

# **‘There Were Phantoms’: Spectral Shadows in Christos Tsiolkas’ *DEAD EUROPE***

**LIZ SHEK-NOBLE**

**University of Sydney**

The return of the dead and the repression of family secrets are central concerns of Christos Tsiolkas’ *Dead Europe* (2005). The killing of a young Jewish boy, Elias, instigates a narrative of intrafamilial trauma in which his phantom as a psychic double emerges to haunt the descendants of his murderers, Michaelis and Lucia Panagis. Michaelis and Lucia silently transmit this secret to their descendants, Reveka and Isaac, who become, in Esther Rashkin’s sense, ‘living tombs’. It is the contention of this essay that Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s phantom is a psychopathological figure that illuminates the unwitting transmission of family legacies in *Dead Europe*, these legacies being sexual violence, murder, and anti-Semitism. What the protagonist, Isaac Raftis, realises, is that in the process of being haunted by the phantom-Elias who ‘lies buried yet alive’ (Rashkin, ‘Haunted’ 346) in his psyche, Isaac is powerfully compelled to come to terms with not only his family history but also his own relation to his Greek heritage.

It is somewhat serendipitous that in attempting to find answers to ‘the theme of homesickness, of exile and return’ (Tsiolkas 35) by journeying to his mother’s homeland Agrio Dassos, Isaac reawakens the phantom of his family’s unspeakable past. The phantom as a spectral doppelganger of the young Jewish boy, Elias, returns to haunt the Panagis/Raftis family in order to seek retribution for his murder and that of his child, Christos, by Maritha Panagis. As indirectly related to Elias and Christos’ murders, Isaac experiences what Rashkin refers to as ‘preservative repression’, which supports the idea that ‘the child haunted by the phantom is not the active source of repression’ (Rashkin, ‘Haunted’ 436-37) but is in fact the recipient of another’s trauma. Isaac and Reveka’s confusion over the identity of the phantom demonstrates the ‘dual unity’ existing between them and their loved ones’ secret, since as Abraham notes, the manifestation of the phantom as an internal force *and* external being causing psychopathological illness is to witness the ‘existence of the dead buried within’ the living self (Abraham, ‘Notes’ 175). Tsiolkas adroitly handles in *Dead Europe* not only Isaac’s difficulty in exorcising the phantom from his psyche but his attempt to salvage from his brutal family history an affirmative narrative of suffering, acceptance and retribution. In *Dead Europe*, the prominence of Elias’ reified body, the spectrality of photographs, the motif of Isaac’s eyes, and Isaac’s anti-Semitism, violence and sexual transgressions demonstrate the predicament haunted individuals face in either maintaining ignorance of that which disrupts the collective psychic life of their family history or alternatively expelling the destructive foreign presence.

As a body that does not deteriorate or age biologically, Elias' body exists as a literal and persistent monument to the injustice surrounding his murder. In its reified form, Elias' body is similar to the indigestibility of the phantom, where in acting 'like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography' (Abraham, 'Notes' 173), it threatens the self-identity of the subject in becoming an intrusive substance that cannot be swallowed and therefore absorbed into the psychic system of the living-self.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, in refusing to succumb to material decomposition—'The Hebrew Youth had not rotted at all' (Tsiolkas 172)—Elias' body maintains a symbiotic relationship with his phantom in its refusal to regard the human body as *mere refuse*, which, in the case of Elias, can be murdered and subsequently exhumed and burned without retribution (Tsiolkas 245-6). Attributing the pestilence of Agrio Dassos to Elias' corpse being buried upon Christian earth, which 'desecrated... holy ground' (Tsiolkas 167) because he was a Jew, Maritha implores Papa Nicholas to exhume Elias' body. Maritha's blood libel is based upon the superstitious belief that the 'Hebrews had their own spirits' and Christian anti-Semitism purporting that the Jews killed Christ and thus 'it must certainly be an abomination for the soul of a Hebrew child to lie in eternity' with God (Tsiolkas 168). Stellios, the gravedigger, also shares Maritha's anti-Semitism. Determining that the boy's corpse was that of a Jew, he viciously kicks 'at the inert body': 'it is a rare chance that a man has to kick at Satan himself' (Tsiolkas 245). Stellios is horrified upon witnessing the 'empty glass eyes' and 'wide imbecile grin' of Elias, believing that he sees within the ghastly ossification of this body 'the summons of his own death' (Tsiolkas 245).<sup>2</sup> The fact that Elias' body flouts organic processes of expiation is ever more horrific than witnessing a decaying corpse, precisely because for Christopher Norris it results in a 'deadlocked *aporia* of meaning' (Norris quoted in Nealon 28) resulting in an inability to distinguish between life and death.

The photograph, as an uncanny 'double' or projection, functions in a similar way to Elias' corpse in operating as a thanatographic trace of a now absent or deceased subject. According to Eduardo Cadava, the photograph is 'a grave for the living dead' (quoted in Rabaté 67), insofar as the resemblance of the image to an external referent revivifies the latter through mimetic trickery. Whilst appraising a particular photograph of his mother's village, Isaac is surprised to find 'shadows that dotted my landscape' which had not been there 'when I had clicked the shutter for that shot' (Tsiolkas 133). What shocks Isaac more than this, however, is the figure of Elias whose 'eyes shone brightly' out of the camera whilst the rest of his body 'was blurred and faint' (Tsiolkas 133). 'The violence in [Elias]... eyes' (Tsiolkas 133) disturbs Isaac and operates as the *punctum* of the photograph. According to Roland Barthes, the *punctum* pertains to an element which 'pricks' the spectator's vision into taking into his/her 'arms what is dead, what is going to die' (quoted in Rabaté 74-5). The oppression which Isaac experiences after viewing the photographs—'the heat, the dust, the mountain air and the stark sky above—were all weighing on me' (Tsiolkas 133)—conveys the thanatographic burden of the *punctum* which forces the spectator to reconcile him/herself with a family history shrouded in superstition and death. Isaac's belief in a 'scientific world' in which such spectral presences can be attributed to a 'technical error' of superimposition, rejects on a rational and factual level the existence of any paranormal activity (Tsiolkas 134). Nevertheless, Isaac's repetition of 'Cursed' on pages 133 and 134 (Tsiolkas) indicates his pre-theoretical unease about the existence of the spirit world, which impels him to wear a crucifix around his neck 'even though it was only superstition' (Tsiolkas 136). Isaac's photographs depict Agrio Dassos as an uncanny province in which the

repression of ‘primitive feeling’ (Freud, ‘Uncanny’ 945) towards the belief in spirits and phantoms returns to efface the distinction between imagination and the real. Indeed, ‘the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts’ (Freud quoted in Davis 16) is characteristic of the uncanny, insofar as the rehabilitation of superstitious beliefs is an involution of ‘what is known of old and long familiar’ (Freud, ‘Uncanny’ 930) but what has been jettisoned in a secular worldview as the ignorant ideational content of ‘our primitive forefathers’ (Freud, ‘Uncanny’ 949). Like the semantic interpenetration of *heimlich* [canny] and *unheimlich* [uncanny] to denote ‘what is hidden and kept out of sight’ (Sanders’ *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*, 933, quoted in Freud, ‘The Uncanny,’ 931),<sup>3</sup> Isaac’s journey to Agrio Dassos not only represents his return to his mother’s homeland [*heimat*] and therefore an intrafamilial sense of familiarity, but also a sense of estrangement facilitated by a certain ‘foreignness’ which permeates its atmosphere. This estrangement follows Isaac across Europe, so much so that Andrew McCann regards Isaac as being ‘colonised... by the curse lurking atavistically within him’ (quoted in Padmore 59).

Interestingly, Elias’ eyes emerge as a motif within *Dead Europe* suggesting the prominence of the ‘evil eye’ within Mediterranean cultures as a look or *gaze* known to cause harm upon its recipient. Tsiolkas’ repeated description of Elias’ eyes within *Dead Europe* rejects the Levinasian ethical injunction of the Other, for rather than positing the Self’s pre-ontological responsibility towards the Other via the compassionate task of responding towards his/her poverty, ‘wretchedness and bankruptcy’ (Levinas, *Reader* 107), the Self is *frightened* by the Other’s radical alterity which nevertheless harbours an *uncanny* familiarity of what has remained suppressed and hidden from sight. As Isaac watches a pornographic show re-enacting the rape of an adolescent boy by his uncle, Isaac’s pleasure in watching the boy-actor’s face as Pano ‘bucked into his frail body’ (Tsiolkas 226), quickly transforms into shame when the boy’s body assumes the guise of Elias:

The boy’s thin body shuddered and as I looked down at him it seemed that his skin had fallen away and his very bones were visible; and when I searched his face it had darkened, his hair was now black, not fair, and the gaunt face that leered up at me was looking straight into my eyes and his eyes were shining, they were laughing, and I knew those eyes, had always known those eyes. (Tsiolkas 226)

The *epistrophe* of ‘those eyes’ in the tautological construction of the final two clauses implies that the exploitation of children in the pornography industry of the post-Communist Czech Republic constitutes a palingenesis to the immemorial violence of Elias’ murder. The transformation of the ‘boy’s thin body’ into Elias, where his ‘gaunt face’ recalls his earlier description by Lucia as having skin ‘stretched tight across his skull’ (Tsiolkas 62), links murder and rape as comparable crimes in the denigration of the human body, both ‘exploitative of flesh’ (Cornell 29). In associating the human body with commodity capital, as a unit whose value derives from its ability to be exchanged for profit rather than from any intrinsic and non-instrumental worth,<sup>4</sup> Isaac is also complicit in ‘the mass production of the sexual’ (Horkheimer and Adorno 1231). For even if Isaac is only a bystander rather than a participant at the pornographic show, the memory of his paying Serge for sex in Athens haunts him due to the similar age between Serge and the ‘boy Pano was fucking on the podium’ (Tsiolkas 226). Additionally, the ‘rich, righteous and mortifying’ (Tsiolkas 226) contempt Isaac experiences in the similarity of age between Serge and the boy-actor fuses with the transformation of the boy-

actor into Elias, thereby inferring that not only must Isaac harbour the shame of perpetuating a ruthless capitalist system in which parents would ‘sell their fucking children for a buck’ (Tsiolkas 202) but also the shame attributed to his ancestors’ repression of Elias’ murder. Consequently, the defiant and rueful eyes which ‘were shining and laughing’ (Tsiolkas 226) at Isaac makes him an accomplice in the death, not just of Elias, but his many iterations in *Dead Europe* (Serge, Milos, Sedat, and Nikolai) who have been personally exploited by Isaac or those with whom he is associated.

Isaac’s confrontation with an old Jewish man in Venice, which begins benignly with the old man impelling Isaac to take photos of anti-Semitic graffiti yet culminates in Isaac uttering an anti-Semitic curse—‘Give me back my camera, you fucking Jew’ (Tsiolkas 154)—demonstrates his complicity within the prevailing bloodlust of not only his family but of Europe of which Elias is but one victim. Just as beneath the ‘fairytale’ architecture of Europe lie ‘layers and layers of shit... manure, blood and bone’ (Tsiolkas 179, 374), the invasion of Isaac’s body by the phantom Elias demonstrates the impossibility of divorcing one’s present from a collective past, rendered by Shoshana Felman as a ‘suppression of accountability that can only mean a denial of responsibility’ (Felman 121) towards the other. The inhabitation of Isaac’s body by this foreign presence mirrors the impossibility of placing oneself in a ‘different zone of ethics and of temporality’ (Felman 121) to a collective history which is always-already anterior and posterior to one’s present situation. Just as Isaac is ‘prepared to accept’ and ‘share’ (Tsiolkas 255, 10) Colin’s shame over his swastika tattoo, it is only through a forgiving embrace that anti-Semitism becomes an indelible and permanent stain upon his body: ‘the ink was on my skin, too’ (Tsiolkas 255). Thus, as Catherine Padmore suggests, the transmission of the ‘disease’ of anti-Semitism from Colin to Isaac denotes how ‘ideologies can move between people through physical contact’ (Padmore 61). Isaac’s consideration of himself as divorced from Europe’s ‘callous history’ belies the vicious cycle of ‘death, life, death, life, endless death’ (Tsiolkas 374) contributing to the colonial invasion of Australia *and* the continuation of anti-Semitic ideologies of the Holocaust in the antipodes. ‘There was blood there, in the ground, in the soil, on the water, above the earth’ (Tsiolkas 374). Colin’s desecration of Jewish headstones in the cemetery, Reveka’s tales of Jewish bloodlust and Andreas’ insensitive comment regarding the Jews’ fixation upon the Holocaust as a form of ‘masochism’ (Tsiolkas 86) argue against a simplistic binary between the ‘we’ and ‘they’ when examining the Holocaust, in which the former are regarded by Felman as being ‘on the right side of history—a side untouched, untainted by the evil of the Holocaust’ (Felman 121). Isaac becomes implicated in the atrocities of the Holocaust by associating himself with those who entertain anti-Semitic rhetoric. The unspeakable past of his ancestors ‘is like [a] historical umbilical cord that can’t be cut off and that pulls at the most unlikely moments’ (*What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?* quoted in Peck 358).

For Felman and Dori Laub, the Holocaust and its repercussions are ‘essentially *not over*’ and ‘still actively *evolving*’ (quoted in Mandel 213) in the violence of present-day history. This is especially the case with the violence that inheres in the photographic medium which, according to Jean-Michel Rabaté, is not to be trusted since it ‘might steal some layer in his [the referent’s] private and precious spectral emanations’ (70). Isaac’s photograph of Gerry’s warehouse and its workers is complicit with the visual rhetoric of the Holocaust in its deformation of bodies. The unsettling description of their bodies, ‘charred, blackened as if from fire and plague’ (Tsiolkas 303), recalls the extermination furnaces of the Nazi concentration camps. Furthermore, in drawing an analogical similarity between the workers and livestock, where the former are

described as ‘carcasses’ and ‘meat’ and their workplace as ‘an abattoir’ (303), Tsiolkas references the animalisation and trivialisation of the human body in images that catalogue the atrocities of the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Tsiolkas’ use of the adjective ‘herded’ to describe the movement of ‘the gaunt, desperate faces of women and children and men’ onto the ‘death-camp trains’ (Tsiolkas 91) utilises bovine imagery to denote a ‘threshold of indistinction and... passage between animal and man’ (Agamben 105) that justified ‘the tortures, the experiments, the annihilation’ of the Jews (Tsiolkas 91).

According to Georges Bataille, these images of collective suffering harbour the simultaneous potential to ‘awaken conscience’ and ‘perversely excite the imagination’ (Rosenfeld 91) by cataloguing the violence inflicted upon human bodies. Violence towards the human body ‘heighten[s] the intensity of erotic pleasure’ (Bataille quoted in Dollimore 252), in suggesting the violation of boundaries central to the abject state of annihilation where ‘meaning collapses’ (Kristeva 2) and is supplanted by a pre-symbolic and atemporal ceaseless continuity that rejects the demarcation of subject and object. Consequently, the description of victims of the Greek Civil War—‘headless corpses roughly bound across a donkey’s back; a man’s body riddled with bullet holes’ (Tsiolkas 91)—parodies the visual similarity between pornography and torture, undercutting an ethical didactics where attending to the destitution, hunger and nakedness of the other is the *a priori* determinant of the self’s humanity (Levinas, *Totality* 214).

Like Aristotle’s dictum that a friend is ‘one soul in twin bodies’ (quoted in Derrida, *Politics* 117), Isaac’s compulsion to attend ethically and hospitably to the phantom-Elias demonstrates not only the folding of the past into the present but the psychic incorporation of the other in the self. The ethical injunction of responding responsively involves accommodating the psychic traumas of the other into the self; an architectural ‘housing’ of traumas of the other in the self-psyche assumes an empathetic dimension of hospitality. Nevertheless, this self-other conjuncture becomes sinister in *Dead Europe* when the phantom-Elias *literally* inhabits Isaac’s psyche. The incorporation of the phantom within Isaac leads him to believe that he is ‘sensing the world through another’s skin’ (Tsiolkas quoted in Padmore 59). Isaac attributes this unsettling affect to the journey which ‘seems to be taking me further away from myself, from all certainties, from even a sense of my origins’ (Tsiolkas 260). Metaphorically associating physical travel with the changing landscape of one’s psychical terrain initially provides Isaac with a rational explanation for his physical illness. Nevertheless, Isaac’s uncontrollable hunger for blood suggests the inhabitation of the phantom within the ego-formation of his self, a process which is described by Colin Davis as a ‘dead person... ma[king] itself at home without being invited’ (79). Particularly, the evocation of indigestion in the description of a ‘gnawing’ feeling within Isaac’s stomach, is akin to Derrida’s typification of the psychopathological process of *incorporation*. His nausea, an effect of the churning motions of the phantom in his stomach—‘a living organism’ (Tsiolkas 353)—typifies Derrida’s description of how the violent insertion of the phantom into the self’s allegedly whole and unified psyche result in its repudiation as foreign. This foreign presence is registered as abject, pathological and deviant, metaphorised as a foul-smelling and tasting object that is not ingested but ‘vomited into the inside, into the pocket of a cyst’ (Derrida quoted in Emery 170, my italics).

Isaac’s heightened olfaction figuratively demonstrates the infiltration of a foreign body into his ego-self. In becoming ‘acutely aware of smell in a way I never had been before’ (Tsiolkas 255), the foreign presence leads him to partake in taboo activities. These activities, including drinking

menstrual blood and anthropophagy, are central to the conceptual thread running through *Dead Europe*, that the automatic compulsions and psychic disturbances one experiences may in fact be inherited or unknowingly adopted rather than intrinsic to the psychic self. In perhaps the most disturbing scene of *Dead Europe*, Isaac drinks the menstrual blood of another train traveller on his way to Germany. Before this act occurs within the toilet of the train, Isaac determines that she is menstruating due to his heightened olfactory powers:

Her stink was powerful and I knew at once that she was bleeding... the only word to describe it [the smell] would be velvet. I could smell the velvet in her cunt' (Tsiolkas 256).

It is significant that the sense heightened after the invasion of Isaac's body by the phantom is the olfactory sense. David Howe identifies an 'intrinsic' relationship between transition and olfaction, whereby one's sense of smell becomes more acute when moving from one architectural threshold to another (bedroom, dining room) or when phenomenologically and epistemologically conjuring a 'concept' (133). Following from this, Barbara Lex determines that olfactory stimulation 'retards or prohibits logical reasoning' (quoted in Howes 132). Consequently, the synesthetic confusion Isaac experiences when he breathes in 'the vinegary perfume of her cunt' (Tsiolkas 257), where the 'velvet' blood is haptically conceived as having a 'coarse corporeal solidity' (Tsiolkas 256), demonstrates the *sui generis* ability for olfaction to dissolve category boundaries between self and other. As a liminal sense which is effectively 'untranslatable' by eluding classification in the same manner as colours or tastes<sup>6</sup> and thus confusing logical and taxonomically-driven structures of meaning, Isaac's heightened olfaction is a particularly fitting characteristic of his transformation into a vampire.<sup>7</sup> The vampire is a figure central to the Gothic genre in operating as the boundary-flouting other that always-already inhabits from within, the closed system of the self. As such, the vampire is the inclusively-excluded other which can never be exorcised from the pure and unified self-body. The vampire is a synecdoche of the 'long dark sleeping hatreds' (McQueen quoted in Maganas) which lie beneath the purportedly calm surface of post-Communist Europe. Isaac's hunger for blood both literalises the insidious invasion of his body by the phantom-Elias and negates the totalising appellation of the self. The self is always 'shadowed' by the negative tracing of (an)other. The messianic and hyperbolic imagery of Isaac's joy after orgasm—'The whole world was ablaze with golden light' (Tsiolkas 259)—effectively demonstrates his revivification by drinking menstrual blood conceived as the *blood of life*.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the reader does not share Isaac's joy after performing cunnilingus. A close analysis of the offending passage, although difficult to 'digest', is necessary to explicate the erotic relationship between disgust and pleasure. During the passage, the reader should keep in mind Georges Bataille's *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, where the positive correlation between disgust and pleasure leads to the perception of death as the apotheosis of negative *Eros*; death becomes an irresistible *stench*, whose powerful odour compels us towards the overwhelming 'pull of annihilation' for the living self (Bataille quoted in Dollimore 251):

My tongue furiously worked the craters of her cunt and I felt the blood, coarse and thick, trickle onto my lips and into my mouth and onto my tongue and down my gut and I forced my lips over her clit and sucked on it till I felt I was drawing her into my very body and the blood kept flowing onto my lips and into my mouth

and my guts and I rubbed my face across the hair and skin and meat of her  
(Tsiolkas 258)

The excited nature of Isaac's language, as demonstrated in the rapid pace of the multiple repetition of 'and' in the passage, is indicative of the sensory overload Isaac experiences in exploring the 'craters' of the woman's genitalia. The sheer libidinal energy required in 'drawing her into my very body' stunts his linguistic facility to communicate this encounter without its becoming a farcical and excremental spectacle of corporeal waste, leading to the reduction of the human to 'meat,' 'guts' and 'tongue[s]'. In its focus on menstrual blood, the reader is immediately reminded of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Indeed, the arousal of disgust towards the unruly menstruating female body is a form of *abjection*, where the immediate desire for the reader-as-(a)-self to *repel, reject* what threatens 'one's own and clean' (65) body is due to its recalling the 'immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated' from another (10). As a substance which simultaneously produces life but also pertains to filth and defilement, menstrual blood confounds the distinctions between life/death, self/other and male/female by gesturing towards the polymorphous sexuality preceding the objectal relationships of the symbolic order. Like the vampire, then, menstrual blood stands for the dangers which are internal to the human body or body politic. They thereby destroy all conceit of an 'untainted', 'pure' and 'univocal' (social) identity.

Additionally, the description of Isaac's hunger as 'an instinct' (Tsiolkas 220) characterised by a 'primal... urge to kill' and sink himself into the 'stink of a million bodies' (Tsiolkas 229, 298) is suggestive of Sigmund Freud's death drive. The death drive describes the outwards-directed instinct of *Thanatos*, in which the 'compulsion to repeat' actions *not necessarily* pleasurable for the ego belies the unconscious 'instinct to return to the inanimate state' (Freud, *Beyond* 32). When operating by itself, *Eros* progresses the development of civilisation in 'establishing... ever greater unities' (Freud quoted in Dollimore 188) between members of a community through friendship and cultural achievements. Nevertheless, when pressed into the service of *Thanatos*, *Eros* merges with the desire to increase the 'quantity of excitation' (Freud, *Beyond* 1) to produce an aggression that is 'directed against the external world' (Freud quoted in Dollimore 33). This is demonstrated in Isaac's desire to rape Sedat in the manner in which Pano had done 'to the Czech boy on stage' (Tsiolkas 229). As Isaac imagines himself being the one to 'turn him over' and rip 'into the guts' of Sedat, the contradictory feelings of 'anguish' and 'sweetness' towards this act lead to the uncontrollable urge to 'destroy' and 'kill' the boy (Tsiolkas 229). Isaac's gradual remorselessness towards the suffering of the other in *Dead Europe* reaches its apotheosis on page 379, in which he baldly asserts: 'we will destroy our neighbours... We will sell our children as whores. We will murder and rape and punish one another'. The *sine qua non* of his 'manifesto' coincides with Freud's dictum, *Homo homini lupus* (Man is a wolf to man) (Freud, *Civilization* 61), in which the death drive when directed externally to the ego is sadism, thus becoming responsible for the atrocities of human history. For as much as *Eros* aims to combine 'organic substances into ever larger unities' when mingled with *Thanatos* the compulsion to direct one's aggression upon the other and 'use him sexually without his consent' is an undeniable force which subordinates the other's welfare to the self's narcissistic pleasure (Freud, *Civilization* 37, 61). Consequently, the indestructibility of Isaac's narcissism, in which he will 'no longer be saddened by the rote masturbations of the whores' or the 'schizophrenic homeless men and women' (Tsiolkas 302), indicates the possession of his psyche by the sadistic pull of the

death drive, whose fundamental instinctual force towards the dissolution of life belies the opportunism of humanity to kill others ‘simply, because we can’ (Tsiolkas 379).

The Freudian death drive exemplifies the destructive mirth of Abraham and Torok’s phantom. According to Abraham in ‘Notes on the Phantom,’ the primary motivation of the phantom’s return is to ‘wreak havoc, from within the unconscious’ (Abraham, ‘Notes’ 175). For in disseminating itself across and within the memories, words and affects of the host-body, the phantom makes the host-body ‘perform bizarre acts’ and be privy to ‘unexpected sensations’ (Abraham and Torok, ‘Mourning’ 130). This is part of its revenge against the ancestor responsible for the suffering experienced by the living self for whom the phantom in a psychic double. Consequently, Isaac’s blood mania can be considered as *transference* of Elias’ death drive. The phantom-Elias not only causes the death of seven Greek babies in Agrio Dassos whilst his son, Christos, ‘[grew] fat and healthy on the misfortune and tragedy of his village’ (Tsiolkas 167), but Isaac’s own penchant for performing cunnilingus on menstruating women (Tsiolkas 322) challenges whether his sadism is a result of being a temporary ‘repository’ for the ‘unspeakable drama’ haunting Elias’ past, or whether these compulsions indicate Elias’ victory over Isaac’s psychic agency, such that the latter becomes indistinguishable from the former in action, speech and physicality (Rashkin, *Family* 22).

Anthropophagy is another taboo activity in which Isaac participates after inadvertently incorporating the phantom-Elias into his psyche. The horrifying scene where Isaac kills and devours Nikolai and Robert James (Tsiolkas 381-82) begs the question of whether in being haunted by ‘the living-dead knowledge’ (Abraham quoted in Castricano 25) of Elias’ murder, Isaac’s subjectivity dissipates irrevocably by being permanently locked in a symbiotic union with the phantom. Evoking the hyper-visceral and liberal use of splatter in schlock horror films, Isaac’s description of Nikolai’s blood ‘on my face, on my lips, in my mouth, in my throat, pouring onto my body’ (Tsiolkas 381) demonstrates his deliriousness in transgressing to a state of abjection via anthropophagy, whereby erotic pleasure is heightened by immersing himself within the ‘polluting’ corporeal matter of ‘piss and shit’ alongside blood as the font of life (Tsiolkas 382).<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Isaac’s awareness of a boy’s ‘violent, delighted laughter’ during this scene suggests that his madness is attributed to an ‘internal psychic splitting,’ in which Elias exists as a projected ‘double’ (Rand, ‘Perspectives’ 100), living by Isaac’s side who orchestrates Isaac’s complicity in the bloodlust of his family history. Ultimately, however, the symbiosis of Isaac and Elias in their mutual bloodlust is unsustainable, since, following Abraham and Torok, the return of the repressed ‘lead[s] to phobias, madness, and obsessions’ (quoted in Rashkin, *Family* 27) in the body which is its host. Even if Isaac holds himself under the epiphanical delusion that he ‘can taste Creation’ in the blood and body of Robert James, the allegedly comforting embrace of Elias ‘wrapping his legs and arms around me’ (Tsiolkas 382) augurs Isaac’s later demise. Indeed, just as Elias’ embrace of Kiriakos caused the latter’s death, so too does Elias’ embrace of Isaac lead to his enervation and later hospitalisation. Described as having ‘sunken eyes’ whose ‘almond shape’ were now ‘grotesquely big for his thin face’ (Tsiolkas 396), the reader draws an association between Isaac’s eyes and the ‘lidded almond eyes’ of Elias, used by Maritha to determine the paternity of Christos (Tsiolkas 171). Moreover, the description of the pallor of Isaac’s face as ‘grey’ like ‘cigarette ash’ harkens to Elias’ reified body having skin that was ‘grey and clung like a shroud over... [his] skinny frame’ (Tsiolkas 245). The importance of these similar descriptions cannot be understated, for insofar as the reader is led to believe that Reveka is the daughter of Michaelis and Lucia, Tsiolkas’ description of Isaac’s eyes as ‘almond



shape[d]' causes speculation as to which crime constitutes the 'unspeakable secret' of the Panagis family and the impossible possibility that Reveka was sired by the phantom-Elias.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Isaac's eyes are but one mystery among many others within *Dead Europe*,<sup>11</sup> whereby the transmission of the secret from Michaelis and Lucia to Reveka, and Reveka to Isaac, suspends the latter in what Rashkin describes as a 'silent partnership dedicated to preserving the secret intact' (Rashkin, *Family* 28).

Whilst I have focused up to this point on how the narrative content of *Dead Europe* exemplifies the legacy of family traumas, through the phantom acting as a conduit for their transference, I now wish to focus upon the narrative structure to uncover the ways in which different narrative foci and temporalities interact to trace the movement of the secret between and among generations. For this section, I will use as my theoretical apparatus Rashkin's *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative*. In order to ascertain the identity of the phantom, the reader must re-piece the 'gaps' and lacunae produced by the split-narrative construction of the novel to determine the various manifestations of trauma and how the integrity of the secret is maintained and passed 'down through an entire family line' (Rashkin, *Family* 30). The dual temporalities operating within *Dead Europe* demonstrate the workings of what Rashkin calls a 'transtextuality' (Rashkin, *Family* 45-6), in which the exorcism of the phantom is predicated upon regarding Isaac's identity as a *palimpsest* created from and informed by the contesting voices inhabiting his ancestral past. Consequently, using Reveka's tale of blood libel as a framing device for the novel demonstrates the necessity of regarding Isaac's story as a text insufficient and incomprehensible if considered on its own. Isaac thus requires his mother's self-sacrifice to complement his story narratorially, in order to facilitate a partial exorcism of the phantom's curse from their family bloodline. Indeed, *Dead Europe* begins with Isaac recounting the tale of anti-Semitic blood libel which his mother, Reveka, reads from a book of mythology, where every Christmas it was believed that the Jews would put a Christian toddler in a barrel, 'run knives between the slats, and drain the child of its blood' (3). The repetition of this tale at the beginning of *Dead Europe*'s last section, *The Book of Lilith* (385), draws an association between Reveka's fate to wander with the phantom Elias 'for all of time, for all of eternity' (411) with the apocryphal figure of Lilith, a *monstrous feminine* whose self-imposed exile from the Garden of Eden consigns her to 'roam the earth' and 'eat the blood of uncircumcised children' (389). Indeed, Lilith's representation as a 'night demon' within Midrashic literature, where her defiance against God in refusing to return into the Garden of Eden and resume her status as Adam's wife leads to her vow to 'inflict harm on male infants up until the eighth day after birth, presumably until their circumcision' (*Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. 'Lilith' 5459). As Adam's first wife and therefore 'our first mother' (Tsiolkas 389), Lilith demonstrates that blood lust and blood libel are as old as time itself, such that no family line remains unscathed by racial hatred: 'you can't escape it' (Tsiolkas 389). Consequently, Reveka's association with Lilith demonstrates, following Christen Cornell, the ubiquity of Jewishness within 'almost every family lineage' (30). This is a point which finds its logical conclusion in the doubling of proper names, where Reveka is named after an American-Jew and Isaac, a lapsed Christian, is named after 'Gerry', whose nickname veils his Semitic heritage.

Religion as a marker of difference and identity is problematised in *Dead Europe*, since the doubling of Christian and Jewish proper names as well as the submersion of Europe within a 'ghoulish' history of anti-Semitism, means that Jewishness is simultaneously 'everywhere' and 'nowhere' in the novel. Just as Jewishness is for Cornell 'unable to be delineated' (30), so too

does the phantom confound the separation between self and other in demonstrating how the 'I' is always-already 'ghosted' by the 'we' and 'you'. In being haunted by the phantom, Isaac demonstrates that subjectivity is as much an inheritance as it is socially-constructed. What are perceived as individual 'tastes' are nothing more than characteristics unconsciously parroted from familial influences. The inhabitation of Isaac's psyche by the phantom-Elias figuratively demonstrates the traumatic 'baggage' that subjects must carry despite there being detached temporally and physically from the original traumatic event. That Isaac is implicated in the violence of the phantom-Elias calls into question not only Isaac's agency over his actions, but the ability to divorce oneself from the haunting narratives of one's family past.

Writing in the context of the Bitburg Affair, The President of the Federal Republic of Germany remarked that 'all of us... must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable to it' (von Weizsäcker quoted in Rosenfeld 101). This sentiment reverberates throughout *Dead Europe* on both a macro- and micro-scopic level. Indeed, Tsiolkas urges the reader to recognise the continuing repercussions of anti-Semitism, which he describes as a heavily discursive appellation 'rooted in defined religious differences and hatreds, and emerg[ing] from individual and cultural identities' (Tsiolkas quoted in Rowe 224). Nevertheless, the spectacles of torture, war, and blood plaguing Europe's collective history are also implicated in the blood lust and unspeakable secrets of the Panagis/Raftis family. Indeed, the phantom of Elias, which initially haunts but comes to inhabit and control Isaac's psyche, demonstrates Fredric Jameson's idea that 'the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be' (Jameson quoted in Davis 9). Isaac's eventual bloodlust and his fate are predicated upon the curse which his grandparents, Michaelis and Lucia, instigate upon murdering Elias. Despite Michaelis asserting to Lucia that 'the crime will be on you' (Tsiolkas 119), the phantom produced in response to the concealment of Elias' murder, journeys into the future to infiltrate and haunt the bodies of Reveka and Isaac. Ultimately, I have used Abraham and Torok's phantom as a means by which to demonstrate the impossibility for Isaac and Reveka of separating themselves from the spectral figures and narratives haunting their collective past. The unspeakable secrets of their family history continue to resonate, inform and shape their fate, since the phantom-Elias returns to manipulate their psychic lives, leading them to parrot anti-Semitic ideology, and perform sexually violent acts.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham argues that the phantom, in acting 'like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography' points to the invasion of the self by the living-dead other. Abraham's description of the psychic incorporation of the phantom is akin to his and Torok's distinction between the processes of introjection and incorporation characterising the work of mourning and melancholia respectively. See Abraham, 'Notes,' 173, and Abraham and Torok, 'Mourning,' 126.

<sup>2</sup> According to Georges Bataille, the horror the individual experiences in thinking about his/her death emerges from the affect of *disgust* towards physical decay. One cannot help but visualise the violation of corporeal boundaries by the 'ferment of life... teeming with worms, grubs and eggs'. On the other hand, the individual desires putrefaction because, decay becomes the 'pathway into unknowable and incomprehensible continuity' linking the self with 'everything that is'. See Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 56, 24.

<sup>3</sup> The negative 'un', according to Sanders, isomorphically denotes what is 'eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear.' Nevertheless, the alternative definition of *heimlich*, as what is 'secretive... deceitful and malicious' demonstrates that the 'un' is in fact a redundant prefix for these significations.

<sup>4</sup> Contrastingly, for both Immanuel Kant and the Frankfurt School, the *sine qua non* of use-value is its intrinsic 'purposiveness without purposeness', which is manifest in *uselessness* according to an instrumentalisation of aesthetic objects. Shane Gunster (67-8) elucidates this change in the definition of use-value.

<sup>5</sup> For Holocaust theorists, because of the rhetoric of 'realism' and 'naturalness' surrounding the photographic medium, there is a danger in assuming that a photograph is an index of 'normative history' rather than a 'reified memory' or representation of an event. Consequently, in believing that through photography we can 'psychically master' the unspeakable atrocities of the Holocaust, the living cheat the murdered of 'the one thing that our powerlessness can grant them: remembrance.' See Young 104, Adorno 115, 117.

<sup>6</sup> 'Smell is distinguished by... indefinability and lack of clear articulation' (Howes 27).

<sup>7</sup> Isaac's transformation into a vampire is inferred on two separate occasions where he is injured but there is no blood: during his confrontation with the mute Jewish man in Venice and when Sal Mineo punches him (Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, 153, 203).

<sup>8</sup> As a corporeal substance which is both defiling and procreating, menstrual blood demonstrates the 'demoniacal potential of the feminine' that resists the phallic phase characterised by the 'acquisition of language,' the construction of order and the 'most archaic boundaries of the self's clean and proper body' (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 65, 72-3).

<sup>9</sup> As Bataille notes, although considered obscene, human excreta is nevertheless endowed with a sensuality based upon the dual function of human genitalia as the body's 'sexual channels' and 'sewers'. The obscene relationship between excreta and sexuality is encapsulated by Augustine's comment, 'inter faeces et urinam nascimur' ('we are born between faeces and urine') (Bataille 57-8).

<sup>10</sup> As the reason for the phantom's return can be determined only by reading the silences within the parent's speech, it is possible that the secret remains hidden due to the profound level of encryption the parent undertakes to repress the trauma and associated guilt. Alternatively, *pace* Abraham, 'if a phantom returns to haunt us,' it is possible that its 'apparent "revelations" are by their nature deceitful' (Abraham 66).

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Isaac's encounter with Gerry in France contradicts Reveka's assertion that he committed suicide by hanging himself some years beforehand.

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