"OUR BRAINS OBLIGE": MEMORY, GHOSTS, AND STORYTELLING IN CRAIG DAVIDSON'S *THE SATURDAY NIGHT GHOST CLUB*

MONIKA LEFERMAN*

Abstract A masterpiece of contemporary Canadian fiction, Craig Davidson's *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (2018) is a masterfully crafted coming-of-age story that deals with various issues ranging from love to personal loss. This paper aims to analyse the novel's Gothic undertones and the symbolic significance of the textual ghosts in depicting individual trauma, arguing that ghosts, as liminal concepts, are not only embodiments of trauma, but also effective means of understanding the self and healing. Drawing on ideas from narratology and psychology, the article also focuses on the complex interplay between storytelling and memory.
Keywords Trauma, Canadian Literature, ghosts, memory, Gothic, storytelling.

Craig Davidson, born in 1975, is a contemporary Canadian author of short stories and novels, who has been shortlisted for several prestigious awards for his work, most notably the novel *Cataract City* (2013) for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (2018) for the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize. Davidson's writerly interest in themes as diverse as the supernatural, abuse, and storytelling is embedded as early as in his first story collection, *Rust and Bone* (2005). His recent novel, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (2018), also explores these profound topics in a coming-of-age narrative that combines childhood nostalgia with Gothic snapshots of traumatic experiences to tell a complex story of loss and pain, as well as forgiveness and healing. In view of its interest in the exploration of trauma, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* can be seen as a valuable addition to the growing body of trauma fiction. This article aims to analyse the novel's Gothic undertones and the symbolic significance of textual ghosts in representing individual trauma, arguing that ghosts, as liminal concepts, are not only embodiments of trauma but also effective means of understanding the self. Furthermore, drawing on theories from narratology and

* *Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca*
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1039-9989.
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psychology, the article will focus on the interplay of storytelling and memory, showing that memory and fictionalisation are key to self-reflection that ultimately leads to overcoming past trauma and making sense of the present self.

The Saturday Night Ghost Club is a first-person narrative that takes the reader to Niagara Falls in the 1980s. The novel chronicles the protagonist's journey into adulthood and the transformative events that shaped it, as well as exploring themes of loss, pain, bullying, love, grief, memory, and guilt. The narrator, Jake, is a neurosurgeon who recalls a pivotal summer from his childhood and introduces a colourful cast of characters who made their mark on his early years, including his eccentric Uncle Cal, his friends Billy and Dove, and Lexington Galbraith, a kind video store owner who often accompanies them on their adventures. A central element of the novel is the Saturday Night Ghost Club, a secret group that gathers to share spooky stories and explore the city's haunted sites.

As more and more of the local legends are explored, Jake gains a deeper understanding not only of his surroundings but also of the deeply traumatising events that shaped Uncle Calvin's past and turned him into a conspiracy theorist and supernatural aficionado. As the story unfolds, the ghosts and monsters are revealed to be symbols of psychological trauma. They become a powerful means of encouraging readers to reflect on how the past shapes the present and the role that ghosts play in shaping memory, constructing meaning, and facilitating emotional healing. At the same time, as Vickroy explains, "literary and imaginative approaches [to trauma] provide a necessary supplement to historical and psychological studies,"[1] making the novel a valuable resource for better understanding how trauma affects us.

The novel weaves together several layers of temporality, alternating chapters about the narrator's present with chapters in which he recalls his childhood memories and the stories his parents tell about Uncle Calvin's youth. The flashbacks seem to zoom in on the tragic circumstances that shaped not only the narrator's childhood but also that of his family. On the one hand, the novel deals with the narrator's memories. On the other hand, Uncle Calvin's traumatic past is thematised through ghosts and haunted landscapes, interconnected by traumatic events that deeply traumatised Uncle Calvin. The ghosts that haunt Uncle Calvin's stories will eventually bring to the surface the buried wounds of the past that are necessary to gain a sense of self.

One of the main thematic concerns of the novel is the complex relationship between memory, trauma, and narrative. Memory holds a central position within psychological discourses, but it is also relevant in other fields, such as philosophy or literature. As Ricoeur explains in a chapter devoted to the ancient studies of memory, both Plato and Aristotle were concerned with memory.[2] In their conception, memory is linked to the representation of the past as absence, which places memory in a position where it becomes "a major contributor to a coherent

[1] Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (University of Virginia Press, 2002), 221.
[2] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 7-21.

epistemology of the past."[3] In other words, memory is a vital element in the pursuit of a coherent self-understanding, and thus a central pillar of one's identity.

Simultaneously, as the narrator of *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* points out, the popular assumption that memory is fixed is a misconception. Instead, he suggests that memory should be understood as a mental process that is constantly changing: "Many people believe our memories are unchanging. This belief even informs the way we talk about them: we say that our minds capture images like a camera snapshot before storing them in the vast filing cabinet of our brains. We use corporeal things— photographs, cabinets—to describe a mental process that is, in fact, in a constant state of flux."[4] He also emphasises how we manipulate memories according to our desires, so that personal choices and subjective preferences always condition memory. The more distant the memory, the easier it is to alter: "Our memories change over time. Some of this change comes through aging. But a much greater part of the change has to do with how we *want* to remember. The more distant a memory becomes, the more our minds manipulate it. The reasons for this are multiple, but often render down to: I want to remember myself, my own history and the people I care for in this specific way. So, our brains oblige."[5] Ultimately, this process of subjective recollection or reconstruction of the past is intended to gratify a psychological need, so it serves as a mechanism for satisfying subjective needs: "Reality never changes. Only our recollections of it do. Whenever a moment passes, we pass along with it into the realm of memory. And in that realm, geometries change. Contours shift, shades lighten, objectivities dissolve. Memory becomes what we need it to be."[6]

In this sense, memory is instrumental for the construction of a coherent self, as Precup argues: "As a cognitive function, the process of revisiting stored memories, of re-tracing the 'absent something' of the past is responsible for generating a sense of coherence that, on the individual level, functions as a mechanism of constructing a sense of self, of understanding personal identity."[7] As Schectman aptly writes, remembering the past is a means to formulate our life story; in her words, "we interpret and reconstruct our experiences to create a coherent life story."[8] Starting from Freud's observations on memory, Lambek and Antze use a metaphor from archaeology to describe how memory operates: "memory lies buried beneath the present or, if we turn the perspective ninety degrees, hidden behind a screen."[9] This complex process involves exhuming buried events. By revisiting past experiences, it is possible to better manage the present and achieve coherence.

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[3] Amelia Precup, "Reversing Absence: The Exploration of Memory in The Yellow Birds by Kevin Powers," *Studia UBB Philologia*, no. 1 (2017): 176.

[4] Craig Davidson, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (Penguin Books, 2018), 197.

[5] Ibid., 197-198.

[6] Ibid., 198.

[7] Amelia Precup, "Reversing Absence: The Exploration of Memory in *The Yellow Birds* by Kevin Powers," *Studia UBB Philologia*, no. 1 (2017): 177.

[8] Marya Schechtman, "The Truth about Memory," *Philosophical Psychology* 7, issue 1 (1994): 8.

[9] Michael Lambek and Paul Antze, "Introduction: Forecasting Memory," in *Tense Past. Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (Routledge, 2016), xii.

Memory can also be understood as "the past made present,"[10] a bridge that joins different temporal frames and brings into focus past issues that have implications for the present. Memory also allows us to examine the different ways in which we frame the past to suit our psychological needs. In this respect, memory, like storytelling, is a highly selective and unreliable mechanism, as described by the protagonist from Julian Barnes' *The Only Story*: "I think there's a different authenticity to memory, and not an inferior one. Memory sorts and sifts according to the demands made on it by the rememberer. (…) I would guess that memory prioritises whatever is most useful to help keep the bearer of those memories going."[11]

Because of its selective and fluctuating aspect and its importance in attaining a coherent self-image, memory is also an emergent concept within trauma scholarship. The notion of trauma has migrated from psychological studies to the humanities, becoming a significant field of research within cultural and literary discourses, with publications such as *Cathy Caruth's Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) becoming a staple text in the growing field of trauma studies.[12]

In general, trauma theory, as Goarzin explains, "is sometimes said to locate itself in the rather exclusive field of major-scale traumatic events from which 'smaller' traumas are excluded and collective traumas dominate over 'individual' narratives"[13] In this sense, The Saturday Night Ghost Club departs from traditional trauma narratives in that it sheds light on personal trauma and how such ostensibly unimportant lives might be affected, while also providing insight into the cultural climate of small-town life in late twentieth-century Canada.

Drawing on Freudian theories, Caruth defines trauma "as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind"[14] The implication here, simply put, is that trauma leaves a psychological scar that is not visible, but it can affect the well-being of the individual just as much. As a painful event, it "does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned."[15] Balaev explains this in terms of the human brain's inability to accurately register and process the violent incident by translating it into processed information: "unrepresentable due to the inability of the brain, understood as the carrier of coherent cognitive schemata, to properly encode and process the event."[16] Indeed, "traumatic

[10] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 3.
[11] Julian Barnes, *The Only Story* (Jonathan Cape, 2018), 21.
[12] Christa Schönfelder, "Theorizing Trauma: Romantic and Postmodern Perspectives on Mental Wounds," in *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction* (2013): 28.
[13] Anne Goarzin, "Articulating Trauma" in *Etudes irlandaises* 36, no. 1 (2011): 6.
[14] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3.
[15] Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth (The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 151.
[16] Michelle Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 2, (2008): 151.

experience is often suppressed and thus not comprehended or rationalized"[17] so the traumatic event is buried in the unconscious part of the human psyche, denial becoming a coping mechanism. This, in turn, leads to another psychological crisis, as Vinci writes: "The process of escaping the moments of traumatic memory, of leaving one framework of reality, crossing an unmarked threshold, and entering another, results in a profound dislocation that instigates another painful crisis."[18] Such a painful memory can be named "wounded, (…) sick memory."[19] However, as the narrator from the novel writes, "the mind is a truth-seeking organ. To use that old cliché about our hearts, it wants what it wants."[20] (193). So, the narrative shares Jake's coming-of-age memories, explores and reconciles past losses, and moves towards emotional healing.

Generally, trauma can be defined as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena."[21] Freud explains that "dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident,"[22] so that "The return to the site of trauma is a repetition, then, that works to numb the experience (…) Repetition is thus both a sign of trauma and a signal that the subject is trying to manage trauma through this revisiting *and* revising of the moment."[23] This, in turn, confirms that "Our memories are often triggered as well as shaped by external factors – ranging from conversation among friends to books and to places."[24]

A significant marker for traumatic memories is the spatial setting. As Balaev explains, "Place is not only a location of experience, but, significantly, a facet of perception that organizes memories, feelings, and meaning at the level of the physical environment. To conceive of place as an actor or character in the novel takes into consideration a conception of identity as relational or as a non-binary organizing principle of the self and consciousness."[25] Emotional trauma is reflected in the spatial setting in *The Saturday Night Ghost Club*: urban spaces such as shops and houses become repositories of painful experiences. The symbolic power of the location is contextualised

[17] Aurelija Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė, "Individual Traumas in Christy Lefteri's The Beekeeper of Aleppo," *New Horizons in English Studies*, no 7 (2022): 61.

[18] Tony M. Vinci, *Ghost, Android, Animal. Trauma and Literature Beyond the Human* (Routledge, 2020), 10.

[19] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, transl. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 69.

[20] Craig Davidson, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (Penguin Books, 2018), 193.

[21] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 91.

[22] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *On Metapsychology*, ed. Angela Richards (Penguin, 1991), 282.

[23] Andrew Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma, 1914-1934* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 6.

[24] Astrid Earl, "Wars We Have Seen: Literature as a Medium of Collective Memory in the Age of Extremes," in *Memories and Representations of War. The Case of World War I and World War II*. Eds. Elena Lamberti and Vita Fortunati (Rodopi, 2009), 29.

[25] Michelle Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 2 (2008): 160.

within the framework of personal loss and the subsequent traumatic impact on the human psyche. This idea is reinforced by Bachelard, who explains that "In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time,"[26] that is, memories are closely tied to spaces.

The Saturday Night Ghost Club is a haunted novel in which ghosts proliferate and the physical environment appears as a site for the spectres of the past, disguised as urban legends and children's play. The idea of haunting, Wolfreys argues, is closely linked to invisible forces that have an unpredictable effect on us: "From one perspective, haunting might best be described as the ability of forces that remain unseen to make themselves felt in everyday life. Such an oscillation causes us to anticipate, to fear, to act or to respond in ways which we do not fully comprehend, supposing that we understand them at all."[27] Ghosts and stories are the hallmarks of haunting in the novel: by recounting local legends and revisiting sites of past significance, the members of the Ghost Club can finally unravel Uncle Calvin's mysterious past and the traumatic events that turned him into a conspiracy theorist and believer in occult powers. In addition, Uncle Calvin explicitly declares that "*This city is haunted by ghosts.*"[28]

Davidson's fascination with the complex relationship between memory, ghosts, and literature is already reflected in the paratext. More specifically, the inclusion of a quotation from MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*, "Memory is another word for story, and nothing is more unreliable,"[29] signals an overt interest in addressing memory and storytelling as unreliable constructs, both highly contingent on the subjective choices of the individual. This metafictional citation ties memory to storytelling, drawing attention to one of the essential qualities of both: unreliability. Just as writing a story implies fictionalisation, remembering is a subjective act that always involves a degree of unreliability, so the two are complementary and inextricably linked as subjective acts of creation. The self-reflexive quote also alludes to the art of writing and ponders the nature of storytelling. In addition, the narrator explicitly confronts the reader with the shattering of "the illusory reality of the fictional world:"[30] "What follows is an account, as I choose to remember it, of my twelfth year on this planet—the summer of the Saturday Night Ghost Club."[31] On the one hand, this act of transgression is a means of emphasising the link between memory and storytelling. On the other hand, it destabilises the created world in an ontological sense.

The strong link between stories and memory is reflected in the opening lines of the novel. Specifically, the narrator, a neurosurgeon, writes about the human brain, using hyperbolic metaphors to emphasise the importance of ordinary memories: "Though I work carefully and with a keen knowledge of the cerebral topography, my wand remains a beast blundering through fields of budding shoots. If I trample something critical, the patient may awaken lacking a vital memory. That one where they gazed into the sky as a child, wondering how a star might taste, settling on

[26] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Penguin Books, 1958), 30.
[27] Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings* (Palgrave, 2022), 110.
[28] Craig Davidson, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (Penguin Books, 2018), 25.
[29] Ann-Marie MacDonald, *Fall on Your Knees* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 255.
[30] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Routledge, 1987), 197.
[31] Craig Davidson, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (Penguin Books, 2018), 11.

breathtaking wintergreen. The smell of their newborn daughter's scalp, or that haunting tingle on their lips following their first kiss."[32] By associating the scalp with a beast with the instant a patient first meets their newborn, the narrator emphasises how fragile, fleeting, and precious those moments are.

The powerful connection between memory and storytelling is further reinforced by the suggestion that memories are the stories we tell ourselves, the things that make us who we are, placing memories at the core of what makes us humans: "The brain is the seat of memory, and memory is a tricky thing. At base level, memories are stories—and sometimes these stories we tell allow us to carry on. Sometimes stories are the best we can hope for. They help us to simply get by, while deeper levels of our consciousness slap bandages on wounds that hold the power to wreck us. (…) Tell yourself these stories long enough and you will discover they have a magical way of becoming facts."[33] Tal explains that "Literature of Trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it 'real' both to victim and to the community."[34] This act of rendering the traumatic event visible can be interpreted as a means of validating the repressed emotions and achieving healing, so that the process of fictionalisation is necessary to overcome these emotional scars.

By insisting on referring to past secrets as emotional burdens that will eventually resurface, the narrator foreshadows the main thematic concern: "But a secret can be hidden from everyone save its holder, and the brain is not only a storyteller, it is a truth-seeking organ. If the stories we tell are no more than an overlay, the equivalent of six feet of caliche covering a pool of toxic sludge, something's bound to bubble up, right? And the most awful truths will do so in the darkest hours of night, when we're most vulnerable."[35] To enhance the power of the image, the narrator uses the dog as a metaphor to explain the violent reappearance of the repressed memory: "If you bury those secrets so deep that you forget they ever happened, okay, maybe you've beat the devil. But the truth is a bloodhound. That's something I can tell you with certainty. The truth is that abandoned dog following you over sea and land, baying from barren clifftops, never tiring and never quitting, forever pining after you—and the day will come when that dog is on your porch, scratching insistently at your door, forcing you to claim it once again."[36] The implication here is that unburying secrets is the key to organising one's life and finding meaning in one's past and present.

As the story shifts to the narrator's childhood, the reader is transported into the wondrous realm of monsters and magic. As a lonely child, the narrator's gullible imagination was fuelled by his Uncle Calvin, an eccentric man who was "the ideal nursemaid for my paranoid fantasies."[37] The use of childhood and a child's imagination as a source of the Gothic and the uncanny situates monstrosity in an imaginary realm, suggesting the construction of ghosts as

[32] Ibid, 2.
[33] Ibid, 3.
[34] Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Traum (*Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.
[35] Craig Davidson, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (Penguin Books, 2018), 3.
[36] Ibid., 3.
[37] Ibid., 4.

symbols rather than actual haunting entities: “Back then, the world had jaws that could grip at any time. That tree branch scratching my window at night? That was the fingernail of a vampire roused from the catacombs beneath the Lundy’s Lane cemetery.”[38] It is suggested that childish innocence and the boundless imagination of children are the source of monsters: “But monsters make themselves scarce when adults are around, only to slither back after dark. Every kid knew this to be an unshakable fact.”[39]

The novel does suggest that monsters are real. However, they are not supernatural, but human beings who are capable of unimaginable evil. For example, a local bully, Percy Elkins, terrorises the town's children in violent confrontations. Or, as the men stabbing Calvin's pregnant wife prove, the real thing is more frightening than the stuff that local myths and urban legends are made from. The monster trope thus becomes a powerful metaphor for investigating evil and grounding the narrative in the real world. Another Gothic symbol used in the novel is that of ghosts. Ghosts hover between two ontological states. As liminal beings *par excellence*, they are the quintessential metaphor for the exploration of trauma. As Smith explains, “Representing trauma in the guise of the ghost establishes a way of understanding, rather than provoking, anxiety.”[40] The same idea is reinforced by Uncle Calvin at the end of the novel: “Nicholas, did I ever tell you that there are friendly ghosts? Right here in our fair city, yes! They live in the space between waking and dream, and if we know where to look, we can spot them. Just before you fall asleep, you’ll see a shimmering. (…) Do not be alarmed, my boy, and don’t ever be afraid. These ghosts mean no harm. They are spirits who have lost their way. They wander the great unknown in search of peace, and wish to guide us to safety whenever we find ourselves in danger. But you have to believe. Only then will they reveal themselves to you.”[41] Through these Gothic tropes, the novel addresses the hidden aspects of the past and the anxieties associated not only with growing up but also with understanding family dynamics.

Medical terminology is also embedded in the novel, which is Gothicized through figurative language and transformed into images of monstrosity. A young girl's tumour, for instance, is described as ready “to infest her brain like the dark legs of a spider protruding from its hidey-hole, severing connections and rewriting memory encodings.”[42] In other cases, medical procedures have a symbolic meaning. For example, one of the narrator's patients, Silas, who has recovered from a serious gambling problem, refuses to let the surgeons operate on his benign brain tumour, arguing that the tumour has helped him to control his gambling impulses. This reminds us that tumours can sometimes have a transformative effect, much like friendly ghosts whose role is to provide guidance.

Uncle Calvin is a formative figure in the narrator's childhood and the main focus through whom the narrator explores trauma. An eccentric character who is described by his family as an

[38] Ibid., 13.
[39] Ibid., 5.
[40] Andrew Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma, 1914-1934* (Edinburgh University Press: 2022), 2.
[41] Craig Davidson, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (Penguin Books, 2018), 205-206.
[42] Ibid., 58.

"Odd duck,"[43] Calvin is tight with Jake because they understand each other better than the rest of their family. They both share a gullible imagination and believe in the paranormal. The narrator attributes this belief to his age. His uncle, on the other hand, seems to be obsessed with forbidden, arcane knowledge and supernatural beings. A testament to his credo is his curiosity shop, called the Occultorium, which sells arcana and bizarre occult objects. Calvin pretends that every object has a mystical background, although Jack suspects that they are mundane. For Calvin, magic and conspiracy theories are channels through which he can navigate life: "People the world had broken in some ineffable way, the same way my uncle had been broken, the same way we all end up a bit broken—a collection of small hurts, hairline cracks in the foundation—who were only looking for something to give their lives meaning, hope, or at least help deal with the confusion."[44] Interestingly, as the reader only is given the narrator's impressions and memories, it is difficult to ascertain whether Calvin was as eccentric as he is portrayed or whether his character is exaggerated through the lens of a child's memory.

It is noteworthy that Calvin's psychological decline and the resurfacing of past traumas are marked by the discovery of an old spirit box in his cellar. As the narrator reminisces, he realises that "What had been buried had taken root again. In the basement under my uncle's shop, where he stumbled upon a device whose provenance he could no longer recall."[45] Liebermann coined the phrase "latent memory" to refer to a type of "memory that works from the beneath the surface" and sometimes ordinary sites or what Foucault calls heterotopic spaces, such as the lake or the shore, "when read as heterotopias, are intricately connected to memory, even if this connection might not be directly discernible"[46] In other words, everyday events and spaces can have a significant impact on memory and remembrance, implying a powerful connection between seemingly ordinary things and past events or circumstances so that "Latent memories thus are the hidden shapes that maintain memory open to constant dialogue."[47] In this context, the basement becomes an apt metaphor for the unconscious, but also for what is hidden underneath, so a marker for these latent memories that haunt Uncle Calvin.

Something as trivial as finding an old and apparently forgotten ghost box triggers an existential crisis in the character, leading to an unexpected turn of events that the narrator pieces together in the novel. The descent into madness, which corresponds to the resurfacing of past trauma, is signalled when Calvin persuades Jake and his friend Billy to break into a funeral parlour so that Billy can see his dead grandmother before her burial and thus achieve closure. This illegal act of breaking and entering inspires Calvin to create the Saturday Night Ghost Club, while also reflecting the perhaps unconscious decision to go down the rabbit hole and face his demons.

The first nocturnal destination of the Saturday Ghost Night Club is the Screaming Tunnel, considered by the townspeople to be the most haunted place in Cataract City. Uncle Calvin tells

[43] Ibid., 26.
[44] Ibid., 203-204.
[45] Ibid., 44.
[46] Yvonne Liebermann, *Memory and Latency in Contemporary Anglophone Literature* (De Gruyter: 2023), 1-2.
[47] Ibid., 6.

the children a sad story about a mentally disturbed fireman and his family, and how the man burned down their house and killed his wife and daughter in the process. Uncle Calvin persuades the children to go down into the tunnel, strike a match at midnight and see if the dead girl will come out as a ghost. Jake reluctantly accepts, and his comments about his memories reveal just how difficult it is to remember traumatic and frightening events: "My memory of the following few minutes is troubled. Remembering it now is like trying to re-create a dream."[48]After the terrifying adventure, Jake hears his uncle sobbing bitterly and discovers some drawings Uncle Calvin has made of a woman and a demon, foreshadowing the dark secrets of Calvin's past and his gradual recollection of what transpired. It is interesting that events from the narrator's present intermingle with or reflect the past. For instance, the drawings of an incurably ill girl in her final days are compared with the drawings of Uncle Calvin, thus creating a connection between time frames and also between different types of traumas.

The club's next adventure takes them to the Niagara River, where a terrible accident happened, to investigate the wreckage of a sunken car. On the lake, Uncle Calvin tells them how the car slipped on ice during the winter and sank into the icy water. He then mentions that the ghost of the girl might appear in the rays of the setting sun, a preta, which are spirits that "are known as hungry ghosts. I've heard them described as humanoid, but with shrivelled, mummified skin, spindly limbs, long thin necks—almost giraffe-like. Giant bellies and small, sucked-in mouths. Hungry ghosts are born when a person dies wanting something, be it love or hope or sanity. That's why they have slender necks and gigantic bellies. Pretas have enormous appetites but lack the ability to satisfy them."[49] Here, the metaphor of the sad ghost may allude to Uncle Calvin's unresolved trauma and his constant longing for what has been lost. It is also about the unquenchable desire to connect the past with the present and the impossibility of finding relief from pain.

The next meeting of their ghost-hunting club takes them to the ruins of a burnt-out house. One winter's night, a gang of criminals broke into the house where a young couple were living and severely injured the wife, who later died in the hospital. The husband returned to the house and burnt it down. The revisiting of this house, which had a powerful effect on Calvin, is another hint that something terrible has happened. This encounter is one of the saddest and most disturbing because it shows the brutality of trauma and what unresolved trauma can do to the human psyche. It is suggested that the tale Calvin tells the children about the house that burned down is some kind of re-enactment of the tragedy that affected Calvin and imprinted itself on his subconscious.

The final meeting of the Ghost Club takes place in a cemetery, where Calvin recounts the legend of Black Agnes, a woman who lost her daughter to the river. The little girl drowned and the mother, Black Agnes, became a ghost who haunts the riverbanks at night, calling out her daughter's name. While Cal was telling the story, Jake's parents arrived and ended the Ghost Club once and for all. This episode explicitly hints at the revelation to come and the focus on Cal's traumatic past. The mother's comment, "Some things you leave buried hoping they stay buried"[50] reveals that

[48] Craig Davidson, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* (Penguin Books, 2018), 83.
[49] Ibid., 109-110.
[50] Ibid., 185.

indeed secrets and past traumas have been buried. The narrative then moves further back in time as the mother tells fragments of Uncle Calvin's youth and the love story between him and Lydia, who turns out to be Black Agnes. At this point, the ghost stories and haunted places of the Saturday Night Ghost Club and Calvin's life begin to intermingle. Calvin and his wife Lydia lived in a house on a hill until one night two criminals appeared at their door and stabbed her. The implication here is that monsters are real, and they are human: "You could say such individuals aren't properly human. They merely drape themselves in the costume of humanity, clad in the same skin that covers everyone else's bones while inside there's nothing but wolfish hunger."[51]

As the story unfolds, more shocking details emerge. While rushing his wife to the hospital on that wintry night, Calvin's car fishtailed and plunged into the icy river. Lydia and the unborn child drowned, while Calvin suffered massive head trauma to the extent that he doesn't seem to remember his wife or what happened to her: "It was as if Calvin's mind clipped those memories clean off the chain of his life. His brain had created an almost seamless overlay, draped over his past: a patchwork of incidents and places and moments, some of which bore a similarity to his actual lived experience whereas others were fabricated, fantasies his mind had created to account for the times in his life when Lydia had been present."[52] The narrator refers to this process as "memory *re-engineering*"[53] as an "act of erasure as a coping mechanism."[54] After that, Calvin became a mystic and a believer in the occult, while everyone else validated his fantasies as a way to spare him the pain of having to face the harsh reality of losing everything: "Operation Keep Cal in the Dark. To them, I guess it felt like mercy."[55] Another shocking part of Calvin's story is his suicide attempt in their former house, which he burned down and then stabbed himself, not remembering what he had done or why. All of these acts, including the Ghost Club, are Calvin's response to his past and his attempt to come to terms with what has happened. Wracked by guilt, loss and grief, Calvin turns to the supernatural and storytelling for comfort, but also as a form of escapism.

At the end of the novel, Calvin seems more at peace after the epiphanies that he experienced while searching for the ghosts of the past. The spatial setting and the narrative re-create past incidents which have shaped the character's life and become "Signposts marking his way back into the past,"[56] but also means to move forward, all mediated by the first-person narrator's impression and memories. Each ghost and each story is a missing piece of the puzzle that is Uncle Calvin's past. The novel masterfully puts them together to create a powerful meditation on loss, grief, trauma, memory and storytelling.

[51] Ibid., 188.
[52] Ibid., 190.
[53] Ibid., 190.
[54] Ibid., 191.
[55] Ibid., 192.
[56] Ibid., 194.

As Schönfelder explains, fiction has "the potential to engage readers' powers of emotional identification and sympathy (…) and critical reflection."[57] *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* challenges readers to think about memory, trauma and storytelling, opening up new ways of understanding how the past influences who we are, and showing the many forms that past trauma can take. The novel also provides a space for the everyday individual to be heard, demonstrating the importance of small things that can be impactful and meaningful. In addition, the novel touches on storytelling as an important element in self-construction and the search for meaning, establishing a strong link between memory and the stories we tell, echoing the Canadian writer Thomas King's famous words, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are."[58] Above all, the novel inspires and challenges its readers to reflect and rethink familiar concepts, and it is a reminder of human resilience and the transformative power of stories.

[57] Christa Schönfelder, "Theorizing Trauma: Romantic and Postmodern Perspectives on Mental Wounds," *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction* (2013): 29.
[58] Thomas King, *The truth about stories: A Native narrative* (House of Anansi Press, 2003), 2.