Cookbooks can be interpreted as sites of exchange and transformation. This is not only due to their practical use as written instructions that assist in turning ingredients into dishes, but also to their significance as interconnecting mediums between teacher and student, perceiver and perceived, past and present. Hinging on inescapable notions of apprenticeship, occasion, and the unifying of all at once—teacher and the writer—the recipe as text renders a specific brand of culinary uncanny. In outlining the function of cookbooks as chronicles of the everyday, Janet Theophano points out that they “are one of a variety of written forms, such as diaries and journals, that [people] have adapted to record and enrich their lives […] blending the raw ingredients into a new configuration” (122). The cookbook unveils the peculiar ability of the ephemeral “text” to find permanence and materiality through the embodied framework action and repetition. In view of its propensity to be read, evaluated, and reconfigured, the cookbook can be read as a manifestation of voice, a site of interpretation and communication between writer and reader which is defined not by static assessment, but by dynamic and often incongruous exchanges of emotions, mysteries, and riddles.

Taking the in-between status of the cookbook as point of departure, this paper analyses the cookbook as a “living dead” entity, a revenant text bridging the gap between the ephemeral word and the tangible physicality of the action. Using Joanne Harris’s fictional treatment of the trans-generational cookbook in Five Quarters of the Orange (2001) as an evocative example, the cookbook is read as a site of “memory, mourning and melancholia” which is also inevitably connected—in its aesthetic, political and intellectual contexts—to the concept of “return.” The “dead” voice in the cookbook is resurrected through practice. Re-encoding instructions brings with it a sense of transformative exchange that, in both its conceptual and factual dimensions, rearticulates unarticulated—a process of the deterritorialized at least as far as cookbooks are concerned, in “a sense of the untranslatable” and “a correspondence between dreams, language, writing” (Castricano 13).

Understanding the cookbook as a “Gothic text” unveils one of the most intriguing aspects of the recipe as a vault of knowledge and memory that, in an appropriately mysterious twist, can be connected to the literary framework of the uncanny through the theme of “live burial.” As an example of the written word, a cookbook is a text that “calls” to the reader; that call is not only sited in interpretation—as it can be arguably claimed for the majority of written texts—but it is also strongly linked to a sense of lived experience on the writer’s part. This connection between “presences” is particularly evident in examples of cookbooks belonging to what has been termed “archigraphical cookbooks”, a specific genre of culinary writing where “recipes play an integral part in the revelation of the personal history” (Kelly 258). Known examples from this category include Alice B. Toklas’s famous Cook Book (1954) and, more recently, Nigel Slater’s Toast (2003). In the autobiographical cookbook, the food recipes are fully intertwined with the writer’s memories and experiences, so that the two things, as Kelly suggests, “could not be separated” (258). The writer of this type of cookbook is, one might venture to argue, always present, always “alive,” indistinguishable and indivisible from the experience of any recipe that is read and re-enacted.

The culinary phantom—understood here as the “voice” of the writer and how it re-enters through the re-enchanted recipe—functions as a literary revenant through the culturally prescribed readability of the recipes as a “transstructural” (Raehink 45) piece. Raehink also suggests that the “cooked” or “fixed” nature of the written words can suggest a close relationship between written and lived, material and immaterial. As the writer of a cookbook is a phantom—a being that relies on encoded messages of haunting, memory, and specificity (45). This fundamental concept—essential to grasp the status of cookbooks as a haunted text—helps us to understand the writer and instructor of recipes as “being there” without necessarily being present. The writer’s words are phantasmatic in that they are a part of both the recipe and motion—is buried alive in the pages of the cookbook. It remains tacit and unheard until it is resurrected through reading and recreating the recipe. Although this idea of “coming alive” finds resonance in virtually all forms of textual exchange, the phantasmatic nature of the relationship between writer and reader finds its most tangible expression in the cookbook precisely because of its textual focus. Harris’s depiction of the text as a sacred sanctuary suggests, in turn, that the reader becomes an active participant and, through his or her knowledge through “secrecy” and choice, cookbooks are specifically bound to a dynamic injunction of response, where the reader transforms the written word into action, and, in so doing, revives the embodied nature of the recipe as much as it revives the spirit of its writer (Spectres of Marx 158).

As a textual medium, the cookbook as a text is linked to the writer’s memories, education, and personal experiences. In this sense, the recipes contain knowledge of the past and, at the same time, the ability to represent a trans-temporal coordinate from which to begin understanding the writer’s life and the social situations she experienced while writing the album.

As the cookery album acts as a medium of self-representation for Mirabelle, Harris also gestures towards the idea that recipes offer an insight into a person that history may have otherwise forgotten. The culinary album in Five Quarters of the Orange establishes itself as a trans-temporal gateway through which an exchange suggests itself between mother and daughter. The etymological origin of the word “recipe” offers a further insight into the nature of the exchange. The word finds its root in the Latin word recipere, meaning simultaneously “to give and to receive” (Floyd and Forster 6). The booktre/album are not only the text representation of the patterns and behaviours on which her life was based but, most importantly, position themselves in a process of an uncanny exchange. Acting as the surrogate of the long-passed Mirabelle, the album’s existence as a haunted culinary document ushers in the possibilities of secrets and revelations, contradictions, and concealment.

On numerous occasions, Frampobe confesses that the translation of the recipe book was a task with which she did not want to engage. Forcing herself, she describes the writing of the personal “struggle” (276). Fearing what the book could reveal—literally the “language” and thought of the writer—she suggests that the book demand to be written as an act of deconstruction. Harris had avoided looking at the album, feeling absurdly at fault, a voyeur, as if my mother might come in at any time and see me reading her strange secrets. Truth is, I didn’t want to know her secrets” (30). On the other hand, Frampobe’s fear could be interpreted as an act of interpretation and communication, a prospect of unveiling simple facts which are not necessarily her mother’s emotions, passions and anxieties, feeling they may actually be sublimated into her recipes (270). Frampobe’s initial resistance to the secrets of the recipe book is quickly followed by an almost obsessive quest to “translate” the text: “I read through the album little by little during those lengthening nights. I deciphered the words [and] wrote down and cross-referenced everything by means of small cards, trying to put everything in sequence” (225).

As Harris exposes Frampobe’s personal struggle in unravelling Mirabelle’s individual identity, the daughter’s hermeneutic excavation into the past is problematised by her mother’s strange style: “The language […] in which much of the album was written was alien to me, and after a few abortive attempts to decipher it, I abandoned the idea […] the mad scrawlings, poems,
In their recent, quasi-Gothic revision of classical psychoanalysis, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok write about the trauma of loss in relation to psychic crypts. In mourning a loved one, they argue, the individual can slip into the psychological crypt itself. In the case of Yannick, Mirabelle’s recipes, by her daughter Framboise, is the tangible expression of the mother’s life.

In 1980, when the death of Yannick’s father altered the course of Framboise’s relationship with the recipe book, an alchemical process began. The book was transmuted, and the recipes were turned from “private” to “public,” as Framboise perceived her mother’s presence in the book as a way to “return” her spirit to the kitchen. In the“Great Jerusalem Artichoke Circus” (17), the cookbook is transformed into a “haunted” text, a “crypt” that contains the memory of the mother. The crypt is a place where the past is encoded, but not necessarily read. The “crypt” is a place of memory, a place where the past is stored, but not necessarily read.
Woolf bringing the reader closer into the relationship of the deceased man and woman. It may also be important that the house, though hundreds of years old, is still standing as symbolically Woolf may be suggesting that so too is the love of the deceased man and woman. They remain very much in love despite the passing of time. What is also interesting about the story is the fact that Woolf never gives any of the three characters in the story a physical description which might suggest that love is not confined to the physical. Love goes deeper than physicality. Another important line in the story is ‘from the deepest wells of silence the wood pigeon drew its bubble of sound.’ Again this line suggests that there is life in the house and gardens. From nothing comes something, a breath of life. This gives “A Haunted House,” like much of Woolf’s fiction, a melodramatic tone. When the shadow of a bird crosses the carpet of the house, the reader understands that this is both an intricate physical detail and a symbol of the mysterious presence that visits the narrator in fleeting moments. The bird’s shadow is cast through the window, an object that also takes on great symbolic importance. The pane of glass through which the narrator often gazes comes to represent an invisible barrier to understanding and satisfaction, states of being that are represented by various kinds of light. The gl Download Word Document Version of Haunted House by Virginia Woolf. Whatever hour you woke there was a door shutting. From room to room they went, hand in hand, lifting here, opening there, making sure—a ghostly couple. “Here we left it,” she said. And he added, “Oh, but here too!” “It’s upstairs,” she murmured. My hands were empty. The shadow of a thrush crossed the carpet; from the deepest wells of silence the wood pigeon drew its bubble of sound. “Safe, safe, safe” the pulse of the house beat softly. “The treasure buried; the room . . .” the pulse stopped short. Oh, was that the buried treasure? A moment later the light had faded. Out in the garden then? But the trees spun darkness for a wandering beam of sun.