The 'Ghost' of Identity in *Finnegans Wake*

MARGARITA ESTÉVEZ SAÁ

Stephen Dedalus has provided us with his own definition of what a ghost is in the "Scylla and Charybdis" chapter of *Ulysses*:

> —What is a ghost? Stephen said with tingling energy. One who has faded into impalpability *through death, through absence, through change of manners.* (*U* 180; emphasis added) [1]

Taking into account this definition of a ghost, it is quite easy to acknowledge that throughout Joyce's fiction there is a wide range of spectres. We find ghosts that have acquired such status through death: let us think, for instance, of Father Flynn in "The Sisters," Mrs. Sinico in "A Painful Case," Eveline's mother in the homonymous story, Michael Furey in "The Dead," Stephen's mother and Bloom's son in *Ulysses,* etc. We can also distinguish those figures that have become ghosts through absence such as the mother figure in "Counterparts"; the priests mentioned in "An Encounter," "Araby" and "Eveline"; Charles Stewart Parnell in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room"; the parents of many of the children in the early stories; etc. [2] We can also consider that E-C- becomes a ghost in Stephen's dreams in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and that the old peasant turns into a specter for the young protagonist at the end of the same novel. There are also ghosts through "change of manners." That could be the case of Father Keon in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room"; the mother, the Virgin and the prostitute in Stephen's Villanelle; Shakespeare's son in Stephen's theory in *Ulysses,* etc.

In the article "The Apparition of One Sir Ghostus," Ricardo Navarrete has mentioned several ghosts of whose existence in Joyce's last work Wakean critics have tried to convince us. [3] That is the case of George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, a Tutankhamen, Joyce himself, his father, his brother Charles, Elvis Presley, the river Dusi, and the "specter of coincidence" whose functioning in the work Navarrete explains in his essay. As Navarrete states "ghosts are only natural in a book that touches the worlds of night, dreaming and resurrecting." [4]

All of Joyce's works, in fact, begin with an allusion to a ghost. Thus, in "The Sisters" the boy introduces the reader into the ghostly remembrance of the dead priest's words that haunt him: "But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work" (*D* 1). [5] This specter appears to him at nights: "But the grey face still followed me. It murmured; and I understood that it desired to confess something" (*D* 3). And early in *A Portrait,* a feverish Stephen is afraid

of the ghost of Maximilian Ulysses, whose family owned Clongowees Wood in the eighteenth century:

> Was it true about the black dog that walked there at night with eyes as big as carriagelamps? They said it was the ghost of a murdered. A long shiver of fear flowed over his body. He saw the dark entrance hall of the castle. Old servants in old dress were in the ironingroom above the staircase. It was long ago. The old servants were quiet. There was a fire there but the hall was still dark. A figure came up the staircase from the hall. He wore the white cloak of a marshal; his face was pale and strange; he held his hand pressed to his side. He looked out of strange eyes at the old servants. They looked at him and saw their master's face and cloak and knew that he had received his deathwound. . .
>
> O how cold and strange it was to think of that! All the dark was cold and strange. There were pale strange faces there, great eyes like carriagelamps. They were the ghosts of murderers. . . . What did they wish to say that their faces were so strange? (*P* 16-17) [6]

In the first chapter of *Ulysses,* Stephen remembers the figure of his dead mother that haunts his dreams: "Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes" (*U* 5). Likewise, *Finnegans Wake* begins with the account of a death, and the promise of a resurrection: "Phall if you but will, rise you must: and none so soon either shall the pharce for the nunce come to a setdown secular phoenish" (*FW* 004.15-17);

> Shize? I should shee! Macool, Macool, orra whyi deed ye diie? Of a trying thirstay mournin? Sobss they sighdid at Fillagain's chrissormiss wake, all the hoolivans of the nation, prostrated in their consternation . . .
>
> Hurrah, thereis but young gleve for the owl globe wheels in view which is tautaulogically the same thing. (*FW* 006.13-30)

The same as happens in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and, as Jacques Derrida has acknowledged, occurs in Marx's *The Manifesto of the Communist Party,* everything begins with the apparition or the mentioning of a specter. [7] Derrida has described the anticipatory effect of this apparition in *Specters of Marx,* "The anticipation is at once impatient, anxious, and fascinated: this, the thing ('this thing') will end up coming." [8] What is then "this, the thing" that ends up coming again and again in Joyce's works in the shape of a ghost? And to whom does "this, the thing" appear?

Sigmund Freud addressed the subject of the "uncanny" that he had featured as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar," in spite of which, "would always . . . be something one does not know one's way about in." [9] Freud has also specified the most prominent themes of uncanninnes in literature:

> These themes are all concerned with the phenomenon of the 'double,' which appears in every shape and in every degree of development. Thus we have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. . . . Or it is marked by the fact that *the subject identifies himself with someone else*, or that *he is in doubt as to which his self is*, or *substitutes the extraneous self for his own*. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. (emphasis added) [10]

Let us go back to Joyce's ghosts. Most of them can be, and in fact many have been, related to the writer's portrayal of characters with unstable identities. They represent the characters' difficulties in coming to terms with their own selves. Thus, Father Flynn has been interpreted as an anticipation of the boy's likely future as an adult: "It began to confess to me in a murmuring voice and I wondered why it smiled continually and why the lips were so moist with spittle. . . . I too was smiling feebly as if to absolve the simoniac of his sin" (*D* 3). Eveline's mother may represent the ghost of women's submission to a patriarchal order: "Strange that it should come that very night to remind her of the promise to her mother, her promise to keep the home together as long as she could" (*D* 32-33). Something similar happens to Stephen in *Ulysses,* in relation to the religious conservatism that his mother's specter symbolises. And it is not difficult to see that Mrs Sinico represents for Mr Duffy the ghost of the other that menaces his chosen narcissistic stance. In "The Dead," Michael Furey comes to definitely dismantle Gabriel's self-conception as an ideal husband-father-lover.

Stephen's women in *A Portrait* are turned into ghosts by the boy since, in a similar way to Freud's uncanny, they are arise his sexuality, long familiar to Stephen, although he does not know his way about in. And the peasant figure that so inexplicably frightens him has been read by Weldon Thornton as the ghost of Irish collective primitivism that the boy rejects in his search for an individual identity: [11] "Old man had red eyes and short pipe. Old man spoke Irish. . . . I fear him. I fear his redrimmed horny eyes. It is with him I must struggle all through this night till day come, till he or I lie dead. . . . Till what? Till he yield to me? No, I mean him no harm" (*P* 274).

In *Ulysses,* besides Stephen's dead mother and Bloom's dead son—that for the latter breaks his family male lineage and even puts into question his own virility: "Something to hand on. . . . My son. Me in his eyes. Strange feeling it would be. From me" (*U* 86); "If it's healthy it's from the mother. If not the man" (*U* 92)—we find Shakespeare who is also a ghost that haunts Stephen. Many critics have offered different interpretations about Stephen's theory on Shakespeare. But the very same fact that Stephen recalls the figure of Shakespeare implies the boy's turning the writer into a Ghost. Derrida explains that this is precisely what happens to himself each time he writes on another author's works:

> So, when I read another, something I do all the time and which I have been reproached for, for not writing anything in my own name but being content with writing on Plato, on Kant,

> on Mallarmé and others—or on Geoff Bennington for that matter—the feeling of duty which I feel in myself is that I have to be true to the other; that is, to countersign with my own name, but in a way that should be true to the other. I wouldn't say *True* vs *False*, but true in the sense of fidelity. I want to add something, to give something to the other, but something that the other could receive and could, in his or her turn, actually or as a ghost, countersign. [12]

The previous are some of the possible interpretations of the ghosts that haunt the characters in Joyce's works. When we come to apply the trope of the ghost in relation to *Finngegans Wake,* we find that ghosts proliferate and haunt the text more daringly than ever. Besides, there are different levels in which the ghost can be explained in the text. We can speak of the author's own ghosts, Joyce's ghosts that comprehend not only the characters, and the literary and historic figures alluded to, but also language itself.

The human figures that appear in the text are also ghosts for, if nothing else, they have a name—or several names—that appear recurrently in the work and make us believe in their existence. Maud Ellmann has related the name to the trope of the ghost:

> For the name is the ghost bequeathed to each of us at birth, insofar as it prolongs our subjectivity beyond our death. The name survives its owner, and therefore it foreshadows his extinction in the very moment that it calls him into being. To sign one's name, moreover, is to manufacture one's own ghost, one's own extravagant and erring spirit: for writing may be iterated anywhere, by anyone, independent of the life of its creator. [13]

The figures that appear throughout the text are also ghosts among themselves. In other words, each of these ghosts is haunted by other ghosts. Thus, Shaun is haunted not only by the ghost of his father as Navarrete reminds us: "It is the case of Earwicker when he is invoked, forced out of Shaun's mouth rather, at the end of III.iii with 'Arise, sir ghostus! As long as you've lived there'll be no other' (*FW* 532.04-05)." [14] Shaun seems to be persecuted also by the figure of his twin brother that, in his opinion, tries unsuccessfully to imitate him:

> It should of been my other with his leickname for he's the head and I'm an everdevoting fiend of his. . . . We shared the twin chamber and we winked on the one wench and what Sim sobs todie I'll reeve tomorry, for 'twill be, I have hopes of, Sam Dizzier's feedst. Tune in, tune on, old Tighe, high, high, high, I'm thine owelglass. Be old! He looks rather thin, imitating me. I'm very fond of that other of mine. . . . But he's such a game loser! I lift my disk to him. (*FW* 408.17-29)

We can also remember that critics have often alluded to HCE as a central figure or conscience in the text haunted by the polarities that constitute his personality and projected in the ghostly duality of Shem and Shaun. We have been also convinced that the same HCE is haunted by his desire for his daughter Issy. And the girl is,

at the same time, recurrently confronted with her double or her mirror-image, Maggie. There is also the possibility of reading Issy and Kate as the spectres of Anna Livia's remembered youth and foreshadowed old age. And Shaun projects most of the ghosts that haunt the book and himself. Thus, HCE, Shem, ALP, Issy, etc., would represent different dimensions of Shaun's self that he has repressed and that haunt him in the form of ghosts. We have seen how it has been mentioned that the figure of the father is invoked by or through Shaun, and that Shem could be understood as his other self, his double, that in a mirror-like way offers him an inverted image of himself. Both ALP and Issy may represent for him the feminine principle that this Don John cannot assimilate and be at ease with. Seamus Deane has pointed out that, in contrast with Shaun, Shem finally reconciles himself with the female figure that he reveals to his brother—by means of a drawing that appears in the "Night Lessons"—as the origin of humanity:

> His language too is full of repression, evasion, his exile is an escape from his origins to which he will again be restored by his mother, ALP. She comes to rescue him from his 'fatherly' writing and restore him to himself, rescuing from his Luciferian sin and madness, 'you first born and firstfruit of woe, to me, branded sheep, pick of the wasterpaperbaskel.' (*FW* 194.12-13) [15]

Shaun, therefore, can be read as one central consciousness surrounded by specters. It is his voice the one we hear most of the time and he is the postman, the one who carries the message conveyed in the book, the gramophone we hear in the text. I know that I am forcing my own interpretation, my own ghosts, the ghosts that I myself have projected in the text and that may not coincide with other readers'.

In his *Introduction á la literature fantastique*, Todorov shares many of Freud's conclusions, especially when attributing literary terror to the collapsing of the psychic boundaries of self and other, life and death, reality and unreality. Todorov distinguishes two kind of genres that he refers to as, on the one hand, "l'étrange" —"the uncanny"—and, on the other hand, "le merveilleux"—"the marvellous." [16] In "the uncanny," at the story's end, the supernatural phenomena can be explained and, thus, reality remains intact. If, on the contrary, new laws of nature must be entertained in order to account for the phenomena, then we enter the genre of the marvellous which implies the supernatural accepted:

> Le fantastique, nous l'avons vu, ne dure que le temps d'une hesitation: hesitation commune au lecteur et au personage, qui doivent decider si ce qu'ils perçoivent relève ou non de la 'realité', telle qu'elle existe pour l'opinion commune. A la fin de l'histoire, le lecteur, sinon le personage, prend toutefois une decisión, il opte pour l'une ou l'autre solution, et par là même sort du fantastique. S'il décide que les lois de la réalité demeurent intactes et permettent d'expliquer les phénomènes décrits, nous disons que l'œuvre relève d'un autre genre: l'étrange. Si, au contraire, il decide qu'on doit admettre de nouvelles lois de la nature, par lesquelles le phénomène peut éter expliqué, nous entrons dans le genre du marveilleux. [17]

If we try to apply Todorov's distinction between the "uncanny" and the "marvellous" to *Finnegans Wake*, we can say that the work has been considered as either belonging to one or the other, and that I have been trying to find an explanation that would interpret it as belonging rather to the realm of the uncanny. This has been also done by those critics that attempted to decipher what happens in the text relating it to a dream dreamt by one or many characters. However, for those who like Derek Attridge do not easily accept this theory of the dream and rather consider it "a comedy focused on the irrepressible force of life," [18] the realm of the marvellous would be more appropriate to account for *Finnegans Wake*.

Todorov's "le merveilleux" demands new laws different to those of nature, in other words, a new kind of logic, a new language is required. Derrida may help us in this point since he has expressed how ontology should be replaced by what he calls "hauntology" and that he defines as "the logic of the specter." And in the first book of *Finnegans Wake* we already find one formulation for the new kind of logic that we must follow: "where the possible was the improbable and the improbable the inevitable. [...] all these events they are probably as like those which may have taken place as any others which never took persona at all are ever likely to be" (*FW* 110.04-21).

Derrida has also made clear that "The spectre is not only the site of the dead other, it is on my side too," since "The absolute other in myself or the absolute other outside amounts to the same thing." [19] And he relates this ghostly dimension in ourselves to personal identity, to our handling with our own selves in terms of individuals:

> 'individual'. That's what I am here. How is this bearable? I think that it is bearable only because of the *as if*: 'as if I were dead'. But the *as if*, the fiction, the *quasi-*, these are what protect us from the real events of death itself, if such a thing exists. [20]

That seems to be also Shem's stance towards his own self and towards his twin brother since, as we are told from the perspective of the latter, he is "haunted by a convulsionary sense of not having been or being at all that I might have been of you meant to becoming" (*FW* 193.35-36); and, consequently, Shem fictionalises his own identity: "writing the mystery of himsel in furniture" (*FW* 184.09-10).

It is his writing and his telling that allow him to prove, to be certain of his existence, even though only after having said it, after having made a fiction of it:

> thereby, he said, reflecting from his own individual person life unlivable, transaccidentated through the slow fires of consciousness into a dividual chaos, perilous, potent, common to allflesh, human only, mortal) but with each word that would not pass away the squidself which he had squirtscreened from the crystalline world waned chagreenold and doriangrayer in its dudhud. This exists that isists after haven been said we know. (*FW* 186.02-09)

What Joyce did with the identity of his characters in *Finnegans Wake,* and, in consequence, what those characters do with and among themselves, and what we readers do when looking for something that haunts and at the same time eludes us, had been announced by Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses:* "We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves." (*U* 204)

Notes

[1] James Joyce, *Ulysses. The 1922 Text*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); I quote from this edition hereafter.

[2] Bernard Benstock has provided us with a large list of ghosts in his chapter "Narrative Gnomonics: The Spectres in the Tales," *Narrative Con/Texts in "Dubliners"* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994) 32-58.

[3] Ricardo Navarrete, "The Apparition of One Sir Ghostus," *Papers on Joyce* 5 (1999): 23-34.

[4] Navarrete 23.

[5] James Joyce, *Dubliners*, ed. Terence Brown (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1992); I quote from this edition hereafter.

[6] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* ed. Seamus Deane (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1992); I quote from this edition hereafter.

[7] Derrida explains that he began writing "Specters of Marx" without realising that Marx's *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* began precisely with the noun "specter": "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism." This ghost that Derrida discovered after rereading Marx's work, was already haunting him, as the French philosopher has acknowledged. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx, the Work of Mourning, and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994) 3-5.

[8] Derrida 3.

[9] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *New Literary History* VII.3 (Spring 1976): 619-645.

[10] Freud 629-630.

[11] Weldon Thornton, *The Antimodernism of Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994) 147.

[12] See Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys, "As *if* I were Dead: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Applying: to Derrida,* eds. John Brannigan, Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (London: Macmillan, 1996) 220.

[13] Maud Ellmann, "The Ghosts of *Ulysses,*" in *The Languages of Joyce,* eds. R. M. Bollettieri Bosinelli, C. Marengo Vaglio and Christine van Boheemen (Philadelphia/Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992) 105.

[14] Navarrete 23.

[15] Seamus Deane, Introduction. *Finnegans Wake*, ed. Seamus Deane (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Boks, 1992) xxxii.

[16] Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction á la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970).

[17] Todorov 46.

[18] Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects. On Language, Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 134.

[19] Derrida in Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys, "As *if* I were Dead: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," 221-22.

[20] Derrida in Ruth Robbins and Jualian Wolfreys, 217.