

Ghostly Manifestations in Modernism

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Essay 1 – Ghostly Manifestations in Modernism

As I generally understand it, Modernism drew attention to and questioned issues which 19th century fiction had either taken for granted or had further attempted to conceal (out of inertia perhaps) in its purport to represent the workings of what is commonly defined as reality. One of the most problematic, and perhaps one of the least directly approached of these, is the theme of ghosts. It has been traditionally explored in gothic fiction, either in order to suggest a sepulchral ambience or to encourage the reader to question the mental stability and credibility of characters. With the rise of Modernism and the advantage of hindsight, however, this approach can be enriched when reading through the lenses of Modernist themes of perception, past, self and, moreover, their instability. If, bluntly put, the ghost is commonly understood as that which is dead, yet somehow in possession of a spirit able to come back, Modernist writing encourages the reader to add not only context (asking who is it that the ghost comes back for and where it comes from), but also the nuance of perception (the absolute “is” turns into “as perceived”¹) and the relation to time, memory and self. A reading underpinned by these questions might inspire a new life not only for the ghosts in and of the story, but also for that precious and elusive strand of meaning which blooms in the mind of the reader.

Modernism has succeeded in shocking with its reinvention of form and narrative perspective,¹ just to name some of its innovations, and in doing that, it has not left the past untouched, but, as Eliot says, “for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered”.² That is why, in order to bring fullness to my point, it might be fruitful to assess the (at times barely inferred) presence of ghosts not only in the High Modernism of Joyce and Woolf, but also in the proto-modernism of James.³ I will start by taking for granted a supernatural reality (James’ *The Turn of the Screw*) or, rather, taking a relativist position in my understanding of its “actual” existence within the logic of the novel, examine a more nuanced approach to ghostly manifestation (Joyce’s ‘The Dead’) and finally conclude ^{by} arguing how these two positions could be reunited (Woolf’s ‘A Haunted House’). By reading these texts as particular examples within the larger context of Modernism, it might become apparent not how ghosts could answer questions, but rather how they could be read as “the past [being]

¹ This paper focuses only on some of its main characteristics, but Modernism revolutionized arguably all elements of narrative, form and content (the revolutionizing can also be understood as foregrounding of previously rarely used techniques). The writing features characters the consciousness of whom is so deeply explored it almost acts as a mirror for a conscientious reader, if to the detriment of plot and by absence and lacune rather than by straightforward storytelling. Descriptions are often off-putting, at least on a first reading, forcing the reader to reconsider their worn perception of daily objects and occurrences. The place of the omniscient narrator is taken either by first-person narrator or, even more notably, by free indirect discourse, a technique which allows the narrator direct and more realistic contact to the way characters navigate the world of the narrative. All these elements contribute to its purported difficulties, a concept detailed later in the paper. It is, moreover, interesting to note that even if the figures of literary High Modernism are considered to be Eliot, Pound, Joyce and Woolf, it spread more or less evenly across whole Europe and beyond, arguably rooted in the psychological fiction of Dostoevsky and Chekhov, infused by the subjective time of memory of Proust, crumbling in the psychedelic prose of Kafka, and reaching even the faraway lands of Japan in the prose rich in allusions and undertones of Kawabata Yasunari.

² T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, *Perspecta*, vol.19 (1974), pp.36-44 (p. 37).

³ Childs sets James on a par with Modernist writers, seeing in his work, particularly in *The Turn of the Screw*, “[t]he question of the relationship between language, narration, perception and knowledge” (Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 153), notions which, in their instability and relativity to one another, hint at Modernist preoccupations.

always present in the present”,⁴ when understanding the ghosts both symbolically, as the voice of tradition echoing through time, and literally, as the voice of the past for the characters trapped in a suddenly unrecognizable present.

Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* is famous for its critics and readers ceaselessly returning to the question of whether the ghosts are “real” or not, and not unreasonably, in Rimmon’s view, who draws attention to “the impossibility of choice between mutually exclusive interpretations”.⁵ It is worth noticing that the question is, arguably, underpinned by the classical understanding of ghosts – supernatural entities which everyone agrees are either manifest or not in the global reality of the novel. But what might be missed in agreeing on the question is the *problematic of subjective experience*, which Modernist thought arguably brings to the table. Perhaps the classical question could be extended by adding subject and condition - who are the ghosts “real” for and how does this feeling of “real” exactly take shape in the character consciousness, this way of reading being one possible intake of Eliot’s words. When “novelty” is perceived in literature, it changes the past by shedding new light on it, thus transforming it and *re-presenting* it (that is, bringing the past into the present again), deeming itself fit for a place in the “*whole existing order*”. By opening our minds to questions which would maybe not even have been possible, conceptually speaking, when the past was originally written, “novelty” creates the possibility itself of asking new questions of classics, finding answers and restating them as classics in the modern world in the process.⁶

One of the striking characteristics of James’ novella are the dialogues between the governess and Mrs. Grose, in the way they are constructed and how information is transmitted and received. From the moment of the former’s arrival at Bly, each sees in the other a companion, a longed-for counterpart, to perhaps spend time and share thoughts with. The governess says “all struck me [...] as so many things thrown in. It was thrown in as well, from the first moment, that I should get on with Mrs. Grose as well”⁷ and, in her perception of the housekeeper, she notices “the clear circumstance of her being so glad to see me”.⁸ In their dialogues they use quite a few deictic words and finish each other’s sentences, as if it is clear for both what or who the topic of the conversation is. One illustrative example of this is the scene where Mrs. Grose and the governess piece together the idea, which takes deep roots in the latter’s mind, that the governess saw Quint’s ghost:

‘A gentleman? [...] a gentleman HE?’
‘You know him then?’
[...] ‘But he IS handsome?’

⁴ Gabrielle McIntire, *Modernism, Memory and Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.171.

⁵ Shlomith Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity - The Example of James* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 116.

⁶ Kermode argues that one of reasons for which the classics maintain their statute is because “time opens them; if readers were immortal the classic would be much closer to changelessness; their deaths do, in an important sense, liberate the texts” (Frank Kermode, ‘A Modern Way with the Classic’, *New Literary History*, 5.3 (1974), 415-434 (pp. 426)). I would add that it is the literary context of the modern reader’s time which encourages new readings and if we admit that Modernism itself also has a component of contiguity with the past, not only of revolution against it, one could tentatively speak of a reader-writer intertextuality which is at play here.

⁷ Henry James, ‘The Turn of the Screw’ in *Henry James Complete Works* (East Sussex: Delphi Publishing Ltd, 2020), Delphi Classics epub (I).

⁸ James, *The Turn of the Screw* (I).

I saw the way to help her. 'Remarkably!'
'And dressed - ?'
'In somebody's clothes. They're smart but they're not his own.'
[...] 'They're the master's'!⁹

The governess states herself that "[t]here were naturally things that in Flora's presence could pass between us only as prodigious and gratified looks, obscure and roundabout allusions",¹⁰ perhaps as an explanation of sorts for why their conversations are rather allusive. Be that as it may, one can still read in their dialogue how each of them mostly builds their own perception of fact from the other one's indirect way of speaking rather than both approaching a common, absolute fact. Rimmon refers to the use of pronouns as being "rendered doubly directed either by having two situational referents or by being assignable, with equal plausibility, to two different pronominal categories"¹¹ and pins them as a mark for the ambiguity inherent to the text itself. While her opinion undoubtedly holds, I suppose that at the time James wrote the novella, and even later as it seems, it might still have been assumed that if two persons with similar upbringing talk in "allusions", it is perfectly clear for each what the underlying topic of the conversation is. Questioning the truth of this assumption, so unproblematic as it might have been in the 19th century, brings us on the realm of Modernist thought, which manages to shatter this mere illusion of the absolute and bring into focus the uncertainty of meaning and the possibility that holding on to the illusion is how that which is believed to be unproblematic and absolute reality, comes into being.

In her analysis of intersubjectivity in Woolf's Modernist work *To the Lighthouse*, Tobin argues that in the closed triangle of joint attention the characters keep trying, but fail, to gain a deep understanding of the thoughts and emotions of each other with respect to the object of their shared attention.¹² Following a similar pattern in *The Turn of the Screw*, the object of joint attention (Quint's ghost in the above example) could be understood to be *created*, an act mediated a great deal by the laconic employment of language, the importance of which Tobin acknowledges: "The act of *seeing together* [...] serves as the linchpin of our ability to assess what is common ground between ourselves and our interlocutors and language provides an array of resources for establishing, directing, and refining this intersubjective experience".¹³

While the points discussed in this paper barely scratch the surface of the matter, the presented argument takes a turn from the "classical" choice between the supernatural or the psychological interpretation when looking underneath what is "in" the story. This position is similar to Brooke-Rose's,¹⁴ whose uncovering of the underlying narrative sentence does not invalidate the multiplicity and ambiguity offered by the text. It is not the concern of the present paper whether the ghosts are real in an absolute, immutable sense, or hallucinations of the governess, as a consequence of mental or emotional instability. The point of the matter is more that the ghosts are very real *for* her because this is her inescapable mode

⁹ James, *The Turn of the Screw* (V).

¹⁰ James, *The Turn of the Screw* (I).

¹¹ Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity*, p.151.

¹² Vera Tobin, 'Joint Attention, *To the Lighthouse* and Modernist Representations of Intersubjectivity', *English Text Construction*, 3.2 (2010), p.185-202.

¹³ Tobin, *Joint Attention*, p. 186.

¹⁴ Christine Brooke-Rose argues in her structuralist reading that the principles of mirroring and reversal are the elements of the narrative sentence, while stating her "purpose to preserve the total ambiguity of the TS text" (Christine Brooke-Rose, 'The Squirm of the True', *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976), p.513-546 (pp. 513)).

of perception, enabled by her upbringing, environment and background, and this is under no circumstance excluding their “actual” existence in the logic of the novel. The ambiguity of the text is also a matter which could be looked at in a different light by following the pattern of Modernist thought. If we choose to read the novel in the traditional realist manner, we might expect, as readers, that we are supposed to understand all the implied references and undertones exchanged in dialogues like the one quoted above or dialogues later in the story, such as the one towards the end, between the governess and Miles:

‘[...] Of course we have the others.’
 ‘We have the others – we have indeed the others’ I concurred.
 ‘Yet even though we have them [...] they don’t much count, do they?’
 I made the best of it, but I felt wan. ‘It depends on what you call “much”!’
 ‘Yes [...] everything depends!’¹⁵

If we choose to take the position of the realist reader, both dialogues burst with ambiguity because we feel that we have all the information to make a final decision, yet we cannot, and thus we decide to both accept the existence of the “realist” ghost and read Miles’s death on the account of the governess’ mental instability, even if the two decisions exclude each other. If, however, we choose to take the position of the modernist reader, ambiguity itself is understood to be a mode of being because we accept that there is no global reality which everyone would agree on and which could at least be knowable, if not necessarily known, to everyone.¹⁶ We understand all characters to be complex figures, to have a background out of which they speak or, as Miles, live under the influence of what both he and the governess know to be dead and gone, yet keep on living in ways differently understood by both himself and the governess. *She* makes place in *her* reality for a new manifestation which has a lot of weight to bear – the new knowledge she comes into possession of during her talks with Mrs. Grose, her unfulfilled personal desires and the pressure of contradictory injunctions.¹⁷ The child characters and their experiences *are not the main concern of* this paper, but Miles can be understood to be struggling with yet unwelcome maturity, imposed on him by the influence of Quint, Miss Jessel and their implied relationship. The governess lives thus in the past of the “realist” ghost, while Miles is haunted in the present by the “modernist”¹⁸ t.

The governess is the perfect example of an unreliable narrator, on the one hand because there are scenes which she doesn’t narrate as they occur, and on the other hand, because a disjunction exists between what she sees and tells and what she seems to *simply know*. In James’ novella the reader is not let in on the background of this knowledge and this is perhaps one source of her unreliability. By contrast, in Joyce’s writing, the strong accent on the state of “knowing” shapes the definition of epiphany, a moment of supreme lucidity, the nature of which the character themselves intuit, its unfolding all the while being shared with the reader.¹⁹ the particular example of ‘The Dead’ however, while Gabriel realizes contemplatively that he had been caught in a “riot of emotions”,¹⁸ he is not able to trace it back to its source and, moreover, as the reader realizes, he fails to live his moment fully, up to the consequence of

¹⁵ James, *The Turn of the Screw* (XXIII).

¹⁶ Continuing the idea from footnote 6 - Kermode argues that second of the reasons for which the classics maintain their statute is that the text has embedded ambiguities, but “What happens is that methods of repairing such indeterminacy change; and, as Wolfgang Iser’s neat formula has it, ‘the repair of indeterminacy’ is what gives rise ‘to the generation of meaning’” (Kermode, *A Modern Way with the Classic*, p. 426).

¹⁷ Christine Brooke-Rose, *The Squirm of the True*, p.537.

¹⁸ James Joyce, ‘The Dead’ in *Dubliners* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1993), p. 127-160 (p.159).

losing touch with Gretta and inability to surmount “the years of their dull existence together”.¹⁹ The epiphanic moment or event (in ^{the} sense of “something happening”, the core of literature), as Sayeau calls it, is interpreted by him, in a paraphrase of Derrida’s deconstruction ^{ist} theory, to be “the not-nowness of the now, the present by the past out of which it emerges as well as the future it suggests”²⁰ and, as he argues in his book-length study, a subversion of traditional narrative methods, by the construction of an anti-event, an artful shell emptied of content, in the form of an event, content looked at through literature read referentially. The ghosts speaking out of tradition are beaten ^{at} in their own game – mimicry, but inversely reinterpreted.

Another ghost manifested here is the purely “modernist” one, that is Gabriel does not literally face a supernatural reality, but his own self, in the much more worrisome realization, from his perspective, that he was wrong about himself and about his life, seeing himself as “a ludicrous figure [...] well-meaning sentimentalist [...] idealising his own clownish lust”.²¹ Thus, an entirely parallel reality emerges, where he faces himself not for what he feels in the momentary present to be, but for how he pictures himself when a hidden facet of his persona is revealed (or created over the course of action). We might tend to ask what the truthful picture is, how Gabriel Conroy is “really” meant to be understood, but even the reader can only piece together fragments of opinions from what other characters indirectly say about him and Gabriel’s own insecurities and inner discourse. If in James’ novella this was understood as ambiguity, contradictory pieces of information across the text, in Joyce’s short story it is understood as the fragmentary and incoherent personality inherent to characters of Modernist fiction.

It is generally suggested in the critical literature that three words from the short story ‘The Sisters’, the first one in *Dubliners*, cast their shadow over the entire collection, possibly even over Joyce’s entire *oeuvre*: paralysis, gnomon, simony, which could further be understood as metonymic representations of his three nets: language, nationality and religion. Benstock reads the ghosts in *Dubliners* through the lens of the gnomon, as an “absence, suspended aloft and rattling its chains, unspoken but nonetheless ‘heard’”,²² which makes itself felt in the fabric of the nets which construct and entrap the characters. Michael Furey, the most preeminent “modernist” ghost in ‘The Dead’ is thus an absence,²³ whose remembrance and *re-presenting* by Gretta throws Gabriel off his position of confidence and into the gloomy, meditative post-state of a failed epiphany.

The idea is perhaps better understood in terms of the tension between what Gabriel remembers from the past moments with Gretta, be they “dull existence” or “stars moments” and the new knowledge of Furey he obtains in the present. The instability given rise to by the encounter with a facet of his wife’s past he was not aware of, triggers a detour of trajectory and the fall into a meditative contemplation of the evening he had spent the party, the moments of which he now calls into question. He conceives the whole evening as a series of failures, which now ^{summarize} in the eye of the reader to the present that has fallen

¹⁹ Joyce, ‘The Dead’, p.153.

²⁰ Michael Sayeau, *Against the Event: The Everyday and Evolution of Modernist Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013), p. 36.

²¹ Joyce, ‘The Dead’, p.158.

²² Bernard Benstock, ‘The Gnomonics of Dubliners’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 34.4 (1988), p.519-539 (pp. 519).

In this essay Benstock draws out the geometrical figure of gnomon, “a nonappearance suggesting a presence made palpable only by the concept of its absence” (p. 520) across all stories in Joyce’s *Dubliners*, interpreting it either as an emotional absence or a physical missing piece in the appearance of characters.

²³ The idea of the absence which casts its shadow on the living is reiterated across Modernist literature, for example in Mansfield’s short story ‘The Stranger’, where Hammond, more drastically than Gabriel, predicts that the absence of the dead passenger will forever stand between him and his wife, or in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, where Lily painfully *re-presents* the dead Mrs. Ramsay.

back into the past reconfigured (*re-presented*) as the future. However inevitable it might be, the future gains poignancy when seen through the failure of the present. The meditative state involves, however, the absence of meaningful togetherness on the other side of the present, the marital one. In his unbent desire to “be the master of her strange mood [...] to overmaster her”²⁴ Gabriel fails to really communicate with Gretta, his fall this time being on meaningless, empty conversation, which at the end of Gretta’s story adds not to their “moments of ecstasy”, but to the “years of [...] dull existence together”.

Woolf’s approach of ghosts in ‘A Haunted House’ is, as it were, even more modernist in nature than Joyce’s, even as it asks the reader to take their existence for granted, at least when reading on a referential level. While the idea of absence is heavily inferred, we seem to be dealing, on one level at least, with “realist” ghosts here, to reuse the terms above. What draws ^{our?} attention, however, is that Woolf takes an important turning point from the traditional approach, namely the ghosts are not perceived, neither by the reader, or by the narrator, to be malevolent. Their presence in the house is accepted: “‘They’re looking for it; they’re drawing the curtain,’ one might say, and so read on a page or two”.²⁵ Unlike *The Turn of the Screw* when dealing with the supernatural, the atmosphere evoked here is, at least in relation with the ghosts, peaceful and embracing, the ghosts being part of the house, background to and object of interest for the narrating consciousness. Instead of the natural/supernatural tension which gothic fiction usually depicts, both modes of being are reunited in the search for an elusive “it”, an object which is more closely described for the ghosts as “treasure”, while remaining completely undisclosed for the human consciousness. Even the search that the narrator is tangled up into is barely inferred: “What did I want to find? [...] if the door was opened, spread about the floor, hung upon the walls, pendant from the ceiling - what?”.²⁶ Through loss of memory, the narrator (interpreted in this first reading as living human consciousness) thus experiences a break from the past and comes across that which is unspeakable, in ^{reaching?} the reach for missing words.²⁷ The lacunae in self-knowledge and self-expression lead, in consequence (without being explicitly explored in the space of the story), to a frayed perception of the world and of the self, the consequences of which are in turn often explored in Modernist works.

McIntire discusses in a book-length study the intertwined nature of time and memory, among other themes in Modernism, bringing them together in a consideration of what arguably is the quintessential Modernist poem, Eliot’s *The Waste Land*: “The past in their [Woolf’s and Eliot’s] work is a cherished, if occasionally dangerous, material that is urgently required to flesh out – sometimes in a flash – the fragile and fleeting (almost absent) fullness of the present”.²⁸ In bringing the awareness of the narrator to the recognition of that patch of darkness which exists in their memory, ‘A Haunted House’ suggests a clear break with the past, but since the presence of the ghosts seems to acknowledge both timelines sharing the same pocket of time, there is no contradiction between the past and the present. They exist

²⁴ Joyce, ‘The Dead’, p.156.

²⁵ Virginia Woolf, ‘A Haunted House’ in *Virginia Woolf Complete Works* (East Sussex: Delphi Publishing Ltd, 2020), Delphi Classics epub.

²⁶ Woolf, ‘A Haunted House’.

²⁷ The motif of the unspeakable is to be found in various forms across a wide range of modernist works, such as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (Kurtz dies by uttering the phrase “The horror! The horror!”), which afterwards haunts Marlow, as does Kurtz’s absence) or Joyce’s short story *Eveline* (Eveline’s mother utters the unintelligible phrase “Derevaun Seraun”, leaving her daughter to live her life on the edge of it) and, according to Childs, can be traced back to Saussure, whose “importance to Modernism lies in his parallel attempt to explore the relationship between language and meaning” (Childs, *Modernism*, p. 64).

²⁸ McIntire, *Modernism, Memory and Desire*, p. 6.

simultaneously, almost interchangeably, like in the dream or book the narrator finds themselves at times, perhaps symbolically pointing towards a reconciliation in the stormy relationship between the “now” of Modernism and the “then” of history. While the ghost, the past, history, is cherished, if elusive and unknown, the human and the present retreat in the “fragile and fleeting fullness” of what, through allusions to dreaming and reading, is suggested to be an act of refuge.

The governess in *The Turn of the Screw* is resolute in her mission of self-appointed savior and Gabriel in ‘The Dead’ had his chance, at least, for an authentic epiphany, but for the unnamed narrator in ‘A Haunted House’ there is no chance and almost a refusal to experience any epiphany of their own. The epiphany involves a spiritual illumination related to the self, and the story sometimes even makes unclear if the narrator is engaged in their own search or is rather more involved in the parallel search: “My hands were empty. ‘Perhaps it’s upstairs then?’”²⁹ If Gabriel does not know that it is his wife’s persona which is out of his reach, the unnamed narrator here already knows there *is* something out of reach but does not know what. In this sense Woolf’s story can be read as an inversion to the pre-modernist ghost tale, not only for the lack of the expected “ghostly” atmosphere, but also for a certain physicality and concreteness which the ghosts enjoy, and the narrating consciousness does not.

The presence of ghosts alone would suffice to bring out Freud’s sense of the uncanny,³⁰ but, as discussed above, the story provides additional aspects which add nuance to this interpretation. Thus, it is not the ghosts that are uncanny, but the human narrating consciousness, which, through the inability to access its own past and language, is fractured from itself and lives in a suspended state, between real life and dream. This inversion brings forward “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old”³¹ and what is frightening here is the uncertainty and the sheer unknown that the narrator is aware of – “intellectual uncertainty”³² at character level, in Freud’s terms. We are used to being sure of everything, to knowing our past and what we are going to do next, that, when reading ‘A Haunted House’, we are forced to resonate with the narrator and face the realization that the reality of our experience might be entirely different, if knowable at all.

As suggested above, at least a second mode of reading the story could be inferred, completely at odds with the one described in the previous paragraphs. The story’s ambiguity then lies, for one, in the fact that the ghosts are never directly perceived. We are only told of “a shunting door”, “the house all empty” and that “the apple only turned its yellow side”, yet the “ghostly couple” still moves through the house. We could understand this as being the more “natural” state of ghosts, who either do not let themselves or cannot be seen by the human eye or that the human consciousness is in a dream state or immersed in

²⁹ Woolf, ‘A Haunted House’.

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, ‘The “Uncanny”’, *New Literary History*, 7.3 (1976), p.619-645.

Freud takes it upon himself to bind in words a notoriously slippery term in his essay, taking the example of Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman’ as practical case study.

³¹ Freud, *The “Uncanny”*, p. 620.

³² Woolf’s story, like a good ghost story, puts forward at least two aspects of the uncanny – fright and uncertainty. Generally speaking, James’ story distinguishes these two aspects as well (strictly speaking, *The Turn of the Screw* is ambiguous, not uncertain), but does so at the reader level. Woolf brings them down to the character level, which creates a different affect in the reader.

Freud, however, takes the idea that the uncanny as an “intellectual uncertainty” is “incomplete” and dismisses it over the course of the essay (Freud, *The “Uncanny”*, p. 620). Later readings of Freud suggest that Freud’s own reading of ‘The Sandman’ focused only on the aspects preferred by the psychoanalyst and it was his reading that was incomplete.

reading, perceiving barely the traces of the ghostly manifestations. The ambiguity has an additional level, characteristic of Modernist writing, and which in *The Turn of the Screw* was not apparent. While James' story arguably provides all the details which enable the two incompatible readings, details which, as shown above, are known by the characters, but not by the reader in the attempt to recreate a global reality, the ambiguity in Woolf's story is enabled by an infusing lack of detail and of knowledge, even on the part of the narrator, making any attempt of the reader to recreate a single global reality untenable. This is one aspect of the infamous "difficulty" of Modernist writing, a phenomenon which Hunter expands on in a study of the nature of difficulty in Modernist short fiction: "'difficulty' could also be generated in writing that foregrounded its shortness or transparency, and which made a feature of porousness, truncation, ellipsis".³³ These very characteristics, however, are what enable further and imaginative filling of the embedded gaps on the part of the reader, here in the form of an inversion grounded in "traditional" interpretive reading but rendering of the uncanny effect. Thus, if we decide to assign the loss of memory to the ghosts and physicality to the human, the story could be read as being told by a ghost who cannot recognize its own nature in time, an idea which has the potential to strike a chord of fear within the reader: there is something uncanny in the perception of a consciousness which has no grasp or feeling of its real state of being, a state foreign to itself, but recognizable to the outside observer (the reader).

Whichever reading takes the foreground, a deep concern regarding human existence remains discernible, when speaking generally in the context of Modernism. Either the human consciousness roams the modern world, split with its own past and memory, uncertain if the epiphany is possible, its only anchor remaining to turn to others, perceived as being in control of their path, or the human consciousness has already lost any chance in death, its past unknowable and unreachable, the only epiphany left to be had being the knowledge of its own state.

Botting makes an interesting point when he says that "[a]s an interplay between conventions and disruptions, the Modernist short story has much in common with the ghost story [...] A recent study has plotted the ghost story's development in terms of social hauntings and a modern historical consciousness produced in relation to dominant literary forms and periods".³⁴ Reading Modernism, we see certain aspects of narrative being foregrounded, aspects perhaps less explored in the pre-modernist era – the substitution of the global reality of the story with a personal reality of both character and reader), incapacity to rise and escape out of the invisible (for the character), but formative nets, inclusion of plot and setting in the relative elements of the story, formatted by and formative of character, rather than background fabric woven by an omniscient narrator. These "novelties", to use Eliot's word, force the reader in a conscious process of reading, where the story elements can no longer be taken for granted,³⁵ but they themselves ask to be given a role and meaning, a request so alive, yet elusive, in the text, that it is only comparable to the presence of ghosts, which, in their various forms, are the embodiment of the uncanny of Modernism and the modern world. Thus, the voice of "dead poets and artists",³⁶ alive, present

³³ Adrian Hunter, 'The Short Story and the Difficulty of Modernism' in *Modernism, Postmodernism and the Short Story in English*, ed. by Jorge Sacido (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 29-46 (pp. 32).

³⁴ Fred Botting, 'Stories, Specters, Screens' in *Modernism, Postmodernism and the Short Story in English*, ed. by Jorge Sacido (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 99-124 (pp. 103).

³⁵ Childs paraphrases Joseph Frank on the idea of "'spatial reading' [...] a 'style' which requires the reader to be more 'active' and also highly self-conscious" (Childs, *Modernism*, p. 155).

³⁶ Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, p.37.

Specifically for Woolf's short story studied in this paper, Cassigneul traces a precise "intertextual web" linked back to the British literary tradition embodied in Henry James, Emily Brontë and Ann Radcliffe. See Adele Cassigneul, 'Woolf's Haunted House of Fiction', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 70 (2018), p.73-86.

and recognized, yet at the same time repressed,³⁷ the depiction of a reality too close to its day-to-day appearance, seductive in its promise, yet “difficult” to make coherent sense of, are but a few examples of the contradictions and uncanniness which Modernism brings to the surface when the reader peers into the deep waters of its mirror, which in turn finds its own reflection in Postmodernism, where now Modernism is the tradition, to be misread and rebelled against.

³⁷ In the essay on the nature of “difficulty” of Modernism, varying from complex ideas to lacunary form with roots in late Victorian fiction, Hunter echoes the argument of Ann Ardis that “a key gesture of high-modernism self-fashioning and self-identification was the effective erasure of the achievements of the *fin de siècle* avantgarde” (Hunter, *The Short Story and the Difficulty of Modernism*, p. 34). On a similar note, McIntire writes that “part of modernism’s critical inheritance has involved a decades-long disavowal of its historical dimensions” (McIntire, *Modernism, Memory and Desire* p. 4).

Ghostly Manifestations in Modernism

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

85 / 100

Instructor

This an exceptionally impressive essay offering an incredibly well-organised and sophisticated reading of 'ghosts' in Modernist fiction.

You build well on a nuanced reading of TotScrew to argue convincingly that each text is pushing the arguments about perception, memory, reality in terms of what Modernism is, or is increasingly concerned with.

The claims about what might have been the norm in the C.18/9 are sound, but exceptions might be found -- Dickens' 'The Signalman' springs to mind; and intersubjectivity of this kind might also be found in Romanticism. But this is to quibble.

Your sentences are sometimes very long, reflecting the complexity of the arguments being made. They might benefit from the use of more semi-colons.

There are (understandably) minor slips in the mechanics of expression but these are not significant.

PAGE 1



Comment 1

Good.

Such questions might be being asked already by earlier writers such as Dickens.

Text Comment. by

PAGE 2

PAGE 3

PAGE 4



Comment 2

This might in some ways also be seen as a Romantic take on reality

Text Comment. are not the main concern of



Comment 3

excellent



Comment 4

It is equally arguable of course that the reader cannot really 'share' the epiphany -- JJ is as interested in ironic distance and distancing as in revelation

PAGE 5

Text Comment. the

Text Comment. ist



Missing ";"

Missing semicolon:

Semicolons are commonly used to join closely related, complete sentences that do not contain coordinating conjunctions or commas as connectors. Semicolons are also placed before words like "however" and "therefore" when such words are used to join sentences.

Text Comment. at

Strikethrough.

Text Comment. culminate?

PAGE 6

Text Comment. to

Text Comment. our?

Text Comment. reaching?

Strikethrough.

PAGE 7



Comment 7

are we?

PAGE 8

Text Comment. from

PAGE 9
