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## ‘The Unthought Known’ in Jayne Anne Phillips’ *Quiet Dell*

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When we are grown up, we come to know many things, but for any variety of reasons, we cannot think about it. There may be things we have forgotten; or have intuition or felt sense for that we sometimes find ourselves desperately struggling to put in words, which the British psychoanalyst, Christopher Bollas called ‘The Unthought known’.

Memories of these experiences live in the boundary between our conscious and unconscious mind. It is the stress we feel in our bodies is one of the primary ways to trace and uncover much of the content of this The Unthought Known.

Scientifically the unthought known is created-virtually from conception through birth & into our first few years, the brain stores stressful experiences without the benefit of language. Normally, everybody have this trauma in life. Significantly many writers have shown this traumatic experience in their works.

Jayne Anne Phillips is one of the well known contemporary Post Modern Feminist writers of American literature. She is the author of several collections of literary pieces and whose works have been translated in twelve languages. To Bollas, unknowingly everything has been inculcated into the memory being as the fetus in the mother’s womb. In the novel ‘Quiet Dell’ Phillips has shown this trauma through two characters. It was written in Oct 13, 2013. It was written based on the true incident happened in Quiet Dell in 1931, West Virginia.

“Quiet” means calm; here the place which is known for calmness turns to chaos. The characters Harry and Annabel are intrude by this unthought known.

Due to the Great Depression, Dutch immigrants in West Virginia began to advertise for companionship in the matrimonial bureau site called ‘lonely hearts’. By registering in this website the person can do online dating and can seek friendship, fidelity and matrimony.

Starving: “There are more people starving for love and companionship than there are starving for bread,” red-inked the American Friendship Society of Detroit, which offered “ABSOLUTELY FREE” lists of wealthy widows to anybody who had the price of a two-cent stamp. In four years the “society” had collected more than \$ 10,000 in dues.

“We Make Thousands Happy,”

Time Magazine, September 14, 1931.

The protagonist Asta Eicher, widow of three children has registered in the site. She began to receive seductive letters from a wealthy, college- educated civil engineer and widower called Cornelius Pierson (Harry). For six months she began to receive letters in which he promised to protect her, marry her and will take care of her and her children.

He never revealed that he was already married; similarly she was unaware that he is a con-man who preyed on widows, brutally murdered them and drained their bank accounts.

The psychoanalyst Abraham and Torok calls Bollas “The Unthought Known” as “Transgenerational phantom”. According to them, the phantom occurs as unspeakable family secrets are passed down through the generations, each new generation keeping alive the hidden facts of the family. It may be unspoken by the parent, but it can be passed to the child unknowingly or unconsciously.

Nicholas Rand in “The Shell and the Kernal “argues that Abraham and Torok’s psychological accounts of mourning and transference may be read both historically and socially. He suggests that,

“The idea of the phantom has implications beyond the study of individual psychology or even familial psychology. Aspects of this concept have the potential to illuminate the genesis of social institutions and may provide a new perspective for inquiring into the psychological roots of cultural patterns and political ideology... Abraham and Torok’s work enables us to understand how the falsification, ignorance, or disregard of the past – whether institutionalized by a totalitarian state... or practiced by parents and grandparents – is the breeding ground of the phantomic return of shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possible even entire nations”. (pg.50, The Shell and the Kernal)

In the novel Annabel is a precocious child, who is highly imaginative. Most of her dream sequences have been present after her death. Often she had a dream that, Bells are ringing and she believes it’s the way through which her ancestors are speaking to her, which her grandmother told her before she died. Heartbreakingly, she herself witnesses her own death.

There are bells on the wind. All the old year’s fall on the ground in light

When you walk across those lights, it sounds like walking on all

the piled-up leaves of giant trees. But up high the bells are ringing

for everyone alive. My grandmother said there was a whisper for each

one dead that year and a feather drifting for each one waiting to be born. (pg.03)

Cornelius Pierson, the antagonist of the novel has cheated Asta Eicher family and murdered them. He has murdered not only her but hundreds of women. After the trail people began to call him as “Bluebeard of Quiet Dell”. From his childhood days, he loves to see the sadness of

others; He used to steal things. His father's scolding has never bothered him. In early age his longings for money made him to court ladies.

Harry Powers identified today as Herman Drenth,  
 a former Wisconsin resident, served 15 months in state prison  
 here on charges of burglarizing the home of a woman he courted.  
 In 1921, Drenth, residing on a farm near Cumberland,  
 WI, was sentenced for the ransacking the house of Mrs. Thomas Early  
 and stealing several articles, including part of her bridal outfit.  
 Mrs. Early has identified a newspaper picture of Drenth;  
 he becomes angry after her marriage to Early and the burglary followed. (pg.280)

Unknowingly his memory has been filled with crude ideas. His father Wilko Drenth is an honest man, whereas he murdered brutally many women and stolen many things. When he began to court ladies he used to change names. To some ladies it is Cornelius Pierson and to others as Harry Powers, Charlie Rogers, Herman Drenth. It's the phantom which made him to do it. May be from his ancestors the phantom might have come within him. During the trial the phantom has been evidenced. In the court, His lawyer asked him,

Mr. Powers, I will ask you to state if you did  
 kill Mrs. Lemke at any time or place,  
 as charged against you in this indictment.

"No, sir" (pg.410)

Memory doesn't know good and bad. It stores everything consciously or unconsciously. In Annabel, unknowingly her memory has stored everything, wish of her father to become a great artist, her mother's unknown love towards her father, which has been reflected in her doings. Annabel says,

I know all of grandmother's stories about papa.  
 Her stories are in the photograph box.  
 Heinrich, ten years old, with Grandmother and Grandfather Eicher  
 ("like you, Annabel, he read the dictionary, and wrote out new words") pg 05.

Grandmother used to say that I might  
 find myself upon a stage one day

as an actor or the author of a play (pg.03).

Throughout the novel in both the characters this trauma can be seen. In Annabel it's her parents' positive attitude of life has been stored in her mind and in Harry it's from his forefathers.

In each individual it may be the phantom or unthought known governs. Unknowingly sometimes we are unaware of it and sometimes we know it but we are unspeakable.

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[en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unthought\\_known](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unthought_known)