in any identification with others and that often coexist in the memoir’s claims to affiliation.

Body Knowledge and Psychic Landscapes in Wiebe’s Of This Earth and Butala’s The Perfection of the Morning

Both Wiebe’s memoir and Butala’s The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature (1994) turn to forms of embodied, unintentional experience to validate their approaches to faith, writing, and landscape, and—most significantly—to authorize and naturalize the resulting affiliations with others who have shared similar perspectives. Strongly embodied experiences of dreaming and spirituality lead the memoirists to negotiate between biological, affective, and psychological discourses in order to articulate relationships with both geographically and temporally distant others. Wiebe and Butala use materialist discourses to explain their experiences, positioning the natural environment as a mediator of shared embodied experience and biological continuity. Their emphasis on bodily response and connectivity obscures the agency in their claims of affiliation and naturalizes the more distant connections made by each author, whether the Russian writers with whom Wiebe shares an affinity or the displaced Cree who formerly camped on Butala’s ranch. By situating a kind of collective unconscious within environmental experiences, the supposedly transsubjective elements of this connectivity universalize the writers’ own epistemological and spiritual responses to landscape. These responses reveal an awkward and inconclusive negotiation of the boundaries between individuality, collective identity, and universality, a blurring that is quite characteristic of the memoir’s ambivalent positioning of subjectivity.
Wiebe’s recollection of his sleepwalking experience is embedded in a longer section that retrospectively bookends the dream with two distinct forms of affiliation connected to the embodied experience. On one hand, Wiebe’s concluding reflection on the dream emphasizes a sense of empathy, affinity and shared experience that links him to Russian poet Mayakovsky; on the other, the discussion preceding the dream implies a connection between his sleepwalking and forms of inherited trauma. Wiebe’s interest in exploring forms of embodied affiliation and affective identification is clear in his brief, ambiguous commentary on his dream narrative, in which he mentions the source of his intertext and describes his sense of affinity with Russian writers in general. The anecdote implicitly reflects a sense of uncertainty about claiming identification and sympathy with an admired group of writers in the absence of a shared national identity. After Wiebe notes the applicability of Mayakovsky’s work to his dreamed experience, he briefly recounts a conversation with a friend, which concludes the memoir’s dream narrative: “A close friend said to me, ‘You’re always reading Russian writers, are you sure you’re not half Mennonite and half Russian?’ and I could only mutter, ‘To be so lucky’” (372). Wiebe’s conclusion with this ambiguous anecdote raises questions about the forms of affiliation made possible by similar embodied and environmental experiences. While Wiebe uses the quotation because it seems to accurately describe his embodied and “split” experience of dreaming and sleepwalking, the anecdote resituates this affiliation within a paradigm of national and ethnic experience. The friend’s comment—“are you sure you’re not[?]”—implies that the resonance between Wiebe’s experiences and that of the Russian writers would be more legitimate in the context of a shared national or spatial heritage. Wiebe’s response is all the more ambiguous: “To be so lucky” suggests a desire that affirms the greater legitimacy of a national and genetic connection, while also referring to the painful history of ostracism and displacement experienced by his Mennonite ancestors in Russia. To some extent, this desire to be connected with Russian cultural production might be thought of as part of Wiebe’s family romance; rather than identifying with his passive father, Wiebe asserts a connection with the powerful and oppressive nation that rejected his parents. Yet Wiebe’s use of the anecdote to close his dream narrative also articulates a desire for affiliation based on shared, resonant affective and artistic experience, and an anxiety about claiming that form of affiliation when a
national or biological connection has been denied. This anxiety suggests, perhaps, why Wiebe extensively grounds the experience of affective response in another material-biological space—the landscape itself.

While the conclusion of the dream hints at an empathy with Russian writers based on similar affective experiences, the pages preceding the report of the dream introduce it by emphasizing shared experiences of landscape that implicitly justify the connection. Wiebe articulates his sense of embodied connection both to his birthplace in Speedwell and to ancestral spaces where he has “felt remembrance beyond words,” in “places where I had never before physically been” (367). These affective sites include former Mennonite villages in Russia and the Ukraine as well as the site of his ancestors’ original departure from Friesland, the Netherlands. Wiebe positions his sense of embodied connection to these spaces as a form of intergenerational memory ambiguously situated in the interaction between body and landscape, reiterating a body-mind dualism in his claim that “[i]t may be that our bodies, despite our minds, retain what we have neglected to notice; or even undermine our ability to forget . . . Even when all facts seem lost, the bodily effects remain” (369). Linking this concept of bodily memory to his parents’ and ancestors’ experiences of trauma and displacement, Wiebe briefly quotes fellow Canadian writer Dionne Brand’s account of her felt response to the historical trauma of slavery, presenting her words as evidence that “when you have lost the place on earth where you come from . . . you suffer damage”: “‘A small space opened up in me . . . a tear in the world . . . a rupture in the quality of being’” (qtd. 369). Wiebe’s subsequent turn to the memory of his dreams, which he spontaneously recalls as a result of this discussion, presents them as examples of this inherited “damage.” Indeed, Wiebe’s description of his childhood sleepwalking evocatively recalls Brand’s imagery of a “tear” or “rupture,” depicting sleepwalking and the abrupt awakenings it occasions as a kind of microcosmic reenactment of displacement and exile: “the child life I lived somewhere in the Land of Sleep would on occasion be ripped open, exposed frightfully in my physical bed . . . my mother would awaken to pick me up in my wanderings” (370). Wiebe also rushes out of his house in the only vivid dream he recalls, a dream that notably occurs shortly before the family is to depart from Wiebe’s childhood home in Speedwell. Thus,
the dreams replicate the displacements experienced by his parents and, in retrospect, foreshadow his own.

The dream account’s implicit suggestion that individual bodies can “retain” and re-enact traumas and displacements experienced by other bodies raises questions about the location and transmission of memory and trauma in Wiebe’s conception of embodied subjectivity. Wiebe ambiguously positions this retention of memory as a function of two organic metaphors which are never entirely distinct: biological inheritance and embodied responses to geography. For instance, he notes that he is connected to each landscape in which he feels embodied remembrance through either his parents or “blood forebears” (367); yet his sense of resonance in these places is also accentuated by his discovery of geographical remnants of his family’s past in the form of a ruined school and gravestones and records that bear the family name—remnants that illustrate that his embodied responses are not simply handed down through his bloodline but are reminders that his own body has been separated from “the place on earth where [he] come[s] from” (369). A similar ambiguity between individual responsiveness to landscape and intergenerational trauma is evident in his depiction of his dreams. While Wiebe vaguely attributes the dreams to a sense of geographical displacement, his intertext also evokes the gothic depictions of intergenerational trauma advanced by psychoanalysts such as Nicolas Abraham. The words of Mayakovsky’s poem—“‘There’s somebody fighting his way / out of me!’” (371)—suggestively connects to Abraham’s description of the transgenerational “phantom,” an unconsciously transmitted family secret or trauma that “lies beyond the scope of symptom-formation in the sense of a return of the repressed; it works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject’s own mental topography” (“Notes” 173). While Abraham’s colleague Maria Torok claims that this “phantom” is transmitted through a “direct empathy with the unconscious or the rejected psychic matter of a parental object” (181), Abraham himself notes that this unconscious transmission occurs “in a way yet to be determined” (173). Wiebe’s discussion of embodied emplacement positions his own sense of unconscious empathy with his parents and ancestors in and through a felt response to landscape. However, the idea that embodied empathy is mediated by landscape also blurs the distinction between his biological connection with his parents and his link to others who have experienced the same
landscapes. By establishing a resonance that exists within the landscape itself, Wiebe’s account of his remembrance and dreams legitimizes his connection to the Russian landscape and naturalizes the active empathy and affinity with Russian writers that he articulates after the dream account.

Wiebe’s implicit privileging of landscape as a site and catalyst for the transmission of unconscious memory differs from other theories of intergenerational trauma. While a number of theorists have discussed the idea that forms of memory and unconsciousness can be transmitted by media outside of the individual subject, this communication typically emphasizes interpersonal dynamics and objects like family memorabilia rather than natural environments. For instance, in Hirsch’s theory of “postmemory,” which she describes as “distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection,” the inherited “memory” is constructed both through a subconscious investment in the gaps of family history and a conscious attempt to fill those gaps through external media, such as photographs (Family 22). Similarly, Campbell draws on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to identify “the unconscious . . . as something that is communicated to you through other people . . . a social as well as individual passage that cannot be confined to a politics of the family” (58). Campbell describes the resulting unconscious as a form of “situated history” (59) or “bodily imaginary” (63) that can be gradually narrativized through “reimagination and rememory” (59). Wiebe’s own engagement with the possibility of an externalized, “situated history” clearly involves intentional “rememory” in his construction of the final chapter of the memoir, but his explicit presentation of the embodied memory and dream experiences emphasizes their non-intentional nature, particularly his claim that “[a]s I wrote and rewrote these words [about geographical loss], gradually a memory of my Speedwell nightmares returned to me” (369). The focus on landscape in his articulation of residual trauma further emphasizes an absence of intentionality in its similarity to theories of affect transmission that problematize the constitution of a self-contained psyche and unconscious. As Theresa Brennan describes the transmission of affect, “[t]he ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual. Physically and biologically, something is present that was not there before, but it did not originate sui generis” (1). Wiebe’s depiction of his dream and his repeated blurring of biological and
environmental metaphors situate the unconscious and the psyche, as Lisa Blackman describes them, as “a threshold experience produced at the interface or intersection of the self and other, material and immaterial, human and non-human, and inside and outside” (23). Thus, his depiction and analysis of the dream underscore the uncontrollable nature of this interaction and ultimately leave it unclear whether the embodied response he celebrates is generational, biological, or experiential, situated in the body or in the landscape.

Wiebe’s use of organic and natural metaphors—cellular, botanical, and hydrological—to articulate his connection to former familial spaces also blurs the distinction between singular and collective experiences, since each are located in shared landscapes that boast similar characteristics and affective power. On one hand, Wiebe’s recollections of his childhood emphasize his individual body’s connection to the earth carved out from the boreal forest of Speedwell. In the image that provides the title for his memoir, Wiebe declares that “[s]tanding barefoot in the turned soil behind our house, I know: Of this earth my cells are made” (367). The agricultural metaphors of soil and cultivation indigenize Wiebe in the Canadian landscape by depicting him as grown from and part of the landscape. Yet Wiebe also indirectly links Speedwell with his family’s former ancestral homes and the origins of their Christian faith in his discussions of the aspen or poplar trees that make his family’s experience “more than simply the endless human labour of survival in the Canadian boreal forest: poplar forests grow from Canada to Russia to England and Israel” (352). The aspen also offers a botanical analogy for the simultaneous dispersion and identicality of Wiebe’s family, which similarly blurs the role of the individual within the group. Reflecting on the tree’s extensive spread around the

21 Jonathan Kertzer argues that imagery of soil and rootedness typifies a heritage of romantic nationalism that continues to influence Canadian literature and criticism, especially the idea of “the organic blending . . . of landscape with individual and communal lives” (16). Wiebe’s reflections here certainly evoke the romantic idea that “transcendental truths must be rooted in a national soil whose peculiarities nourish the true poet” (14). However, growing awareness of the constructedness of nationalism has meant that such organic metaphors are sometimes more associated with regionalism, which Christian Riegel et al. note is often “accepted as . . . a kind of kinship . . . sometimes as a more organic alternative to the nation-state with its arbitrary borders” (“Regionalism” ix, x). It is worth noting that Wiebe and Butala’s memoirs might be described as regionalist, since each focus on a particular locale and ecosystem, and neither capitalize on these metaphors to advance a specifically national perspective.
globe, Wiebe notes that “[i]n fact, scientists tell us that clones of a single aspen seed can occupy up to eighty hectares of land . . . The aspen in Canada’s boreal forest are the largest living organisms growing on the earth; every one a link in our boundless circle of life” (354). The metaphor of the aspen, which can send up thousands of genetically identical stems from the same root system, rejects the popular metaphor of transplantation in favour of a more rhizomatic model of the dispersion of individual parts of the same organism. Wiebe’s emphasis on the language of unity and identicality—each individual aspen is a “clone” of the original, part of a single “organism”—is telling for his application of this organic model to his familial and ethnic history of dispersion and connection; while geographically separated and connected to the local spaces in which they grow, each part remains identical to the others as well.

While Wiebe’s emphasis on the metaphor of organic growth and interconnection reinforces a depiction of genetic connection within and despite diasporic migration, his articulation of these ideas through proliferating images of landscapes that exist around the world ultimately undermines the importance of genetic connection in these identical spaces. This emphasis on landscape is most prominent in a depiction of embodied remembrance that emphasizes the cellular identicality of landscape rater than a biological connection with an ancestor. Recalling an affective apprehension of memory while in Noordhaven, the Netherlands, Wiebe relates:

I have a sudden, overwhelming, sense that this water glittering in this canal passing this hotel door and being pumped up into the North Sea, is, molecule for molecule, cycle for cycle, the very water my ancestor Wybe Adams van Harlingen last saw here in the town of his birth, when he sailed away to Danzig in 1616. (369)

Wiebe’s emphasis on the identicality of an observed environment and the similarity of his own experience to that of Wybe Adams rests on the similarity of experience, not on biological or genetic connection. Landscape thus becomes a site for shared experience and affiliation, with the ability to evoke the same experience hundreds of years apart. By invoking a sense of hydrological and molecular stability, Wiebe creates a claim to the experience based on a shared materiality. While Wiebe’s emphasis on biological connection reiterates the genealogical nature of affiliation with his forebears and their
experiences of exile and displacement, his depiction of the landscape thus also underscores his desire to address a sense of universality through similar interaction with landscape and environment. The “sudden, overwhelming sense” of connectivity that he experiences in Noordhaven is similar to the overwhelming urgency of his sleepwalking experience, and Wiebe capitalizes on the apparent unconsciousness and external agency of both experiences to claim connections with spaces and cultural production beyond Canada and beyond his nuclear family.

The association between dreams, felt experience, and a psychic landscape is more pronounced in Butala’s *The Perfection of the Morning*, which negotiates similarly vexed questions of affiliation, landscape, and universality. The memoir recounts Butala’s mid-life move from urban Saskatoon to an expansive ranch in the southern prairies of Saskatchewan, a transformative experience that leads her to reject the negative perspective of rural life passed down from her mother and to search, like Wiebe, for discourses that will approximate her felt experiences. She declares that “no one would ever again tell me what I thought . . . I would never again accept anybody’s word about anything having to do with my life unless, having . . . matched it against how it felt in my heart, my gut, my head, I knew it fit my own real feelings, how I viewed life and my own real experiences” (72). In this search for what Bakhtin would name an “internally persuasive” discourse (342), Butala considers and connects a range of physiological, psychic, and environmental catalysts for her powerful affective experiences on the ranch. Like Wiebe, she uses organic metaphors to describe the sense of connection with the land that she observes in those around her, ascribing that relationship to a process of cellular incorporation and change. While she believes that her own relationship to the land may never be as strong as those who have “lived in it so long that it has seeped into your bones and your blood” (78), she still depicts the environment as materially changing her own body: “My very atoms would be rearranged” (57).

Butala’s memoir develops with reference to a series of dreams that she associates with her new presence in a natural landscape. As she reflects, “It was not until I moved into the country to live that my significant dreaming really began . . . [I]t was suggested to me . . . that perhaps living in this ancient, skeletal landscape had brought on these dreams”
Dreams, which Butala responds to viscerally, join several other forms of embodied knowledge that she describes as a “sixth sense”; she posits that they are forms of primitive knowledge that can only be maintained through close connection with the natural world (56). Butala’s association of her dream experiences with the “ancient” landscape and primitive ritual beliefs echoes, to some extent, Jung’s theory of a collective unconscious based in archetypal human experiences. Jung posits that dreams are “a survival from an archaic mode of thought” (“General Aspects” 34), combining the personal with “suprapersonal, archaic elements of thought, feeling, and instance” (44). In her evocation of this archetypal understanding of dreams, Butala allows for a more primitive and romantic connectivity through landscape than Wiebe, whose emphasis on landscape is in part a metaphorical attempt to claim intergenerational connection. The difference between the two is similar to Nicholas Rand’s comparison between Freud’s late interest in “‘archaic heritage,’” which deals with “the inheritance of the actual primeval experiences of humankind” (168) and Abraham’s theory of the “phantom,” which is more narrowly “a function of the individual life experiences of the person who transmits it to his or her descendants” (“Notes” 169). However, Rand acknowledges that for both theories, “the issue is the process of transmission which assures the survival of the memory traces derived from the experiences of earlier generations” (166). While Freud and Abraham consider how archaic material survives within an interiorized psyche, Butala mirrors Wiebe in situating this process of transmission in the landscape itself, which “br[ings] on” her dreams (88). Her depiction of an extended and external psyche also differs from Jung’s collective unconscious, which he saw as “contained within the human psyche,” existing in each individual as a microcosm: “every man, in a sense, represents the whole of humanity and its history” (36). Butala instead positions a form of unconsciousness outside of the individual, blurring the distinction between the individual and the collective by attributing the shared content to an environmental force: “surely it was Nature which, whether with a will and intention or not, taught, allowed, gave them [primitive peoples] dreams as an instrument of knowledge” (91).

Wallace Stegner similarly emphasizes the psychic potency and “teaching” of the southern Saskatchewan prairie in Wolf Willow (1957). He writes of his repeated dream of a particular river bend:
unidentifiable psychic agency to the natural world literally naturalizes the forms of embodied knowledge that she investigates, as well as the shared experiences they permit.

Butala’s emphasis on a singular, historically continuous, and agential “Nature” allows her, like Wiebe, to consider the potential for landscape to mediate connections between herself and more distant others who have shared the same physical space. However, her memoir also shows that this concept of an environmental psyche problematically universalizes experience and facilitates forms of appropriation and indigenization. At one point, for instance, Butala tells a friend that “[t]his land makes Crees of us all” (87). Butala attempts to justify her narrative’s appropriation of an indigenous identity by attributing the cultural practices that interest her to the experience of the environment that she now inhabits, even as she acknowledges the awkward boundary between claims of affiliation based on shared lineage and culture, and claims based on shared experience:

I have said that I have no Native blood that I know of and that I knew little about Native peoples’ spiritual beliefs and ceremonies. Nonetheless, as a result of such experiences, I seem to have found myself drawn into their world as I seek to understand my own. . . . I do not want to make claims about or on things I have no right to and don’t understand because my history is a different one . . . Rather than reconstructing or copying Native beliefs, these understandings of the spirit world, it seems to me, come with Nature, come out of Nature itself; come with the land and are taught by it. (112)

Although Butala makes an effort to represent the historical existence and removal of the Native groups that formerly inhabited her ranch and the surrounding area, her desire to naturalize her own sense of affinity by attributing it to the influence of her natural environment is problematic. It implies an unmediated, indigenizing connectivity with landscape that allows her presence to replace the absent cultures through her similar

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Every time I have that dream I am haunted, on awaking, by a sense of meanings just withheld, and by a profound nostalgic melancholy. Freudian implications suggest themselves . . . But the Freudian and endocrine aspects interest me less than the mere fact that [this] dead loop of river, known only for a few years, should be so charged with potency in my unconscious. . . . I suppose I know, actually. As the prairie taught me identity by exposing me, the river valley taught me about safety. (22)
reception and enactment of embodied knowledge and spirituality. It also enables a sense of synchronicity that bridges the historical divide between herself and the former Native population. Like Wiebe, who experiences a resonance with his temporally distant relation by inhabiting the (ostensibly) identical space four hundred years later, Butala ends her memoir by relating an incident in which, “drawn” outside by an external force, she arrives at a series of stone circles and momentarily sees the figure of a “shaman” standing before her. Noting Jung’s recording of a similar experience of synchronicity, she speculates, “what I saw in my mind’s eye was perhaps a scene that took place two hundred or two thousand or more years ago on that very spot” (187). Although her momentary instance of synchronicity acknowledges—and possibly is made more poignant by—the historical realities of displacement and cultural difference, it also attributes a problematic consistency to the natural world and universalizes the human body’s capacity to affect and be affected by the same environment.

Central to Butala’s depiction of this connectivity is an active release of her own agency and intentionality in allowing the connections to take place. Instead, “Nature”—which she habitually capitalizes to indicate its embodied power—becomes a site of agency and psychic power. Butala describes her interactions in the prairie as, “if not a casting away of the will, at least a subjugating of it to what I sometimes thought was a larger will” (125). This “larger will,” like the embodied experiences that it initiates, is depicted as powerful and unnamable: “I thought, What if I am walking inside the mind of a creature—call it what you will” (127). The final phrase in this animistic speculation implies that to “call” or name the power inherent in nature is an act of will and involves

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23 Margery Fee identifies this impulse of “identification and usurpation” as a common dynamic in representations of First Nations by white writers (15); this dynamic is known as indigenization because it encompasses settlers’ desire to become indigenous by asserting a natural connection with the land. Kertzer further articulates the inequality of the kind of indigenizing scenario that Butala represents, arguing that literary intersections between Western and Native cultures will always be unjust “as long as [they] . . . [are] played out as an asymmetrical confrontation between history (white) and myth (red) . . . Non-native writers who go so far as to reject Canadian institutions and to embrace the Native world as a compensating source of value face the same problem. . . . They claim authenticity for their nation by forging a spiritual kinship with the people they have displaced, but without recognizing that their self-possession as Canadians is the fruit of an ongoing dispossession” (132).

24 The synchronicity in the scene is another example of the “allochronism” that Ondaatje desires, but ultimately rejects at the end of Running in the Family (Fabian 32). See Chapter Three, 178-179.
detachment from it. Intentionality thus becomes a barrier to true attunement with the natural world as well as with its psychic meaning. In the final few sentences of her memoir, Butala applies this negative relationship between psychic power and intentionality to the very constitution of reality itself: “I see that the world fails to dissolve at the edges into myth and dream, only because one wills it not to” (191).

Butala’s emphasis on the extension of intentionality beyond the self and into the environment interestingly intersects with recent work on ecological reciprocity, a theorization of how human life is “interpenetrated, riven, and always already mediated—and even determined—by relationships with human and nonhuman ‘objects’ that might not conventionally be thought to have agency of their own” (Tiessen 129). Yet as Butala’s memoir shows, ascribing agency to the natural world and emphasizing its ability to mediate shared embodied experiences can also obscure important cultural distinctions and historical gaps between individuals who traverse the same geographical spaces. This shifting of agency from individual consciousness into environmental affect also distracts from Butala’s own investment in claiming affiliations with First Nations cultures and claiming a natural and spiritual connection with the landscape that justifies her presence in a space where she initially feels uncomfortable and out of place.

Although Butala’s discussion of the primitive source of dreams and embodied knowledge leads her to a sense of affiliation with the Native populations that had formerly lived in her region, she and Wiebe pursue forms of affiliation on more than one level. Butala emphasizes the connections not only between dreams and primitive belief but also between dreamed insight and women’s experience specifically. Recounting her life as a feminist academic before she departs the city, she describes herself and her peers as a “collective,” “a race, a tribe, a nation of people, when we had thought each of us belonged to mothers and to men” (27). Both her experiences in the natural world, which call up “some primal sense of womanhood . . . and . . . an unconscious tribal memory” (47), and her numerous dreams of female figures reinforce and justify this sense of collective identity. Reflecting on her dreams at the end of the book, she asserts her belief that “there is an archetypal feminine soul, existing in that mythical world, the world of dreamtime, which we reach at last in dreams and waking visions and which informs our lives” (159). Butala reconciles her association of psychic power with the “feminine soul”
specifically and the natural world more generally by uncritically aligning nature with femininity, a move that justifies her second-wave feminist universalization of female experience by locating it in a kind of primitive and archetypal unity that she associates with nature. However, she finally must acknowledge the tensions involved in connecting different levels of specificity and universality, and she juxtaposes the uncertainty of interpretation with the certainty she feels in her embodied experience: “In my ruminations on the connection between the feminine soul . . . the Wise Woman . . . and Nature as feminine, or women as in some respects synonymous with Nature, I can come to no hard and fast conclusions” (169).

Despite this admission of inexplicability, Butala consistently emphasizes the sense of certainty that accompanies moments of embodied realization, as does Wiebe. Although Leys is concerned with the “belief that the affects are fundamentally independent of intention and meaning because they are material processes of the body” (667), the affects and embodied knowledges that Butala and Wiebe experience are infused with meaning precisely because they seem to be independent of intention and because they seem inexplicable. Wiebe’s faith in this felt sense of meaning lies behind his most compelling expression of his Christian faith in the memoir, which also mirrors Butala’s universalizing emphasis on primeval experience. In his discussion of the aspens, Wiebe emphasizes the links between the boreal landscape of Speedwell and other landscapes around the world by referring to an “ancient legend” that “aspens around the circle of the earth have been trembling since that moment when the hands and feet of Jesus were nailed to a poplar cross” (352-3). These interconnected trees share an embodied response to trauma (trembling) as well as an archaic genetic connection; the boreal forest that surrounds Speedwell is described as stemming from “one seed on land first exposed to sun and wind when the Pleistocene ice sheet melted here 12,000 years ago” (354). Having established the global spread and ancient heritage of the aspen, Wiebe builds on

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25 Although this sense of felt truth is important to personal experience, its problematic subjectivity is evident in satirical news anchor Stephen Colbert’s recent coinage of the word “truthiness,” which Couser defines as “an insistence on one’s intuitive sense of reality without need for verification” (Memoir 83).
the metaphor to affirm his own sense of embodied faith as both personal and universally resonant. Directly after he describes the interconnectedness of aspens, Wiebe writes:

Perhaps that is why—who can explain how—the death of Jesus for me always was, and will always remain, indelibly more than an historic act of brutal execution. When aspens bend, sighing pale, my body feels fact beyond any sight, or hearing; or denial.

That contradictory, unfathomably comforting awareness: the fire that burns in the soul like ice, the ice like fire. (354)

The “fire . . . like ice” of Wiebe’s embodied faith mirrors the imagery that captures the urgency of his dream, suggesting that—despite Wiebe’s personalization of the experience, with the words “for me”—the faith he feels is similarly prelinguistic, prerational, and prepersonal. Further, by attributing the ostensibly inexplicable resonance of Jesus’ crucifixion to the connectedness, identicality, and empathetic trembling of the aspens, Wiebe links his own sense of faith with a worldwide sense of “creation, grieving” (353) that is situated in landscape. The resulting tensions between individuality and universality resonate with Ervin Beck’s comment that “[t]he paradoxical problem in analyzing Wiebe’s writing is to discern whether he evidences a truly ‘heterological mentality’ while he also remains true to the Christian understandings that inform his writings” (860). As Beck notes, “The universalist, including the Christian, sees the Other as ‘equal because not really different,’ which ‘obliterates’ the Other” (860). Indeed, on a generic level, the conflict between the idea of an identical, prepersonal affective response to landscape and the contribution of this response to a sense of individual character and faith results in a tension that reflects historical conflicts over subjectivity in the memoir. The conflict is inherent in autobiographical discourse in the sense that even as autobiographers insist on forms of generational, experiential, or

26 The chiasmus of fire and ice that Wiebe reflects on here and in his dream evokes both a compelling sensory experience and an apocalyptic intertext—Robert Frost’s poem “Fire and Ice” (Frost 220), which meditates on the destructive potential of the two elements and their associations with desire and hatred.

27 Wiebe’s association of his individual feeling about landscape with a universal faith is similar to the paradoxical nature of the “genius loci” or spirit of place, which as Kertzer notes, involves an “ambiguous conflation of universal Genius and local genius” (46). The wording in this passage, in which the aspens are depicted as “groaning together. The long sound of creation, grieving” (353), also alludes to the New Testament idea that the natural world responds to the “frustration” of sin and anticipates liberation when Jesus returns. See New International, Rom. 8:22: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”
universal affiliation, the subjective nature of the writing also requires them to emphasize their own specificity and the local elements of their identities. Dreams contribute to the articulation of this tension in that they are private, subjectively compelling experiences that also allow the dreamer to imagine forms of transcendent, psychic collectivity that problematize the question of situated subjectivity.

Haunting, Vulnerability, and the Humanism of Gesture in Choy’s Not Yet

In contrast with the works of Wiebe and Butala, Choy’s Not Yet engages with questions of dream, body, and epistemology to underscore strongly intentional forms of affiliation and humanism. As I have shown in my analysis of Choy’s ICU hallucinations, Choy experiences the body’s autonomy from his conscious control during his hospital stay, but his response is not to develop an understanding of a porous selfhood and external psyche. Instead, he reiterates both the integrity of his personhood and the need, in situations where personal control and authority are impossible, to rely on the care of others. Throughout the memoir, his resulting exploration of vulnerability, authority, and affiliation involves a range of other hallucinations, dreams, and hauntings. A dream at the beginning of the memoir affirms the comforting significance of physical touch, while later hauntings that Choy is told about but cannot himself feel or experience underscore his growing embrace of uncertainty about the end of his own life, as well as the limitations of shared cultural discourse and understanding. The dreams and hauntings in Choy’s memoir tend to call up forms of vulnerability that contrast with the certainty of intentional gestures of care and compassion.

Choy’s interest in developing new forms of family and affiliation, and his intention to address his homosexuality more overtly in this second memoir, are evident from his opening dedication: “To all who understand love has no rules” (n.p.). His resistance to the “rules” provided by his parents’ cultural expectations for his family life and career inspires Choy’s “youthful desire to begin a life where I could discover my own values” (11). The experiences of illness that the memoir recounts reveal that these values centrally include the careful choice of intimate friendships that are expressed partly through physical support and care. For instance, lying in his hospital bed after his first heart attack, Choy hears voices that recall his parents’ concern about his disinterest in
starting a traditional Chinese nuclear family, reinforcing the heteronormativity of their culture:

One day you be old and sick and no wife be there for you, the voices scolded. 
For sure, you marry or no one be with you! 
No son! 
No daughter! 
You die alone! (10)

While Choy indeed finds himself “old and sick” in the hospital, he emphasizes that the presence of another person in the room with him contradicts the authority of these voices, both parental and cultural. For Choy, the authority of gesture dismisses the voices as well as their concern about his lack of familial affiliations: “With a soft tissue, the same hand blotted the corner of my eyes, a gesture so intimate, so sure, that it wiped away the ancient voices” (11). Like Wiebe and Butala, Choy finds a certainty in embodied experience, but it is the intentionality of the gesture that is significant, despite the fact that Choy does not know the identity of his companion. The certainty of intentional touch is enough to assure Choy that making his “own way” has not left him alone.

The voices’ are further contradicted—“dumbstruck”—at the arrival of Choy’s goddaughter, Tosh (38), and the affiliative forms of “family” and friendship that Choy develops over the course of his life are celebrated in the memoir, demonstrating that the concerns of his parents and the Chinatown voices are unfounded. Christopher Peterson notes that a search for alternatives to biological and heterosexual models of family and intimacy are common threads in queer theory (19), and Choy’s late-life discovery of his own adoption only reinforces his belief in the power of intentional bonds to replace the biological family. As a friend and roommate of two heterosexual couples and their children over several decades of his adult life, Choy becomes incorporated into both families. One of his godchildren, Gary Jr., includes Choy as a core member of a “catalogue of family members: ‘I got a sister, a mommy and daddy, and a Wayson’” (26). Choy emphasizes the interconnection of these familial affiliations and the comfort of physical touch during his time in the hospital. As one of his family members touches his forehead, Choy reiterates, “I was not alone! Family’s here, I thought” (24). Although Choy incorporates occasional biological metaphors to describe his affiliations—in one
scene, after a nurse puzzles over the arrival of friends of various races who all insist that they are family, Choy jokes: “How odd, I thought, observing the parade, they all look Asian to me” (54)—he destabilizes the assumption that biology and family are necessarily linked. As he asks himself during his illness, “Perhaps the voices of Chinatown were right: Why would anyone be there for you unless they were blood-bound?” (12). The entire memoir presents itself as a rebuttal to the heteronormative assumptions implicit in the question.

Despite Choy’s emphasis on his chosen familial connections, his simultaneous desire to theorize a more basic intentional humanism, founded on experiences of compassionate care during his illnesses, also emerges throughout the memoir. The precedence of embodied intention over family ties is suggested by the conclusion to Choy’s sequence of hallucinatory nightmares of the “Queen of Water,” a “stern little woman in green scrubs” who declares that “[a]ll the water in this hospital belongs to me” (45). This authoritative figure denies Choy life-giving sustenance, and Choy’s bodily vulnerability renders him dependent on others to vanquish the dreams: “I couldn’t move” (46). Choy’s adoptive family is positioned as one potential recourse; just after introducing the dreams, Choy establishes their authority in his life by emphasizing not only their love for him but also their legal relationships. He repeatedly refers to Tosh and Gary Jr. as his godchildren and emphasizes the legal powers of his adult family members: “my designated powers of attorney, Karl and Marie, Gary and Jean—all my family standing around my bed . . . I had given each of them a terrible authority: to let me die if the medical situation was hopeless” (46). Despite their familial authority over Choy’s body, however, the family are unable to fully reassure Choy of their power against the Queen of Water. Once they understand Choy’s fear, a friend explains, “The Queen of Water can’t get into this ward, Wayson . . . The hospital has posted a guard at the entrance to stop her.’ ‘Karl and Gary are right here standing guard, too,’ Marie said” (47). Despite the family’s verbal reassurances, and the promise of guards—an intriguing parallel to Freud’s depiction of dreams as involving censorship that distorts any dream content that is too threatening—they cannot safeguard Choy from the threat that the Queen of Water represents, since it is located in his own body. Only a gentle nurse’s physical intervention has the power to banish the Queen of Water by offering swabs for Choy’s throat: “With my throat on fire
all those days from the ventilator, I had craved the simplest of all relief—relief not only from the fear of dying of thirst, but from the fear of not feeling again the simple acts that can connect one human being to another’ (48). This “simple act” of human connection ends the chapter, resolving the crisis of authority with Choy’s conviction of the life-giving power of gesture and compassion. The moment when the swab touches his lips is, as Choy later describes it, “the instant when even the sickest cell in my body . . . rallied for an extra second of life” (50).

Choy’s dreams and hallucinations in the first half of the memoir thus depict struggles for discursive authority while also centrally illustrating the vulnerability of the body and the significance of external networks of intentional, embodied care. In contrast, the second half of the memoir, which details Choy’s recovery and relapse, features a more ambiguous treatment of visionary experience and haunting that still foregrounds questions of individual limitation and uncertainty, including the limitations of embodied knowledge. Partially recovered and insistent on returning to his habitual way of life, Choy is warned by his longtime friend Victoria, a Chinatown restaurant owner, that he is being accompanied by two ghosts that he cannot see. Although Victoria’s own ability to see the ghosts involves sensory apprehension—the movement of wind chimes when Choy is in the vicinity—Choy’s inability to see or feel the ghosts discomfits him, and he alternately treats the incident as a joke, a scam, or at worst, “[c]oincidences! Nothing more” (160). When Victoria warns him about the ghosts in the presence of his childhood friend Larry, Choy reiterates, “I saw nothing. Nothing but empty air . . . No one was there, but that didn’t discourage Larry from his intense focus” (154). The incident, however, has several functions in the narrative. First, it introduces a form of haunting that is both a reminder of the biological family and an extension beyond it; based on Victoria’s description of the ghosts, Choy guesses that they are his biological mother, whom he has never met, and a close friend and Choy’s first love, Philip, who died of tuberculosis as a teenager. Second, the introduction of the ghosts emphasizes the limitations of embodied knowledge, since Choy must confront the possibility that the ghosts exist despite his own inability to sense them. At Victoria’s insistence, Choy undergoes an exorcism to release the ghosts. Although he concedes that undertaking “a ceremony that I didn’t believe in, to rid me of spirits that I couldn’t see, left me feeling
immensely sad” (167), Choy concludes the experience with a sense of calm and of “respectful[ness] of something I couldn’t quite explain” (171). As with his hallucinations, Choy defuses the threat of the apparent hauntings by emphasizing his conscious choice to acknowledge the possibility of their existence and to continue insisting on his personal values and beliefs.

Choy’s encounters with his bodily vulnerability and the limitations of his sensory experience force him to confront the uncertainty and contingency of embodied subjectivity, but he paradoxically still relies on conscious embodied experiences to mediate those uncertainties. Although he continues to look for “signs” throughout the narrative, explaining to a friend that “[t]aking notice of signs gave one the chance to turn things around, to mediate the randomness of life” (79), the conclusion of the memoir ultimately suggests that it is not the cultural discourse of signs that mediates the randomness for Choy but the experience of compassionate human touch. In a discussion with his goddaughter Tosh that closes the memoir, Choy indicates his acceptance of touch as an “answer” to his uncertainty about lived experience. After Tosh gently tells Choy that “‘Maybe we shouldn’t ask so many questions. Does it matter to you whether there’s some final answer?’,” Choy does not respond verbally; rather, “I felt the comfort of her touch and I closed my eyes” (187). Choy emphasizes this supplemental role of touch even further in the final lines of the memoir. Developing an analogy based on a hummingbird that he and Tosh have observed, he concludes:

That night, I felt as if I were soaring, gliding on some invisible current. With my eyes shut tight, I saw a pattern of hands brushing against hands, multiplying into the millions, gestures making no headlines, sounding no trumpets, yet knitting together countless reasons for frenetic hearts—like mine—to rest in peace against uncertainty. (190)

Choy thus emphasizes the stabilizing ability of touch, which literally and figuratively stills his “frenetic heart.” The imagery interestingly downplays his sense of personal identity while also reinforcing it; while the repeated image of disembodied hands implies that personal relationships are not necessary for the compassionate touch to be effective, Choy also suggests that this “invisible current” also enables his own ongoing personality as both an embodied and psychological “frenetic heart.” As he affirms when Tosh
departs, “her leaving was the sign that . . . I would be the same person I was before almost dying, twice. That all my faults would remain completely intact” (190). This conclusion thus illustrates that Choy’s willingness to embrace uncertainty does not extend to his understanding of subjectivity.

Although Choy attributes a kind of universalism to the disembodied, gesturing hands, the hauntings in Choy’s memoir overall deconstruct a sense of universalism. Choy believes he is unable to sense the ghosts because he is too far removed from the Chinese cultural values shared by Victoria and by his friend Larry; as he responds to Larry’s openness to the presence of the ghosts, “Clearly Larry was more Chinatown than Sonny Choy could ever be” (157). Choy locates shared experience and knowledge in cultural discourses, experiences, and relationships rather than in space or landscape. He thus demonstrates a sense of broad humanism that reflects on intentionality but is also aware of cultural difference. When Choy travels to China to narrate a documentary on Confucius, for instance, he rejects the idea—perpetuated by his fellow documentary filmmakers, who are Caucasian but speak Chinese fluently—that he is “‘more connected to all of this than [we] could ever be.’ Not true, I thought. I shrugged” (156). Choy’s refusal of a privileged link with China based on his biological heritage is significant, as Deborah Madsen critiques his earlier work for participating in what Rey Chow calls the “myth of consanguinity” (qtd. Madsen 105). Madsen claims that in Choy’s work, as in the work of other Asian-North American authors, “[the] fiction of blood kinship . . . is narrativized by the story of ‘return’ to China . . . where historical agency is surpassed by transcendent blood identity” (105), a signifier that allows connection even “in the absence of Chinese cultural content” (105). Instead of relying on this biological sense of connectedness or on a cellular incorporation of the landscape—“I had never breathed Chinese air” (121), he notes, only to find that his asthma affects his ability to breathe it at all—Choy searches for other explanations for his ambivalent response to his first visit to China. Choy acknowledges an affective response to the cultural sites and artifacts he visits, but he emphasizes the humanism of that response: “I had felt that same pride before the castles of Europe . . . because I was a human being and belonged to a race of creatures capable of making so much beauty and extravagance” (157). The sense of connection that Choy finally affirms as he leaves China is based not on biological connection or any felt
response, but on his sense of affinity with the thought and philosophy of Confucius, whose teachings were instilled in Choy by his adoptive father. As he makes this connection, Choy reflects, “I felt renewed. An unbroken chain of human intention had at last become a part of me” (138). Thus, he emphasizes a simultaneous sense of generational and human connectivity that is based in intentional cultural and philosophical education rather than a preconscious embodiment.

While Choy’s emphasis on the power of intentionality involves a refusal to overlook cultural difference, it also depends on a conservative understanding of embodied agency and the integrity of the individual person. Even though Choy’s experience involves uncertainty and moments in which his own will is compromised, such moments are downplayed, as when Choy continues “writing” with his twitching hand (29). Choy also repeatedly expresses his sense of personal responsibility for his own medical condition due to his love of clutter, which exacerbates his asthma, and his difficulty maintaining the lifestyle changes required for his recovery. Even after his medical crises, these habits also allow him to celebrate the preservation of his personality; in his doctor’s words, which he echoes at the end of the memoir, “‘[i]t looks like all your faults are intact’” (119). Choy’s celebration of the complete survival of his sense of self and his resulting reliance on the compassionate support of others may seem idealistic and even facile to some readers, especially in contrast to other illness memoirs in which writers depict the profound physical and psychological alterations that can follow medical crises. However, understanding this emphasis on coherent personhood as an authoritative discourse positioned against the troubling vulnerability of the body and his anxious response to his early dreams and later hauntings helps to explain his insistence on this stability. Choy’s depiction of stable selfhood is also necessitated by his wish to affirm the power of intentional affiliation. Peterson suggests that a similarly idealistic model of the self as contained, intentional, and grounded in an “economy of presence” (34) is prominent in queer theory, which likewise bypasses biological ideas of affiliation in order “to imagine forms of belonging beyond the family” (137). Peterson acknowledges the important political reasons that queer theory focuses on forms of kinship while also detaching the concept “from the state, family, reproduction and so forth” (19). Yet he also argues that “queer theory has failed to interrogate the fundamental assumption that kinship—whether
biological or non-biological, straight or queer—constitutes a relation of positive affect and immediacy. The concept of kinship, in other words, presupposes that the distance between self and other might ultimately be bridged” (137). Similarly, Choy’s emphatic emphasis on compassionate touch and chosen familial relationship insists on the possibility of immediacy and transparent mutual acceptance.

In Peterson’s view, this idealization of the embodied interpersonal relationship is essentially a misrecognition of alterity and a “refusal of mourning” (137); in response, he advocates for a recognition that “kinship always depends on an idealized relation to otherness even in its nonfamilial, nonbiological articulations” (147) and that it replicates “the very fantasy of inwardness, of mutual incorporation without remainder or loss” (150). Peterson’s cautions offer a reminder that all intersubjective affiliations involve some form of identification or incorporation that has the potential to elide differences. While in earlier chapters I illustrated that dream accounts can build alterity into the memoir’s depictions of relationality and mourning, the dreams I have examined in this chapter function slightly differently in their impact on relationality and ethics. In Wiebe’s sleepwalking, Butala’s mythic dreams, and Choy’s haunting, the relationship with the other is not solely depicted within the containing and liminal space of the dream. Rather, the experience of dreaming and the detachment between body and mind that it creates both necessitate and are used to justify these authors’ various identifications with others. In Thomas’s terms, the ways that authors choose to approach the “discursive gap” of the dream enable them to “justify a discourse of subjectivity” (2). Thus, the instability and equivocation of dreams are not always used to create irony, even though every account of dreams—regardless of whether or not the writer provides an explicit interpretation—involves some form of negotiation and equivocality.

However, memoirs’ use of dreams, hallucinations, and hauntings as part of their complex examinations of the interfaces between mind, body, and other still represents an important negotiation of the genre’s tensions. The inevitable appropriations and idealizations involved in models of affiliation and kinship suggest that neither Choy’s combination of a conservative subject and intentional affiliation nor Wiebe’s model of a porous and material subject can entirely resolve the paradoxical relationship between the
individual and the universal that has become central to the memoir. Rather, the writer of
the relational memoir is always subject to what Leigh Gilmore calls the
“auto/biographical demand” (72). While Gilmore introduces the term specifically to
articulate the paradox “in which the demands of autobiography (to tell my story) and the
demands of biography (to tell your story) coincide,” I find the term useful to express the
range of competing demands that cause the auto/biographical memoir writer to encounter
an “irresolvable narrative dilemma because it both divides and doubles the writing
subject with respect to the task” (72). This doubled demand can be identified not only in
the tension between responsibilities to different stories but in the desire of memoirists to
articulate personal values that nevertheless have universal resonance, to represent bodies
that are contained but abstractly connect with and impinge on others, and to claim
relationships with peoples and spaces that are at once emotionally meaningful and
physically separate. The dream’s ability to capture the simultaneity of the different
discourses, desires, and identifications that coexist in the memoir thus render it a
uniquely flexible and compelling topos in the genre. Whether dealing with questions of
intersubjectivity, emplacement or universality, dreams distill the points of tension in the
genre and evocatively illustrate the “acute and untranscendable” nature of the
auto/biographical demand (72).
Conclusions
Waking Up: Out of the Dream and Out of the Memoir

The dreams, visions, and hauntings that I have examined in this dissertation dramatize and negotiate the complexities of personal, geographical, and social loss and reconnection. At once aesthetically compelling and implicitly reflexive, these narrative devices illustrate the centrality of questions of relationality, mourning, and claims to belonging in contemporary Canadian memoirs. Their prominent inclusion in a wide range of memoirs indicates a broader interest in the forms of ambivalence, reflection, and critique that they enable, and also highlights a narrative trend in contemporary Canadian life writing. In fact, the consistent patterns of dreams and visionary encounters in memoirs have the potential to become predictable aesthetic devices; they can almost too coyly insist on the presence of the “Other” and other spaces in the text, and some recent texts that use visionary encounters with the dead heavy-handedly suggest that perhaps the device is becoming expected in the genre.¹ Yet this predictability does not negate the ambivalent functions of such dreams and visions, which I described in the introduction as a form of “spectropoetics,” borrowing Alessia Ricciardi’s term to suggest that dreams operate as “space[s] in which art allows the enigma of mourning to resonate” (9). Ricciardi distinguishes spectropoetics from contemporary art in which, “instead of being understood as an ethical question, mourning comes to be rephrased as an aesthetic device or posture (not a process of self-interrogation, but a kitschy display of nostalgia)” (4). However, the dreams and memoirs I have considered in this study complicate Ricciardi’s separation between ethical and “kitschy” representations of mourning. Simply put, the memoir is a popular and populist genre, even in its literary forms, and the dreams and visions that they employ encompass both aesthetic and ethical demands, nostalgia and self-interrogation. The dreams I have examined throughout this dissertation both foreground and problematize the solipsistic nature of the memoir as they negotiate the

¹ For instance, Lorna Crozier’s Small Beneath the Sky (2009) ends with a series of conversations with her deceased mother that seem forced and trite, disrupting the otherwise spare and measured tone of the work. In one sequence, her mother asks how “Dr. Phil” is doing: “‘Dr. Phil, you silly, on TV. You know who I mean’” (187). Such works seem to participate in a broader trend of popular writing that speculates about the nature of the afterlife, such as Mitch Albom’s novel The Five People You Meet In Heaven (2003).
meaning and parameters of loss in both private and public contexts. In their open-ended and critically ambivalent engagement with mourning, dreams and visions contribute to the equivocal tone of the memoir genre by illustrating the genre’s competing demands to represent the self and the other, to give space to the personal and historical, to include reflective and affective responses to experience, and to articulate individual and collective forms of identity. They convey memoir writers’ desire to express relationality and its difficult ethical demands despite and within the limitations of the monologic memoir.

Dreams—and perhaps memoirs, too—might be thought of as devices that both enable and contain evocative representations of the “engima[s] of mourning” (Ricciardi 9), engaging with central questions raised by the experiences of loss and displacement: What does it mean to imagine and dream other people and other spaces, even when we know they are gone? How can the absent remain present? What remains after something is lost, and what new forms of presence and forms of being can grow from loss? Not least, how is who I am shaped by and dependent on the people and places that form my physical and psychic environments? As I have illustrated in the previous chapters, dreams, visions, and hauntings have the capacity to convey the inconclusive answers to such questions in concise, evocative scenes that complement each memoir’s broader negotiations of loss and belonging. While adding the enigmas of their own meaning and authority to questions of continuity, relationship, and representation, dreams offer spaces of narrative possibility that lend themselves to the ways in which memoirists narrate dying and its effect on subjectivity; they stage encounters that raise questions of voice and of voicing-over the other; they evoke landscapes of the past into which dreamers may only temporarily travel; and they constitute spaces in which differing discourses about mind and body, family and community can be negotiated. Overall, I have argued that dreams function to convey the powerfully ambivalent tensions inherent to the memoir genre, both in memoirs’ tendency to acknowledge and leave open-ended the uncertainties of ongoing life and in their efforts to balance representations of self and other, individual and collective, and public and private. While dreams and visions thus provide narrative spaces in which the irresolvable paradoxes of mourning are often dramatized, these spaces are also importantly delimited and contained as phenomena separate from
conscious, waking life. As such, they allow for the expression of desires that are personally or politically threatening—desires ranging from contacting the dead to making a personal claim to a distanced or alien landscape. In addition, although dreams and visions may allow the dreamer—and the reader—to experience both the gratification of desire and the impossibility of reconnection, they also necessitate a return to and recognition of the waking world. In closing, then, I offer some reflections on what insights dreams and memoirs might lend into the worlds to which dreamers and readers return—into the broader visions of life and selfhood presented by these memoirs, into their claims to community and citizenship, and into their existence in and as literary texts that enter a Canadian marketplace.

The idea that dreams may affect waking life is as old as dreaming itself, though their possible effects have been interpreted in many ways, ranging from prophetic power and divine inspiration to psychic insight and emotional regulation. I began this study by comparing my reading of the literary dream with Gary Grenell’s theory that dreams operate as detached mental spaces in which contradictory affects can be integrated, thus diffusing potential psychological tensions by teaching the brain how to balance and accept the co-existence of competing ideas in a state of equilibrium. In the personal and writerly contexts of the dreams I have examined here, dreams similarly contribute to a sense of equilibrium and competing possibilities that strongly affects the tone of the memoir genre. Some dreams literally depict a liminal juxtaposition of differing possibilities, as in Keefer’s depiction of the dream of her grandmother as “both taking leave of and greeting her forever” (Honey 15). Others emphasize the dream’s ability to envision desired possibilities that both contradict and complement reality. Charlie Johnston’s deathbed visions in Baltimore’s Mansion allow him to simultaneously experience an ultimate emplacement in his forge, a site of Newfoundland nationalism, and to depart in a metaphorical exile that mirrors his descendants’ experiences. Similarly, the dreams of the dead that I discussed in chapters One and Two, such as Marlatt’s terrifying encounter with her mother in a dream of the underworld, offer the competing possibilities of reassurance that the other’s life continues and detachment from the potentially threatening or ethically problematic elements of contacting and representing the dead. In their staging of contradictions and forms of simultaneity, dreams contribute
to an overall suspension of final judgment and closure that characterizes the contemporary memoir.

The equilibrium established by dreams in the memoir conveys a paradoxically positive and philosophical embrace of life as marked by loss and complexity. In Chapter Two, I argued that dreams have a compensatory and redirective function; although they seem to provide access to the deceased other, they ultimately turn the dreamer back to an awareness of both the limitations and the possibilities of life itself. Like Goodison in *Turn Thanks*, they may conclude that “there is no need” to recover the other’s voice after death (31). While such an approach to life might be thought of as inherently elegiac, it is not intractably melancholic; rather, it accords with philosophical approaches to contemporary life that scholars have also identified in other forms of contemporary literature. In an analysis of John Updike’s novels as prose elegies, for instance, John B. Vickery explains that “the elegiac becomes a normal, anticipatable, and quite possibly an inevitable phase of life. As such, it calls neither for bitter grief and lamentation nor for absolute resolutions” (*Prose* 6). In the works I have studied, dreams contribute to an elegiac approach to life that occasions both reflection and celebration. In contrast to Freudian models of the “work of mourning” which involve either absolute detachment from a lost object (mourning) or a pathological attachment to it (melancholia), dreams allow for simultaneity in their provision of a sense of tentative connection and awareness of detachment, as well as in their episodic recurrence. Just as Bhabha describes the incursion of the past in the present as an ongoing interruption that re-shapes our understanding of the present (*Location 7*), dreams can act as ongoing reminders of loss and the inextricability of absence and presence that coexist with life. For instance, although Goodison’s *From Harvey River* ends with an inheritance of dreaming in which Goodison recites her identification with her familial and cultural past, the dream ultimately serves to provide rejuvenation for a new transnational present; she affirms that “immersing myself in the waters of the river named for the Harveys calmed my night fears” (277).

Memoirs themselves enact a similar paradox of simultaneity in which both the past self
and the lost other can be made present—elusively and illusively—through text. Yet like the dream, the memoir is a genre of limited duration, an illusion of presence and prosopopoeia that ends by looking forward; although Ondaatje spends *Running in the Family* reflecting on the possibilities of reconnection offered by a dreamy, synchronic image of landscape, by the “last morning” of his memoir, he ultimately hints that as the book ends, he will “turn on the light” and dispel the illusion (202). Many memoirs end with an affirmation of the values constituted within and through relations with others, and yet they also include the recognition that these values are provisional and ongoing. Both the dream and the memoir thus approach loss through the detached and open approach of spectropoetics, which “neither upholds any myth of progress through forgetting, nor affirms a unique genealogical path back to the past through nostalgia. It insists instead on openness to different levels and components of loss” (Ricciardi 9).

The dream’s impact on understandings of loss and life in memoirs also illustrates that the memoir need not be thought of as a genre that is simply focused on identity construction. Each of my chapters has considered how dreams and visions focus the writer’s and reader’s attention on the complexities of relating to and representing other people and communities—both absent and present—and on how such relationships have an ongoing influence on the individual self, however it is defined. While awakening from a dream in real life often invites introspection, the dreams that are typically portrayed in the memoir direct attention outward, to the people and places that shape the writers’ perspectives of life. In keeping with Ondaatje’s opening dream of his father in the Ceylonese jungle, dreams may catalyze further investigation into the nature of those other spaces and relationships, as well as reflection about to what extent their influence authorizes personal or political claims. Thus, my study of dreams highlights how personal genres of life writing like memoirs adapt traditional aesthetic devices and discourses to reflect not only on identity but also on philosophical and political questions about the nature of life, death, and relationships with others. By considering the impact of fairly brief scenes of dreams and dreaming in a range of memoirs, the study also foregrounds how the narrative and rhetorical strategies of literatures of mourning are often embedded within the broader stories that memoirs tell about personal experiences, whether private or public.
As I have illustrated in chapters Three and Four, dreams and visions are well suited to negotiate questions of social, geographical, and national belonging as well as questions of personal loss. Thus, the prevalence of dreams in all of the memoirs I have examined also raises questions about their production of a Canadian literary space. The experience of “waking up” involves not only a sense of loss, distance, and even bewilderment about the dream but also a necessity for spatial re-orientation. When Wiebe wakes from his sleepwalking dream, he quickly asserts a defiant agency and sense of emplacement in order to shake off the dream: “I’m Tüss, home, I’ll go upstairs and sleep. And I do it” (371). Atwood presents a more ambivalent depiction of the disorientation of awakening in her final elegiac dream-poem for her father in *Morning in the Burned House*, describing her position as “Nowhere familiar. Somewhere I’ve been before. / It always takes a long time / to decipher where you are” (104). If the dream is a “space” of resonance, then exiting that space also involves a reorientation in the real world, which may involve a renewed examination of both familiar and strange geographies and the narrators’ places in them. Viewed in this light, Canadian memoirs might be thought of as works that negotiate new thinking and reflection on belonging both on the part of the writer and the reader. As I argue in the conclusion to Chapter Three, the prominence of non-Canadian spaces in dreams in a wide range of memoirs conveys a vision of Canada as a space of many different private experiences and loci that inform contemporary interactions and various levels of community. While this interaction of private selves in public spaces is not unique to Canada or even to multicultural societies, the frequent appearance of dreams in Canadian memoirs suggest an ongoing desire in Canadian life and literature to identify and negotiate models of belonging and emplacement.

Dreams may be used to negotiate and articulate forms of connectivity that reflect the personal needs of the writers but they also offer models of bereavement and belonging to readers, inviting participation and reflection on the part of those readers through the inclusion of uninterpreted dreams and inconclusive experiences that mirror the sense-making processes of everyday life. Julie Rak has argued that such examples of living, which provide insight into others’ experiences, help to explain the memoir’s popularity as a genre that she argues can be considered a “citizenship technology” in that “[m]emoir makes many people feel connected, and it connects individual feelings to group ideas”
(Boom! 33). More specifically, memoirs can “transmit what citizenship and belonging can mean for an individual . . . [to readers] who want to know what these experiences are like, and what they can mean if what they felt like is communicated to another” (156). For Rak, this articulation of belonging both within and through the memoir illustrates that “citizenship—and not narcissism—should be a key way to understand the popularity of memoirs” (33). While the subjective experiences of dreaming and memoir-writing—as well as memoir-reading—might seem to inform a strange kind of citizenship, the ability of dreams to integrate competing discourses and to express philosophical ways of accommodating difference and alterity contribute to a profoundly complex understanding of citizenship and community. This complexity is evident and invites reflection even when dreams are used to articulate problematic forms of universality, as in Wiebe and Butala’s depictions of dreams as connected with landscape.

While the memoir’s projection of private, dreamed experiences into a public space may reflect both writers’ and readers’ interests in relationality and belonging, the publishing industry in Canada also facilitates these forms of interaction through the publication of memoirs and the media and award cultures that celebrate certain kinds of books. As Rak reflects, “it is necessary too to understand the conditions that produce the products that engender [memoir-reading’s] sense of belonging, and to evaluate what they mean” (41). The external pressures of both the popular market and the expectations of critical reception may not only shape what kinds of memoirs are published and well-received, but they may also have an effect on the forms of ambivalence that are articulated in memoirs. In this sense, the equilibrium sought in the memoir’s depictions of the past parallels a tension that Herb Wyile identifies in contemporary Canadian historical fiction. In Speculative Fictions (2002), Wyile observes “the ambivalent fashion in which contemporary historical novels ‘speculate’ in history, on the one hand inscribing an uncertainty and scepticism about historiographical practice and commodity culture and on the other hand speculatively ‘investing’ in history as the raw material for the production of marketable fiction” (215). Contemporary memoir writers similarly develop their personal and family histories into works that critically reflect on the endeavour of writing the past, but are also marketable and personally meaningful to themselves and to readers. The tensions between personal and public meaningfulness, writerly and readerly
expectations, historical critique and nostalgic affectivity, thus join the psychic tensions of
the dream’s ambivalent depiction of the relationship between self and other, and help to
explain why such memoirs, like the novels that Wyile examines, exhibit a “relative
conservatism” (253) that stems from “the somewhat paradoxical dual task of making their
history and questioning it too” (253). The ambivalence of the dream and the memoir thus
stems partly from the intersecting discourses around the production and expectations of
the genre, and yet the use of dreams in the genre also seems consciously and
unconsciously to write back to these pressures, insisting that the very purpose and power
of the memoir and the dream exist in their resonant, inconclusive inclusion of multiple
speculative possibilities.

Like dream interpretation and the memoir genre itself, this dissertation ends without
closing down possibilities. I have sought in this project to consider how the dreams in
memoirs adapt a literary heritage of visionary writing to address questions about life and
death, relationality and community that are both ongoing and of particular concern in
contemporary Canadian writing. Most significantly, these dreams illustrate a strategically
non-committal approach to making claims and imagining possibilities that is self-
reflexive, ironic, and yet calmly accepting of the uncertainties of existence and
relationality. By aligning these functions with the memoir more generally, my study
contributes to theorizations of the memoir genre both in Canadian auto/biography studies
and internationally, deepening an understanding of the genre as rhetorically strategic and
as a philosophically visionary form of personal writing about the complex nature of
personal, familial, and social experience. While my study draws on the observations of
Gilmore, Egan, and others about the various demands involved in the genre, the dreams
and visions I have examined also shed new light on the ways in which issues of
bereavement, emplacement, subjectivity, and embodiment overlap and, in Freud’s terms,
are overdetermined in the contemporary memoir. Ultimately, this study offers a series of
theoretical angles through which to tease out the dream’s contribution to each of these
important discourses, while recognizing that, as Freud also concludes, “[t]he dream-
thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any
definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate
network of our world of thought” (Interpretation 5: 525).
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