

## Abstract

*Talking to the Dead: The Persistence of Impossible Conversations* is a creative writing dissertation that utilizes creative nonfiction as a method of inquiry to explore what it is to be in communication with the dead. Prior to and following the millennial years we've seen resurgence of works -- in popular media such as television, film and novel as well as in literary novel -- that explore the relationship between the living and the dead. These essays are a response to this presence of the dead in the collective literary imagination. We are surrounded by the suggestion that it is possible to be in conversation with the dead, yet how does one know when one talks to the dead or imagines such conversations? How does one distinguish a ghost from other bodiless entities? How might we reconsider the nature of conversation if communication between living and dead, bodied and bodiless is possible? How does one distinguish between one's own voice and voices from beyond one's self? What is the nature of voice?

Chapter one, *Contemporary Theories of Spectrality* considers the ways in which theories based in post-structuralism handle the spectral in contemporary American fiction. The primary argument is that a presupposition of disbelief in spectral phenomena has profound effects of textual interpretations and undermines the literature's impacts on readers. The following lyric essays, chapters 2-7, dabble in the gaps inherent in such questioning. These essays are suggestions, fragmented mediations, poetic mosaics that grasp not at the ghost's sheet but at the surrounding air by which it lifts. These essays weave personal experiences: a trip to a cadaver lab, a visit to Rumi's tomb in Konya Turkey, my father's funeral, with meditative reflections on the movement of the imagination and with internal witness of the mind.