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Fantastic Spaces of Memory: Fantasy, Memory, and Trauma in *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011)

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# 1. Introduction

Narrative strategies do more than construct fictional worlds; they shape how readers perceive, interpret, and engage with a story. The fantastic, in particular, often challenges conventional storytelling by making the familiar appear strange and opening up alternative ways of representing memory and interiority. Fantastic elements can, therefore, evoke both fascination and discomfort, and it is precisely this ambivalence that makes the fantastic a powerful narrative tool for exploring memory in its various forms.

This master's thesis explores how different types of memory are represented through the fantastic as a narrative strategy in Ransom Riggs's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*<sup>1</sup> (2011). Drawing on Rosemary Jackson, this thesis understands the fantastic not as a genre but as a mode of subversion (25). Riggs employs this fantastic mode as a narrative strategy to challenge the limits of realism and enable the representation of forms of memory that would otherwise remain inaccessible within a purely realistic framework. Specifically, the analysis demonstrates how embodied memory is externalised through the Peculiar children's abilities, traumatic memory is literalised through the novel's use of the time loop, and postmemory is textually mediated through fantastic stories and the vintage photographs.

*Miss Peregrine* is the first book in Riggs's young adult series. The novel tells the story of sixteen-year-old Jacob, who, following the traumatic and mysterious death of his grandfather, Abe, begins to unravel his ancestor's concealed past. His search leads him to the isolated island of Cairnholm in Wales, where he seeks the orphanage that sheltered his grandfather during World War II. Exploring the children's home, which remains as ruins, Jacob accidentally enters a time loop, finding the house fully intact on September 3, 1940, the day a German air raid destroyed it. Within this temporal loop, he encounters the peculiar children, individually gifted with supernatural mental and physical abilities, along with their caregiver, Miss Peregrine. Jacob discovers that he also belongs to this marginalised community, inheriting his grandfather's rare ability to see the predatory Hollowgasts that hunt them. Distinguished by its inclusion of authentic vintage photographs, the novel combines a fantastic narrative with historical references to World War II.

Trauma and memory are profoundly linked and continuously affect each other (Meyer 44). In this thesis, memory serves as the overarching analytical framework, with trauma viewed

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<sup>1</sup> In the following abbreviated as *Miss Peregrine*

as one specific form it can take, alongside postmemory and embodied memory. As Marianne Hirsch observes, past traumatic events persistently haunt and influence the present (“Postmemory” 107). This tension becomes visible within the novel’s four fantastic elements: the Peculiars’ abilities, the time loop, the family stories, and the vintage photographs, which act as narrative anchors that make the invisible structures of memory perceptible.

This thesis argues that Riggs uses the fantastic mode as a narrative strategy to represent three forms of memory: embodied memory, traumatic memory, and postmemory. By analysing the four fantastic elements, this study seeks to demonstrate how these forms of memory are made narratively representable, transforming abstract historical trauma through the mechanisms of externalisation and literalisation. The narrative embodies memory through the Peculiar’s abilities, drawing on Lenore Terr’s theory of childhood trauma; these attributes function as bodily manifestations of psychological wounds, reflecting the persistence of past trauma in the physical form. Additionally, the novel utilises a time loop to externalise and literalise the disruption of temporal progression inherent in trauma. By trapping the characters in a recurring past, the loop functions as a spatial representation of stagnation, a dynamic best understood through Cathy Caruth’s definition of trauma as a repetitive, delayed experience (4). Finally, Grandfather Abe’s stories, accompanied by the vintage photographs, serve as vehicles for Hirsch’s concept of postmemory. These artefacts transmit a traumatic past to his grandson, Jacob, blurring the boundary between historical reality and fiction.

While the novel has gained recognition for its visual and fantastical composition, there is limited scholarly engagement with the text from the perspectives of memory and trauma studies. Existing research has primarily focused on the connections between the text and the vintage photographs or exploring themes of belonging, leaving the function of the fantastic mode as a narrative strategy unexamined. Anja Meyer’s *Images of Traumatic Memories* (2020), particularly the chapter “A Peculiar Narrative Photo Album: Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children,” offers an in-depth analysis of the novel’s interplay between text and photography. Meyer examines the intermedial relationship between text and photography in trauma-centred narratives, demonstrating how the vintage photographs shape the reader’s perception of memory through Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, while briefly drawing on Roland Barthes’s theory of photography. However, she does not explicitly engage with Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic framework of the uncanny, nor does she address Viktor Shlovsky’s concept of defamiliarisation. This thesis extends her work by applying Freud’s theory

to the vintage photographs, interpreting them as moments of unsettling familiarity that disrupt the boundary between empirical observation and imagination. I also draw on Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation to show how the novel transforms the ordinary into the strange, thereby rendering the abstract dimensions of the past perceptible (20). In addition, while Meyer focuses heavily on the photographs, this thesis positions the fantastic as the primary mode of representation, through which all four elements operate as an interconnected system.

Alongside Meyer's work, Hawk Chang, in his essay "Between Reality and Fantasy: Home in Ransom Riggs's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*," explores themes of belonging, identity, and displacement, conceptualising the home as an uncanny space that exists between the fantastic and the empirical. Although Chang's primary focus is not on memory or trauma, his discussion of home as both a place of safety and a trap parallels this thesis's analysis of memory as a refuge and a prison. Chang's examination of the book's liminal spaces provides a valuable context for understanding the novel's depiction of memory as simultaneously a sanctuary that preserves the past and a constraint that prevents engagement with the present.

To directly address the gaps identified in the existing research, this master's thesis aims to answer the research question: How does *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* use the fantastic mode as a narrative strategy to make three forms of memory - embodied memory, traumatic memory, and postmemory - representable through the Peculiars' abilities, the time loop, family stories, and vintage photographs?

In addition to this overarching inquiry, the following sub-questions will be explored:

- How do the Peculiars' abilities embody memory and reflect the persistence of past traumatic experiences in the present?
- How does the time loop function as a device for representing cyclical trauma and temporal stagnation?
- How do the oral family stories and the vintage photographs act as uncanny triggers of postmemory, blurring the line between history and fiction?
- How does the interplay between visual and textual elements contribute to the defamiliarisation of memory?
- In what ways does the novel depict memory as both a refuge and a constraint?

To address these research questions, this thesis employs a literary analysis focused on close reading. Drawing on theories of fantasy, memory, trauma, and photography, the analysis examines how these frameworks enable the novel to make the distinct forms of memory perceptible through the fantastic mode. Attention is also given to the multimodal interplay between text and image, particularly the function of the vintage photographs. Of the forty-four photographs in the novel, I have selected a representative sample of nine. By focusing on this corpus, the analysis combines a detailed examination of visual-textual interactions with an overall assessment of the novel's narrative structure, guided by three primary selection criteria:

1. Images depicting the Peculiars were chosen to develop the novel's multimodal mechanics and to examine how the peculiar abilities serve as direct visual externalisations of embodied memory.
2. Landscape and historical photographs were selected to assess the spatial and temporal aspects of trauma, demonstrating how visual indicators mark the boundaries of the time loop and represent stagnation.
3. Ancestral portraits and narrative-connected snapshots were chosen to explore the transgenerational transmission of postmemory, illustrating how archival records align with oral family histories to facilitate the descendant's identification with their heritage.

The thesis is divided into six main chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework, defining the central concepts of the fantastic mode, trauma, memory, and postmemory. In Chapter 3, the novel and its four fantastic elements are contextualised, preparing the foundation for the subsequent close reading. The analysis is divided into two sections: Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. The first explores how the fantastic facilitates the representation of memory in its three distinct forms (embodied, traumatic, and postmemory) through the individual analysis of the four fantastic elements. Chapter 5 expands on these findings by examining the dual functions of these memory forms, arguing that the fantastic mode presents memory simultaneously as a refuge and a prison. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes this thesis by summarising the findings, addressing the study's limitations, outlining its contributions, and considering their broader implications for the portrayal of memory in young adult fantasy literature.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter establishes the foundation for analysing the narrative representation of memory in *Miss Peregrine*. Positioned at the intersection of fantasy studies, trauma theory, memory studies, and photography theory, this interdisciplinary framework bridges abstract narrative modes with the physical materiality of textual and visual artefacts. Section 2.1 positions the fantastic mode as a narrative strategy that disturbs conventional realism, creating a subversive framework that makes internal, emotional states visible. Section 2.2 examines the theoretical models underlying traumatic and embodied memory, tracing how unassimilated trauma registers within the body and the narrative mechanisms required for its integration. Finally, Section 2.3 investigates how the past is transgenerationally mediated and transmitted through the analytical lenses of postmemory and photography. Collectively, these theories provide the analytical tools necessary to demonstrate how the novel's four fantastic elements, the peculiar abilities, the time loop, Abe's family stories, and the vintage photographs, function as strategic literalisations and externalisations of memory.

### 2.1. The Fantastic as a Narrative Strategy

“Is it real?”  
“Of course it is.”  
- Ransom Riggs (11)

This section establishes the theoretical framework for the fantastic, treating it not as a genre, but as a subversive mode capable of representing the complexities of traumatic inheritance. To examine how the fantastic elements intersect with historical representation in *Miss Peregrine*, the relationship between realism and the fantastic mode is addressed at the outset. Section 2.1.1 formalises the critical distinction between genre and mode, tracing the historical origins of the fantastic as a counter-discourse to rationalism that makes the suppressed or unseen visible. Next, Tzvetan Todorov's structuralist concept of hesitation and Claire Whitehead's criteria for the narrative recreation of the primary world are examined, before this framework is anchored in Rosemary Jackson's definition of the fantastic as a mode of subversion. Additionally, Viktor Shklovsky's defamiliarisation technique (2.1.2) and Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (2.1.3) are integrated to clarify the mechanics of textual perception and the narrative return of the repressed. Together, these theoretical approaches form the necessary foundation for evaluating the novel's fantastic elements as strategic literalisations and externalisations that render complex forms of memory narratively representable.

### 2.1.1 From Hesitation to Transgression

To analyse *Miss Peregrine* as a site of narrative subversion, it is essential to differentiate between “fantasy” as a genre and “the fantastic” as a mode. This thesis employs the term “fantasy” to refer to the broader literary genre, conceptualised as a “fuzzy set” that lacks strict boundaries but encompasses a wide spectrum of texts sharing common tropes (Mendelsohn 13; James and Mendelsohn 1). In contrast, “the fantastic” operates as a specific narrative mode that functions as a counter-discourse to the dominance of realism. Following Rosemary Jackson’s distinction, the fantastic is defined as a mode of subversion that disturbs the rules of realism from within (14). While conventional mimesis focuses on surface depiction, the fantastic mode disrupts realist codes to uncover the underlying structure of historical experience, exposing the “fatal crack” where history and memory intersect (Attebery 14–15). Crucially, this mode does not merely operate as a “closed system” of allegorical correspondences; instead, it relies on open-ended analogies (9). In other words, instead of simplifying complex human experiences into straightforward, one-to-one codes, the fantastic mode relies on fluid analogies that support multiple interpretations. In *Miss Peregrine*, these open-ended comparisons serve to depict the psychological impact of historical trauma. Specifically, I argue that they fulfil a dual narrative function: the externalisation of internal states and the literalisation of abstract concepts into concrete facts within the storyworld. Defining the fantastic mode through these dual mechanics establishes the analytical flexibility necessary to demonstrate how Riggs employs it to render historical trauma representable through four distinct narrative elements: the peculiar abilities, the time loop, Abe’s family stories, and the vintage photographs.

Rosemary Jackson describes the fantastic as the act of making the imperceptible visible, bringing repressed elements to light (13). Claire Whitehead notes that the mode emerged during the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment as a counter-narrative to scientific rationalism (3). While this period prioritised reason, the fantastic developed through the Gothic novel to address irrational phenomena that rationalism overlooked (3). In this role, the fantastic “opens to a region which has no name” (Jackson 25), adopting a strategy of disguise to operate in a rational environment. Jackson notes that the fantastic acts as a camouflaged layer within realistic frameworks, “concealed, but always present” as a hidden subtext rather than an alternative world (124). Ultimately, this mode expresses a deep longing for what is missing or absent, giving voice to the “unheard” and “unseen” in direct contrast to what the dominant culture deems visible (91). In the context of *Miss Peregrine*, I argue that this narrative

strategy allows the suppressed trauma of historical violence to inhabit the margins of a realistic storyworld, deploying strategic literalisations to render historical trauma representable in ways that conventional realist techniques often fail to achieve.

Tzvetan Todorov established the foundational definition of this mode, emphasising the boundary between the real and the imaginary. Within this framework, the fantastic is characterised by a narrative tension called hesitation, which occurs when a text destabilises the boundary between natural and supernatural explanations (33). The narrative layout resists a definite resolution between the realist framework and the illusion of the imagination, remaining suspended between these two poles (36, 37). Todorov argues that the fantastic mode exists only during the duration of this textual uncertainty, as it is sustained by the dilemma of whether “to believe or not to believe” and the narrative delay of formal resolution (83, 31). To sustain this hesitation, the text must maintain a paradoxical relationship with the truth, withholding the empirical evidence necessary for a definitive conclusion (Todorov 33), thereby defining the fantastic “by what it is not—*unreal*” (Sandner 21).

For this hesitation to operate effectively, a fantastic text requires, as C. Whitehead argues, the construction of a recognisable primary world before disruptive elements can be introduced (8). Rather than building an entirely secondary realm, the fantastic functions by “re-creating [...] the real” (Jackson 20), shaping a familiar world in which repressed aspects can surface. This necessity for a grounded, realistic framework is highlighted by Hawk Chang, who observes that anchoring a narrative in everyday occurrences creates the credibility needed to make subsequent fantastic developments structurally plausible within the storyworld (88). Without a well-established mimetic baseline, the text lacks the essential structural framework needed to create hesitation, risking rapid identification as a secondary-world fairy tale. Therefore, the story must indicate that the depicted world operates under the same logical principles as conventional realist fiction (C. Whitehead 9). Following this logic, Anja Meyer argues that incorporating realistic material markers, such as photographs within trauma-centred narratives, serves as a tangible anchor that stabilises the text’s initial realist illusion (102). By providing seemingly authentic evidence, these markers bridge the gap between the story’s realistic primary world and its fantastic elements.

Nevertheless, this resemblance to realism is not merely a function of setting; it is also maintained through narrative perspective. Textual hesitation is often expressed through a character within the storyworld, resulting in a break in the seemingly mimetic baseline (Todorov 33).

As Olga Riemann highlights, the fantastic hero “continually and distinctly feels the contradiction between two worlds” (qtd. in Todorov 26). This alignment of character perception and narrative focus shifts the fantastic from a structural device into a psychological encounter (33). While Jackson notes that this “conflation of narrator and hero” binds the text to the protagonist’s uncertain perspective (30), her framework departs from Todorov’s strictly structuralist focus. For Todorov, this perspective sustains the mechanics of hesitation; for Jackson, however, this shared uncertainty functions as a subversive narrative strategy. By limiting the narrative to the protagonist’s unstable viewpoint, the text challenges conventional realist history conventions, utilising the narrator’s doubt to make a repressed historical trauma visible.

Following this uncertainty, Todorov distinguishes two solutions that end the fantastic state, transitioning the text into generic categories: the uncanny, in which events are rationalised through natural explanations, and the marvellous, in which the supernatural is accepted as operating under new laws (41). In the uncanny, events may appear exceptional or disruptive, but the supernatural elements are ultimately accounted for by rational laws (46). This classification is characterised by the textual representations of the characters’ emotional reactions, specifically fear (47). Conversely, if hesitation is resolved through the acceptance of new supernatural norms, the text enters the realm of the marvellous (41). In this category, the storyworld operates under rules vastly distinct from the primary world’s realist parameters, making supernatural events unremarkable within that specific storyworld (171–72) and establishing a textual stance of “believe without really believing” (83). Complementing Todorov’s focus on hesitation, Eric S. Rabkin describes the fantastic as the “anti-expected,” proposing that it arises when the narrative’s established rules undergo a complete structural reversal (10, 12).

While these structuralist frameworks effectively capture the initial disruption of the text’s realist parameters, Todorov’s definition is limited to the duration of uncertainty. In a narrative, once the supernatural elements are confirmed within the storyworld, the text technically shifts into the marvellous. However, if the fantastic mode is restricted to structural hesitation, it cannot entirely account for how the narrative represents the enduring presence of historical trauma. Consequently, as this hesitation is resolved, it is essential to shift the focus from the mechanics of the mode to the thematic purpose the fantastic serves within *Miss Peregrine*.

Jackson provides this functional perspective by moving the emphasis from narrative ambiguity to subversion. Within her framework, the fantastic is not merely a momentary hesitation but a mode that generates normative uncertainty, challenging social and moral boundaries by giving voice to what a dominant cultural discourse represses or renders absent (4). The mode operates as a vehicle to articulate what conventional realism cannot express, introducing elements that are conceptualised primarily through negation, “the impossible, the unreal, the nameless, formless, shapeless, unknown, invisible” (26). Ultimately, the central concern of this mode is to render the unseen visible and give form to what remains unspoken (48). By entering this “area of nonsignification,” the difficulty of establishing a stable version of reality is highlighted (41).

Jackson positions the fantastic within a “paraxial area,” a “spectral region” that is neither fully real nor completely illusory, yet remains inseparable from the primary world’s realist framework (19). This aligns with Claire Whitehead’s view that a text should initially establish a convincing illusion of empirical reality before incorporating any non-realist disruptions (8). This baseline acts as the essential foundation for the eventual subversion, echoing Fyodor Dostoevsky’s claim that the fantastic “must be so close to the real that you almost have to believe in it” (qtd. in Jackson 27). Instead of completely detaching from the mimetic baseline, the fantastic mode reconfigures and destabilises realist codes from within; it “takes the real and breaks it” (20). By occupying this ambiguous space, the fantastic disrupts the parameters of the possible. This presentation of what “cannot be” yet somehow exists serves to define the epistemological boundaries of a culture; it exposes the strict rules governing realistic representation as arbitrary limits on what is considered acceptable (23).

Structured upon internal contradictions, Jackson notes that the fantastic mode forces a text’s rational boundaries to confront the elements they conventionally exclude (21). This inherent tension creates an ongoing interrogation of the stability of the real, demonstrating how temporal and spatial boundaries operate as relative constructs within the text (36, 84). Moreover, in a cultural discourse that merges empirical reality with physical visibility, the fantastic mode deconstructs the boundaries of perception (Jackson 45). Because dominant frameworks make “‘I see’ synonymous with ‘I understand’,” the introduction of the un-seeable directly challenges established epistemological systems (45). The paraxial space, therefore, functions as the primary zone where the otherwise unrepresentable events are made perceptible. Operating within this “spectral region” (19), the fantastic mode not merely serves as an escape

from empirical constraints but also offers parameters for visualising the distorted, haunting structures of fragmented memory. This transition from concealed to visible elements extends beyond mere spatial changes; it requires a disruption of automated textual perception. Viktor Shklovsky provides the mechanism for this subversion through defamiliarisation, a process that forces the unseen back into focus.

### **2.1.2 Estranging the Known**

In his essay “Art as Technique,” Shklovsky argues that perception within conventional representation inevitably succumbs to “habitualisation,” a process of “algebrisation” in which objects and narrative elements become automatic, fading into a conceptual shorthand that diminishes the impact (19–20). Under these conditions, the mimetic environment is merely acknowledged rather than actively perceived (20); a component is recognised, but it no longer functions with immediate aesthetic impact. Crucially, Shklovsky warns that this automated numbness can even devour “the fear of war”(20), demonstrating how historical trauma can become desensitised through conventional methods of representation. To counteract this automation, Shklovsky asserts that art restores the “sensation of life” by employing devices that render objects “unfamiliar,” thereby increasing the difficulty and duration of perception (20). In this study, the concept of defamiliarisation serves as a technical framework to examine how the fantastic mode disrupts an automated representation of history. The formal tension between the realist baseline and the fantastic operates as a deliberate strategy to destabilise historical clichés, thereby making the abstract structures of traumatic memory perceptible through the text.

To evaluate how these principles of estrangement function within a contemporary narrative, Meyer's work offers a necessary expansion of the concept of prolonged perception. She argues that the intermedial intersection of text and photography in *Miss Peregrine* transforms the image into a “narrative nucleus” that extends beyond mere illustration (102). Within this layout, a friction occurs between the authentic framed photographs and the fictional elements of the prose, creating an interpretive delay about the origin of the visual artefacts (102). This tension and confusion produce the exact complexity and duration of perception outlined by Shklovsky; the narrative layout resists a superficial recognition of the photographs as passive illustrations, requiring a reconciliation between the historical artefact and the fantastic text. Within this intermedial structure, text and visual elements function simultaneously to generate “narrative meaning,” doing more than sharing information by shaping mood and setting

(Meyer 102). Ultimately, this interaction disrupts an automated recognition of conventional historical representation. This material representation of the past is not merely a visual aesthetic but rather a specific application of the fantastic mode, in which the familiar becomes profoundly strange. By destabilising the boundary between the known past and the defamiliarised present, this intermedial tension transitions directly into the mechanics of the uncanny.

### **2.1.3 The Return of the Repressed**

While defamiliarisation explains the mechanism of estrangement, it does not account for the narrative generation of dread. To analyse the dimensions of this aesthetic shift, it is necessary to turn to Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*). Unlike Shklovsky's aesthetic renewal, Freud argues that the uncanny operates through the return of repressed elements in a distorted, unsettling form ("Das Unheimliche" 314). Consequently, the uncanny does not merely destabilise the storyworld; it marks the precise threshold where Jackson's paraxial area becomes perceptible.

It is essential to distinguish between the uncanny as a structural genre and as a psychoanalytic experience. While Todorov defines the uncanny as a narrative resolved through rational explanation, Freud focuses on an emotional state: the unsettling collapse of boundaries between the familiar and the strange ("Das Unheimliche" 298). Freud's analysis begins with a linguistic investigation of the German word *heimlich*, noting that it contains a crucial paradox. While its primary definition refers to that which is "belonging to the home, not foreign, familiar, tame," its secondary set of meanings describes that which is "concealed" and "kept from sight" ("Das Unheimliche" 299–300). In this second definition, the term collapses into its opposite, *unheimlich* (the uncanny). Drawing on Friedrich Schelling, Freud observes that the uncanny is "everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (own translation; qtd. in Freud, "Das Unheimliche" 301). This indicates that the uncanny does not merely involve the presence of the unfamiliar; it requires the return of elements previously suppressed from the surface ("Das Unheimliche" 314). By making these concealed histories visible, the uncanny functions as a disruptive device within the narrative layout, forcing a confrontation with the unspoken aspects of the past. Although Freud's framework reflects a late nineteenth-century worldview, this structuralist analysis isolates the mechanics through which the uncanny bridges the connection between historical memory and the fantastic mode, making it essential for my argument that Riggs employs the fantastic

mode as a deliberate narrative strategy to literalise abstract historical trauma, making it representable.

Beyond the linguistic roots, Freud identifies the “intellectual uncertainty” (*intellektuelle Unsicherheit*) regarding whether an object is animate or inanimate as a primary catalyst for textual dread (“Das Unheimliche” 308). This mechanism is linked to an “infantile factor” (*infantile Moment*), signifying the resurfacing of childhood beliefs or anxieties that have been repressed by rationality (“Das Unheimliche” 308). Within the fantastic mode, this ambiguity is heightened through the “return of the dead” (*die Wiederkehr der Toten*) (“Das Unheimliche” 315). This instability is further intensified by the “compulsion to repeat” (*Wiederholungszwang*), a process in which the “repetition of the same thing” (*Wiederholung des Gleichartigen*) transforms the seemingly accidental into the ominous (“Das Unheimliche” 312). These repetitions reveal the automated mechanisms underlying the realistic framework, making the repeated past inherently uncanny (“Das Unheimliche” 312). This collapse becomes most acute when the boundary between the fantastic and the realist baseline is effaced, specifically when an element previously dismissed as purely imaginary manifests as a literal presence (“Das Unheimliche” 317). Freud’s uncanny thus offers a precise analytical means to evaluate how the text employs these tensions to connect personal trauma with collective history, demonstrating how the haunting resonance of the past is articulated through the subversion of the familiar.

Together, these perspectives establish the fantastic mode not as an escapist genre but as a deliberate narrative strategy in *Miss Peregrine*. While Todorov identifies the initial hesitation that disrupts realist expectations, this fundamentally relies on a strict adherence to a recognisable setting. Through Jackson’s framework, the fantastic functions as a mode of subversion that disturbs the rules of realism from within. Occupying this paraxial space, the mechanisms of Shklovsky’s defamiliarisation and Freud’s uncanny make the repressed past textually visible. This framework enables an analysis of how the novel’s four fantastic elements, the Peculiar’s abilities, the time loop, the family stories, and the vintage photographs, serve as strategic literalisations and externalisations that make abstract historical trauma narratively representable. To connect these mechanisms to internal psychological states, the next section outlines the models of trauma and embodied memory.

## 2.2. Trauma Theory

*They were monsters with human faces, in crisp uniforms, marching in lockstep, so banal you don't recognise them for what they are until it's too late.*

- Ransom Riggs (17)

Following the establishment of the fantastic mode as the primary narrative strategy, this subchapter integrates trauma theory to examine the persistence of the past. Rather than focusing solely on the psychological wound, the framework traces how trauma operates across three distinct dimensions of remembrance: its temporal disruptions, its somatic manifestations, and its integration into a collective narrative. Section 2.2.1 outlines the structural foundations of trauma through Cathy Caruth's concept of latency and the resulting linguistic stasis, alongside Anne Whitehead's work on represented environments. Section 2.2.2 addresses the embodiment of early wounds, incorporating Lenore Terr's concept of "behavioural reenactments" (13) and Gabriele Schwab's idea of somatisation to analyse how traumatic memory manifests in the subject. Finally, Section 2.2.3 examines the transition from individual trauma to a collective, voiced history through the works of Susan Brison and Mieke Bal, highlighting the crucial role of the witness. These perspectives establish a framework for understanding how the fantastic mode serves as a vehicle for externalisation, turning invisible trauma into concrete forms that enable a physical and temporal engagement with a history that would otherwise remain unspeakable.

### 2.2.1 Traumatic Temporality and the Crisis of Time

Cathy Caruth notes that the term "trauma" derives from the Greek word for "wound," which initially referred to a physical injury (3). In psychoanalytic theory, this definition shifts from the somatic to the psyche, as Freud redefined trauma as a psychic wound or a shock to the mind ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 12). This internal injury disrupts the perception of time and self because the traumatic event happens so suddenly that it cannot be mentally processed at the moment of impact. Characterised by this structural delay or latency, trauma functions as an experience that evades immediate registration, yet requires articulation afterwards (Caruth 4). Caruth argues that this disruption stems fundamentally from the mind's initial failure to register the event as it occurs (62). Consequently, the unassimilated experience resists closure, remaining inaccessible to consciousness until it resurfaces belatedly in nightmares or "repetitive actions" (4, 11).

In his study of traumatic dreams, Freud also identified this recurrence phenomenon, observing that individuals repetitively relive the same distressing scenes, which bring the subject back into the frightening situation of the initial accident (“Beyond the Pleasure Principle” 13). He defines this tendency to unconsciously reenact original trauma through dreams or behaviour as repetition compulsion (“Beyond the Pleasure Principle” 19). As established in Section 2.1.3, this mechanism plays a prominent role in his concept of the uncanny, in which repetition transforms the seemingly accidental into the ominous (Freud, “Das Unheimliche” 312). When translated into narrative form, this compulsion introduces a structure of cyclical stasis rather than linear progression. Trauma functions not as a single event confined to the past, but as an ongoing condition that reasserts itself across time (Caruth 4). Instead of simply erasing memory, this structural delay produces a temporal gap within the experience itself, operating through the paradoxical process of simultaneous transmission and forgetting (17). This stagnation is further reflected in the work of Eva Hoffmann, who draws on George Halasz’s description of “subtle cycles, or loops” to emphasise how an internalised legacy of trauma can drive an individual to retreat into their own displacement (qtd. in Hoffmann 62). Within these repetitive loops, affected subjects often experience the historical past as having a “greater, more compelling, more serious reality than the present” (242). This study conceptualises trauma as a form of cyclical stagnation, providing a theoretical framework for analysing how the novel’s time loop functions as an expression of a history that persistently resists becoming past.

While Caruth defines trauma through temporal latency, Ernst van Alphen reinterprets this silence as a crisis of discourse. Where Caruth attributes this breakdown to overwhelming affect, van Alphen identifies a failure of language, a “failed experience” resulting from an absence of narrative tools (25). This perspective directly addresses Michelle Balaev’s critique of the “unspeakable void,” a concept she notes has historically pervaded literary scholarship by depicting trauma as an inherently unrepresentable absence (1). By shifting focus to this linguistic deficit, van Alphen reconfigures the void from an inaccessible psychological phenomenon into a structural problem that requires alternative narrative strategies. He contends that an event must be contextualised within an existing narrative framework to be assimilated (24). During extreme historical catastrophes, this process collapses because the event resists articulation in the language available at the moment of occurrence (26). As Hoffmann notes, the “unspeakable and the unimaginable” stem from the “literal inadmissibility and inexpressibility of the survivors’ anguish” (47). Without the linguistic ability to convert the event into

a past-tense narrative, chronological progression stalls, leaving the unmediated experience outside linear time (van Alphen 27). Because conventional realism depends on linear progression, it cannot depict this moment of narrative freeze. Van Alphen's concept of discursive stasis thus positions the fantastic mode as a necessary strategy for externalising this linguistic paralysis and portraying the unspeakable historical.

When language encounters this limit, the unassimilated trauma frequently finds a secondary anchor in the physical environment. Anne Whitehead extends Caruth's framework into spatial dimensions, positioning the landscape as a site of repetition in which a fundamental connection exists between memory and geographical location (48). Within this concept, specific environments exhibit a "temporal consciousness," or an inherent "will to remember," converting the landscape into a vessel for material traces of historical suffering (49, 65). This spatialisation disrupts linear time, leaving a narrative structure marked by repetition and stalled progression (3). In the fantastic mode, this temporal collapse often manifests through tropes such as hauntings, in which physical space preserves the past to force collective historical trauma into the contemporary present (6, 7). Consequently, the structural latency of trauma fundamentally disrupts chronological progression, locking the experience in a state of temporal stasis. When the subject cannot convert this unassimilated event into a past-tense narrative, the unresolved history anchors itself externally, turning the landscape into a site of repetition that leaves the unspoken wound suspended between physical space and the mind.

### **2.2.2 Embodiment of Trauma**

Within this internal domain of the mind, the locatable nature of trauma often manifests in what Gabriele Schwab terms "haunting legacies" (1). She describes these inheritances as repressed memories of violence hidden within "unreachable psychic recesses" that are not voiced but continue to exert a strong influence on the subject (1). This silent phenomenon has a "haunting quality" that disturbs the individual's perception of reality (2). When a subject is unable to complete the process of mourning, they may employ a psychic defence mechanism known as a "crypt, an internal space that buries an unassimilated historical fragment while maintaining its psychological presence (2). This concept of the crypt correlates with the Freudian uncanny, as both frameworks explore the eerie resurfacing of repressed yet unforgotten elements. Similarly, Hoffmann describes intergenerational trauma as an "almost literal haunting," where a past presumed dead remains hidden within the psyche until it manifests as "spectres and shadows" (65). Ultimately, Schwab's model of the crypt demonstrates

how unprocessed historical fragments become embedded in the psyche, forming an internal structure that continuously risks breaking its boundaries and manifesting externally.

Lenore Terr's clinical research on childhood trauma provides a foundational framework for this somatic anchoring. She defines early psychological wounds as the mental result of external shocks that leave a young individual “temporarily helpless” and overwhelm their defence mechanisms (11). Crucially, these disruptions initiate internal changes that persist over time, ensuring that traumatic memories remain vividly active despite conscious efforts to suppress them (11, 14). Rather than undergoing standard cognitive processing, this unassimilated history manifests as “behavioural reenactments,” where physical reactions and habits replicate the “original [...] thoughts or emergency responses” of the event, eventually becoming “distinct personality traits” (13).

This biological imprint aligns closely with what Hoffmann terms a “language of the body” (9). Within the transgenerational dynamic, the inherited past manifests for the descendant not as a cognitively mediated narrative but as physical refrains that “erupt in flashes of imagery” with “frightening immediacy” (9). Therefore, the pain of the ancestral generation echoes directly within the body of the next; as Hoffmann notes, this transmitted trauma is processed “in the marrow of [the] bones,” forming an internal realm of “deep, embodied anguish” that is untouchable because it functions as an unmediated somatic inheritance rather than an accessible personal memory (14). This unmediated inheritance drives what A. Whitehead terms a “rupture of the self,” a fragmentation that occurs when these internal wounds manifest physically as a form of “molecular inheritance” transmitted through “the very blood and cells of the body” (36, 55). Consequently, the integration of the traumatic past cannot be achieved through a simple act of forgetting; rather, it requires carefully gathering scattered pieces to rebuild a past that has become biologically ingrained (55).

This biological embedding creates what Susan Brison describes as a “physiological” state of heavy paralysis, blurring the line between mind and body through traumatic memories that persist “in each of the senses” (42). These “uncontrollable, intrusive, and frequently somatic” memories inflict a profound “cognitive and emotional paralysis” that erodes the survivor’s sense of a continuing self, breaking the connections among the past, present, and future (40–42). In this fragmented state, the body no longer serves as a means of linear progress but instead becomes a somatic barrier that continually reenacts the initial shock (41–42). To explain this physical entrapment, Brison draws on Roberta Culbertson, who describes this

traumatic imprint as fundamentally tied to “fleeting images [...] and movements of the body” rather than any cognitive or linguistic record (qtd. in Brison 42). Trapped by these sensory intrusions, the subject is left unable to envision a future because their physical presence is dominated by the unresolved past (39, 43).

Beyond functioning as a site of somatic containment, the body itself becomes, as Schwab observes, a “site of narration” when conventional language fails (45). This shift constitutes a form of “corporeal cryptography,” a state where the conflict between the encrypted, lost identity and the traumatised self is revealed through physical manifestation (45). Driven by what Terr notes as a “tendency to revisualise” or “re-feel” the traumatic event (12), this cryptographic process converts the physical frame into a dynamic visual testimony. It illustrates the theoretical mechanisms through which internal psychological erasure is externalised and literalised.

Thus, following Terr’s framework, physical manifestations and “behavioural reenactments” (13) define the absolute threshold of the subject’s unassimilated traumatic experience. When trauma bypasses the mind’s capacity for cognitive processing, it effectively rewrites the body’s nature, converting “personality traits” (13) and somatic traces into a silent, encrypted language. However, this “corporeal cryptography” creates an inherent tension: while the body reveals the trauma through somatic inscriptions, it remains a solitary, unmediated mode of expression (Schwab 45). This bodily manifestation of history provides the necessary framework for evaluating how the fantastic mode can serve as a narrative strategy to literalise bodily paralysis, thereby externalising the internal state of a subject trapped within their own history. To progress from somatic isolation to narrative integration, these non-verbal corporeal signs must be translated into a shared history through an empathetic witness.

### **2.2.3 Narrating the Unspeakable**

In contemporary trauma theory, the transition from somatic suffering to a shared narrative is understood as inherently challenging because catastrophic experiences resist conventional ways of representation. Mieke Bal clarifies this narrative barrier by distinguishing between “traumatic memory,” which manifests as “tragically solitary [...] [and] inflexible” intrusion and “narrative memory,” which is naturally social and communicable (x). To bridge this divide and disrupt somatic stasis, Schwab emphasises the importance of using an alternative form of “symbolic expression” (8). This internal pressure to convert trauma into a

communicatively accessible form cannot be resolved by the subject alone; it demands an external, collaborative structure.

Because the self is inherently relational, created and sustained through social interactions, Brison notes that a traumatic event reducing the victim to a passive object simultaneously fractures their connection to the wider social fabric (40–41). As long as this rupture persists, the trauma remains an unresolved chapter of history, causing the survivor to experience a sense of stagnation in time. This temporal freeze occurs because, in the absence of a social network to validate and contextualise the traumatic event, the past remains inaccessible, trapping the individual in an unchanging history (43). Reclaiming agency over these traumatic encounters involves transforming this wound into a shareable history. Marita Sturken describes this process as “narrative integration,” noting that unmediated trauma becomes true memory only when articulated through a representational form (235). Through these “speech acts of memory,” the survivor ceases to be a passive medium for somatic replication and, in Brison’s formulation, becomes the active subject of their own story (39). Crucially, this transformation requires “an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them” (46). This dependency necessitates what Bal identifies as a “second person” or a “confirming witness” to validate the destabilised past (x). Without this “empathic other,” the subject remains trapped in solitary repetition, permanently stalling the possibility of narrative integration (Brison 46).

To fulfil this collaborative role, the listener must actively participate by sharing the emotional impact of the testimony without fully absorbing it. Dori Laub emphasises that this engagement requires the witness to partially inhabit the “bewilderment, injury, [and] dread” of the survivor to facilitate a process of co-ownership over an otherwise unutterable past (222). However, Dominick LaCapra warns that this responsive role should be guided by “empathic unsettlement,” a state of deep narrative empathy in which the secondary witness takes on the speaker’s position while carefully “recognising the difference of that position” and refusing to displace the survivor (“Trauma, Absence, Loss” 200). This ethical boundary is particularly crucial for the descendant-witness, who, as Hoffmann suggests, acquires a deeper understanding of the past not through objective historical records but by remaining close to the survivor’s affective dimension of grief (56). By navigating this tension, this collaborative storytelling process allows the traumatised subject to move from what LaCapra terms “acting out,” manifesting here as the involuntary, physical repetition established through Terr’s

“behavioural reenactments” (13), towards a conscious “working through” of the unresolved event (LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss” 200; “Trauma, History, Memory, Identity” 377). This narrative work enables the survivor to safely process the trauma, creating an essential boundary that allows them to finally recognise that “the past is past” (Hoffmann 74).

In summary, this theoretical framework establishes that trauma is not a static historical fact but a living, recurring, and physical presence. Driven by structural latency, trauma’s fundamentally belated nature ensures that the unprocessed experiences often cannot be expressed through conventional language, resulting in significant limitations in verbal expression. When linguistic tools fail, these traumatic traces find alternative anchors, manifesting either externally, through the landscape as a site of spatial repetition, or internally, through the permanent embodiment of encrypted bodily inscriptions. By outlining these temporal, spatial, and physical obstacles, this framework underscores the importance of the fantastic mode. This mode offers the mechanisms required to externalise silent bodily traces into observable narrative forms, transforming an abstract, unspeakable wound into a tangible manifestation. However, this externalisation is only the initial step towards resolution. For these fragmented traces to achieve narrative integration, the trauma must extend beyond the individual body and become part of a shared, communicative process. Processing this unsettled past requires an “empathic other” (Brison 46), whose supportive presence transforms the physical repetition of the wound into an active, social act of remembrance. The following subchapter, therefore, turns to the mechanisms of memory and postmemory.

### **2.3. Memory Theory**

*What did you think about, lying here at night?  
Did you have nightmares, too?  
- Ransom Riggs (104)*

While the previous section analysed the internal experience and somatic aftermath of trauma, this subchapter examines memory as the primary external mechanism through which that silence is negotiated and transmitted across generations. To understand how the individual void and structural absence left by unprocessed trauma are transformed into shared histories, this framework utilises the foundational sociological concepts of Maurice Halbwachs, as well as those of Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann. Their models establish the social structures that facilitate the negotiation of personal recollections into collective remembrance. Within this inquiry, the terms “memory” and “remembrance” are used interchangeably to refer to both the cognitive process of storing past information and the social activity of reconstructing

it. This social reconstruction often centres on physical memory sites, reflecting the spatial dynamics of trauma established in Section 2.2.1, conceptualised here through Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, in which geographical locations and material archives serve as deliberate repositories for a lost past (12). Because this section tracks the transition from historical witness to descendant, Marianne Hirsch's framework of postmemory, alongside Hoffmann's definition of the "hinge generation" (xv), serves to clarify how the unspeakable is conveyed to subsequent generations. This transgenerational inheritance, however, is not merely abstract; it relies on physical anchors. Consequently, the framework integrates the visual theories of Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes to examine how photography serves as the material bridge between those who lived through historical trauma and those who inherit its legacy. Ultimately, these perspectives establish a framework for understanding the connection between collective memories and material artefacts, showing how transgenerational trauma is externalised by transforming a fragmented postmemorial inheritance into a coherent narrative space in which the past can be addressed.

### **2.3.1 The Mechanics of Remembrance**

As Meyer observes, trauma and memory are seldom separate; they are profoundly interconnected and continuously affect each other (44). As established in the previous section, trauma often manifests as a failure of the past that refuses to conclude. Memory serves as the essential social mechanism through which this stasis can be addressed and overcome. Rather than being a purely internal or isolated act, remembrance is an active process of reconstruction that depends on external frameworks for its survival. As Maurice Halbwachs argues, "[n]o memory can exist outside the frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (43). These social frameworks, comprising shared language, spaces, and collective beliefs, offer the essential context that allows the individual mind to reconstruct "its memories under the pressure of society" (51). Within the family context, these frameworks act as a "traditional armour" that protects the group's identity, providing models and "landmarks" that enable it to connect with the past (59, 61). Instead of keeping individual memories fragmented and chaotic, the family's collective framework stabilises these recollections, turning personal experiences into a structured narrative with shared meaning.

This reconstructive process transforms raw historical data into what Hoffmann describes as a "mythos or fable" (5), or a "psychic fable" (74). She suggests that descendants inherit not

a strict, chronological history but a psychologically infused, narrative version of trauma where emotional and mythic truths replace historical realism. Jan Assmann notes that this process ensures that “history becomes myth,” not through the literal construction of false events but by shaping carefully curated versions of the past designed for transgenerational transmission (38). Drawing on this framework, this narrative transformation functions as a cognitive necessity; without a collective system to anchor and interpret the past, unguided individual recollections remain, as Halbwachs observes, “mutilated” and “fragmented,” until they resemble a dream state rather than a coherent history (Halbwachs 41–42).

Crucially, remembrance can only occur in the present. When historical trauma is embedded in a physical setting or tied to specific objects, it forces the subject remembering to remain in a continuous present, resulting in an ontological state entirely defined by the past. For the survivor, remembrance is therefore transformed into an active, physical effort rather than a passive recollection of images. As outlined in the trauma theory section, overcoming this temporal trap involves externalising those experiences to a listener who is “willing to hear” (Brison 46). This forms an interpersonal dialogue that is further enhanced in this section by the intentional examination of material traces, such as “old papers [and] old letters” (Halbwachs 48). This reliance on both dialogic interaction and physical artefacts highlights that traumatic memories cannot be accessed solely through solitary reflection. Because trauma frequently causes profound linguistic silence (see Section 2.2.1), the individual relies on these external triggers to mechanically initiate cognitive connections.

J. Assmann expands this social dimension of memory work by differentiating between cultural memory and communicative memory. Within his framework, cultural memory is an institutionalised collection of shared texts, symbols, and rituals that preserve a society’s foundational history long after direct experiences fade (37–38). Conversely, communicative memory is shared among contemporaries and is inherently fragile, spanning a “floating gap” of three to four generations, approximately eighty to one hundred years, that endures only as long as its carriers survive (41, 36, 54). Aleida Assmann notes that once these historical witnesses pass away, the objects they leave behind, such as anonymous photographs, risk becoming “silent witnesses” that have lost their living context (53–54). To counteract this loss of contextual meaning, J. Assmann argues that the material object must be rescued from this “floating gap” and placed into an archival framework to ensure its survival (54).

This transition highlights the shift from Pierre Nora's concept of “true memory” to the archival nature of contemporary history (13). Nora defines “true memory” as an internalised experience residing in gestures, habits, unspoken traditions, and somatic self-awareness (13). As these lived traditions diminish, accelerated by radical physical breaks with the past, such as mass displacements caused by World War II, this form of memory is replaced by “modern memory” that is primarily archival (7, 13). Because memory is no longer sustained internally by a living community, it must be externalised, relying on external structures and visible signs, depending entirely on “the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, [and] the visibility of the image” (13). To prevent the total loss of the past, societies must intentionally establish “archives” or *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) designed to “block the work of forgetting, [and] to immortalise death” (12, 19). Nora characterises these sites as a “breathtaking storehouse” of material stock that serves as a visible sign of what would otherwise be impossible to remember (13). These sites are labelled as “hybrid” and “mutant” (19) because they exist at a liminal boundary between the physical object and intangible sentiment, functioning simultaneously as material inheritances and abstract psychological constructs that subsequent generations must continuously reinterpret.

While Nora primarily illustrates *lieux de mémoire* through large-scale, national monuments, this spatialisation of memory can be effectively scaled down to an intimate, localised level through the concept of the domestic sphere. To bridge this spatial gap, Hawk Chang draws on David H. Morgan's sociological framework, noting that the home traditionally serves as a central “source of identity and stability” for the individual (qtd. in Chang 78). For subjects displaced by historical trauma, these domestic environments become a “tenuous shelter” in which the shattered past is made tangible (89). Building directly on Chang's concept of spatial reading, I argue that this domestic *lieu de mémoire* is more than a passive shelter; rather, the narrative actively deploys the fantastic mode to transform abstract, traumatic history into a protective structure through externalisation and literalisation. By placing the domestic space at the intersection of memory and the fantastic, this framework establishes the theoretical foundation for analysing how this spatial anchor functions as both a protective refuge and a constraint on cyclical stagnation.

A site of memory is rarely a passive tomb; according to J. Assmann, its preservation fundamentally depends on “ritual repetition” to maintain the past active in the present (73). In what he defines as “cold societies,” cultures that prioritise persistence and actively seek to exclude

historical change, time circulates through a static order of rituals designed to protect specific cultural meanings from historical erasure (52–53, 72–74). While this frozen temporal structure shields a community from external destruction, it also simultaneously traps collective memory within an unchanging, artificial present. By arresting the linear progression of time, a cold society risks converting a defensive sanctuary into a space of permanent stagnation, where historical trauma is endlessly contained rather than processed. This tension provides a critical framework for evaluating how narrative strategies construct spaces of remembrance. While Nora's theory establishes that a *lieu de mémoire* serves as a site where memory "crystallises" (7), J. Assmann's "cold society" model (52) illuminates how the fantastic mode can literalise this temporal stasis, transforming the ritual of historical preservation into a narrative reality. Together, these perspectives position oral testimonies and visual artefacts as the vital "materiality of the trace" (Nora 13), required to anchor what J. Assmann terms a "remembered history" (38) within a static environment. As these material traces transition from the private familial relics into a broader historical archive, the burden of remembrance shifts, introducing the transgenerational dynamics of postmemory.

### **2.3.2 Postmemory and the Generation After**

While cultural memory defines the broad archives of a society, postmemory describes the intimate connection that the "generation after" maintains with traumatic events they did not personally experience (Hirsch, "Postmemory" 106). This connection is not structured by a literal recollection but is mediated through "projection, investment, and creation," establishing a space of remembrance that differs fundamentally from the survivor's direct memory (Hirsch, "Projected Memory" 8). To conceptualise the specific demographic weight of this inheritance, Anastasia Ulanowicz suggests the term "second-generation memory," emphasising that this transgenerational transmission is a "historically and materially bound" process of "presence and collaboration" (9, 12). Viewed through this lens, remembrance becomes an active, "productive and improvisational" act in which images of the past figuratively "haunt" the descendant's contemporary awareness (11,12).

Although these frameworks often focus on the immediate second generation, the children of survivors, the scope of inheritance expands to encompass subsequent generations of descendants. Hoffmann argues that these legacies are persistent, describing these later descendants collectively as a "hinge generation" (xv). Within this lineage, the precise order of the genealogy is crucial because postmemorial transmission reaches a critical historical point at the

third generation. Hoffmann observes that the emotional and somatic effects of a family legacy often persist into this grandchild generation, which serves as the final temporal pivot before J. Assmann's eighty-to-one-hundred-year "floating gap" (54) closes, and transmitted knowledge is irrevocably transformed into either history or myth (Hoffmann xv, 185). Occupying this vulnerable position as the final communicative recipients of a survivor's vivid recollections, third-generation grandchildren navigate a unique axis of historical distance. The fragments of the past they inherit, described by Hirsch as "broken refrains" and "flashes of imagery," evoke powerful emotional responses yet remain incomplete and mediated ("Postmemory" 109).

Existing in this state of temporal belatedness means living in the continuing shadow of an ancestral trauma that often overshadows the descendant's personal present (Hirsch, "Postmemory" 107). As Hoffmann notes, the legacy transmitted in such contexts consists "not [of] a polished, mastered history," but of fragmented signs of "suffering [...] grief and loss" (34). Crucially, this transgenerational movement operates not only through conscious narrative but within a silent, unconscious dimension. Schwab observes that historical trauma can "hibernate in the unconscious" like an unnoticed disease (3). Expanding on the concept of the psychic "crypt" established in Section 2.2, Schwab argues that descendants are frequently haunted by "unbearable secrets" buried deep within familial silence (45, 51). Even when unvoiced, this trauma exerts an invisible pressure, conveyed non-verbally through a "parent's moods" or the particular aesthetics of care that quietly shape the emotional atmosphere of the domestic space (51, 53). The descendant inherits a fractured silence rather than a transparent historical record, leaving them with a postmemory that is inherently filled with "holes and gaps" (Schwab 14, 49). To navigate these structural voids, the recipient of postmemory must engage in what Hirsch terms a proactive "imaginative investment" ("Postmemory" 107). Because no factual record exists within the silent crypt, the descendant is forced to invent what was left unsaid. Nevertheless, this creative reconstruction introduces a profound ethical dilemma: the constant tension between empathy and appropriation ("Postmemory" 114). If the descendant over-identifies with the ancestral trauma, they risk causing narrative displacement, in which their contemporary identity overwrites the victim's distinct historical otherness ("Postmemory" 114).

To resolve this tension, Hirsch proposes "heteropathic identification" as a model for transgenerational engagement, defining it as a method of "aligning the 'not me' with the 'me'"

without internalising it” (“Projected Memory” 9). This form of “identification-at-a-distance” allows the descendant to honour the survivor’s pain while maintaining an essential sense of historical humility, captured by the position: “It could have been me; it was me, also... but it was not me” (“Projected Memory” 9). Balancing this ethical obligation provides the cognitive foundation for reclaiming narratives; as Brison notes: “surviving the present requires the courage to confront the past, reexamine it, retell it, and thereby remaster its traumatic aspects” (49).

Ultimately, postmemory functions as a transformative bridge between the historical trauma experienced by the survivor generation and the descendant’s belated contemporary experience. By deliberately integrating an ancestor’s recollections into their own “mnemonic repertoire,” the descendant creatively and respectfully mediates these fragments to form a coherent understanding of a past they never personally lived (Ulanowicz 4). This theoretical lens illuminates how postmemorial narratives utilise fragmented media to reconstruct a history that does not belong to descendants, yet functions as a dominant narrative that precedes their own consciousness (Hirsch, “Postmemory” 107). Having established the psychological landscape of transgenerational transmission, the following subsection turns to the material mechanics of visual artefacts, examining their role as the physical anchors of postmemory.

### **2.3.3 Photography as a Narrative Bridge**

To confront the haunting of a silenced past, the descendant must reconstruct a history they never personally lived, utilising “available props” such as oral stories, letters, and especially photographs (Schwab 14). For Ulanowicz, these props embody a “ghost image” where layers of inherited history overlap with contemporary experience (5). Operating as “mechanically reproduced texts,” photographs serve as an objective conduit for the descendant, anchoring fluid postmemory within a concrete artefact (5).

Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart highlight that these photographs are not merely abstract representations but “physical objects that exist in time and space” (1). This materiality transforms the image into a tangible object experienced through a spectrum of embodied senses, including “smell, taste, touch and hearing” (2–3). Retaining a link to a past physical presence, the photograph provides an undeniable “evidence of embodiment” for those who have perished (Meyer 31). Rather than functioning as a static record, it serves as a dynamic prism for examining memory through the “leftovers, debris, [and] single items” of a life interrupted by catastrophe (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 13). Because the physical photographic print can

survive material devastation and outlive its subjects, it acts as a spectral return of a bygone world (Hirsch, “Postmemory” 115). By freezing time, Susan Sontag notes, the image transforms absence into a form of presence (*On Photography* 10). Consequently, Hirsch argues that this material survival allows the photograph to serve as the primary medium for the emotional reactivation and transgenerational bridging of inherited remembrance (*Family Frames* 14).

Nevertheless, the efficacy of this transgenerational connection depends heavily on the unique ontological status of the photographic medium. Unlike verbal accounts, which rely on a narrator’s subjective interpretation, the image possesses a singular authority derived from its mechanical recording process and the physical presence of the subject it captures (Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* 23). This direct link between the image and its referent fosters a “talismanic” and “magical” quality, positioning the snapshot as a physical extension of what it depicts rather than a mere imitation (Sontag, *On Photography* 16, 155). This material trace reflects the *noeme*, or fundamental mode of being, that Roland Barthes defines as “[t]hat-has-been” (77). Every photograph functions as a “certificate of presence,” confirming that the referent once stood before the lens at a specific moment in time, thereby producing a “temporal hallucination” where the subject is visibly present yet irretrievably absent (87, 115).

However, this authority remains highly ambivalent, as images reveal the past only by simultaneously hiding it. While a photograph offers a visual trace of a past presence, its framing inevitably obscures as much as it exposes (Sontag, *On Photography* 23). These visual records “claim: things like this happened,” yet they do not inherently provide the contextual framework required to understand why; instead, as Sontag notes, while narratives provide comprehension, “photographs do something else: they haunt us” (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 42, 80). This friction between textual narrative clarity and visual photographic haunting operates as an essential mechanism for representing transgenerational trauma, mirroring the omissions inherent to postmemory. By withholding a complete historical explanation, the uncontextualised photograph defamiliarises the narrative structure, forcing a confrontation with the boundaries of what can be recovered from an unlived past.

For the descendant, this visual haunting is shaped by what Hirsch defines as the “familial gaze,” a relational perspective in which the looking subject and the looked-at object are mutually constructed (*Family Frames* 9). Hirsch describes this reciprocal exchange as a dynamic

where the looking subject encounters an object that is simultaneously looking back, a structure that governs the interpretation of a family archive (*Family Frames* 9). Through this gaze, family photographs invite an immersive encounter where “past and present, self and other, appear to merge” (Hirsch, “Projected Memory” 10). This perceived merging, however, does not collapse historical distance. Instead, the encounter maintains a strict heteropathic distance, in which the descendant acknowledges the ancestor’s suffering while deliberately preserving the ethical boundary between the contemporary self and an unexperienced past. Because the photograph is a physical object with defined boundaries, its frame functions as a structural threshold. While the image draws the look inward, its borders continually reinforce the unbridgeable distance between the present and the historical trauma.

Sontag notes that this eerie, haunting quality is most acutely expressed through the confrontation with the direct gaze, when a subject is looking “straight into the camera” (*On Photography* 37). Barthes identifies this quality as the ultimate “punctum,” a seemingly minor detail that unexpectedly pierces the observer (27, 43). By forcing an encounter with a historical life that is simultaneously lost and persistently present, this gaze activates the mechanisms of the Freudian uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) (Barthes 111). Mirroring the psychological friction established in Section 2.1.3, this confrontation generates a profound “intellectual uncertainty” (*intellektuelle Unsicherheit*) regarding the subject’s vitality; the static image appears to look back, unsettlingly blurring the line between an inanimate object and a living presence (Freud, “Das Unheimliche” 308). This visual shock serves as a crucial counterbalance to the emotional numbing that results from temporal distance. When individuals are repeatedly exposed to archival records of historical catastrophe, the mind often constructs a defensive armour, an internal resistance designed “to survive the horror of looking” (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 25). While this protective habituation diminishes the affective responses over time, the uncanny stare provides the sudden rupture that reawakens historical consciousness, utilising images to arrest viewers who have become numb to historical horror (Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* 73). This disruption closely aligns with Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarisation, where the “estranging power of art” frees an object from automatic perception (20). Hence, evaluating the direct gaze as a “punctum” (Barthes 27) reveals how a visual medium can break its frame to create an active, interpersonal connection across time, challenging a detached historical perspective by bringing the underlying trauma directly into the contemporary space.

Because the isolated image lacks a direct narrative, its effectiveness across generations largely depends on the descendant's active effort to interpret the contextual omissions and narrative gaps inherent to a fragmented visual record. This silence specifically encourages textual and narrative development, turning the photographs from a mere "window to the past" into a dynamic spark for literary expansion (Hirsch, "Postmemory" 117). Within this framework, visual and linguistic media become inextricably linked. As Meyer observes, the visual medium's meaning "is clarified only through the linguistic medium" (21). Rather than playing a subordinate, merely illustrative role, photographs embedded in hybrid narratives "interact with [the text] in the co-creation of meaning" (64). This word-image intersection highlights a psychological tension: while the photograph's reference to the past is profoundly strong, it is never synonymous with the fluid, internal process of recollection. Instead, the static image often becomes a site of emotional projection, a "ghostly revenant" (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 20) that risks functioning as what Barthes terms a "counter-memory," threatening to freeze remembrance into a single image that blocks deeper reflection (91). In hybrid postmemorial texts, this threat is countered by treating the photograph as an active component of what Hirsch terms an "imagetext," a fully integrated visual and textual medium (*Family Frames* 11). By embedding these material snapshots within a larger literary structure, the work functions as a dynamic archive where "the forms of familial looks and gazes can emerge more forcefully and through a variety of lenses" (*Family Frames* 11). Text and image thus operate interdependently, turning a potentially stagnant counter-memory into a collaborative space where an inherited postmemorial legacy can be critically negotiated.

Memory, therefore, is not a static repository of past events; rather, it is a dynamic, collective process of reconstructing the past that takes place continuously in the present. As Halbwachs, J. Assmann, and A. Assmann have shown, the preservation of memory relies on social and spatial structures that actively shape and structure historical narratives. Within these collective structures, an unmediated, pure past remains unspeakable; shared memory is inherently fragmented and shaped by a community's ideological borders. In a postmemory context, this process is even more complex, as the descendant must navigate an inherited history that is not their own but significantly influences their personal story (Hirsch, "Postmemory" 107; Hoffmann 25). Trauma introduces a profound fracture into this collective framework, creating a silent "crypt" of transgenerational haunting that resists conventional narrative integration (Schwab 2). Consequently, this traumatic legacy cannot be directly remembered; instead,

it must be deliberately constructed through active “imaginative investment” to address the gaps created by ancestral silence (Hirsch, “Postmemory” 107).

To render these invisible psychological gaps narratively representable, postmemorial transmission requires material scaffolding. At this intersection, the ontological authority of the photographic medium directly reinforces the mechanics of the fantastic mode. By incorporating a material trace of the primary world into a fictional narrative, the photograph’s “certificate of presence” (Barthes 87) purposefully disturbs the rules of realism from within, forcing a confrontation between historical fact and fantastic hesitation. Within the combined visual and textual framework that Hirsch defines as an “imagetext” (Family Frames 11), this material validation provides a structural foundation for the coexistence of traumatic memory and fantastic hesitation. Instead of merely serving as a passive illustration, the photograph engages in a dialogic relationship with the written text, enabling a conscious externalisation and literalisation of memory. This narrative strategy deploys the fantastic to transform abstract psychological absences into concrete elements within a storyworld. Therefore, this framework demonstrates how visual and linguistic structures operate interdependently to translate unvoiced psychological layers into visible narrative structures.

Ultimately, the theoretical frameworks of the fantastic, trauma, and memory discussed in this chapter do not operate as isolated pillars; instead, they form an interconnected system for analysing the structural and memory dimensions of *Miss Peregrine*. The fantastic mode provides the narrative strategy, offering a subversive vehicle that challenges conventional realist boundaries to engage with an otherwise unspeakable historical past. In this literary space, trauma theory offers the vocabulary to examine psychic crypts and somatic hauntings rooted in transgenerational legacies, while postmemory frameworks provide the material and archival traces needed for the descendant to bridge historical distance across generational boundaries. This combined conceptual framework advances the critical analysis of the text beyond the boundaries of the fantasy genre, positioning the narrative as an ethical site for postmemorial negotiation and historical reflection. With this theoretical foundation established, the analytical focus shifts from abstract definitions to the historical and material specifics of the primary text.

To demonstrate how these theories manifest in practice, the subsequent chapter serves as a vital bridge between theory and textual analysis. By situating the novel within its word-image format and historical setting, it outlines the four fantastic elements, the Peculiars’ abilities,

the time loop, the family stories, and the vintage photographs, establishing how they function as strategic literalisations and externalisations that make embodied, traumatic and postmemorial memory visible.

### 3. Context and the Fantastic Elements of *Miss Peregrine*

While the preceding chapter established the theoretical foundations of the fantastic, trauma, and memory, the analytical focus now shifts to the specifics of the primary text, Ransom Riggs's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*. To understand the novel's literalisation of memory, it is essential first to contextualise the narrative and examine how the fantastic mode functions as a deliberate narrative strategy within this specific work. Accordingly, this chapter outlines the four fantastic elements: the Peculiars' abilities, the time loop, the family stories, and the vintage photographs. Establishing these core devices provides the necessary foundation for the subsequent close reading of embodied, traumatic, and postmemorial memory in Chapter 4, which ultimately informs the evaluation of remembrance as both a refuge and a constraint in Chapter 5.

#### 3.1 Narrative Setting

*I tried to make it sound like I was coming around  
to the idea that there was nothing special  
about the island or my grandfather.*  
- Ransom Riggs (176)

Ransom Riggs's novel operates as a hybrid, multimodal narrative that bridges the divide between contemporary young adult fiction and historical trauma. The story begins with a traumatic rupture: the violent death of Abraham "Abe" Portman by an unexplained creature. For his sixteen-year-old grandson, Jacob, occupying the distinct position of a third-generation descendant who witnesses the attack, this event is more than an isolated family tragedy. It acts as a profound "breach in the mind's experience of time" that manifests as a psychological stress disorder, characterised by repetitive nightmares, illustrating the latency of trauma that cannot be fully grasped as it occurs (Caruth 4). Jacob's subsequent quest is sparked by a search for the truth behind his grandfather's fragmented postmemorial past, guided by Abe's fantastic bedtime stories and his echoing last words that function as a cryptic mnemonic device: "Find the bird. In the loop... September third, 1940" (Riggs 33). Through this quest, the narrative engages with the historical trauma of the Holocaust; as a Polish Jew during World War II, Abe had fled his country to find refuge in a children's home in Cairnholm, Wales. Travelling from contemporary Florida to the remote Welsh island, Jacob discovers that the

physical home is a ruin, having been destroyed by a Luftwaffe air raid in 1940. However, by accidentally passing through a stone cairn, Jacob enters a time loop and is transported back to September 3, 1940. Within this temporal site, which precisely mirrors the idyllic environment of his grandfather's stories, "where the sun shined every day and nobody ever got sick or died" (Riggs 9), Jacob encounters Miss Peregrine and the children from his grandfather's past. Preserved visually within the vintage photographs, these children rely on the time loop to shield them from Hollowgasts and Wights, predatory monsters that hunt the peculiar community. Because Jacob inherits his grandfather's rare ability to see these otherwise invisible monsters, his role shifts from a detached contemporary observer to an active guardian of historical memory. This temporal enclave is finally broken when Miss Peregrine is captured, leading to the collapse of the time loop and compelling the children out of their perpetual stagnation. Faced with this crisis, Jacob chooses to remain in 1940 rather than his contemporary present, committing himself to rescuing their caregiver and safeguarding the peculiar community.

Although the plot adheres to a classic hero's journey archetype, its execution depends on specific geographical and temporal contexts. The transition from modern Florida to the liminal space of Wales is essential; the island functions as what Jackson describes as a "hollow world," a space surrounded by the illusion of the evident and real but fundamentally characterised by absence (46). Within this setting, Riggs employs the fantastic mode as a deliberate narrative strategy to confront "that which has been silenced [and] made invisible" (4). Central to this mode is Jackson's concept of the camouflaged fantastic, in which a nonrealistic text is concealed within a realistic framework (24). This approach enhances the narrative's credibility by mimicking a recognisable, contemporary empirical world, thereby establishing the realism needed for the fantastical elements to resonate, as C. Whitehead observes (8). The island's history, its material ties to World War II, the family tragedy, and Jacob's quest for truth provide this mimetic foundation. Instead of serving as a passive setting, this historical construct ensures that when the fantastic manifests, it actively disrupts the rules of realism from within. Therefore, this structural camouflage functions not as an obstacle but as the essential narrative structure necessary for the fantastic subversion to effectively challenge the storyworld's realism.

The strategic deployment of the fantastic mode functions as a unified narrative system that makes the intangible aspects of memory visible. This approach underpins the four fantastic

elements through which this memory network is externalised and literalised: the peculiar abilities, the time loop, the family stories, and the vintage photographs. Together, these elements create a narrative bridge between history and fiction, representing the act of recalling a fragmented past and transforming abstract historical trauma into a concrete, externalised narrative. To trace how these devices operate, both individually and collectively, it is necessary to provide the context and function of each element in relation to the fantastic mode.

### 3.2 The Four Fantastic Elements

*If I could do something spectacular like you,  
don't you think I would've noticed by now?*  
- Ransom Riggs (240)

The first element is the peculiarity itself, which refers to the children's supernatural physical and psychological abilities. The novel defines a Peculiar as "syndrigast" and "peculiar spirit" (Riggs 149), a distinct branch of humanity in the storyworld possessing recessive traits that manifest as abilities such as levitation, fire manipulation, or the ability to animate the dead. Riggs constructs these distinct attributes as physical markers of Otherness. Miss Peregrine compares the variation of these abilities to differences in skin pigmentation or facial features, stating that they are "infinite in combination and variety" (Riggs 151). This comparison reinforces the notion that these powers function as inherent biological markers of difference that exclude the children from the social order of the novel's primary world. By establishing a deliberate structural parallel to the historical persecution of marginalised groups during World War II, the narrative uses this corporeal alterity to render the children targets of violence. As a result, these abilities serve as a somatic externalisation and literalisation of historical trauma, manifesting as physical traits that embody the children's past vulnerabilities and fundamentally shape their positions within the storyworld.

The time loop serves as the novel's second fantastic device, created and maintained by Ymbrynes, female adult peculiars with the ability to "manipulate time fields," such as Miss Peregrine herself (Riggs 151). These loops allow the peculiar community to "live indefinitely" by continuously resetting a specific twenty-four-hour cycle (Riggs 151). Within the storyworld, these temporal spaces exist as vital sites designed to protect the peculiar population from Hollowgasts and Wights. These predatory monsters hunt the Peculiars and function as a strategic literalisation of historical erasure and persecution. Every day, Miss Peregrine executes a "reset on the whole town" (Riggs 192), reverting the physical environment while the peculiar children retain their cognitive awareness, creating an existence in which their

experience remains continuous despite temporal circularity. Within the storyworld, numerous time loops exist across various historical eras; however, Miss Peregrine's specific sealed environment is anchored to a moment of profound historical trauma: September 3, 1940, the day a Luftwaffe air raid was set to destroy the orphanage. Consequently, the loop externalises the psychological return of trauma by transforming a repetitive, internal memory into a physical, spatial structure. Instead of using a linear timeline, which inherently struggles to accommodate the nonlinear realities of traumatic experiences, the narrative employs the fantastic mode to restructure the storyworld's time. By permanently freezing the timeline on the day of the historical attack, this device transforms a fragmented past into a static setting.

The third element consists of Abe Portman's fantastic stories, oral narratives shared with Jacob during his childhood, usually at bedtime. These accounts operate on multiple levels, blending historical recollections of Abe's youth in occupied Poland during World War II with his life in the Welsh enclave and his subsequent adventures as a soldier and traveller. The central narratives, however, focus specifically on the children's home, depicting the peculiar children and the monsters that haunted them. With J. Assmann's framework, these direct oral exchanges initially constitute "communicative memory," which is bound to everyday communication among living contemporaries (36). However, since communicative memory lasts only during the survivor's lifetime, it inevitably encounters what he terms the "floating gap," the critical point where living memory risks fading into history as the surviving generation dies (54). Abe's sudden death places Jacob, the third-generation descendant, at this pivotal boundary. By embedding these fragile historical moments within the vivid imagery of the fantastic, the novel ensures their survival through this transitional phase. The fantastic mode functions as a structural bridge, preserving the grandfather's past for future generations before the living connection to history is lost.

The final fantastic element is the collection of vintage photographs, which serves as visual anchors for the oral narratives Abe shares with Jacob. These images exist both outside and inside the time loop: Abraham preserves the "yellowing snapshots" (Riggs 10) in a cigar box, while Miss Peregrine keeps them inside a photo album. The forty-four black-and-white snapshots embedded throughout the text are, as Riggs notes in the afterword, "authentic, vintage found photographs" sourced from various markets and private collectors, the majority of which remain unaltered (350). Rather than serving as passive illustrations, these images function as the novel's "narrative nucleus" (Meyer 102). By physically interrupting the text

through full-page visual insertions, these snapshots, with their frayed edges and physical imperfections, emphasise what Edwards and Hart define as the “functional context of a materiality” (2). This multimodal layout destabilises the boundary between historical documentation and fictional storytelling. For instance, when the text introduces Victor’s supernatural strength, the inclusion of the photograph of the boy lifting a boulder (see Figure 1) on the following page transforms a fading oral story into a tangible archival artefact. This juxtaposition mirrors the physical progression of archival exploration, compelling the reader to actively engage with the fragmented past through the somatic act of turning pages. By presenting an illusion of authentic documentary evidence, the vintage photographs operate as a crucial mediating conduit, materialising the connection between represented historical realism and the novel’s fantastic subversions.



*Figure 1: “Boy Lifting Boulder” (Riggs 14)*

These four components: the Peculiars’ abilities, the time loop, Abe’s stories, and the vintage photographs, collaboratively form an interconnected network that concretises the act of recalling a fragmented past. Within this narrative system, the children’s corporeal abilities function as an embodied representation of traumatic history, securely housed within the spatial structure of the time loop. This framework lays the foundation for Chapter 4, which transitions to a close reading of how each fantastic device makes a specific form of remembrance representable through the fantastic mode: embodied memory through the peculiar abilities,

traumatic memory through the temporal loop, and postmemory through the dynamic interplay between oral stories and visual artefacts.

## 4. Narrative Representations of Memory through the Fantastic

This chapter extends the theoretical and contextual foundations established in the preceding sections by providing a detailed close reading of *Miss Peregrine*. It argues that Riggs employs the fantastic mode as a deliberate narrative strategy to literalise and externalise three distinct forms of memory through the dynamic interaction of the novel's four fantastic elements. Subsection 4.1 investigates the link between the peculiar children's abilities and embodied memory, illustrating how the text positions these somatic traits to serve as physical archives of historical trauma. Subsection 4.2 examines traumatic memory in relation to the time loop, analysing the structural literalisation of cyclical repetition and temporal stagnation. Subsection 4.3 then explores postmemory through the interplay between Abe's family stories and the vintage photographs, examining how oral and visual narratives function together to facilitate transgenerational transmission. Collectively, these sections demonstrate how the narrative utilises the fantastic mode to disturb the rules of realism from within, thereby rendering the invisible structures of historical trauma textually perceptible.

### 4.1 Embodied Memory in the Peculiar's Abilities

*Can you imagine, in a world so afraid of otherness,  
why this would be a danger to all peculiar-kind?*  
- Ransom Riggs (150)

In the storyworld, the state of being peculiar is synonymous with being fundamentally Othered and traumatised. This analysis approaches peculiarity, specifically the children's peculiar abilities, as a narrative strategy that literalises traumatic memory within the corporeal self. This strategy functions as a structural necessity: because the historical trauma of the Peculiars' origins is deemed "unspeakable" (Schwab 49) within realist narrative conventions, the narrative employs the fantastic mode to externalise these psychological wounds as physical manifestations. The textual revelation that there are "peculiars all over the world" who were long ago branded as "malevolent faeries and shape-shifting ghosts" because "the larger world turned against [them]" suggests a global community of survivors whose traumatic histories are not merely remembered but physiologically inscribed upon their somatic identity (Riggs 150). This group of Others reflects the precarious status of the trauma survivor, whose existence serves as a disruptive reminder of a past society prefers to keep "silenced [and]

made invisible” (Jackson 4). Because their traumatic history persists despite attempts to suppress it, it becomes physically imprinted upon their bodies, defining their lives as a form of “true memory” (Nora 13) that manifests in gestures, habits and physical traits rather than in spoken language. The Peculiars inhabit a state where the past is never truly over but is perpetually corporealised, unable to leave the physical body. By examining the invisible Millard, the future-seeing Horace, the incendiary Emma, the reanimating Enoch, and the witnessing Jacob, this section demonstrates how the narrative uses the fantastic mode to literalise the weight of historical trauma, transforming it from a distant abstraction into a tangible presence. These five characters collectively constitute a cohesive somatic memory network, in which each ability externalises a different facet of the same underlying historical trauma, demonstrating that the Peculiar body functions as a literalisation of the past trapped in the present.

The declaration of being peculiar, “[b]ecause we weren’t like other people” (Riggs 10), serves as an ontological marker; it identifies the body itself as the primary site of divergence from normativity. This marker blends the self and the symptom, suggesting that peculiarity is innate rather than learned. By transforming internal differences into physical abilities, the narrative anchors the characters’ Otherness in their very being rather than in their behaviour. Through this mechanism, the feeling of being an outsider becomes visible, rendering Otherness a permanent, physical attribute. To possess a peculiarity is to belong to a marginalised group, an “[o]dd collection of people” (Riggs 93) that is excluded from mainstream society because its existence is perceived as a threat to the dominant social order. This order originates from modernity’s pursuit of rationalisation, a worldview that values reason while dismissing irrational phenomena (C. Whitehead 2). The narrative utilises the fantastic mode as a “telling index of the limits of that order,” revealing the “unsaid and the unseen of culture” that the dominant order tends to keep “silenced” (Jackson 4). The shift in how the Peculiars are perceived, evolving from “shamans and mystics” to “malevolent faeries” (Riggs 150), illustrates how cultural narratives operate as mechanisms of historical exclusion. Miss Peregrine explains that while “[t]here was a time when [they] could mix openly with common folk,” this harmonious relationship fractured precisely where “modernity and the major religions [...] gain[ed] a foothold” (Riggs 150). Thus, the Peculiar body was used as a scapegoat by society, trying to outline its boundaries through religious and rationalist beliefs: “The Muslims drove us out. The Christians burned us as witches” (Riggs 150). This marginalisation extends from the public into the private sphere; the children are frequently “abused and

neglected” (Riggs 150) by their own parents at home, causing them to remain “in hiding” (Riggs 248) to ensure their survival.

This marginalisation is further emphasised by the historical changeling-accusation. Miss Peregrine explains that: “parents of peculiar children simply assumed that their ‘real’ sons or daughters had been [...] replaced with changelings” (Riggs 150). According to Susan Schoon Eberly, the folklore of the changeling historically served as a “folk explanation” for children born with congenital disorders or disabilities (58). Crucially, the violent rituals developed to reveal the child's true nature, such as throwing an infant into “glowing coals” or leaving them to the tide, were “socially-countenanced forms of infanticide” (Eberly 61–62). By labelling the Peculiars as “enchanted and malevolent [...] fictitious, lookalikes” (Riggs 150), the text exposes how dominant cultural narratives replace a child’s actual suffering with a supernatural myth. Consequently, the narrative deploys this folklore to represent the children’s marginalised position: they function as a somatic archive of a history that mainstream society refuses to witness. This social exclusion within the domestic sphere reaches its peak in the commodification of the freak show, demonstrating that these “seemingly terrifying freaks” are, in fact, “the real victims of human cruelty and violence” (Chang 89). When Jacob discovers that the Peculiars once “performed [...] for [...] [n]ormal people” (Riggs 182) as entertainment, the narrative depicts the transformation of historical trauma into curated spectacle. By transforming the marginalised body into a commodity for the mainstream, the narrative literalises the institutional exploitation of historical suffering. This process exoticises the Other, effectively detaching the victims from their subjective realities to maintain the stability of the primary world. However, through the fantastic, Riggs subverts this exploitation by redefining peculiarity from a supernatural gift into a somatic defence mechanism. The narrative constructs the peculiar children's abilities as literalisations of Terr’s concept of embodied trauma, externalising what she describes as the compulsive re-experiencing and re-imagining of distressing events (12). These traits translate what Brison identifies as the “incarnation of a cognitive and emotional paralysis” (42) into a physical form that mirrors the internal state of trauma.

#### **4.1.1 Millard the Invisible Archivist**

Millard’s peculiarity of permanent invisibility is a corporeal literalisation of the social metaphor of being erased from history. While physically present within the storyworld, his visual absence transforms his figure into a representation of those individuals who are overlooked

or silenced by dominant historical discourse; ghost-like presences characterised by an absence of social recognition. Through this device, the text physically performs the erasure that historical trauma inflicts upon the marginalised subjects. Millard is not simply a character with a fantastic ability; he is defined by a physical absence that functions as a structural embodiment of the loss of the self following a traumatic event (Brison 39). This corporeal void disrupts the perceived stability of the visible storyworld, exposing a history erased from the official record. Because Millard is only recognisable to others when he wears clothing, holds objects, or is immersed in water, he must engage in a constant process of anchoring his traumatic absence to the material world. The fact that Jacob can only “see the true shape of his body” (Riggs 312) through these external, material layers underscores the survivor’s complex struggle to regain a visible identity. To compensate for this physical erasure, the narrative depicts Millard attempting to restore his presence through an obsessive archival act. As established in section 2.3.1, the archive functions as a *lieu de mémoire*, a systematic collection of traces designed to “block the work of forgetting” (Nora 19) and serve as a “storehouse” (Nora 13) for a past that no longer exists in a living environment. Millard dedicates his existence to creating a comprehensive minute-by-minute record of the island’s frozen twenty-four-hour cycle:

In fact, I am in the midst of compiling the world’s first complete account of one day in the life of a town, as experienced by everyone in it. Every action, every conversation, every sound made by each of the one hundred fifty-nine human and three hundred thirty-two animal residents of Cairnholm, minute by minute, sunup to sundown. (Riggs 192–93)

As the one “who knows everything” (Riggs 192), Millard serves as a living archive. Because his invisibility enables him to “follow you, quiet as a mouse, with no clothes on so you couldn’t see him” (Riggs 11), he occupies a space of absolute observation, asserting, “In just twenty-seven years I’ve already observed half the animals and nearly all the humans” (Riggs 193). Since his body has been physically removed from the visible social economy, he compensates by becoming a meticulous documentarian for whom “[n]otes are absolutely essential to the process” (Riggs 193). This shift transforms his invisibility from a passive disability into an active archival vantage point. In this context, the narrative utilises the fantastic mode to literalise the metaphor of the invisible observer. Unlike a conventional researcher who attempts to remain unnoticed to preserve objectivity, Millard bears this invisibility as an inescapable somatic condition. By materialising the idea of being unseen, the story emphasises that Millard’s social erasure is an inherent, physical dimension of his lived experience. His ability to predict immediate events consequently acts as an archive in action; because he

knows the past so perfectly, the storyworld present unfolds for him with total predictability, as when “Millard began pointing things out just before they happened” (Riggs 193). This obsession with recording every movement in his “studies” (Riggs 132) functions as a narrative tool of resistance. By turning the constraints of his invisibility into a “will to remember” (Nora 19), Millard ensures that no fragment of the Peculiars’ shared existence is lost to the novel’s primary world. In doing so, he literalises the role of the historian; a figure I conceptualise here as the one who deliberately remains out of sight to ensure that the everyday traces of a vanished existence are never forgotten. This role, however, profoundly impacts Millard’s sense of self. By acting as the perfect recorder, he risks becoming secondary to the documentation he produces. His physical invisibility echoes an emotional self-erasure; he chooses to observe life rather than engage actively. While this strategy preserves the community’s collective memory, it simultaneously sacrifices his personal presence, demonstrating that the narrative’s employment of the fantastic mode preserves memory from fading only through a degree of self-sacrifice.

Figure 2, titled “The Invisible Boy,” functions as a crucial visual materialisation of this erasure. By presenting a photograph of an empty suit, the narrative employs Shklovsky’s deconcept of familiarisation to compel the reader to *see* invisibility as a genuine, visible absence, rather than a mere absence of textual information. While the latter would manifest as a blank space or missing entry, this visible absence creates a distinct silhouette of a subject who should be present but remains unseen. The empty suit prompts an analytical tracking of the absent body’s contours, turning this corporeal void into a tangible form. This photograph marks a significant moment in the text, in which the fantastic is documented; it not only depicts Millard’s character but also emphasises the complete erasure of his bodily presence. The artefact thus functions as a visual literalisation of historical trauma, a state where victims are known only through their material remains. The suit thus serves as a somatic archive, or, as Barthes terms it, a “certificate of presence” (87), simultaneously confirming Millard’s existence and documenting his departure from the visible storyworld. Through this multimodal framework, the trauma of historical erasure moves from an abstract concept into a textually materialised condition. This creates a profound contradiction within Millard’s function: he is the invisible archivist who remains unseen to safeguard historical traces, yet Figure 2 stands as the very record that exposes his somatic absence. While Millard dedicates his life to erasing his own subjectivity in favour of objective documentation, the photograph destabilises this project by making his erasure the focal point of the frame. He remains caught in a

structural paradox: his invisibility is required to record the histories of the marginalised, but the photographic medium must make this omission visible to ensure that such marginalisation remains unforgotten. In this paradoxical tension, the photograph does not merely depict a character; it visually stages the mechanism of history's forgetting of a subject and, in doing so, prevents that erasure from ever becoming absolute.



Figure 2: "The Invisible Boy" (Riggs 12)

#### 4.1.2 Horace the Visionary of Prophetic Weight

While the narrative utilises Millard to literalise the historical omissions of the silenced subject, the character of Horace is constructed to embody an alternative somatic burden: the internal, excessive intrusion of traumatic memory through the corporeal self. His peculiarity, the ability to foresee future events through dream episodes, functions as a textual manifestation of what Brison terms the "physiological [...] lead" (42), the inescapable translation of a mental state into a physical form. This juxtaposition reveals two distinct narrative strategies of representability: whereas the text employs Millard's invisibility to literalise social erasure, it utilises Horace's dreams to externalise a private psychological weight. These "prophetic dreams" (Riggs 192) are far more than a simple plot device to predict future events; they function as literalised nightmares that force him to witness future catastrophes, as acute present-tense traumas. In a realistic setting, a nightmare remains invisible to external observers. In *Miss Peregrine*, however, the text deploys the fantastic mode to turn this internal dread

into a shared experience. By literalising the nightmare, the narrative removes the trauma's private nature and brings it into the physical world of the loop, where it has concrete narrative consequences. Horace does not merely experience a dream; he is somatically overtaken by it. This dynamic directly mirrors the psychoanalytical understanding of trauma as a catastrophic event that is involuntarily relived through intrusive visions (Caruth 11). Accordingly, the text collapses the boundaries between the character's subconscious and the external storyworld through what the text depicts as a violent, physical seizure:

I'd never seen Horace's peculiar talent in action, until one evening, he began to scream. A bunch of us rushed upstairs to the garret where he'd been on sentry duty to find him rigid in a chair, in the grips of what seemed to be a waking nightmare, clawing at the air in horror. At first his screaming was just that, but then he began to babble, yelling about the seas boiling and ash raining from the sky and an endless blanket of smoke smothering the earth. (Riggs 269)

Horace's body acts as a biological projector for a trauma that, while technically oriented towards the future, is already physically stored in his nervous system. His screams thus externalise this internal collapse. Significantly, "the others had seen this happen before [...] often enough that there were photos of his episodes in Miss Peregrine's album" (Riggs 270). By capturing these visceral somatic experiences within a photo album, the text transforms a biological manifestation into a tangible archive, further strengthening the material dimension of embodied memory. Horace's somatic knowledge is emphasised when he simply states, "but I've seen it" (Riggs 333). This declaration captures the hallmark characteristic of traumatic memory: it does not function as a recollection of a past event, but a continuous present-tense reenactment. The narrative bridge between this subjective trauma and historical catastrophe is established when Jacob connects Horace's vision of "ash clouds and scorched earth" to the Wights' plans for global destruction (Riggs 322). This ash operates as the somatic residue of the 1940 bombing, a traumatic memory so potent it bleeds into the future, refusing to remain contained within the historical past. As van Alphen notes, catastrophic trauma often undermines the capacity to articulate the experience, leaving the individual without the linguistic tools to put the event into the past tense (26–27). Because the historical trauma of the Blitz cannot be successfully integrated into a narrative memory, it persists as an unmediated, physical experience that exists outside linear time. The narrative utilises the fantastic mode to literalise this collapse: within the unchanging time loop, the 1940 fire never ceases to burn. By mirroring how trauma disrupts chronological flow (Caruth 4), the text positions the historical attack as the source for Horace's future visions. The ash thus serves as an enduring

material trace of an unassimilated history, demonstrating that the narrative positions the destructive forces of the past as the primary threat to the storyworld's future.

However, the “physiological lead” (Brison 42) of this trauma is counterbalanced by Horace's obsession with extreme sartorial order. This creates a sharp contrast between internal psychic chaos and external discipline. Jacob describes Horace as “morbidly ultraformal, no matter the occasion,” noting that even in photographs, he appears “completely overboard: top hat, cane, monocle” (Riggs 190). As illustrated in Figure 3, this costume serves as a visual manifestation of the thematic dimension of memory as a refuge. While the character's dreams represent the “shattered self” characteristic of trauma (Brison 39), his formal attire serves as a form of somatic resilience, operating as a mechanism to contain and cope with the overwhelming effects of these traumatic visions. Riggs employs the fantastic mode to transform this clothing into a literalised corporeal shell, where the suit functions as a physical defence mechanism, providing protective armour. By dressing the character in the most rigid, formal representations of the Victorian past, the narrative establishes this attire as a temporal anchor that shields the somatic self from the catastrophic visions of a future timeline. This maintains an external stiffness of class and manners to counteract the internal rigidity of traumatic paralysis. Thus, through the fantastic transformation of his costume into a protective layer, Horace's body becomes an ongoing site of negotiation where the external stability of traditional form opposes the internal horror of the dream.



Figure 3: “A Follower of Fashion” (Riggs 191)

#### 4.1.3 Emma the Incendiary Guardian

If Horace represents the intrusive rigidity of trauma, Emma embodies its volatile, unpredictable nature. Her peculiarity, the ability to generate fire from her hands, functions as a somatic literalisation of the unstable and incendiary structure of traumatic memory, effectively transforming the metaphor of “burning rage” into a corporeal manifestation. By depicting her holding a “ball of raw flame, attended by nothing more than her bare skin” (Riggs 117), the text establishes an unmediated connection between fire and skin, thereby using the fantastic mode to externalise Caruth’s concept of the “crying wound” of trauma (4), an injury that persists in the present and remains resistant to narrative integration. Because her skin remains perpetually warm to the touch, as Jacob notes, “her skin hot where she’d held [the flame]” (Riggs 173), her historical trauma becomes textually perceptible as a somatic imprint (Brison 42) that radiates from her pores. Her body does not merely recall the fire; it embodies it, making the heat of the past a persistent, tangible presence within the storyworld.

Emma’s identity as a marginalised Other is framed through her history as a spectacle; having been “abandoned at a circus when her parents couldn’t sell her” (Riggs 289), she represents the traumatic individual whose history has been commodified for public consumption. In this context, the narrative positions her fire as the externalisation of suppressed rage, a destructive force born from social rejection. This ability mediates the tension between social erasure and

the subject's internal reactions, creating a recursive somatic cycle in which the pain and anger of marginalisation are continuously converted into physical heat. Riggs constructs this trait as a mechanism of physical self-protection, producing a tangible, defensive force that concretises these internal states.

Nevertheless, Emma's fire is not merely a somatic burden; it is a versatile tool that literalises her psychological resilience. The text depicts the transformation of destructive rage into a protective barrier when Emma strategically holds "her hand palm-side down just above the alcohol-soaked bar" to create a "wall of foot-high flames" that ensures the community's escape (Riggs 136). By mastering her ability to "make fire, swallow it, then blow it out again without burning herself" (Riggs 182), her somatic performance signals a deliberate reclamation of agency over the source of her trauma. Her hand-flame (see Figure 4) thus evolves from a marker of Otherness into a source of light that guides the group through chaos: "by the bright light of Emma's hand-flame we found our way" (Riggs 336). The embedded photograph acts as a material archive of the incendiary body, constructing a multimodal link between historical trauma and imaginative representation. By providing a tangible record of the impossible, the image challenges the conventional realist view of the past, making the trauma of the 1940s narratively visible in the present. When Emma produces a "torch of her hand" (Riggs 136) or a "tiny ball of blue flame [...] above her hand" (Riggs 340), she physically performs the burning history of the 1940s, a decade defined by the fires of the Blitz. Her body operates as a living archive that negotiates between the destructive force of the past and the protective utility of the present, ensuring that the historical trauma she carries illuminates the way forward for the Peculiars.



Figure 4: “Emma in the Dark” (Riggs 118)

#### 4.1.4 Enoch the Somatic Architect

The character of Enoch functions as a narrative vehicle for an active, confrontational engagement with death and historical violence, enabling the novel to literalise the return of the repressed through his ability to animate the inanimate. He operates as a structural manifestation of the Freudian repetition compulsion (*Wiederholungszwang*) (Freud, “Das Unheimliche” 312), staging brutal combat and domination scenarios under his absolute control. This mechanism is most clearly materialised in the narrative’s depiction of Enoch’s “homunculi” (Riggs 211), constructed from clay figures or doll heads, and animated by animal hearts:

“Fight, you nancies!”, he commanded, which is when I realised they weren’t simply bumping into one another, but hitting and kicking [...] Enoch snatched him up and snapped off his legs. “That’s what happens to deserters in my army!” he cried [...] He grabbed one of the soldiers and stripped off its clothes. Then with both hands he cracked it down the middle and removed from its sticky chest a tiny, convulsing heart. The soldier instantly went limp. Enoch held the heart between his thumb and forefinger for me to see. “It’s from a mouse,” he explained. (Riggs 213)

Enoch’s ability to “take the life of one thing and give it to another [...] something that used to be alive but ain’t anymore” (Riggs 213) functions as a somatic response to the uncontrollable death surrounding the children within the loop. His peculiarity does not cause a permanent physical change; instead, it manifests as an exhausting somatic performance. Unable to stop the historical trauma of 1940, Enoch creates a miniature world where he governs the

threshold between life and death, declaring that “[t]hey wouldn’t be alive at all if it wasn’t for [him]” (Riggs 213). His hands thus become the site of a somatic negotiation with mortality, where his ambition to master this trauma manifests in his intent to weaponise the repressed past. This obsession with control is anchored in his basement laboratory, described as a space for “experimental surgeries [...] that would’ve made Dr. Frankenstein cringe” (Riggs 268). The narrative’s comparison of this laboratory to a “Civil War field hospital” (Riggs 269) functions as an intentional historical bridge, tying this fantastic play directly to the materialities of wartime casualties and transforming the clay figures into embodied markers of historical violence. The physical impact of this reanimation process highlights the deeply visceral mechanics of memory work. When Enoch animates the corpse of the museum curator Martin, he becomes a bodily conduit, undergoing a severe physical strain: “His face took on a new intensity as he raised it above Martin’s rude coffin, squeezing it like he meant to drive his fingers through. As the heart began to shake and tremble like an overcranked motor, Enoch shouted, “Rise up, dead man. Rise up!” (Riggs 285–86). Jacob observes a “sudden convulsion” pass through Enoch’s body as he channels the life-force into the corpse, accompanied by “fast, shallow breaths” (Riggs 285). This physical strain indicates that the revival of the past is a physiological burden that demands the living to sacrifice a portion of their own vitality to make the invisible perceptible again. Crucially, this resurrection literalises Schwab’s concept of “bodies in pain” (2). The revived Martin pleads to be sent back because “[i]t hurts” (Riggs 287), while Enoch himself admits the practice is “cruel” (Riggs 217), revealing a gap between preserving memory and the ethics of suffering. This friction arises from the conflict between the survivor’s desire to record the past and the agony of the victim compelled to reenact that memory. For Enoch, the resurrection offers a feeling of agency and control; for Martin, however, maintaining the forced consciousness becomes a secondary trauma that repeatedly evokes historical pain because it has not been properly laid to rest.

The narrative’s depiction of Enoch “cramming four chicken hearts into a single chest cavity” (Riggs 269) demonstrates that the fantastic resurrection of memory does not inherently provide a refuge; instead, it operates as a site of continuous trauma for the subject. Figure 5 functions as a crucial visual representation of this dynamic. By presenting Enoch alongside his crafted, uncanny figures, the text uses the fantastic mode to render the repetition compulsion visually manifest. The dolls act as an external somatic archive, physically connected to the animator’s body. This creates a significant paradox: Enoch aims for structural control by

animating the dead, but the photographic frame permanently captures him with his puppets, tying his identity to the trauma he seeks to manipulate. His defiance of death's finality marks him as a marginalised Other, challenging the dominant realist order from within. In the time loop, Enoch's actions preserve the past, literalising the survivor's desperate effort to keep the hearts of the deceased beating long after the historical event has ended.



*Figure 5: "Enoch's Dolls" (Riggs 212)*

While the narrative grants Millard, Horace, Emma, and Enoch unique abilities that externalise these traumatic dynamics, their figures collectively constitute a static memory network within the confines of the time loop. The activation of this network depends upon an external observer; Jacob functions as this vital final component, linking inherited postmemory to the somatic present through his own corporeal experience.

#### **4.1.5 Jacob the Witnessing Bridge**

Jacob's journey from denial to acceptance represents the final stage of the somatic network: the emergence of the witnessing body. Unlike the other children, whose bodies serve as material archives of memory, his character functions as the physiological space in which this archive is narratively activated. Initially, Jacob seeks a camouflage of the self, repeatedly insisting that "t[t]here's nothing peculiar about [him]" (Riggs 241) and that he is "common, just like [his] grandfather" (Riggs 240). This denial operates as a defence mechanism against the burden of a history he does not yet comprehend. However, Riggs utilises the revelation that Abe Portman possessed a "rare and peculiar talent [...] [to] see the monsters" (Riggs 241), an ability passed down to Jacob, to literalise the transgenerational mechanics of postmemory. Within the stroyworld, the detail that peculiarity often "skip[s] a generation" (Riggs 150) literalises trauma latency, demonstrating how traumatic memory can remain

latent within an intermediate generation, represented by Jacob's father, only to later manifest bodily in the next. Jacob's ability to perceive the Hollowgasts, therefore, is the somatic legacy of Abe's unarticulated trauma. While the narrative suggests that Abe "must've known" (Riggs 248) about Jacob's ability, prompting the Peculiars to wonder "[how] a relative of Abe's [can be] so perfectly clueless?" (Riggs 131), the grandfather is depicted as attempting to protect his descendant by wishing for him "what he could never have for himself [...] [t]o be ordinary" (Riggs 249). Nevertheless, the traumatic history of the 1940s is ultimately inscribed in Jacob's body, demonstrating that one cannot "escape [their] peculiarity" (Riggs 249) and reinforcing the physical inevitability of an inherited past.

The ability to "see the monsters" (Riggs 243) functions as the ultimate literalisation of the act of historical witnessing. While the realist framework of the primary world dismisses the Hollowgasts as hallucinations, the narrative positions Jacob's corporeal perception to identify them as tangible threats. In this sense, seeing the monsters means confronting the traumatic, unspeakable aspects of the past that society prefers to keep "invisible" (Jackson 4). The text thus constructs Jacob's body as a somatic sensor for history, making the trauma that other characters ignore narratively perceivable. While Jacob initially views his talent with shame, the peculiar community reframes this physiological burden as a "gift" and "the highest compliment" (Riggs 243) of belonging: "He's one of us [...] welcome to the family" (Riggs 243–44). This communal validation signifies a critical shift as he moves from being a displaced outsider to becoming an interpreter of his ancestral legacy. He transforms his inherited trait, which was once a source of alienation, into a narrative tool that enables him to confront the monstrous remnants of historical violence. Consequently, this ability is not only a plot-driven strategic advantage but also a manifestation of empathy, enabling him to acknowledge the traumatic traces of Abe's past while turning an inherited postmemorial burden into a narrative of somatic resilience.

The absence of a photograph depicting Jacob serves as a crucial ontological marker within the novel's multimodal structure. Unlike the other Peculiars, whose vintage photographs emphasise their stagnation in the 1940s time loop, Jacob is excluded from this visual record, a narrative choice that exempts his character from the archive's limitations. While the other children remain fixed in the moment their images were captured, Jacob remains a present-day figure, unbound by a static visual record. This lack of a physical trace affords him unique narrative flexibility, positioning him as the only Peculiar capable of bridging the

contemporary primary world and the novel's fantastic temporality. Since Riggs does not anchor Jacob's identity to a concrete image of the past, the character is permitted to occupy a liminal space, existing in both temporalities without being rigidly defined by either. This fluidity configures his body as a dynamic conduit, capable of negotiating ontological boundaries while the other characters remain visually fixed.

Collectively, these five abilities form a somatic network that externalises abstract traumas, positioning the peculiar body as a living archive of a past that refuses to settle. By mediating this history through physical traits such as invisibility or reanimation, the narrative utilises the children's peculiarities to literalise Nora's concept of a memory residing in the body's innate self-awareness (Nora 13), thereby establishing a physical site for a history denied alternative modes of representation. This corresponds with A. Whitehead's description of "molecular inheritance" suggests that traumatic memory is present throughout the body rather than constituting merely a mental construct (55). The network is organised around a series of dichotomies, absence and presence, past and future, destruction and protection, death and animation, that allow conflicting temporal states to coexist as material facts. These connections function along clear thematic axes: Millard and Enoch represent the preservation and revival of the past, while Emma and Horace navigate the defence of the present and the anticipation of the future. Within this collective structure, Jacob is deployed as the somatic witness, whose perception validates the system. Through these abilities, the text transforms abstract historical wounds into tangible bodily experiences, ensuring that trauma does not operate as a distant story but as an embodied, materialised condition within the storyworld. By framing these "unstable forms" (Jackson 83) as permanent states of being, the narrative ensures the representation of a perpetual "behavioural reenactment" (Terr 13) of historical trauma. Crucially, the novel specifies that this access is restricted, establishing that "common people can't pass through time loops" (Riggs 240–41), thereby implying that only those who store the weight of traumatic memories in their bodies are permitted entry into this frozen temporality. Because these embodied memory markers are interdependent with this temporal suspension, the analysis must pivot to examine how *Miss Peregrine* deploys the time loop as the strategic literalisation of cyclical trauma.

## 4.2 Traumatic Memory in the Time Loop

*So tomorrow never comes.*  
- Ransom Riggs (159)

The twenty-four-hour cycle of the time loop functions as a spatialisation of memory, demonstrating the persistence of a past that resists narrative closure. The loop is a physical space where the past is both remembered and constantly reenacted, transforming the psychological sensation of existential stasis into a tangible geographic experience. By externalising Caruth's "unclaimed experience" (4) as a physical location, the narrative literalises how trauma disrupts the flow of time, turning a repetitive action into a permanent state of existence. This is achieved through the disruption of temporal logic, as seen in the exchange regarding the loop's mechanics: "If today is September third, 1940, then tomorrow is ... also September third?" "Well, for a few of the loop's twenty-four hours it's September second, but, yes, it's the third" (Riggs 159). This exchange underscores the loop's primary mechanism: it manifests fragments of trauma into a "perfectly preserved" (Riggs 89) static form. In this sense, the time loop acts as a "cold" temporal structure, designed to "eliminate the possible effects of historical factors on their stability and continuity" (J. Assmann 52). Crucially, this preservation is an active process; it is Miss Peregrine herself who ensures the children's physical survival by freezing them in this time loop. However, this act of preservation also creates an arrested environment where historical progress is precluded. By rejecting a linear future and instead focusing on a traumatic now, the loop represents the suppression of communicative memory, the active, evolving memory that typically fades after three to four decades (J. Assmann 41). Since the peculiar children are "physically isolated, thanks to the island's unique geography" (Riggs 152), the text anchors trauma to a specific site that houses the "haunting legacies" (Schwab 2) of a history that the modern world has already moved to the past. Within this spatial boundary, the Peculiars inhabit a state where "experience [...] is continuous" (Riggs 151), but temporal progression is arrested. The loop externalises a "failed experience" (van Alphen 25); because the text resets the twenty-four-hour cycle before the day can ever become a yesterday, the traumatic event is relived but never fully integrated into a stable memory. This section investigates how the novel employs the fantastic to literalise the unresolved dimension of trauma, analysing the structural stagnation of the time loop as a bridge between a frozen past and a displaced present.

#### 4.2.1 Temporal Stagnation

Before Jacob fully comprehends the loop's mechanics, he acutely registers the material friction between the modern primary world and the 1940s setting. Riggs employs stark material contrasts to make this temporal collision tangible, illustrating how a stagnant, unchanging present abruptly arrests the linear progression of history:

Where this morning a battalion of tractors had plied the gravel paths, hauling carts loaded with fish and peat-bricks up and down from the harbour, now those carts were being pulled by horses and mules. The clip-clop of hooves had replaced the growl of engines. Missing, too, was the ever-present buzz of diesel generators. (Riggs 123)

By replacing the “growl of engines” with the “clip-clop of hooves” (Riggs 123), the narrative literalises Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation, to evoke an immediate sensory recognition that time has physically reversed. This reversal creates a pervasive atmosphere of the Freudian uncanny, in which the familiar, homely environment is destabilised and revealed as *unhomely*. This dynamic is most acute as Jacob witnesses the newness of seventy-year-old objects; the material preservation of these items exposes the artificiality of the time loop. The narrative underscores this paradox when Jacob observes that “the style of everything around me looked old but the things themselves were new” (Riggs 130). This detail literalises the loop as a geographic snapshot: a space where the “floating gap” of communicative memory (J. Assmann 54) is physically present yet forcibly closed, allowing the past to retain its tangible freshness rather than fading into historical abstraction.

This suspension of time constructs a specific “temporal consciousness” tied directly to the landscape (A. Whitehead 49), establishing the loop as a site where the past can be physically preserved. Hence, the temporal loop operates as the ultimate literalisation of Nora's “site of memory” (*lieu de mémoire*) (7). Because the historical destruction of the children's “real environments of memory” (*milieux de mémoire*) (7) necessitates an alternative structural home, a site is intentionally created through a “will to remember” (19). The loop thus functions as a “breathtaking storehouse” (13), where the landscape itself resists the natural fading of history. This spatial strategy reinforces A. Whitehead's assertion that trauma is locatable (48); by moving beyond the concept of an “unspeakable void” (Balaev 1), Riggs employs the fantastic mode to configure the loop as a concrete map of 1940s history.

Through this configuration, Jacob skips what Todorov defines as fantastic “hesitation,” the moment of uncertainty between a rational explanation and a supernatural one (26). Because

the loop is so physically detailed and sensorily overwhelming, he is forced to accept it as an immediate fact, noting that “[e]verything had happened so quickly, [he] never had a chance to stop and wonder if [he] might be chasing a hallucination” (Riggs 121). This suggests that the past does not merely manifest as “haunting legacies” (Schwab 1) but as a concrete environment. By portraying historical trauma as an unavoidable, tangible experience, the text externalises this temporal stagnation, thereby challenging and disrupting the conventions of realism from within (Jackson 34). Unlike a traditional historical novel that depicts the 1940s through a modern lens, the fantastic mode revives the era in the narrative present by reversing the flow of time, preventing history from ageing. Through the sounds of hooves and the material newness in old objects, the temporal arrest is rendered as a perceptible physical phenomenon. Hence, the loop does not merely reflect a memory of 1940; it serves as a version of history that has never been allowed to age or disappear.

The stagnation of the loop is ontologically synchronised with the Peculiars, transforming their bodies into frozen artefacts of a single moment in history. This connection is manifested through the merging of the archival record with the living subject. When Jacob recognises Enoch by “the same [overalls] he’d worn in pictures [he]’d seen” (Riggs 210) and observes that Emma “looked much the same as she did now” (Riggs 117), compared to her decades-old photograph, the fantastic mode reveals the loop as a somatic prison. The boundary between history and the narrative present is erased; the past is their permanent present, where progressive development is arrested. The children are not merely vessels for memory; they are physically trapped in the visual archive of history, where even their clothing operates as a somatic marker of a day that never ends. This juxtaposition between the archival image and the living body creates a profound sense of temporal dissonance. This is best exemplified by Jacob’s realisation that Emma is a “teenaged old woman, this rather beautiful girl who had loved my grandfather when he was the age I am now” (Riggs 173). Here, Riggs highlights the uncanny dimension of traumatic memory: Emma exists simultaneously as a relic from the past and as a tangible presence within the narrative present, embodying how traumatic memories persist without ageing or fading into history: “You look like you haven’t aged a day” (Riggs 343). The Peculiars are denied a conventional path of maturation because the loop’s structure enforces a continuous now, where experiences are relived but cannot be integrated into a linear life story. This manifestation of traumatic stagnation is what I term the “sealing of the subject”: a literalisation of a condition where the individual is protected from

death but prevented from growth or future development. This paradox is most visible during the dialogue concerning the children's ages:

Do you mind if I ask how old you all are?" I said. "I'm eighty-three," said Horace. Olive raised her hand excitedly. "I'll be seventy-five and a half next week!" I wondered how they kept track of the months and years if the days never changed. "I'm either one hundred seventeen or one hundred eighteen," said a heavy-lidded boy named Enoch. He looked no more than thirteen. (Riggs 165)

This chronological absurdity underscores the halt of all progress. Although the children track the "months and years" (Riggs 165), these measurements lack significance because they do not align with biological or emotional development. The text emphasises this distortion by comparing the Peculiars to the elderly of Jacob's contemporary world: "I knew plenty of eighty-year-olds in Florida, and these kids acted nothing like them. It was as if the constance of their lives here [...] had arrested their emotions as well as their bodies" (Riggs 166). The Peculiars are denied the opportunity to develop mentally, resulting in unavoidable temporal stagnation (Chang 90). This contrast evokes the Freudian uncanny: the children appear familiar in their youth, yet their actual ages provoke a sense of strangeness. Riggs highlights this contradiction during Jacob's encounter: "It was strange to them that I should be so young, but what was strange to me was how young *they* seemed" (Riggs 166). They represent the old-young figure, where the past (their age) and the present (their youthful appearance) are uncomfortably combined, exemplifying the psychological tension of the uncanny by existing in a time that should have moved on (Freud, "Das Unheimliche" 314). While the elderly depicted in Florida represent linear memory, a life where experiences build upon one another to create an evolving identity, the Peculiars represent a static accumulation. Although they remember the passing decades, the resetting of their environment and the freezing of their bodies preclude psychological maturation. They are prevented from weaving their experiences into a progressive life story; instead, they are stuck in a permanent now. In other words, they lack the *then* needed to define a *now*, because tomorrow is just today again. This "sealing of the subject" in their youth, like Peter Pan and his Lost Boys" (Riggs 166), indicates that, while they can recall and have not forgotten the past, they cannot envision a future, a capacity that Brison identifies as vital for developing a cohesive self (Brison 44). Without the ability to change, the peculiar children remain maintained in a state of "irrevocable divorce from the ongoing present" (Riggs 254).

#### 4.2.2 Cyclical Trauma

This uncanny state of arrested development is not an automatic consequence of the fantastic mode; it is an active structural requirement. In alignment with A. Assmann's observation that cultural memory demands active care to endure (33), the novel literalises this preservation as manual labour. The daily reset of the time loop is not a self-sustaining phenomenon; it is a structural expression of the Freudian "compulsion to repeat" (*Wiederholungszwang*) (Freud, "Das Unheimliche" 312). By trapping the children in an endlessly resetting cycle, the text employs the loop as a "repetition of the same" that confines the characters to a state of helplessness, positioning them to reenact the identical twenty-four-hour period indefinitely (Freud, "Das Unheimliche" 311; "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 19): "It's only the one day? It repeats?" "Over and over" (Riggs 151). This mechanical repetition mirrors Caruth's definition of unclaimed experience, where the traumatic event recurs as a "repetitive action" (4). However, Riggs introduces a sense of agency to this compulsive behaviour, suggesting that this repetition functions as a specific "ritual repetition" (J. Assmann 73):

[W]e must also ensure that our loops reset each day like clockwork [...] Fortunately, the mechanism by which loops are reset is a simple one: One of us must cross through the entryway every so often. This keeps it pliable, you see. The ingress point is a bit like a hole in fresh dough; if you don't poke a finger into it now and then the thing may just close up on its own. And if there's no ingress or egress—no valve through which may be vented the various pressures that accrue naturally in a closed temporal system— (Riggs 156)

This analogy of the "hole in fresh dough" (Riggs 156) emphasises that the loop is not a natural state but a constructed environment that requires constant intervention. Rather than persisting as a passive, detached haunting, traumatic memory functions here as an active condition that demands ongoing psychological labour. The loop's spatial structure thus exemplifies an "inflexible and invariable" script of "traumatic reenactment" (Bal x) executed each night. Within this internal narrative logic, the bomb must fall to keep the temporal boundary "pliable" (Riggs 156). This mechanism externalises the survivor's burden, literalising the exhausting effort needed to shield a traumatic past from the absolute finality of historical closure.

The existence of "other time loops" (Riggs 152) implies that temporal stagnation and repetitive trauma are entirely normalised within the storyworld. When characters ask, "[i]sn't that how things go in your loop?" (Riggs 137), they reveal that traumatic repetition has become an institutionalised way of life. This network of loops literalises the narrative's earlier description of a temporal "valve" that needs to be "vented" (Riggs 156), to manage historical pressure. Instead, it needs to be perpetually recirculated within a closed, mechanical system.

Consequently, memory ceases to operate as an unmediated psychological act; it becomes a mechanical necessity, where the children must actively perpetuate historical trauma as an essential condition of their survival.

The nightly reset exemplifies the loop's compulsive repetition, transforming a moment of historical finality into a performance of mastery. While the Luftwaffe bomb represents absolute destruction, within the primary world, the loop reconfigures this catastrophe into a ritual spectacle. The text focalises this contrast during the air raid: while Jacob "ducked at each concussion [...] the kids never so much as flinched. Instead they sang, their lyrics timed perfectly to the rhythm of the bombs" (Riggs 167). By accompanying the explosions with a song and "applaud[ing]" the destruction (Riggs 168), the children manifest a strategic habituation of their trauma, reframing a lethal threat as a harmless "changeover [...] no reason to get your knickers in a twist" (Riggs 166). This habituation is emphasised by the aesthetic transformation of horror into beauty. By declaring that "[t]he changeover is ever so beautiful!" (Riggs 167) and treating it as a "fireworks display" (Riggs 168), it allows the peculiar children to regain control over an event that initially made them powerless. This aestheticisation illustrates van Alphen's premise that an unmediated experience of trauma remains impossible at the moment of its occurrence (26), while literalising the survivor's need to "re-imagine" the event (Terr 12) until its lethal impact is neutralised. This dynamic is reinforced by the photograph titled *Our Beautiful Display* (see Figure 6), which captures a performance rather than a historical tragedy. The visual record transforms a violent historical catastrophe into a static aesthetic object, sealing the destructive history into an archive that can be observed but never escaped.



Figure 6: “Our Beautiful Display” (Riggs 169)

The moment of the reset literalises arrested time, by converting the chaotic violence of war into a static, two-dimensional snapshot: “The wind-bent boughs of trees were frozen in place. The sky was a photograph of arrested flames [...] Drops of rain hung suspended before my eyes. And in the middle of the circle of children, like the object of some arcane ritual, there hovered a bomb, its downward-facing tip seemingly balanced on Adam’s outstretched finger” (Riggs 171). This structural delay concretises historical stasis; the bomb balanced on a finger functions as a literalisation of memory held in constant suspension, near enough to touch or see, yet unable to reach its destructive conclusion. However, the “[c]atastrophe, cataclysm, disaster!” that Miss Peregrine fears should the loop fail (Riggs 156) externalises the survivor’s anxiety regarding the return of linear time. Without this protection, seventy years of compressed historical time would manifest instantaneously within the space. This implies that the children are held in a state of suspended mortality. Within this fantastic structure, the only barrier between the subject and death is the perpetual reenactment of historical trauma, demonstrating that survival remains viable only as long as the past is prevented from reaching narrative closure.

When the time loop collapses, following the capture of Miss Peregrine, the “nightmare house” (Riggs 331) is exposed in its historically deteriorated condition. Although this destruction introduces a violent rupture in the storyworld’s temporal stasis, it serves as the

structural mechanism that facilitates the shift from cyclical trauma to a linear history. By allowing the suspended weapon to finally detonate, the narrative dismantles the frozen archival state, releasing the text into a continuous temporal progression. This moment marks the end of the “beautiful display” (Riggs 168), replacing the harmless snapshot with the burnt remnants of history:

The bomb had not come to rest atop Adam’s finger, as it usually did, but had split straight down the middle and exploded. The back corner of the house had been reduced to a slumped and smoking ruin. Small fires burned in the charred shell of two rooms. Where Adam had been was a raw crater deep enough to bury a person upright. It was easy now to picture what this place would one day become: that sad and desecrated wreck I had first discovered weeks ago. (Riggs 331)

This explosion literalises the termination of the “repetition of the same” (Freud, “Das Unheimliche” 312), causing the narrative present to fracture its artificial boundaries: “for the first time in a very long time, the days were moving again” (Riggs 347). The resulting “raw crater” (Riggs 331) represents the belated impact of the 1940s, integrating a previously unresolvable trauma back into historical progression. For the Peculiars, this movement into the future manifests as a somatic awakening: “the air in their lungs was fuller, the race of blood through their veins faster. They felt more vital, more real” (Riggs 347). The transition to “fuller” air and racing blood (Riggs 347) signals the reintroduction of biological time, in which being real, in this context, requires surrendering to mortal vulnerability. Jacob operates as the primary catalyst for this change because his character has not been “mastered by death” (Riggs 255) through prolonged temporal stasis. By possessing the agency to bridge the two worlds without physical collapse, Jacob mirrors the legacy of Grandfather Abe, who “refused to hide” (Riggs 248) and instead “let himself grow old” (Riggs 148). In doing so, Jacob breaks the cycle of “behavioural reenactment” (Terr 13), transforming a closed traumatic ritual into a progressive, linear narrative.

The time loop thus functions as a structural literalisation of the stagnation inherent in traumatic memory, deploying the fantastic mode to convert the psychological stasis into a geographical location. Through this spatial framework, the text constructs a “cold” temporal structure (J. Assmann 52), where history is physically preserved through the ritualised cycle of a “failed experience” (van Alphen 25). While this structure ensures the community’s survival, it simultaneously enforces the “sealing of the subject”, rendering the Peculiars frozen relics whose endless repetition of the same day blocks the transition into a stable historical past. However, this spatialised memory would remain inaccessible without the material

artefacts that first compel Jacob to witness it. If the loop is the geographic site where memory is preserved, Abe's stories and the vintage photographs serve as the primary triggers that bridge the temporal divide. The following section, therefore, examines how these archival elements function as strategic literalisations of postmemory.

### 4.3 Postmemory in Abe's Stories and the Vintage Photographs

*Fine, you don't have to take my word  
for it," he said. "I got pictures!*  
- Ransom Riggs (10)

Abe's fantastic stories and the vintage photographs serve as the primary mediums through which the novel depicts the inheritance of an unwitnessed past: "I recognised them somehow, though I didn't know where from" (Riggs 117). These two elements operate as the narrative and visual conduits that facilitate Jacob's transition from adolescent scepticism to active secondary witnessing. Within the storyworld, this inheritance is defined by the tension between an initial childhood paradise, a world of levitating girls and invisible boys that Grandpa Portman "had sworn were of children he'd known" (Riggs 116) and the historical "horror story" (Riggs 17) hidden beneath the protective layer of the "fairy tale" (Riggs 16). By applying Hirsch's framework of postmemory, this section traces Jacob's path from dismissing his grandfather's past to confronting its material presence as a historical archive, thereby demonstrating how historical trauma is rendered representable through the fantastic mode. This analysis centres on the intermedial friction between the oral and the visual, illustrating how *Miss Peregrine* employs these distinct forms to disturb the rules of realism from within. While the fantastic stories function as an externalisation of traumatic memory, the vintage photographs act as strategic literalisation, providing the material anchors required to bridge the generational divide. Through the interplay, the fantastic mode transforms a "half-remembered dream" (Riggs 117) into an archival act; one that positions Jacob not only to acknowledge his grandfather's past as historically grounded but also to actively participate in its narrative reconstruction.

#### 4.3.1 Oral Transmission and Fantastic Masking

Abe's stories concerning "the monsters [and] the enchanted island" (Riggs 22–23) act as the initial postmemorial conduit, deploying a strategy of fantastic masking to navigate the "floating gap" of cultural memory (J. Assmann 54). The text constructs a deliberate ambiguity around these forces; while Jacob's father rationalises the "monsters [that] were after him" as a metaphorical masking of the Nazis, noting that wartime "Poland was simply rotten with

them” (Riggs 9), the novel eventually reveals these figures to be Hollowgasts and Wights. By depicting these forces as “awful hunchedover ones with rotting skin and black eyes” (Riggs 9), the text operates on two levels simultaneously. Rather than merely obscuring historical facts, this alteration transforms the raw trauma of the Holocaust into a “mythos or fable” (Hoffmann 5). This “psychic fable” (Hoffmann 74) serves as a purposeful narrative mask, protecting the postmemorial descendant from the direct horror of ancestral history while preserving its deep psychological validity.

Within Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, this dual-layer structure serves a distinct purpose: the monsters initially function as a psychological externalisation of wartime trauma, which the narrative subsequently literalises by introducing the Hollowgasts as physical predators. Transforming this traumatic past into a fantastic narrative operates as a form of “self-therapy” (Meyer 110), empowering Abe to regain agency over the persistent traces of his history (Brison 40). By encoding historical atrocities through a fantastic lens, Abe establishes a curated authority over his past. This stylised delivery provides the necessary distance for “imaginative investment,” bridging the generational divide to render an otherwise inaccessible history engageable (Hirsch, “Postmemory” 107). By replacing soldiers carrying guns with Hollowgasts featuring “squirming tentacles” (Riggs 9), the narrative employs Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarisation to disrupt the habitualisation of standard wartime accounts. This estrangement forces both Jacob and the reader to confront the terror of the past through a visceral, sensory lens, generating a direct encounter with history as if witnessing it for the first time. Consequently, Abe’s stories create a narrative space for “empathic unsettlement” (LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss” 200), where Jacob moves beyond the role of a passive listener to operate as the “necessary reporter” (Meyer 103) who is compelled to fill the gaps of his grandfather’s trauma with his own imagination.

However, as Jacob reaches adolescence, the text evokes a Todorovian hesitation regarding the reliability of this oral transmission: “it was hard to tell if he was being serious” (Riggs 10). Rejecting Abe’s stories as “fairy tales [...] for pants-wetting babies” and concluding that the “photos and stories were fakes” (Riggs 16). Jacob attempts to resolve this hesitation by offering a rational explanation: the monsters are “exaggerated versions of the truth” (Riggs 17). He reinterprets the Peculiars as “refugee kids” (Riggs 68), rationalising that “[t]he peculiarity for which they’d been hunted was simply their Jewishness” and that the enchanted-children’s home merely “a truth in disguise (Riggs 17), designed to mask an “awful truth”

(Riggs 96). This defence mechanism allows Jacob to force an unhealed, traumatic past into a closed, linear historical timeline, concluding that the monsters were simply “human faces, in crisp uniforms, marching in lockstep” (Riggs 17). This protection, apparent when Jacob tells Abe, “the monsters aren’t coming for you. You killed them all in the war, remember?” (Riggs 23), reflects what Brison identifies as a societal pressure to “live with the unbearable by pressuring those who have been traumatised to forget” (49). By reducing Abe’s memories as symptoms of “encroaching dementia” (Riggs 22), Jacob shields his own perception of reality from the unsettling, unmediated impact of historical trauma.

Crucially, the novel frames this rationalisation as an expression of Jacob’s longing for a “magical life” (Riggs 88) and deep respect for an honourable ancestor, rather than dismissing Abe as an unreliable narrator. Hence, even when adolescent scepticism compels Jacob to dismiss the accounts, the emotional impact of traumatic memory persists. His own identity becomes intertwined with this ancestral history; he depends on the validity of these family stories to uphold his own worldview, concluding that “if Grandpa Portman wasn’t honourable and good, I wasn’t sure anyone could be” (Riggs 88). As the narrative shifts to Wales, Jacob initially attempts to remove the fantastic elements from the environment, reducing the ruined area to a conventional realist scene: an “old children’s home [...] during the war” (Riggs 68), where children were once “burned up and blown apart” (Riggs 106). By contrasting the decay Jacob encounters with “all the wonderful things Grandpa Portman had said about this place” (Riggs 109), the text reveals a deep disconnection in postmemorial transmission, reactivating the Todorovian hesitation as the house itself takes on an uncanny agency:

My grandfather had described it a hundred times, but in his stories the house was always a bright, happy place [...] What stood before me now was no refuge from monsters but a monster itself, staring down from its perch on the hill with vacant hunger. Trees burst forth from broken windows and skins of scabrous vine gnawed at the walls [...] the sky visible through sections of collapsed roof. (Riggs 79)

The “scary house” (Riggs 80) functions as a spatial literalisation of persistent trauma, shifting from a stagnant historical site into an uncanny presence that disrupts Jacob’s rationalisation. He wonders if “the children were still here, preserved like the bog boy, inside the walls” (Riggs 103). This spatial encounter brings his Todorovian hesitation to a climax, as Jacob confronts the physical site that “any of [the stories] could be true – *literally true* – was unthinkable. And yet, standing there in dusty half-light in that dead house that seemed so alive with ghosts, I thought, *maybe...*” (Riggs 116). This “maybe” marks the precise moment when

the fantastic masking begins to slip. By revealing that the monsters are not merely symbolic externalisations of Nazi persecutors, but literalised physical predators within the storyworld, the narrative moves the representation of trauma from oral fables into a lived experience. This shift from doubt to acceptance reframes Abe's entire testimony; allowing for his final words to "make a strange kind of sense" (Riggs 60) and prompting Jacob to evaluate of this ancestral secrecy: "If it was all true—all his stories—and if he knew I was like him, why did he keep it a secret until the last minute of his life?" (Riggs 248). This inquiry exposes the strategic function of the fantastic mask as a protective shield that holds back the unassimilable historical trauma until the descendant is psychologically prepared to confront it.

This shift from dismissive scepticism of "[w]ho said anything about fairies?" (Riggs 16) to an acceptance of the uncanny is anchored by the first visual intersection of the fantastic and the historical: the photograph of the fighter planes (Figure 7). By displaying a verifiable war-time weapon, this image concretises the moment the "floating gap" (J. Assmann 54) of cultural memory is crossed, destabilising Jacob's rationalist defences. This encounter establishes the novel's foundational photo-textual logic: if the planes captured in the vintage photographs are historically authentic, the peculiar children preserved within the same collection must also be accepted as "literally true" (Riggs 116).



*Figure 7: "Fighter Planes" (Riggs 134)*

#### 4.3.2 Photographic Artefacts and the Materialisation of the Past

This transition from oral family narratives to the visual medium of photography shifts the representation of trauma from an un-narratable absence to a material archive, positioning the vintage photographs as a historical threshold. By anchoring spoken accounts to the visual artefacts, the text transforms what Jacob previously dismissed as a fairy tale into a documented historical record within the storyworld. While Caruth states that trauma remains inherently “unassimilated” and beyond conscious awareness (4), these photographic artefacts provide the visual grounding required to make the cognitively inaccessible representable. By literalising the peculiarities through a physical medium, the novel bypasses the conventional “unspeakable void” (Balaev 1) of historical catastrophe, providing Jacob with a tangible anchor. This shift towards historical witnessing is triggered by a spatial discovery; as Jacob explores the ruined children’s home, the text focalises his postmemorial haunting by projecting his ancestral trauma onto the environment: “*Were you scared? Did you hear the planes coming?*” (Riggs 103). Uncovering a collection of vintage photographs in the abandoned house, Jacob finds an archival link to the past. These images “share a nightmarish quality with [his] grandfather’s old photos [...] as if they had all come from the same batch” (Riggs 110), matching those he had “seen in his cigar box just a few months ago” (Riggs 111). The retrieval of these artefacts from a “smashed trunk” (Riggs 111) reconfigures the postmemorial dynamic from a passive listening into an active archival act. The shattered state of the trunk materialises the fractured nature of ancestral memory, compelling Jacob to operate as a secondary witness who must assemble visual fragments to reconstruct a narrative dissolved by history.

These photographs act as what I term “authentic fakes”: materially genuine historical artefacts that have been narratively reinterpreted to function as fictional accounts of supernatural events. Here, the Todorovian hesitation reaches its highest tension. Mirroring his early scepticism surrounding Abe’s oral testimony, Jacob initially dismisses the visual evidence as “fake-looking” (Riggs 110). Seeking to protect his realist worldview from the intrusion of the supernatural, he rationalises the mechanics of the photographic medium itself to enforce a comforting scepticism: “It struck me how blatant the fakery was. A little burning and dodging was probably all it took to make the “invisible” boy’s head disappear. The giant rock being hoisted by that suspiciously scrawny kid could have easily been made out of plaster or foam. But these observations were too subtle for a six-year-old, especially one who wanted to believe” (Riggs 45).

To maintain a rational distance, Jacob initially reframes the snapshots as *memento mori* of a long-gone generation. He views the children in the vintage photographs as doubly deceased: vanished into the historical era of the 1940s and simultaneously trapped in the stasis of the black-and-white medium. The unique efficacy of these photographs lies in the friction between their historical legitimacy and their surreal subjects (Meyer 102), reflecting a broader transition toward what Nora terms an “archival” memory that prioritises the “materiality of the trace” and the “visibility of the image” (13). This material presence prevents the narrative from collapsing into “habitualisation”, a state where familiar objects are recognised automatically rather than truly seen (Shklovsky 20). Instead, defamiliarisation is achieved through Barthes’s “punctum”: a visual puncture that “pricks” the viewer and forces a shift from a passive scan to a conscious interrogation of the material trace (27). This “talismanic” power, in which the photographic print functions as a physical remnant of a vanished reality (Sontag, *On Photography* 16), establishes the vintage photographs as primary conduits for postmemory, providing a concrete link that binds Jacob to a history he did not witness.

Unlike Abe’s oral narratives, the photographs are material artefacts with which both Jacob and the reader physically engage. To describe this intermedial disruption, I build upon Todorov’s structuralist framework to introduce the concept of “tactile hesitation.” While Todorov defines hesitation solely as a cognitive choice between the uncanny and the marvellous, tactile hesitation functions as a physical, somatic pause dictated by the text’s multimodal structure. Where Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarisation serves as the cognitive effect that disrupts automatic recognition, tactile hesitation serves as the material process that facilitates this shift. By embedding the vintage photographs directly into the page layout, the narrative enforces a physical disruption that grounds Todorov’s hesitation in a somatic act. This material engagement intensifies the cognitive friction, as the documentary realism of the photographic medium directly collides with the fantastic details depicted. Consequently, the text aligns the reader with Jacob, forcing a constant negotiation between whether these images document supernatural abilities (the marvellous) or function as Abe’s trauma-induced dementia (the uncanny). This dynamic creates an unbearable hesitation between the rationalised assumption that a “darkroom technique had been used” (Riggs 110), and the marvellous reality of the supernatural: “[i]t was impossible, anyway; those kids had all died a lifetime ago. Even if they hadn’t, it was ridiculous to believe they would still look exactly as they had when the photos were taken” (Riggs 121).

The core contradiction of the photographic medium in the novel lies in its ontological duality: it functions as a historically legitimate artefact, yet its subjects represent a physical impossibility. As a material trace “stencilled off the real” (Sontag, *On Photography* 154), the vintage photographs provide physical “evidence of embodiment” that brings the past into the present (Meyer 31). Through this tangible presence, Freud’s concept of “intellectual uncertainty” (*intellektuelle Unsicherheit*) (“Das Unheimliche” 308) regarding experiences of the past shifts into an immediate verification crisis as Jacob examines the visual artefacts: “It couldn’t have been a coincidence, which meant that the photos my grandfather had shown me – that he’d sworn were of children he’d known in this house – *had really come from this house*. But could it mean...that the pictures were genuine? What about the fantastic stories that went along with them?” (Riggs 116).

If the photographic trace is accepted as a verifiable historical artefact, the unthinkable history it depicts must also be accepted as factual, even when it defies natural laws, such as Abe’s early description of Millard, the invisible boy: “[s]ure, he’s got a head! [...] [o]nly you can’t see it” (Riggs 10). By validating these physically impossible figures through a material medium, the text transforms the latent legacy of the past into a “perpetually actual phenomenon” (Nora 8), forcing both Jacob and the reader to confront the unsettling idea that historical trauma is never absent but remains suspended in the present, waiting to reemerge.

In this archival configuration, the vintage photographs function not merely as illustrations but as a structural foundation of Jacob’s postmemorial perception. By offering what Sontag terms “incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened” (Sontag, *On Photography* 5), the physical snapshots provide the material validation required to authenticate Abe’s oral testimony. This material intervention disturbs the rules of realism from within, transforming the unnarrated trauma of the Holocaust into a tangible archive. This transition becomes clear as Jacob examines the vintage photographs inside the ruined children’s home, observing that: “the more I studied the pictures, the more familiar they began to seem” (Riggs 110). This familiarity is later explicitly confirmed in the storyworld through Enoch’s exclamation: “Abe told him everything. Even showed him bloody pictures of us!” (Riggs 297). This dialogue indicates that the visual artefacts influence Jacob’s consciousness long before he enters the loop, creating a continuous transgenerational chain of postmemory prior to any physical contact with the Peculiars.

The ultimate literalisation of postmemory and the text's most radical subversion of realism occurs when Jacob enters the time loop, transforming static archival subjects into living entities. This transition produces the foundational layer of the Freudian uncanny, which arises specifically when "lifeless things, pictures, [or] dolls" appear to come alive (Freud, "Das Unheimliche" 308, 318), exemplifying a literal "return of the dead" (*die Wiederkehr der Toten*) (Freud, "Das Unheimliche" 315). This shift materialises visually during Jacob's exploration of the ruins, when he encounters the Peculiars, a moment in which the photographs enact this transition: "the pictures strewn before me, staring up at me just as the children stared down" (Riggs 117). By erasing the distinction between imagination and historical reality, this shared gaze effectively transforms the comforting home (*Heim*) of the family archive into a profoundly un-homely (*Unheimlich*) space ("Das Unheimliche" 317). Hence, the peculiar children occupy a liminal space between a somatic presence and a static archival image. They do not return as ghosts but as physical bodies that have resisted temporal stasis captured in snapshots: "I'd seen her picture not five minutes earlier" (Riggs 117).

This visual alignment facilitates a postmemorial identification that oral narratives alone cannot achieve, bridging the private familial archive with the public ruin of history. This shared perspective transforms historical data from a passive record into active encounters, compelling the descendant to confront these figures as living agents of history. This intermedial collision reaches its peak when Jacob discovers the photograph of the boy covered in bees (see Figure 8). Recognising the image, he recalls "something Grandpa Portman had said about [...] a boy with bees living inside him" (Riggs 110), a sudden alignment of oral memory and archival evidence that shatters his scepticism. This material encounter forces a visceral shock; it causes the "hairs on the back of [his] neck [to stand] up" (Riggs 110) and makes his "skin crawl" (Riggs 80), transforming Abe's past from a dismissed fable into a somatic reality that permanently integrates the ancestral legacy into Jacob's own identity.



Figure 8: “A Boy and His Bees” (Riggs 114)

Standing in the yard “full of children, almost all of whom [he] recognised” (Riggs 140), Jacob experiences the resolution of the Todorovian hesitation through a sensory verification: “I instantly recognised her as the ‘levitating girl’ [...] only now she wasn’t levitating” (Riggs 141). This encounter bridges Jan Assmann’s “floating gap” of cultural memory (J. Assmann 54) by translating what was once a detached “horror story” (Riggs 17) into a navigable geography. Jacob no longer merely decodes visual traces; instead, he physically inhabits the “paradise [his] grandfather had described” (Riggs 140). This transition achieves its most poignant expression through the photograph of “Abe and Emma” (see Figure 9). When Jacob holds this artefact, it functions as the material manifestation of an intergenerational relationship, facilitating the postmemorial identification described by Hirsch. The encounter directly answers her concern regarding how a descendant can adopt ancestral trauma “without imitating or unduly appropriating” it (Hirsch, “Postmemory” 114). By allowing Jacob to engage with a historical version of his own lineage through his grandfather’s past, the text shatters the boundary between archival stasis and the storyworld’s present. Within the fantastic mode, the ancestral past is not a fixed historical record; rather, the archive functions as a dynamic space awaiting the arrival of the postmemorial witness.



*Figure 9: “Abe and Emma” (Riggs 344)*

This spatial activation of the archive consolidated when Jacob sits at the very desk where Miss Peregrine “[had] shown the same pictures to my grandfather all those years ago, when he was my age—maybe right here in this room” (Riggs 152). This scene underscores a generational convergence, allowing Jacob to step “into his [grandfather’s] past” (Riggs 152). This alignment concretises a crucial narrative tool: the transformation of what the text terms a “poisonous heirloom” (Riggs 104) of un-narrated trauma into a shared, lived experience. By verifying the physical existence of the peculiar children, Jacob completes his evolution into a secondary witness who successfully navigates the fragmented postmemorial landscape to uncover the historical facts Abe had concealed. Ultimately, this resolution demonstrates that within the fantastic mode, the traumatic past is no longer a distant legacy but rather a physical reality that continually demands accountability and presence from the descendant.

The interplay between Abe’s stories and the vintage photographs forms a deliberate narrative strategy that makes the abstract weight of postmemory representable. Rather than functioning in isolation, these oral and visual elements depend on each other to disturb the rules of realism from within. While the family stories initiate an essential “imaginative investment” (Hirsch, “Postmemory” 107) by providing a fantastic mask for an otherwise unspeakable trauma, they remain vulnerable to being dismissed as fables or symptoms of dementia. The text counters this vulnerability by introducing the vintage photographs as a material counterweight; as

Meyer notes, “[t]he visual medium [...] is clarified only through the linguistic medium” (21). By integrating documentary realism into the storyworld, the physical snapshots provide the validation necessary to anchor the oral narratives, transforming what was previously perceived as Abe’s delusion into a concrete archive. Together, this intermedial configuration functions as a strategic literalisation of postmemory, preventing the ancestral past from remaining suspended as an unverifiable fiction. By anchoring Abe’s spoken words to the material traces in the vintage photographs, the narrative establishes a space for postmemory, compelling both Jacob and the reader to confront historical trauma as an inescapable reality rather than a “fairy tale” (Riggs 16).

This chapter demonstrates how embodied memory, traumatic memory, and postmemory are represented through the novel’s deployment of the fantastic mode. Within the structure of *Miss Peregrine*, memory is not treated merely as an internal act of recollection; instead, these invisible psychological experiences are externalised and literalised as a physical space the characters inhabit (the time loop), a biological trait they possess (their peculiar abilities), and archival artefacts they engage with (the family stories and the vintage photographs). Through these narrative devices, the text employs the fantastic mode as a deliberate strategy of subversion that disturbs the rules of realism from within. By turning abstract psychological trauma and invisible historical absences into undeniable facts within the storyworld, Riggs transforms the burden of historical trauma into an immediate, sensory experience through strategic literalisation. The efficacy of this narrative structure depends on how the four fantastic devices, the peculiar abilities, the time loop, the family stories, and the vintage photographs, work together to depict specific forms of memory. While the peculiar abilities construct a somatic network of embodied memory, the time loop represents temporal stagnation and the cyclical nature of traumatic memory. This temporal loop preserves historical trauma in stasis, yet it is Abe’s oral narratives that initiate the transmission of postmemory across the “floating gap” of cultural memory (J. Assmann 54). Finally, these family stories are anchored by the vintage photographs, providing the visual evidence and visibility that archival memory demands (Nora 13). Consequently, the fantastic devices constitute the essential structure of memory in the novel, allowing its fantastic elements to resonate with the multi-layered experience of transgenerational trauma without reducing the text to a static historical referent. The following chapter expands this framework to evaluate the systemic tension within the storyworld, examining how these devices serve as both a refuge and a constraint.

## 5. The Functions of Memory

The previous chapter analysed how embodied memory, traumatic memory, and postmemory are literalised and externalised through the four fantastic elements within the novel. Chapter 5 examines the dual function of these structures. I argue that the fantastic mode serves as a deliberate narrative strategy to represent the paradox of memory in *Miss Peregrine*: a shelter that simultaneously functions as a site of entrapment. For the Peculiars, memory is not a passive act of retrieval; instead, it is a lived environment and a literalisation of what van Alphen defines as “experience of the past”, a state in which the past refuses to become history, remaining continuously active. (25) The chapter is divided into three sections to explore this functional paradox. Section 5.1 analyses memory as a sanctuary, exploring how the time loop and archival traces provide a safe house that protects identity from historical erasure. Section 5.2 examines memory as a prison, showing how this same temporal arrest results in somatic entrapment and an “irrevocable divorce” (Riggs 254) from the present. Section 5.3 provides a synthesis of this fantastic duality, utilising the theories of Jackson, Shklovsky, and Nora to demonstrate that the fantastic mode serves as an effective strategy to make the fragmented, traumatic past representable. This chapter illustrates how the fantastic mode sustains the paradox of memory, making it uniquely capable of transforming a haunted legacy into a textually perceptible structure.

### 5.1 Memory as Refuge

*A safe haven of endless summer and guardian angels.*  
- Ransom Riggs (17)

One primary function of memory in the novel is the establishment of a sanctuary, a concrete refuge materialised by the structure of the children’s home. In this context, memory serves as a protective shield for the peculiar children, insulating them from the destructive forces of linear history. This sanctuary goes beyond being a mere mental escape; it operates as a strategic haven that preserves identity against the threat of historical erasure. By literalising Nora’s internal “will to remember” (19) into a physical site, Riggs transforms memory into a lived environment where the past is experienced as an organised eternity: “[t]he sun, the feasts, the friends ... and the sameness, the perfect identical days” (240). By tying this “sameness” to the physical space of the loop, the text demonstrates a deliberate literalisation of memory. The fantastic mode operates here by turning an abstract psychological need for safety into a fixed, unchanging geographical setting in which identity remains intact, but at the expense of complete immobility. This section examines how this seemingly safe space is

constructed and how the novel provides a narrative structure that transforms abstract memories into a protective space.

To ensure this state of preservation, the time loop serves as the material foundation for this sanctuary, functioning as a domestic refuge that protects the marginalised Other from a linear history that intends to erase their existence. Since the living environments of memory, the *milieux de mémoire* (Nora 7), of these children were violently destroyed by the catastrophes of World War II, a deliberate sanctuary had to be created. Here, Nora's concept of a constructed *lieu de mémoire* (7) converges with A. Whitehead's assertion that specific environments can manifest an inherent "will to remember", converting the physical landscape into a vessel for the material traces of past suffering (65). In the novel, this environmental containment is represented through the fantastic mechanics of the time loop, which artificially freezes the island's entire local ecosystem in a single, endless day. This structural arrest establishes what Chang conceptualises as an alternative domestic sanctuary for the displaced subjects (89). This extreme form of environmental insulation prioritises physical safety over the progress of linear time, transforming the island from a fragile geographic location into a sacred site dedicated to preservation that suspends historical violence within a protective, repeating cycle.

This preservation establishes what J. Assmann defines as a "cold" temporal structure, designed to "eliminate the possible effects of historical factors on their stability and continuity" (52). Inside this defensive boundary, memory provides a protective haven where the bomb never hits, and historical trauma is indefinitely postponed. The loop resets mechanically every evening on September 3, 1940, just seconds before a Luftwaffe air raid destroys the orphanage: "*This is the night they were killed. Not just the night, but the moment*" (Riggs 170). This temporal arrest of a lethal event creates a physical barrier that prevents the Peculiars' storyworld from being shattered by the devastating force of historical violence. In this sanctuary, attempts to silence the children are successfully countered by transforming their survival into an eternal, repeatable ritual.

In addition to physical safety, the sanctuary, geographically isolated on the island of Cairnholm and temporally anchored by the time loop, serves as a vital space for preserving identity. As established in Section 4.1, in the outside world, being peculiar is a marker of marginalisation and a source of existential rootlessness. However, within the refuge of the children's home and the time loop, the peculiar children's abilities are reinterpreted from "freakish"

(Riggs 45) traits into crucial elements of a stable community. In this setting, the loop acts as an artificial site of memory, a *lieu de mémoire*, where a historical past that has been severed from the living world “crystallises” (Nora 7, 23). It provides the only environment in which the Peculiars’ abilities are recognised as valuable, allowing the children to maintain their peculiarity, whereas outside this sanctuary, they would face certain death. Miss Peregrine’s home represents a “heaven-like space” (Chang 86) that compensates for the loss of a prior home.

The transformation of trauma is particularly evident during the loop’s daily reset. When the Luftwaffe bomb falls, its catastrophic potential is completely defused by the temporal boundary; instead of destruction, the moment of impact triggers the children’s collective “laughter” (Riggs 171). By replacing the devastation of the Blitz with a surreal wave of happiness, the text literalises a psychological defence mechanism. The dynamics of the loop not only keep history alive but also transform a moment of intense trauma into a recurring, playful spectacle. Within this protective space, the children move beyond being mere anonymous wartime victims. The temporal stasis of the loop preserves their individual identities and agency, ensuring they remain active, distinct subjects rather than passive objects of historical violence. This shift highlights that the sanctuary does more than ensure physical survival; it also preserves the living archive. By shielding the identities of the peculiar children, the story creates a concrete archive that ultimately enables Jacob to connect with his ancestral past.

This archive materialises primarily through the vintage photographs and family stories, which provide an emotional haven that helps Jacob move from a state of disconnection to a sense of ancestral belonging. In his life in Florida, Jacob experiences a sense of purposelessness, reflecting: “I tried to feel lucky for the safe and unextraordinary [life] that I had done nothing to deserve” (Riggs 18). For him, his grandfather’s fantastic stories and vintage photographs serve as tangible fragments of historical lives and traumas that would otherwise be lost to historical erasure. Within this postmemorial structure, these images function not merely as uncanny artefacts but as a “mythos or fable” (Hoffmann 5), a fairy-tale framework that shields the descendant from the unmediated horror of ancestral trauma, offering a stable context for decoding a heritage heavily overshadowed by “all the death [Abe had] endured” (Riggs 96). The memories passed down to Jacob facilitate a shift from feelings of dislocation to a position of belonging. The archival traces act as a protective layer, a form of refuge-memory that reminds him of his childhood, a time free from the weight of traumatic memory,

when he felt safe. This comfort is anchored in the material presence of the photographs: “the photos I knew so well: the invisible boy, the levitating girl, the boulder lifter, the man with a face painted on the back of his head” (Riggs 45). When Jacob eventually encounters the peculiar children, he instantly recognises them through this archival preparation: “I’d seen them in the photographs” (Riggs 117). This recognition highlights how the images serve as a space for “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (Hirsch, “Postmemory” 107), enabling the text to establish the past as a sanctuary even before Jacob physically enters the time loop. By making the intangible past tangible, the archive reduces his profound sense of alienation, allowing Jacob to develop an identity rooted in a “remembered history” (J. Assmann 38) rather than a disconnected present. In addition, the cairn that leads into the loop is not merely a physical boundary; it symbolises the entrance into a living archive. Crossing this threshold allows for a transition from the “silent witnesses” (A. Assmann 54) of the vintage photographs, specifically the static visual representations of the children, to a direct, sensory encounter with the past. In this moment of realisation, the entrance serves as a bridge to a heritage once out of reach, transforming memory and the frozen images of a distant myth into a tangible refuge.

Memory in *Miss Peregrine* thus acts as an essential refuge that literalises the existential need for safety. By creating a constructed memory site (*lieu de mémoire*) that “block[s] the work of forgetting” (Nora 19), the novel preserves identity and a sense of belonging for both the survivor and the postmemorial descendant. The interaction between the photographic archive and Abe’s oral narratives transforms into a tangible, lived experience, offering access to a dynamic history that serves as a protective shelter. Initially, this sanctuary seems to function perfectly, as the time-stopping loop enables the characters to maintain their peculiar abilities in a world that would otherwise seek to erase them. This artificially constructed domestic space is essential for the characters’ physical preservation. However, this very completeness of safety and suspended time creates a paradox. While it protects its residents from the trauma of a historical disaster and shields them from external threats, this temporal barrier also prevents future development. Consequently, the vital sanctuary for survival morphs into a prison of repetition, a transformation that is further examined in the following section.

## 5.2 Memory as Prison

*A dollhouse with dolls inside, lifers in an ornate prison.*  
- Ransom Riggs (103)

The transition from the safe house to the prison house exposes the central paradox of the fantastic mode: the very mechanisms that construct memory as a lived, protective sanctuary also induce an inescapable existential stasis, transforming it from a comforting refuge into a source of absolute stagnation. While the previous section demonstrated that entering the past as a lived present offers the postmemorial descendant a vital space of shelter and ancestral belonging, the material foundation of this refuge simultaneously enforces a strict temporal confinement. Within this framework, the protective mechanism of the time loop undergoes a crucial inversion. While this temporal barrier successfully insulates the localised storyworld from disruptive historical trauma, particularly the violence of World War II, it simultaneously arrests the progression of linear history. Consequently, the defensive structure that guards against death also blocks developmental growth, turning the sanctuary into a barrier to future progression. This section thus examines how the fantastic mode literalises this memory-prison and explores how a place of safety becomes an inescapable site of confinement.

The concept of memory-as-prison is reinforced by the island's geographical isolation, which acts as a tangible mental boundary. While the orphanage strives to fill the void left by the loss of home, it comes with a deep existential sacrifice, turning what should be a sanctuary into a place of perpetual temporal confinement. This exile is characterised not only by the characters' physical displacement from their countries of origin because of wartime persecution, but also by their systematic exclusion from linear history itself. By freezing the storyworld within a repetitive past, the text literalises a memorial cycle in which the physical landscape develops what A. Whitehead terms a static "temporal consciousness" (49). Marked by indirectness and constant recurrence (3), the island ceases to function as a sanctuary and becomes an existential prison. The peculiar children are arrested in a cycle of geographic repetition, forced to continually relive the same physical movements, dialogues, and weather conditions for more than seventy years, with their narrative unable to progress due to the loop that simultaneously preserves their existence.

This temporal mechanism directly mirrors what Caruth conceptualises as the repetitive, intrusive return of an "unclaimed experience" (4). Much like traumatic memory confines the mind in a compulsive cycle of reliving a historical disaster, the fantastic mode manifests this

internal state as a tangible, unavoidable environment. Within this restricted landscape, true escape is impossible, as Jacob notes: “[t]here was no escaping the monsters, not even on this island [...] Not anywhere” (Riggs 96). Consequently, the “mountains of fog and sharp rocks and seething tides” (Riggs 96) that surround the island serve as the physical bars of a trap. This geographic confinement transforms the refuge into a somatic prison zone. Because the Peculiars can only stay outside the loop for a few hours before “time starts to catch up with [them]” (Riggs 278), their physical existence is bound to the temporal geography of 1940. Crossing the loop’s boundary triggers rapid, catastrophic ageing, demonstrating that the characters cannot detach their bodies from the historical trauma ingrained in the landscape. Within the loop, they do not merely relive a single day; they are confined to a biological stasis, entirely isolated from a linear timeline that has moved on without them.

This multi-layered confinement, operating simultaneously on spatial, temporal, and somatic levels, ultimately collapses the distinction between maintaining life and maintaining memory. Within the analytical framework of the prison-house metaphor, the time loop functions as what Nora defines as a “dominated lieu de mémoire” (23). Nora uses “dominated” to refer to a memory site that has been artificially controlled, managed, and sealed off by an external authority, preventing it from evolving naturally through spontaneous historical changes. In the novel, this artificial domination is enforced by the maternal authority of the Ymbryne, Miss Peregrine herself, who ensures the children’s safety and protection by freezing them within the permanent material archive of September 3, 1940. Consequently, the Peculiar’s survival becomes entirely dependent on the suspension of time, forcing the narrative to collapse into a permanent present. This structural arrest shows that sustaining life is fundamentally linked to preserving memory. The characters cannot develop or change because, leaving the confines of the memorial archive, the decades of accumulated linear time would catch up upon their bodies, causing fatal accelerated ageing, while allowing the loop to collapse would mean succumbing to the lethal historical impact of the wartime bomb. Survival, therefore, requires permanent confinement within this dual threat, rendering the refuge an inescapable prison house. By freezing the temporal frame to block out external violence, the narrative immobilises the storyworld within the time loop. Therefore, the safe house becomes an inescapable prison marked by the suspension of time, where survival is purchased at the cost of any forward progress.

The novel's photographs strengthen the theme of entrapment by sealing the peculiar children and their identities into a fixed archival form. According to Barthes, photographs do not preserve subjective memory; instead, they create a "counter-memory," a semiotic barrier that blocks remembrance by substituting the fluid, evolving nature of human recollection using a single, unalterable visual example (91). Within the loop, this creates the difficulty where the Peculiars become their photographs: static, perpetually on display, and never permitted to grow beyond their fixed depiction. This entrapment manifests what Barthes terms a "temporal hallucination," a phenomenon where the visual deceptively presents a lost past as a living present (115). By forcing the Peculiars to inhabit this stasis, the text reduces their existence to a repetitive cycle of "this has been" and "that is going to die" (96). As unchanging artefacts from a bygone past, these images detach the children from their fluid existence; they remain within the loop but are eternally frozen in their historical era. By turning the characters into visual representations, the narrative confines them in a permanent archive, maintaining them only as frozen images and preventing any possibility of change.

Complementing this visual containment, Abe's stories initially allow Jacob to feel connected to his grandfather; however, they also serve as a masking narrative, as established in Section 4.3. This strategy illustrates what Hoffmann conceptualises as a "psychic fable" (74), a fragmented narrative framework through which a survivor's transgenerational trauma is passed down to a descendant. Rather than evaluating the novel as a whole, this section focuses on the fables Abe uses to depict his late childhood experiences in the Welsh children's home. By translating the historical trauma of the Holocaust into an adventure story populated by Hollowgasts, the text creates a protective narrative shield. This framing aligns historical Nazi persecution with fantastic monsters, shaping Jacob's postmemory through what Hirsch describes as an imaginative connection to a past he never experienced ("Postmemory" 107). In the prison setting, this fable reinterprets a place of temporal confinement as a "magical" (Riggs 88) sanctuary, portraying the children's insulation as a necessity for survival. This fairy tale framing delays Jacob's recognition of the underlying entrapment and conceals the boundaries of the loop, which lasts until this protective illusion inevitably collapses and he is forced to confront the sanctuary not as a refuge but as a prison and a traumatised archive.

As established in Section 4.1, the Peculiars' bodies function as sites of embodied memory, manifested in their abilities. However, within the restrictive framework of the prison-house metaphor, this externalisation also functions as a form of somatic entrapment, limiting the

characters' physical forms to repetitive, archival traits. This bodily confinement becomes especially evident to Jacob when the protective narrative fables collapse under the weight of historical forces. His recurring “wake-up-screaming nightmares” where he “couldn’t close [his] eyes without seeing it-that tentacle-mouth horror in the woods” (Riggs 35), illustrate this internalised restriction. Triggered by witnessing his grandfather’s violent death, these nightmares create a mental prison-state in which the boundaries between ancestral historical trauma and Jacob’s contemporary reality blur. This somatic crisis reflects Schwab’s concept of the “prison house of repetition compulsion,” in which an individual is trapped in cycles of historical trauma through intrusive bodily experiences (2). Jacob’s need “to wear a mouth guard to keep from grinding [his] teeth into nubs as [he] slept” (Riggs 35) represents the “body in pain” (Schwab 2) that results from a memory that cannot be escaped or integrated. For Jacob, this physical pressure is deeply bound to the repeated imagery of “black tongues” and “shattering glass” (Riggs 41), which function as the ultimate sensory triggers of the night he witnessed Abe’s murder. Instead of functioning merely as abstract metaphors, the fracturing glass and predatory tongues serve as specific signs of historical trauma breaking into the present. Because Jacob was physically present during the catastrophe, these sensory elements act as involuntary triggers that bind him to the moment of historical violence. By translating these external triggers into internal bodily manifestations, where teeth-grinding and the necessary use of a mouth guard physically ground this shock, the text shows that memory has become an inescapable state of somatic confinement, carried within Jacob’s body.

This confinement illustrates how the peculiar children in the time loop are cut off from the essential experience of growth, ageing, and transformation, being “denied the normal chance to mature” (Chang 90). Staying within this memorial space confines them in a frozen timeline, leaving the characters tied to a past that prevents progression or escape. Crucially, because the act of remembering can only ever occur in the present moment, materialising historical trauma as a physical environment forces the Peculiars to live in a permanent present tense entirely dictated by bygone events. They are trapped in a paradox where the past refuses to become history. Within the mechanics of the time loop, however, recognising that “the past is past” (Hoffmann 74) is structurally made impossible. Because the temporal loop resets every twenty-four hours, the physical environment prevents the past from ever concluding. It cannot be processed or integrated into a linear timeline; instead, it becomes an inescapable cage that the peculiar children are forced to inhabit indefinitely.

Memory, therefore, operates as a constraining force that traps the individual in an unchanging present. By converting a need for security into a repetitive physical entrapment, the narrative illustrates that the absolute preservation of the past completely closes off the possibility of progress. This creates a central contradiction within the chapter: memory serves simultaneously as a source of safety and a source of stagnation. The following section reveals how the novel deploys the fantastic mode as a narrative strategy, enabling these conflicting functions of memory to coexist and emphasising the tension of a memory that can be both a vital sanctuary and a suffocating prison.

### 5.3 Between Refuge and Prison: The Role of the Fantastic

*I couldn't square my grandfather's idyllic stories with this  
nightmare house, nor the idea that he'd found refuge here.*  
- Ransom Riggs (81)

Sections 5.1 and 5.2 have established a fundamental tension within the novel's representation of memory, wherein the structures that provide a sense of refuge simultaneously generate a dynamic of confinement. Unlike a realist narrative, which might struggle to balance these opposing functions, Riggs deliberately deploys the fantastic mode as a narrative strategy to uphold this paradox without resolving it. By challenging the rules of realism from within, the fantastic establishes a space in which the past serves a dual purpose as both protection and imprisonment. The island of Cairnholm appears timeless, shaped by its isolation and its dual history as a sanctuary for those fleeing both the historical persecution of Nazi-occupied Europe and the supernatural threat of the Hollowgasts. As Jackson points out, the fantastic represents the "inside, or underside, of realism" (25). This final section illustrates how the fantastic mode functions as the primary facilitator of memory, allowing the four elements, the time loop, the Peculiars' abilities, the family stories, and the vintage photographs to operate as a coherent, interconnected system that offers both safety and limitation.

This paradox is best understood through Jackson's idea of the "paraxial area", described as a "spectral region" that is neither entirely real nor fully illusory, yet remains linked to the primary world (19). In this shadowy intersection, the time loop and the children's home function as a paraxial structure in which Riggs constructs a "hollow world" (Jackson 46) designed to shield the peculiar children from the destructive effects of linear history. This defensive strategy relies on a modern worldview, rooted in Enlightenment rationalism, that prioritises reason and dismisses the irrational or impossible as non-existent (C. Whitehead 3). As Miss Peregrine explains, their safety depends on this modern disbelief: "common folk no longer

make much of an effort to seek us out” (Riggs 146). By disguising this paraxial sanctuary within the Gothic trope of “scary old houses” (Riggs 146), the text subverts conventional expectations. While an eerie old house usually signals danger, for these displaced children, the orphanage offers a “source of identity and stability” (qtd. in Chang 78). It serves as a protective refuge that bridges the gap created by their geographical separation and historical isolation to preserve marginalised identities that would otherwise be suppressed by the dominant historical narrative. However, this protective insulation does not offer a true escape; it exists as a “dominated *lieu de mémoire*” (Nora 23), explicitly dominated by the temporal stasis and the cyclical repetition of September 3, 1940. By disrupting the natural flow of time so the peculiar children can survive, Riggs externalises the internal process of memory, transforming the home into a physical safe space that simultaneously serves as a prison. While this mechanism ensures their immediate survival within what Chang describes as a “heaven-like space” (86), it also inflicts a heavy price by sacrificing the characters’ futures. Therefore, this restriction within this paraxial framework establishes the confines of a cage because existing in a frozen yesterday prevents any opportunity for growth.

Beyond the temporal structure of the time loop, the fantastic mode materialises memory through the Peculiars’ abilities and the vintage photographs. As Shklovsky argues, perception often succumbs to “habitualisation,” in which even intense feelings, such as “fear of war,” become simplified, reducing their emotional impact (20). Within a realist framework, the historical trauma of 1940, the Blitz, the Holocaust, and the plight of orphaned children risk being viewed as mere factual data rather than as lived experiences. Riggs employs the fantastic mode to disrupt this automated, numbed response, transforming memory into a “physically and temporally isolated enclave” (151). By externalising the “materiality of the trace” (Nora 13) into peculiar abilities and fixed archival images, the narrative compels an encounter with the past in a highly defamiliarised form. The children’s bodies do not merely function as passive representations of historical victimhood; rather, their peculiar abilities make the “stone stony” (Shklovsky 20), converting survival into a tangible, undeniable physical manifestation. As a result, the memory of war is stripped of its historical familiarity. By merging these vintage photographs with surreal, fantastic bodies, the text breaks the detachment of historical record, bringing an emotional “sensation of life” (20) back to a traumatic past that conventional realism would render static.

The ultimate aim of this fantastic duality is revealed in the transition from hesitation to transgression, where the narrative resolves the tension between memory as an escape and as a legacy. Todorov defines the fantastic by the hesitation experienced between natural and supernatural explanations (25). In the novel, this tension is externalised in Jacob's struggle to choose between viewing his grandfather's past as a comforting "psychic fable" (Hoffmann 74) or accepting it as a traumatic inheritance. The structural uncertainty collapses when Jacob encounters the Peculiars firsthand and enters the time loop, validating his grandfather's oral accounts. Consequently, the fantastic elements of Abe's stories shift from a protective fable into what Schwab terms a "haunting legacy" (2), a manifestation of the Freudian uncanny, in which the repressed historical trauma, literalised as the predatory Hollowgasts, can no longer be hidden behind a fairy tale narrative. By confronting these literal threats, Jacob actively embraces his role within this lineage; his journey represents the effective integration of a fragmented ancestral history into his own contemporary identity. His deliberate choice to escape the constraints of endless cycles shifts his path from the structural uncertainty of the fantastic to a conscious resolution. Jacob recognises that, while the fantastic mode was a necessary bridge, remaining permanently in the temporal stasis is to accept a form of living death. As the time loop fails to reset, Jacob is forced to move beyond the "dominated *lieu de mémoire*" of the island (Nora 23). In doing so, he preserves these postmemorial markers, including the family stories, the peculiar abilities, and the vintage photographs, and carries them forward into his own continuous future. This act of transgression transforms the fantastic elements from a static archive into a fluid heritage, demonstrating that the fantastic mode serves as the vehicle for transforming a haunted legacy from a stagnant trauma into a postmemorial experience.

In conclusion, memory in *Miss Peregrine* is portrayed as a dual entity, serving simultaneously as a crucial refuge and a constraining prison. It operates as a safe house where the fantastic mode literalises a shield of protection essential for enduring historical erasure. Conversely, it functions as a prison house, where the past becomes trapped in a cyclical loop, preventing growth and progression. This inherent conflict, in which the past is both a haven and a limitation, is sustained and rendered representable specifically through the fantastic mode. Rather than merely reflecting this tension, the fantastic acts as a deliberate narrative strategy that spatialises the paradox; by transforming abstract psychological defence mechanisms into a concrete structure, it enables these opposing dimensions of memory to coexist. It suggests that memory remains a safe refuge only when it evolves as a dynamic legacy, but

becomes a prison when treated as an unchanging retreat. Through the mechanisms of paraxial inversion and defamiliarisation, Riggs enables an understanding of the “fatal crack” (Attebery 15) at the intersection of history and memory. By destabilising the boundaries of time and space, this paraxial framework permits the simultaneous existence of both sanctuary and prison. Ultimately, the fantastic does not resolve the tension between preservation and stagnation; rather, it maintains this paradox, establishing the foundation for evaluating how these dual structures externalise and literalise the text’s central forms of memory, transforming abstract historical trauma into a narrative structure.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates that Ransom Riggs deliberately uses the fantastic mode in *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children* as a narrative strategy to make embodied memory, traumatic memory, and postmemory representable. By examining the novel’s four fantastic elements, the Peculiars’ abilities, the time loop, the family stories, and the vintage photographs, this study shows how internal emotional states and historical traumas become perceptible through the mechanisms of externalisation and literalisation. Instead of simply offering an escape from reality, the fantastic mode serves as an internal challenge to realism, disrupting its rules from within and creating a narrative space where the repetitive and unspoken aspects of historical trauma can be explored.

The primary research question sought to determine how the novel deploys the fantastic mode as a narrative strategy to make three distinct forms of memory, embodied memory, traumatic memory, and postmemory, representable through the four fantastic elements. To address this overarching inquiry, five specific sub-questions were integrated into the analytical framework to guide the investigation. These sub-questions explicitly interrogated how the Peculiars’ abilities embody memory and reflect the persistence of past traumatic experiences in the present; how the time loop functions as a device for representing cyclical trauma and temporal stagnation; how the family stories and the vintage photographs act as uncanny triggers of postmemory, to blur the line between history and fiction; how the interplay between visual and textual elements contributes to the defamiliarisation of memory; and, finally, in what ways the novel depicts memory as both a refuge and a constraint.

The analysis showed that each of these questions highlights the structural features of the fantastic mode. The Peculiars’ abilities function as externalisations of embodied memory,

transforming historical marginalisation and wartime survival into somatic traits. Regarding temporal stagnation, the study demonstrates that the time loop serves as a literalised spatialisation of trauma, turning internal repetition compulsion into a spatialised, geographic cage defined by cyclical temporal stasis. Furthermore, in evaluating the sub-questions on postmemorial triggers and multimodal dynamics, the analysis illustrates how the family stories and vintage photographs act as archival traces that challenge the historical record. By blending seemingly realistic visuals with fantastic narratives, the text makes the past feel unfamiliar and promotes active, postmemorial engagement from the descendant, thereby blurring the boundary between historical record and fiction. Additionally, the interaction between visual and textual elements, viewed through Shklovsky's defamiliarisation perspective, removes the past from its automated historical recognition, converting memory from a static archive to a dynamic encounter. Through the fantastic mode, these elements collectively depict memory as both a vital sanctuary and a confining prison. As a sanctuary, the paraxial framework creates a secure, insulated space in which marginalised identities are protected from historical erasure. Conversely, as a prison, this absolute preservation prevents linear progression, trapping the subjects within a frozen timeline where the past resists becoming history.

The findings highlight that when conventional realism cannot fill the gaps of historical catastrophe, the fantastic mode offers an alternative narrative strategy. By externalising the internal process of memory into an interconnected network of abilities, a time loop, and archival traces, the novel demonstrates that the fantastic mode constitutes an essential "paraxial area" (Jackson 19) in which the unspeakable can be visualised. This mechanism allows the silent void of historical trauma to be expressed and represented. Through literalisation, the novel pushes the boundaries of conventional realism, emphasising how the past continues to impact the present. Riggs uses fantastic elements to make Nora's "will to remember" (19) perceptible within the paraxial space of the fantastic, thereby turning abstract legacies such as embodied memory, traumatic stagnation, and inherited postmemory into narratively visible dynamics. The narrative externalises these historical traces, making them accessible and shaping the depiction of trauma to give form to what might otherwise remain unseen. The fantastic mode serves as a vehicle for the descendant to confront their inherited trauma, demonstrating that, although the past may seem unavoidable, the fantastic narrative approach can transform this haunted inheritance into meaningful heritage. In this way, the mode renders historical trauma and memory perceptible.

Nevertheless, the limitations of this thesis must be acknowledged. Due to the study's specific scope, the analysis concentrated exclusively on the first novel in Riggs's series, thereby excluding his other two books. The analysis prioritised an examination of the text's visual-textual interactions, without analysing how these memory structures evolve in the subsequent books. Moreover, this project focused on the print medium and excluded a comparative analysis of the novel's 2016 film adaptation. Because this thesis also examines the distinct interaction between vintage photographs and prose text as postmemorial triggers, investigating how these elements are reconfigured within a moving, visual medium was beyond the scope of this study. Building on these limitations, future research might extend this analytical framework to explore how contemporary fantastic fiction employs multi-modal strategies to depict historical trauma. Exploring how these memory mechanisms evolve over literary series or in response to changing media formats could further reveal the distinctive capacity of the fantastic mode to make unassimilated history narratively perceptible.

This study contributes to literary and memory studies by demonstrating how the fantastic mode serves as a narrative strategy for representing historical trauma. By exploring the dual mechanisms of externalisation and literalisation, it shows how multimodal texts navigate unassimilated historical absences. Ultimately, the analysis illustrates that the fantastic mode effectively balances the conflict between memory as both a refuge and a constraint, preserving marginalised histories without condemning the past to temporal stagnation.

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## 8. Appendix

### Abstract (English)

This master's thesis analyses Ransom Riggs's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011), arguing that the novel employs the fantastic mode as a deliberate narrative strategy to make distinct forms of memory representable. Situated at the intersection of fantasy studies, trauma theory, memory studies, and photography theory, the study draws on Rosemary Jackson's definition of the fantastic as a mode of subversion that disturbs realism from within. Specifically, it demonstrates how four fantastic elements, the peculiar abilities, the time loop, oral family stories, and embedded vintage photographs, function as strategic literalisations and externalisations of abstract trauma and memory dynamics.

By synthesising Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, Jan Assmann's cultural memory frameworks, and Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, the analysis illustrates how these narrative devices manifest three different forms of remembrance: embodied memory, traumatic memory, and postmemory. The study demonstrates how these elements create a narrative bridge between history and fiction, enabling the text to confront the unrepresentable nature of historical trauma through the paraxial space. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* utilises the fantastic mode to expose the paradox of remembrance: illustrating how memory functions simultaneously as a protective refuge that preserves the past and as a prison that constrains the present.

## Abstract (German)

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht Ransom Riggs' Jugendroman *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011; deutsche Ausgabe: *Die Insel der besonderen Kinder*) und argumentiert, dass das Werk den fantastischen Modus gezielt als erzählerisches Mittel nutzt, um bestimmte Formen des Erinnerns darstellbar zu machen. Verortet an der Schnittstelle von Fantastikforschung, Traumatheorie, Gedächtnisforschung und Fotografietheorie, stützt sich die Untersuchung auf Rosemary Jacksons Definition des Fantastischen als Modus der Subversion, der den Realismus von innen heraus stört. Dabei wird gezeigt, wie vier fantastische Elemente, die Fähigkeiten der besonderen Kinder, die Zeitschleife, die Familiengeschichten und die Vintage-Fotografien, als strategische Literalisierungen und Externalisierungen abstrakter Traumata und Dimensionen des Erinnerns dienen.

Die Analyse verbindet Cathy Caruths Traumatheorie, Jan Assmanns Ansätze zum kulturellen Gedächtnis und Marianne Hirschs Konzept des Postmemory, um aufzuzeigen, wie diese narrativen Mittel drei unterschiedliche Formen des Erinnerns manifestieren: das verkörperte Gedächtnis, das traumatische Gedächtnis und Postmemory. Die Untersuchung zeigt auf, wie diese Elemente eine narrative Brücke zwischen Geschichte und Fiktion herstellen, die es dem Text ermöglicht, die narrative Repräsentation ansonsten ungreifbarer historischer Traumata durch den paraxialen Raum zu konfrontieren. Letztlich demonstriert diese Arbeit, dass der Roman den fantastischen Modus nutzt, um das Paradoxon des Erinnerns offenzulegen, indem veranschaulicht wird, wie dieses einerseits als schützender Zufluchtsort fungiert, der die Vergangenheit bewahrt, und andererseits als Einschränkung, die die Auseinandersetzung mit der Gegenwart verhindert.