

## Joyce's Myriadminded Ghosts

### 1. Is 'Ulysses' a Ghost Story?

We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves. The playwright who wrote the folio of this world and wrote it badly (He gave us light first and the sun two days later), the lord of things as they are whom the most Roman of catholics call dio boia, hangman god, is doubtless all in all of us, ostler and butcher, and would be bawd and cuckold too but that in the economy of heaven, foretold by Hamlet, there are no more marriages, glorified man, an androgynous angel, being a wife unto himself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses. The Corrected Text*, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (London: Penguin-The Bodley Head, 1986), 175. Hereafter cited as *U*.

This famous passage from the "Scylla and Charybdis" chapter of *Ulysses*, in which Stephen Dedalus discusses Shakespeare in "whirling words", goes immediately to the heart of the matter. The "economy of heaven" is the richness of the unconscious in which all the dimensions of the human self – both male and female, whether present, past, or future – operate independently, making it the greatest source of creative power, and giving the artist who draws on it the unique capacity of becoming the "androgynous angel". "What is a ghost? Stephen said with tingling energy. One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners" (*U*, 154). According to him, anyone living out of time is properly a ghost. That is why John Eglinton, in the library episode, can reduce both the complexities of *Hamlet* and those of Stephen's presumptuous Shakespeare theory to a banal ghost story: "He will have that *Hamlet* is a ghoststory" (*Ibid.*). Fundamental to this understanding of the ghost is the idea that the spectre does not need to have died before returning in spectral form. Throughout *Ulysses* the borders between life and death are undifferentiated, and the living and the dead indistinguishably haunt streets and houses. It is the sense of claustrophobia that affects all – not only Stephen's – characters, it is the incessant return of the past and its dominance over the present, it is that sort of "terror" that relies upon the inner, deepest sources of memory and history, that makes *Ulysses* – just as *Hamlet* is – a *credible* ghost story.<sup>2</sup> Despite some few theoretical ingenuities, Shari Benstock's seminal essay on this subject still retains its critically intuitive contemporaneity, when she maintains that:

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace, eds., *Gothic Modernisms* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), *passim*.

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Whatever might interest Stephen Dedalus about *Hamlet* (e.g. Shakespeare's treatment of the fatherhood and infidelity themes or the possible biographical elements of the play), and whether or not we agree that the theory is essentially implausible and illogical, it is the multivalent nature of the ghoststory element in the play which provides for Stephen the instrument of his intellectual virtuosity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Shari Benstock, "Ulysses as Ghoststory", *James Joyce Quarterly* 12 (1975), 396.

Stephen's ghost story, however, has a happy ending, at least for the history of literature: deprived of his virility before its actuality, nonetheless Shakespeare created a supreme dramatic art out of his own incertitude and bewilderment. Writing *Hamlet*, he felt himself "the father of all his race" (*U*, 171). Asked if he believes in his own theory, Stephen promptly says no (*U*, 175), but he belies a painful ambivalence between belief and disbelief, wavering as he is within his inner Scylla and Charybdis. Even though he does not credit the Shakespeare he has invented, Stephen needs all the same to fit Shakespeare to his own literary strategy and aesthetic ambition. And – as we shall see – his ghost story is soaked in his own fears and in his own phantasms. Like Hamlet, Stephen, desperate with imagination, almost approaches madness, the "general paralysis of the insane", as Mulligan warns him (*U*, 6); yet, his strained Shakespearean argument is meant to baffle his intellectual enemies, while he waits to decide his own destiny either in artistic creation or existential revenge.

## 2. Dialectical Ghosts

Before entering the underworld of Stephen's ghost theory, it may be useful to consider two modern critical approaches that both summon up Shakespeare while involving memory ghosts and apparitions from the past. I am thinking of Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida. Like Joyce, the German thinker sees the history of the western world as terrifying, and both utilise aesthetic and theological structures to articulate an appropriation of the past which is capable of remoulding the present. Benjamin's famous *Theses on the Philosophy of History* present us with a dialectical reformulation of history that contemplates both a *destruens* and a *construens* part: while he violently criticises the past, he endeavours to recover its oppressed elements and censured discourses: "Like every generation that precedes us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. This claim cannot be settled cheaply".<sup>4</sup> Benjamin defines his speculative method "dialectics at a standstill", which seems to me the most appropriate description of Stephen's mind as suspended over the whirlpool of Scylla and Charybdis. In the present of the delivering of his ambitious theory, Stephen's weak Messianism allows him to construe the past of Shakespeare's life in a process of simultaneously discarding and redeeming. The phantasmal

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 254.

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reincarnation of the Bard's existential events operated by Stephen in the National Library constitutes a *Jetztzeit*, or a moment of realization in which past time "is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 261.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida directly invokes the ghost of Hamlet's murdered father as his paradigm of a spectral subject destined to haunt future generations, by disrupting linear conceptions of history, and reminding us that time, any time, is out of joint. Derrida's call for a new *hauntology*, a "logic of haunting" that would be more powerful than an ontology of being, seems particularly apt to a perusal of Shakespeare's haunting presence in *Ulysses*. Derrida thinks that a spectre claims some sort of possession of us, making us "feel ourselves looked at by it ... even before and beyond any look on our part".<sup>6</sup> As a representative of past time, the ghost invites us to question the reassuring argumentative schemes by which we manage to cope with history. When phantoms appear in literature, generally they reveal tales that had been elided, or give grave warnings that speak of the betrayed, the restless, the injured. As the spectral residue of mortified flesh, they bear in their formlessness the imprints of past lives: "the name of the one who disappeared must have gotten inscribed someplace else".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 5.

*Ulysses* is full of spectres, either in a proper or a metaphorical sense. Both Stephen and Bloom are visited by spectral forms, and talk of spirits throughout the whole book. Some of these spirits are exorcised, while other shadows remain, despite the living characters' efforts to push them out. Spectral presences are often connected with apprehensiveness about textual authority, intellectual legitimacy, and the equivocal function of tradition. It is peculiarly suggestive that *Ulysses* came out under the imprimatur of the "Shakespeare and Company" bookstore run in Paris by Sylvia Beach, implicitly signalling both some sort of family connection and an act of usurpation of the father's name on the part of the son. When references to Shakespeare and to ghosts appear together, and more so when Shakespeare himself comes to the fore as a phantom-like, *revenant* presence, textual and existential anxieties manifest themselves most persistently. To be sure, the most pervasive and also the most multivalent and "consubstantial" presence in this novel is William Shakespeare as the shadow of Hamlet's father.

### 3. The Ghost of the Unquiet Father

The *Hamlet* theory is mockingly announced by Buck Mulligan in the morning: "He proves by algebra that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father .... O, shade of Kinch the elder! Japhet in search of a father"! (*U*, 15). At two o'clock

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Stephen is in the director's office of the National Library, together with A. E. (the poet George Russell), John Eglinton (the essayist William Magee), and "the Quaker librarian", T. W. Lister. Invited to proffer his theory, Stephen obliges, and proceeds with a question that will entirely structure his argument: "Who is the ghost from *limbo patrum*, returning to the world that has forgotten him? Who is King Hamlet?" (*U*, 154). He pictures a performance of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare's company at the Globe. In Act I enters the Ghost, embodied by Shakespeare himself, who while speaking to Hamlet (embodied by Richard Burbage) also addresses his own son, Hamnet, who died at the age of eleven:

The play begins. A player comes on under the shadow, made up in the castoff mail of a court buck, a wellset man with a bass voice. It is the ghost, the king, a king, no king, and the player is Shakespeare who has studied *Hamlet* all the years of his life which were not vanity in order to play the part of the spectre. He speaks the words to Burbage, the young player who stands before him beyond the rack of cerecloth, calling him by name: *Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit*, bidding him list. To a son he speaks, the son of his soul, the prince, young Hamlet and to the son of his body, Hamnet Shakespeare, who has died in Stratford that his namesake may live for ever. (*U*, 155)

Shakespeare, identifying himself with the murdered father, tells Hamnet/Hamlet that he is the "dispossessed son", and that his mother Ann is the guilty queen (*U*, 155).

Russell protests against this use of literature as a means of conjectural prying into the lives of authors. Eglinton repeats the traditional critical estimate of Ann Hathaway as a figure of little significance in the life of Shakespeare the writer. Stephen replies that she was his first mistress, the mother of his children, and his death mourner. Eglinton objects that he made a great mistake in marrying her, and then got out of it by running away from Stratford to London. Conversely, Stephen's view is that "a man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery" (*U*, 156). Later on, Eglinton says that Shakespeare is an enigma, Mr. Best (another librarian) asserts that *Hamlet* is a deeply personal document, and Eglinton again maintains that Shakespeare identifies himself with prince Hamlet: it is a challenge to Stephen, who continues his argumentation. Shakespeare was seduced by Ann Hathaway; his actual experience of love was that of an eighteen-year-old boy taken by a determined woman of twenty-six. Sexually wounded and spiritually killed by an 'old' woman, Shakespeare becomes the ghost of an erotically murdered man, not knowing what it is that has destroyed him, except by a divinely prophetic insight such as he reveals in the plays. Obsessed throughout his life as an artist, from the time of Tarquin's rape of Lucrece to that of Iachimo's aborted rape of Imogen, with a dream of masterful

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ravishing which he is never able to realise, he journeys through the stage-world like a ghost, a shadow, whose living self will be substantially made known only in his progeny: the poet Shakespeare to be made known only in his plays, Shakespeare the man to be made known only in the “unliving” son Hamnet (*U*, 161-2). It is precisely for this laceration that Shakespeare identifies himself with King Hamlet: “He is a ghost, a shadow now, the wind by Elsinore’s rocks or what you will, the sea’s voice, a voice heard only in the heart of him who is the substance of his shadow, the son consubstantial with the father” (*U*, 162). Deprived of the bodily son who might have been the recipient of his wisdom, Shakespeare sought to externalise and exorcise his obsession through art. Nevertheless, Stephen’s psychoanalytic stance is not so naïve as to make him think that the imperfections of an artist’s life are totally overcome in his artistic production. Stephen remarks that Shakespeare’s psychological wound was never completely healed. Although there is a sense of reconciliation in the last plays, where weary and suffering old men find comfort in their daughters – Marina, Perdita, Miranda – just as Shakespeare found solace in his only and loved grandchild – the daughter of his elder daughter Susanna – Stephen’s Shakespeare dies still unsatisfied (*U*, 160).

The most revealing element in Stephen’s dialectics is the emergence of Joyce’s ‘ghost’ of fatherhood, propelled by his inner image of the betrayed, assassinated king Hamlet. He (Stephen or Joyce?) argues that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* immediately after his own father’s death. He claims that it is absurd to identify the author, aged twenty-five, father of two marriageable daughters, wise and mature in experience, with the young undergraduate prince, and his seventy-old mother with the passionate queen. No, Shakespeare cannot be the son in the play, because he is fatherless; old John Shakespeare is securely at rest, he is not an unquiet father:

No. The corpse of John Shakespeare does not walk by night. From hour to hour it rots and rots. He rests, disarmed of fatherhood, having devised that mystical estate upon his son. Boccaccio’s Calandrino was the first and last man who felt himself with child. (*U*, 170)

Stephen formulates his doctrine of fatherhood in simultaneously strict and passionate terms. There is no such thing as an act of conscious begetting in which a man knows himself as a father. Rather, fatherhood is a “mystical estate, an apostolic succession” handed over from “only begetter to only begotten”. This is the most authentic mystery on which Christianity is founded. Mother’s love is grounded in an evident physical relationship – “*amor matris*, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life” – but the mystery of paternity establishes a son’s allegiance on incertitude; thus “a father is a necessary evil” (*U*, 170). Not only this; father and son are separated

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by a permanent sense of bodily shame, both knowing that their relationship uniquely comes from the brutal sexual act in which conception took place: "What links them in nature? An instant of blind rut" (*U*, 171). Coherently enough, the son is the father's enemy, a rival to his virility, growing to manhood by his decline (*U*, 170). The Sabellian heresy, which proclaims the absolute identity of Father and Son, is therefore particularly hostile to Stephen (as it was to Aquinas), because, applied to his own case, it predicts the failure of the son to become dissociated – that is emancipated – from the fatherly figure. Stephen's insistence that John Shakespeare cannot walk like king Hamlet's ghost is a heavy statement of liberty from the fatherly past. This apparent contradiction between the persistence of the past advocated by the ghost theory and its rejection, implied in the paternity question, is partly solved by a train of thought on identification of the self, which anticipates the conclusion of the theory itself: "Molecules all change. I am other I now ... But I, entelechy, form of forms, am I by memory because under everchanging forms ... I, I and I. I" (*U*, 156). This concern with a perdurable self, as opposed to a succession of transient selves, states in different terms the relation which is at the basis of the Shakespeare theory, that is the relationship between the past which persists and the past which is left behind. Such a relationship foregrounds Stephen's expectancies, expressed in the most crucial passage of the chapter:

As we, or mother Dana, weave and unweave our bodies, Stephen said, from day to day, their molecules shuttled to and fro, so does the artist weave and unweave his image. And as the mole on my right breast is where it was when I was born, though all my body has been woven of new stuff time after time, so through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the unliving son looks forth ... So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now by the reflection from that which then I shall be. (*U*, 160)

Stephen's theory also comprises Derridean spectres of textual legitimacy. Commenting on some of the alternate authorship suppositions that have identified the *real author* of the Shakespearean canon (as, variously, the earl of Rutland, Francis Bacon, or the earl of Southampton), he tries to exorcise his *angst* of paternity by proposing that a powerful son can, after all, metaphorically give birth to his own father:

When Rutlandbaconsouthamptonshakespeare or another poet of the same name in the comedy of errors wrote *Hamlet* he was not the father of his own son merely but, being no more a son, he was and felt himself the father of all his race, the father of his own grandfather, the father of his unborn grandson who, by the same token, never was born. (*U*, 171)

In the "Circe" chapter, in effect, Stephen momentarily becomes the ghost of his own father, that is the shadow of his literary ancestor, when



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he and Leopold Bloom, another surrogate ‘father’, gaze together into a ‘mirror up to nature and behold, instead of their respective faces, Shakespeare’s lineaments: “[Stage direction] *Stephen and Bloom gaze in the mirror. The face of William Shakespeare, beardless, appears there, rigid in facial paralysis*” (U, 463). In the library nonetheless, Stephen poses as the knowing, usurping son not only of the Bard but also, *via* allusions, appropriations and parodies, of many real-life Shakespearean speculators. These being, in succession: Georg Brandes and Sidney Lee (U, 160), from whose popular biographies Joyce took a great deal of information about Shakespeare’s family life. Frank Harris, author of an erotic biography entitled *The Man Shakespeare*, and G. B. Shaw, author of the play *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (U, 161). Edward Vining, who proposed in *The Mystery of Hamlet* that the Danish prince was a woman; Judge D. P. Barton, writer of an essay on the links between Shakespeare and Ireland; and Oscar Wilde, who in the novella *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* advanced the hypothesis that the sonnets had been composed for a man named Willie Hughes (U, 163). Then Edward Dowden, a distinguished professor of Trinity, author of widely read books on Shakespeare (U, 168). And finally Karl Bleibtreu, a notorious proponent of the Rutland theory (U, 176).

But, to go back to *Stephen’s* no less farfetched Shakespeare theory: why does Shakespeare/Ghost tell Hamnet/Hamlet that his mother Ann, so as to say his own ravishing mistress, “the greyeyed goddess who bends over the boy Adonis, stooping to conquer” (U, 157), ‘is’ Queen Gertrude? Here comes another obsession, a further mental phantom that haunts Shakespeare, King Hamlet’s spectre, and of course Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, Richard Rowan (the protagonist of his play *Exiles*), the whole company of Joyce’s authorial masks.<sup>8</sup> This mental phantom is the tormenting fear of woman’s betrayal. Their image of the Great Mother, like Hamlet’s image of Gertrude and of all women, is a sullied one: “Eve. Naked wheatbellied sin” (U, 163). Stephen’s case is that Ann was unfaithful to Shakespeare with his own brothers, and his plays show him to have been psychically possessed by the idea of the wife’s unfaithfulness, *Hamlet* most notably, where in the fifth scene he “branded her with infamy”: “Two deeds are rank in the ghost’s mind: a broken vow and the dullbrained yokel on whom her favour has inclined, deceased husband’s brother” (U, 166). According to Stephen, the names of the betraying brothers, Richard and Edmund, are inscribed as the names of the blackest villains in the Shakespearean canon: Richard III and *King Lear’s* Edmund (U, 172). Hamlet, in Stephen’s view, is not so much haunted by the image of his dead father as he is by the image of his living mother. While Stephen himself is equally haunted by both the ghost of the father and the ghost of the mother.

<sup>8</sup> See my *‘Esuli’: dramma, psicodramma, metadramma* (Pisa: Pacini, 2006).

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#### 4. The Ghost of the Emaciated Mother

The most threatening ghost, in *Ulysses*, is undoubtedly the spectre of Stephen's mother, as innumerable critics have remarked.<sup>9</sup> In "Proteus", after meditating on Eve's womb, he switches to his own mother's womb, and the coitus during which he was conceived. "Made, not begotten" – he reflects (*U*, 32), lacking as he does any sense of fatherhood except as a meaningless physical coincidence – "the man with my voice and my eyes" (*U*, 32) – and because his mother has now become a "ghost-woman" inhabiting his dreams, as well as invading his thoughts even when he is intellectually speculating on Shakespeare's wife at her husband's death bed: "Mother's deathbed. Candle. The sheeted mirror. Who brought me into this world lies there, bronzelidded, under few cheap flowers. *Liliata rutilantium*" (*U*, 156). If he is persecuted by the phantom of his sense of guilt, in having refused to pray and take the Eucharist, on her demand, at her death bed, he is nonetheless actually haunted, in his thoughts and visions, dreams or hallucinations, by the phantasmagorical figure of the *revenant* genetrix, who returns to chastise him about his failures of filial devotion and transgression of religious-political imperatives. "Ravisher and ravished" (*U*, 162) – by Ann Hathaway – but also betrayer – of his mother's social and religious expectations – and betrayed – by his mother's precocious death – Stephen confronts in May Dedalus, as Hamlet does in Gertrude, a frightening female figure: a mother/mistress compounded image that agitates his mental and psychic structure.

The maternal theme is also introduced by some of the usual rebukes by Mulligan:

The aunt thinks you killed your mother, he said. That's why she won't let me have anything to do with you.  
Someone killed her, Stephen said gloomily.  
You could have knelt down, damn it, Kinch, when your dying mother asked you, Buck Mulligan said. I'm hyperborean as much as you. But to think of your mother begging you with her last breath to kneel down and pray for her. And you refused. There is something sinister in you. (*U*, 5)

And soon after, when Stephen refuses to borrow a pair of his friend's pants, he adds: "Etiquette is etiquette. He kills his mother but he can't wear grey trousers" (*U*, 5).

At the beginning, in "Telemachus", May's ghost comes in his visions quietly, "silently", although terribly "reproachful", desperate in still trying to win over her son's will:

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,

<sup>9</sup> Among many others, James Maddox, *Joyce's 'Ulysses' and the Assault upon Characters* (Hassox: Harvester Press, 1978), and Jeffrey Weinstock, "The Disappointed Bridge: Textual Hauntings in Joyce's *Ulysses*", *Journal of the Phantastic in the Arts* 8 (1977), 347-369, have given remarkable views of the Stephen/Mother relationship.



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her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes. (*U*, 5)

And later on:

Her glazing eyes, staring out of death, to shake and bend my soul. On me alone. The ghostcandle to light her agony. Ghostly light on the tortured face. Her hoarse loud breath rattling in horror, while all prayed on their knees. Her eyes on me to strike me now. *Liliata rutilantium te confessorum turma circumdet: iubilantium te virginum chorus excipiat.* (*U*9)

She comes in by bodily, intensely ‘physical’ appearance, although she smells of ghostly candles and funeral ashes. So penetrating is her presence that, in Stephen’s mind, a chain of extrinsic associations immediately starts, each related to a complete sensory dimension that goes from the visual to the auditory to the olfactory to the tactile:

Her secrets: old featherfans, tasselled dancecards, powered with musk, a gaud of amber beads in her locked drawer. A birdcage hung in the sunny window of her house when she was a girl. She heard old Royce sing in the pantomime of *Turko the Terrible* and laughed with others when he sang: *I am the boy/ That can enjoy/ Invisibility*. Phantasmal mirth, folded away: muskperformed. *And no more turn aside and brood*. Folded away in the memory of nature with her toys. Memory beset his brooding brain. Her glass of water from the kitchen tap when she had approached the sacrament. A cored apple, filled with brown sugar, roasting for her at the hob on a dark autumn evening. Her shapely fingernails reddened by the blood of squashed lice from the children’s shirts. (*U*, 8-9)

The mother’s spectre’s physicality both repels and attracts the son, her *revenant* image being a complex co-figuration of simultaneous decomposition and sexuality: “Touch me. Soft eyes. Soft soft soft hand. I am lonely here. O, touch me soon, now. What is that word known to all men? I am quiet here alone. Sad too. Touch, touch me” (*U*, 41). Precisely this ambiguous amalgam of disgust and desire leads Stephen to transfer his mother’s apparition onto a vampire, a cannibal ghost who has come to devour him: “Ghoul! Chewer of corpses! No, mother, let me be and let me live” (*U*, 9). Certainly, the phrase *chewer of corpses* could be related to Stephen himself, who derives some sort of perverse pleasure from mentally visiting and revisiting the scene of his mother’s death. But in “Circe”, this possible ambiguity will be completely cleared up. In Bella’s brothel, in the course of his *Walpurgisnacht* – in search of both an ideal father (Bloom) and his own recondite self – Stephen undergoes a further awfully physical as well as bodily corrupt vision of his mother:

[Stage direction] (*Stephen’s mother, emaciated, rises stark through the floor, in leper grey with a wreath of faded orangeblossoms and a torn bridal veil, her*

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*face worn and noseless. Green with gravemould. Her hair is scant and lank. She fixes her bluecircled hollow eyesockets on Stephen and opens her toothless mouth uttering a silent word. A choir of virgins and confessors sing voicelessly).*  
THE CHOIR: *Liliata rutilantium te confessorum ...  
Iubilantium te virginum ...* (U, 473)

The mother speaks to Stephen in words that evoke the Ghost's address to Hamlet: "I was once the beautiful May Goulding. I am dead" (U, 473). It is at this point that Stephen, "horrorstruck", clarifies who the vampire actually is – himself or his mother? – crying to the phantom: "Lemur, who are you? No. What bogeyman's trick is this?" (U, 473). Nevertheless, Stephen too feels like a lemur, both in his sense of guilt for having 'killed' his mother, and for having drawn life and sustenance from her body: "She had loved his weak watery blood drained from her own .... With her weak blood and wheysour milk she had fed him" (U, 8).

The mother, in being flesh, body, sensuality is always associated with liquids; not only blood, milk, water, but also the terrible bile flowing from her mouth in the last days of her cancer illness: "A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting" (U, 5). In "Circe" too her ghost appears with "*a green rill of bile trickling from a side of her mouth*" (U, 474). As woman, love, nature, the mother is also related to the sea and its movements: "A tide westering, moondrawn, in her wake. Tides, myriadislanded, within her, blood not mine, *oinopa ponton*, a winedark sea" (U, 40). And again the mother/sea is linked to May's deathly vomit: "Across the threadbare cuffedge he saw the sea hailed as a great sweet mother by the wellfed voice beside him. The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid" (U, 5); "A cloud began to cover the sun slowly, wholly, shadowing the bay in deeper green. It lay beneath him, a bowl of bitter waters ... She was crying in her wretched bed" (U, 8). The Irish sea is 'green' like May's bile. As Jean-Michel Rabaté has convincingly argued, by glowing in the dark, ghosts illustrate the peculiar connection between a disturbing presence and certain colours, and especially green (which is not a primary colour) metonymically functions as a signal for a lost or absent existence.<sup>10</sup>

The fluid/liquid metaphorical system that Joyce arranges around the dead mother's image also comprises the *moon*, the agent of both sea transformations and the cyclic natural progression – destined anyway to death – signified by menstruation:

A tide westering, moondrawn, in her wake. Tides, myriadislanded, within her, blood not mine, *oinopa ponton*, a winedark sea. Behold the handmaid of the moon. In sleep the wet sign calls her hour, bids her rise. Bridebed, childbed, bed of death, ghostcandle. *Omnis caro ad te veniet.* (U, 40).

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Ghosts of Modernity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), passim.

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But, whose *caro*, whose flesh, is Stephen thinking about? Which flesh goes to whom? Is the mother's dead body tormentingly coming to the living son, or is it the son who obsessively goes visiting the mother's body, desperately trying to absorb her dead life, lemur-like, giving way to repressed incestuous desires? Indeed, "He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails blooding the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss" (*U*, 40). The vampire's kiss, added to Stephen's desire to be touched by his mother – as we have seen before – casts him in the role of the melancholy Danish prince, as the reference to Hamlet in the same context makes clear: "A side eye at my Hamlet hat. If I were suddenly naked here as I sit?" (*U*, 40). The vampire is an image of death-in-life, which transmits the idea of Stephen giving in to his sexual attraction towards his mother, demanding of her the kiss of death.

## 5. The Ghost of the Changeling Son

Not only Stephen is haunted by ghosts. Leopold Bloom as well has his visits from the world of the dead. Bloom, just like Dedalus, must pass through the phantasmagorical apocalypse of the unconscious. His wild, imaginary drama extends itself along the play which occupies the most difficult chapter of *Ulysses*, namely the "Circe" section. And I find it extremely significant that when Joyce, the greatest twentieth century novelist, had to describe the unconscious, he felt he had to turn to the dramatic form, in order to represent the multifaceted, elusive, and metamorphic structure of the human psyche, whose urgency and immediateness tend to bypass the reflexive narrative order.

In Nighttown – Dublin's red-lights district – *Ulysses'* two complementary agonists confront their own repressed fears, anxieties, and wishes, but also a collective human compound of dreams and fantasies. In the climax of the chapter, Stephen finally rejects his mother's dominance over his mind, and synchronically finds in Bloom a surrogate of the father figure, during a psychodrama that breaks down any traditional boundary between fiction and reality, as well as any difference between man and woman. Bloom encounters his repressed past, coping with his deep sense of anguish for the memory of his father. Moreover, he undergoes the experience of a fundamental 'androgyny', along with a full realization of the way in which his sexual separation from his wife Molly has forced him to concur in her love affair with Boylan. He will be able to incorporate his painful phantoms within himself, thus becoming a momentarily symbolic father to Stephen.

The ghost of his son Rudy is one of the most important presences hovering over Bloom's life (and the text as well). Leopold's sexual abstinence with Molly dates back to Rudy's death, signalling his fear of having and losing another child. Although Rudy's shadow continuously

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flutters in Bloom's thoughts, only in "Circe" is he granted the privilege of a vision of his son, who has aged as if naturally, being now, exactly like Hamnet Shakespeare, eleven years old. Contrasted with Stephen's vision of his dead mother in the same episode, Bloom's phantasm is, if not cheerful, at least quiet. Bloom, who has just played the role of the father with drunken, distracted Stephen, has a vision which seems to suggest that he may be eventually able to overcome the trauma of his child's death. Rudy appears smiling over, reading, and kissing a book. As the book is being read from right to left, it is a Hebrew volume, thus relating Rudy to the ghosts of Bloom's childhood and his renegade Judaism:

[Stage direction] *Against the dark wall a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet, holding a book in his hand. He reads from right to left inaudibly, smiling, kissing the page.*

BLOOM (*wonderstruck, calls inaudibly*): Rudy!

RUDY *gazes, unseeing, into Bloom's eyes and goes on reading, kissing, smiling. He has a delicate mauve face. On his suit he has diamonds and ruby buttons. In his free left hand he holds a slim ivory cane with a violet bowknot. A white lambkin peeps out of his waistcoat pocket. (U, 497).*

Rudy's ghost, which appears at the very end of the episode, is linked to the ghost of Bloom's father, Rudolph, which comes to the fore at the start of the hallucinatory drama:

[Stage direction] *A stooped bearded figure appears garbed in the long caftan of an elder in Zion and a smokingcap with magenta tassels. Horned spectacles hang down at the wings of the nose. Yellow poison streaks are on the drawn face. (U, 357)*

The ghost speaks in typical Jewish English, also playing the stereotypical role of the Jewish miser:

RUDOLPH: Second halfcrown waste money today. I told you not go with drunken goy ever. So you catch no money .... What you making down this place? Have you no soul? (with feeble vulture talons he feels the silent face of Bloom) Are you not my son Leopold, the grandson of Leopold? Are you not my dear son Leopold who left the house of his father and left the god of his fathers Abraham and Jacob? (*U, 357*)

It is worth noticing that Bloom's father was a suicide. This paradigm evokes the hubristic challenge to God to upset his rational schemes; in this way he appears as a ghost of particular unrest and consequently of threatening strength. Nonetheless Bloom seems not to be as troubled by his father's phantom as he will be by his son's shadow. The warning fatherly ghost is calmly dismissed in Bloom's descent into Nighttown, his own private *Walpurgisnacht*. Either for his permanent fear of coping with

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anxiety-producing matters, or for his adherence to the material, physical world, he gives himself over to sensual events as a means of escaping the deep traumas of his past and present existence. He lives by psychological shortcuts, like crossing streets in order not to meet his wife's lover, or continuously forcing himself not to think of Molly's behaviour in bed with someone else: as soon as any repressed thought explodes in his mind, he energetically changes the subject, so as not to deal with the uncomfortable contents of his conscious life. It is his subconscious, as expressed in "Circe", that gives him opportunities of rescue and revenge, through a personal metamorphosis created in the deepest strata of his brain.

The first phantasmagorical change of essence concerns his hidden androgyny. A medical examination establishes that "Professor Bloom is a finished example of the new womanly man" and that "he is about to have a baby" (U, 403), thus contradicting Stephen's view in "Scylla and Charybdis" according to which "Calandrino was the first and last man who felt himself with child" (U, 170). The female, Molly, previously suppressed in his conscious mind, now reappears within Bloom himself. Soon after his gorgeous deliverance – "*Bloom ... bears eight male yellow and white children*" (U, 403) – a mysterious "Voice" asks: "Bloom, are you the Messiah ben Joseph or ben David?" (U, 403). This complex amalgam of female and Jewish details clarifies Bloom's confused conception of himself. Indeed, the end of the hallucination presents him enthusiastically accepting his social defeat as "Messiah", that is the frustration of his idealized self-image. Rubbing his hands cheerfully (stage direction), he says: "Just like old times. Poor Bloom" (U, 406), at which point a further father-like phantom appears, who again summons up the idea of the son's death: "[Stage direction] *Reuben J Dodd, blackbearded Iscariot, bad shepherd, bearing on his shoulders the drowned corpse of his son, approaches the pillory*" (U, 406).

Apart from Rudy's death, Bloom's most painful obsession is his father's suicide – a desperate reaction to Ellen Higgins Bloom's premature departure – which causes in him the recondite desire to follow his example:

Let me be going now, woman of the house, for by all the goats in Connemara I'm after having the father and mother of a bating. (*with a tear in his eye*) All insanity. Patriotism. Sorrow for the dead, music, future of the race. To be or not to be. Life's dream is o'er. End it peacefully. They can live on. (*he gazes far away mournfully*) I am ruined. A few pastilles of aconite. The blinds drawn. A letter. Then lie back to rest. (*he breathes softly*) No more. I have lived. Fare. Farewell. (U, 407)

It is only when Bloom sees Zoe, the prostitute, a still-living female, that he recovers his moral strength. Together they enter Bella's brothel, where Bloom is going to encounter the temptations of the flesh: "[Stage direction] *Bloom stands, smiling desirously, twirling his thumbs*" (U, 417).

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Unfortunately, a new hallucination dismisses his mirth. The warning shadow of Lipoti Virag, Bloom's grandfather, enters the scene:

[Stage direction] *Lipoti Virag, basilicogrammate, chutes rapidly down through the chimneyflue and struts two steps to the left on gawky pink stilts. He is sausaged into several overcoats and wears a brown macintosh under which he holds a roll of parchment. In his left eye flashes the monocle of Cashel Boyle O'Connor Fitzmaurice Tisdall Farrell. On his head is perched an Egyptian psbent. Two quills project over his ears.* (U, 417).

Lipoti Virag's dramatic (as well as humorous) function is that of chastising his grandnephew's lively sexuality and helping him to resist the temptation of flesh signified by the prostitute:

Promiscuous nakedness is much in evidence hereabouts, eh? .... Correct me but I always understood that the act so performed by skittish humans with glimpses of lingerie appealed to you in virtue of its exhibitionisticcity .... Obviously mammal in weight of bosom you remark that she has in front well to the fore two protuberances of very respectable dimensions, inclined to fall in the noonday soupplate, while on her rere lower down are two additional protuberances, suggestive of potent rectum and tumescent for palpation, which leave nothing to be desired save compactness. (U, 417-418)

The phantom's second function is to solicit Bloom to remember his past, his family, his race, thus avoiding the immediate problems of the present: "Stop twirling your thumbs and have a good old thunk. See, you have forgotten. Exercise your mnemotechnic. *La causa è santa*. Tara. Tara. (*aside*) He will surely remember" (U, 419). The counterpoint to Virag, a ghost from the past, is Henry Flower, Bloom's alter ego in the present, whose image materialises momentarily chasing Lipoti away. "There is a flower that bloometh" (U, 422). Henry Flower is Leopold Bloom's pseudonym in his letters to an idealised fiancée, Martha. Contrasting "Virag truculent", Henry is "gallant", as well as beautiful like a traditional picture of Christ: "*He has the romantic Saviour's face with flowing locks, thin beard and moustache*"; he is sweet, flirtatious: "*(caressing on his breast a severed female head, murmurs) Thine heart, mine love*" (U, 422, 426). Immediately Virag returns, and before saying goodbye, counterbalances Henry's female head by unscrewing his own and putting it under his arm. Then the two complementary Bloomean figures simultaneously disappear: "*exeunt severally*" (U, 426).

The Virag sequence is a sort of comic *entr'acte* before the most complex of Bloom's several hallucinations, that of the hermaphroditic owner of the brothel, Bella/Bello Cohen, the figure of a virile woman on to which he projects his hidden desire to be dominated and physically punished by the female. Bloom's first reaction to Bella's entrance is self-abasement and defeat: "Exuberant female. Enormously I desiderate your domination. I



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am exhausted, abandoned" (*U*, 430). A modern Circe, she transforms Bloom into ever and ever degrading animal forms, from "sheep" to "cow", to suggest his typical sentiment of fear. Her power is overwhelming because her form summarises the deep content of all his *phantasmata*, that is his need to avoid action and retire from strife. On her command he becomes womanly again, not to give birth now, but to adopt a subjected and masochistic stance. As womanly man, Bloom at once sees only the male side of the "massive whoremistress", and Bella comes over as Bello, who exercises total power on him, and gradually transforms his female nature into a sow:

BELLO: Down! (*he taps her on the shoulder with his fan*) Incline feet forward! Slide left foot one pace back! You will fall. You are falling. On the hands down! BLOOM: (*her eyes upturned in the sign of admiration, closing, yaps*) Truffles! (*With a piercing epileptic cry she sinks on all fours, grunting, snuffling, rooting at his feet: then lies, shamming dead, with eyes shut tight, trembling eyelids, bowed upon the ground in the attitude of most excellent master*). (*U*, 433)

The theme of falling, which permeates the entire chapter, is particularly relevant in this bestial context. Bloom's fall is not a *felix culpa*, is not a pattern of defeat and redemption, but only one of progressive, indisputable degradation. As the hallucination mounts to its climax, Bella/Bello provokes in Bloom the ever increasing thought of Molly's infidelity. For a moment he envisages the possibility of a reunion: "To drive me mad! Moll! I forgot! Forgive! Moll... We... Still..." (*U*, 442), but Bella/Bello implacably argues that no return to the past is possible, there is no Molly prior to Rudy's death: "No, Leopold Bloom, all is changed by woman's will since you slept horizontal in Sleepy Hollow your night of twenty yeas. Return and see" (*U*, 442). Instead of Molly he sees a young woman "breaking from the arms of her lover", whom he does not promptly recognise as his own daughter: "BELLO (*laughs mockingly*) That's your daughter, you owl, with a Mullingar student" (*Ibid.*). Milly, who partially resembles her mother, again frustrates Bloom's desire to go back to the past: "It's Paply! But, O Paply, how old you've grown" (*U*, 442).

Bello goes on ridiculing Bloom about his need of recovering the dead past: "Die and be damned to you if you have any sense of decency or grace about you. I can give you a rare old wine that'll send you skipping to hell and back. Sign a will and leave us any coin you have!", thus mimicking Circe's instructions to enter and re-emerge from the underworld. In point of fact, Bloom has already passed through his own unconscious, and is now starting a new ascent to actuality (*U*, 443). The sign of his tentative escape from the soul's darkness is the construction of a new figure as an antidote to Bella's dominant female power, the phantom of a kind, delicate, sympathetic nymph:

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THE NYMPH: You bore me away, framed me in oak and tinsel, set me above your marriage couch. Unseen, one summer eve, you kissed me in four places. And with loving pencil you shaded my eyes, my bosom and my shame.  
BLOOM (*humbly kisses her long hair*) Your classic curves, beautiful immortal, I was glad to look on you, to praise you, a thing of beauty, almost to pray. (*U*, 445)

To revenge himself against Bella/Bello, Bloom's mind creates an image of beauty and purity, and yet he does not succeed in governing it. As soon as he approaches this idealized simulacrum, a button bursts in the back of his trousers: "Bip!... O, Leopold lost the pin of his drawers/ He didn't know what to do,/ To keep it up,/ To keep it up" (*U*, 451). Thus reality wins over unreality; the immaculate nymph acquires a moist stain upon her dress, of which she charges Bloom's masculinity: "Sacrilege! To attempt my virtue!... Sully my innocence! You are not fit to touch the garment of a pure woman" (*U*, 451). In response "*she draws a poniard and, clad in the sheathmail of an elected knight of nine, strikes at his loins*" (Ibid.). Bloom succeeds in seizing the hand which holds the castrating knife, but the nymph, now become a statue from the museum, cracks open emitting an odour of living flesh. Nonetheless, Bloom's virility is recovered, and he emerges from this phantasmal experience with new energy and self-control; characteristically, his ability to return to the factual world allows him an escape from the spectres of his unconscious.

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It is important to remember that, in his definition of ghost, Stephen equates the three terms death, absence, change ("one who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change in manners", *U*, 154). Death or absence are nothing more than change or history. This means that the ghost lives in everyone, since every creature is submitted to continuous transformations, while participating in the natural pattern whose end – in both senses of the word – is disappearance, erasure, subtraction. "We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants..." (*U*, 175). This means that we meet ourselves in acting out our lives, in wearing one mask after another, in moving from reality to phantasmagoria, according to a logic – *unlogic*? – of interchangeability, confronting the subjective creations of our own consciousness. The face of Shakespeare, the image of the "myriadminded man" which materializes in the mirror where Stephen and Bloom simultaneously look at themselves, thus becomes the paradigm of the interaction between impalpability, death, absence, change (*U*, 168). Stephen's phantasms, and Bloom's hallucinations have shown the limit beyond which neither can go without perhaps the other's help. If Stephen's psychodrama ends with a phantasmagoric sequence of

