Specters of Totality: Reading and Uncertainty in Joyce's *Ulysses* and Borges's Fictions

Gabriel Renggli

WKS KV Bildung, Switzerland

For all the differences between their literary projects, James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges are connected not only through Borges's sustained interest in Joyce's work, but also through a shared concern with total systems of knowledge. Both authors are skeptical of such systems; yet both also betray a deeply ingrained fascination with the idea. This is particularly apparent in scenes from their work featuring acts of reading, such as the discussion about Shakespeare or the apparition of Rudy's ghost in Ulysses, *or several of Borges's short narratives. Both Joyce and Borges insist on the uncanny attraction that totality has even for wary readers, as well as on totality's self-defeating aspects, which introduce into the process of reading a certain sense of loss in a manner reminiscent of Derrida's thinking on spectrality.*

> "More than once I cried out to the vault that it was impossible to decipher that text."
>
> —Jorge Luis Borges, "The God's Script" 205

> ([. . .] *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*

Gabriel Renggli (gabriel.renggli@bluewin.ch) received his PhD from the University of York, UK. He teaches English at the WKS KV Bildung in Bern, Switzerland. His articles on James Joyce have been published in *Modernism/modernity* and *Joyce Studies Annual*.

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 diamond 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*.)

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*
(15.4956–67)

What book is Rudy's ghost reading in the "Circe" episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses*? All we can infer from the passage in question and from its context is that the book is most likely a religious text written in Hebrew. As Gifford and Seidman put it in *Ulysses Annotated*: "The question of which sacred book Rudy is reading has been worried to little avail; it could be any Jewish religious text with the name of God in it" (529). It is possible to follow up a disclaimer of this kind with speculation, but let us for a moment remain with the sheer sense of mystery. The scene forms the conclusion to "Circe," the longest and most bewildering chapter of *Ulysses*, brimming with intrusions of the fantastic into a text that has already become engrossed in a game with styles, perspectives, and narrative voices. The further destabilization of the narrative world in "Circe" allows for the appearance of what I will call ghosts or specters, although I do not take them to be manifestations of the supernatural. The ghosts featured in "Circe" combine effects that include psychological realism, symbolic concretization of cultural frameworks, and textual effects not reducible to intra-diegetic or extra-diegetic reality.[1] In all of these functions, a ghost can be understood as an intrusion of a (narrative, historical, textual) past that wields influence beyond the impact of immediate presence.

However, a ghost's persistence in excess of immediacy is not restricted to bringing to mind what has already taken place. In "The Ghosts of *Ulysses*," Maud Ellmann describes a ghost more generally as "a mark of mediation" (86), as a point where what is present communes with what is not. In this view, Ellmann suggests, a ghost resembles nothing so much as a signifier, "in that it bespeaks the absence rather than the presence of its referent" (86). Both the signifier and the ghost draw attention to an absence and pose the paradoxical challenge to confront what is not there. What interests me here is both the notion of a lack that makes itself known and the nature of the ensuing interaction with a spectral presence.

In the case of Leopold Bloom's son Rudy, who died in infancy, one function of this interaction is to provide emotional denouement. The ghost of Rudy replaces the stupefying noise that dominates "Circe" with a cathartic moment of silence. Yet although the encounter between Rudy and Bloom is the sad but comparatively

peaceful conclusion to the most riotous part of *Ulysses*, the Circean transgression still present in this moment deserves attention. The terms used to describe Rudy invoke folklore that equates an infant's death with abduction by fairies. Usually, "changeling" refers to the fairy child left behind in such an event, but it can also refer to the child taken away. This is the more appropriate reading in conjunction with "kidnapped" (reinforced by the fact that the figure is said to be "eleven," Rudy's age had he lived). The phrase "fairy boy," then, refers to a human boy kidnapped by fairies. His presence has elements both of promise—he lives, though in another realm—and of threat.

This fairy child, who is consoling, heart-breaking, and uncanny all at the same time, is presented to us as contemplating a text. In asking what book he is reading, I do not intend to resolve the question. Instead, I will show that the *questionable* quality of the apparition allows us to read it as a depiction of reading itself. Nor is Rudy's apparition at the center of my argument. To investigate the link between reading and mystery suggested by this scene, I will draw on several examples from *Ulysses,* as well as from the work of Jorge Luis Borges, who can be seen to engage in a dialogue with Joyce. Each of my examples establishes a connection between the situation of a reader and an encounter with an enigma. I hasten to add that Joyce and Borges are writers operating in very different fields: Borges being a champion of both magical realism and of infinitesimal condensation, Joyce one of modernism and of boundless expansion. But I will show that both Joyce and Borges take a keen interest in what we could call totality and its discontents.

My focus, then, is on the relation between reading and the unknown as it appears in the writings of Borges and Joyce. I will examine this relation by looking at instances where the experience of readers *in* the text can be brought to bear on the situation of readers *of* the text. If I introduce this motif using Rudy's ghost, it is because the depictions of reading that we find in Borges and Joyce resemble what Jacques Derrida terms *spectrality*. I will turn to Derrida only towards the end of this article, before offering some closing remarks on the ghost of Rudy. Yet, where it deals with the readers depicted by Joyce and Borges, my discussion keeps in mind Derrida's notion that the temporalization of the reading process— the gap between inscription and decryption any legibility must cross—interferes with the self-presence of any authorial voice. Located at the very border between the present and the absent, specters offer an ideal figure for conceptualizing this complication and the uncertainty it introduces in reading. And we will see that uncertainty is indeed at the heart of reading as Joyce and Borges portray it.

Consider the answer Tim Conley gives to the question of Rudy's book. In *Joyces Mistakes* (sic), Conley ventures "that the book is *Ulysses* itself" (104). This should not be taken as a suggestion at the level of narrative explication, where the gloss provided by Gifford and Seidman reigns supreme. Rather, Conley's proposition draws attention to the self-referential quality of an act of reading being featured at this pivotal moment of Joyce's text: a reading (Rudy's) within a reading (ours). This duplication entails a sense of vertigo that Borges also describes

when he asks: "Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*?" ("Partial Magic" 231). Such hall-of-mirrors effects (books within books, plays within plays) add to our expectation of a momentous revelation. They raise the stakes, something that can also be perceived in David Spurr's comment that Rudy's "reading from right to left implies not only a sacred text but also a reading back to origins" (102).

I argue that Joyce's *undercutting* of these expectations is part of his depiction of reading. That is, I subscribe to Spurr's interpretation, but I would add that when we do return to the origin, there is little there. Joyce stages Rudy's appearance in a manner that suggests there may not be knowledge, but an absence of knowledge, at the center of the experience of reading. This links the reading ghost in *Ulysses* to a recurrent motif in Borges.

Many of Borges's stories revolve around an object, place, or person that is in some sense perfectly self-contained. Yet the narratives unfailingly reveal that such an entity does not form a stable microcosm, but something far more unsettling: a veritable *abyss* of self-reference. One example of this is found in Borges's story about yet another reader of *Ulysses*: "Funes the Memorious." Ireneo Funes is a man who remembers everything he has ever experienced, so that he can pass the time by recalling, say, "the forms of the southern clouds at dawn on 30 April 1882" or by reconstructing "a whole day" from memory (92). There is a link between the mnemonic capacity of Funes and the mnemonic capacity of Joyce, whose modern epic seems resolved to exhaust the impressions one day—16 June 1904—can muster. The connection is no coincidence. In a note entitled "A Fragment on Joyce," Borges names the gift or curse of Funes as an example of what reading *Ulysses* demands. Borges states that Funes "is a monster," and he adds that "a consecutive, straightforward reading of the four hundred thousand words of *Ulysses* would require similar monsters" (220).[2]

Like Rudy, Funes can be conceived of as an imaginary reader of *Ulysses*, and as a monstrously appropriate one at that. It is easy, moreover, to expand this train of thought to include Funes as the "ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia" of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (120.13–4). Indeed, in the story of Funes we learn that "[i]t was very difficult for him to sleep" (Borges, "Funes" 94). At this point, it would appear that both Joyce and Funes create a self-contained world that swallows up enough of the past to become an alternative reality. Inside this world, they are the keepers of a knowledge to whose totality we, the non-monstrous readers of *Ulysses* or of "Funes the Memorious," can only aspire. However, this is precisely the conclusion we should avoid. Funes could never produce an interpretation of *Ulysses*, nor of any other text. Since he cannot forget, he cannot add to his knowledge either. He has only the unfaltering terms his memory provides, but he cannot analyze or synthesize these terms. The text tells us that "it bothered him that the dog at three fourteen (seen from the side) should have the same name as the dog at three fifteen (seen from the front)" (93–4). By the incorruptibility of his mind, Funes is thus locked into a series of thoughts and impressions whose scope may appear boundless, but which are utterly unproductive.

This double-edged quality of total memory is also remarked upon in Patricia Novillo-Corvalán's *Borges and Joyce*. On the one hand, Novillo-Corvalán states that Funes "embodies the type of intellect required for the reading of *Finnegans Wake*, and [that] his persistent state of insomnia, moreover, turns him into Joyce's ideal insomniac" (70). On the other hand, she points out that "[s]ince Funes's memory is infallible, unselective and devoid of abstraction, his reading of *Ulysses* would envisage, of course, less an interpretation than a replication" (75). This discrepancy between the seeming capacity for ideal reading (of either *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*) and the actual failure to read at all is significant not just for the extraordinary case of Funes, but for all readers. Far from presenting an ideal reader, "Funes the Memorious" stages a hermeneutical deadlock with far-reaching implications of which the "Fragment" makes no mention. Whereas in the "Fragment," Borges does not qualify his verdict that an unchanging memory is what *Ulysses* demands, in "Funes the Memorious," he has the narrator state: "I suspect, however, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions" (94).

César Augusto Salgado explains this discrepancy, pointing out that "'Funes the Memorious' can be interpreted as a parody of the baroque modernist novel in its ultimate forms: *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*, and Proust's *Recherche*" (71). Funes, for all his incapacity to produce a reading, is mockingly presented as the ideal reader of these works insofar as he is the only type of reader equal to their encyclopedic excess. This explains Funes as the monstrous reader of *Ulysses*; the problem is that Joyce's implementation of totality is more subversive than Borges allows for. In the "Fragment," Borges takes issue with the heterogeneity of *Ulysses*, venturing that Joyce is "[l]acking the capacity to construct" (221). Borges reads *Ulysses* as a book that aims at, but fails to achieve, the kind of inclusiveness that would produce unity and closure. As we will see, these are aspirations that Borges's own fiction works to undermine—and *Ulysses* can be seen to do much the same thing. If, as Borges writes, "Joyce's book is indecipherably chaotic to the unprepared reader" (221), this chaos serves to dismantle the ideal of unity. It subjects to centrifugal forces the same baroque comprehensiveness that, in Borges's short form, is brought to collapse in on itself. Despite Borges's assertions to the contrary, the parallel that emerges between the two authors is that both stage the dissolution of total systems. I thus only partly agree with Salgado's observation that "Borges builds parables about the futility of the baroque extremisms of the modernist novel, for the rich totality it strives for will never be communicated" (77). *Ulysses*, too, addresses self-defeating aspects of total knowledge that—due to its totality—cannot organize or implement itself, and therefore implodes into futility. This gives rise to a correspondence between Joyce and Borges that Salgado sidesteps in his assessment of Borges's views.

I am inclined to agree with Novillo-Corvalán, who treats as unproblematic the assertion that both Borges and Joyce "emphasize the conflictual forces inherent in any totalization of knowledge" (71). Yet my view differs on the nature of this conflict, particularly the role desire plays in it, as we will see in the next

example. Borges's most famous rendering of total knowledge is "The Library of Babel." There he describes a library containing "all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though extremely vast, is not infinite): in other words, all that it is given to express, in all languages" (81). Everything that can be expressed linguistically (in languages employing the same alphabet) is present in the Library. The story centers on the opposition between the fact that there is no truth graspable in alphabet-based language that would not be recorded somewhere by some combination of letters, and the fact that in the vastness of permutations, it is astronomically unlikely to find anything remotely readable, let alone helpful.

The difficulties staged in this narrative are not, however, reducible to problems of what we now call Big Data, of archives that are difficult to manage because of their size. If you have a *self-contained* totality of knowledge at hand, it becomes nearly impossible not only to isolate the information you require, but also to know *what* you require. Should you happen across a book that strings together words and sentences in a reasonable manner, you would be unable to judge the truth-value of the resulting text, as your only reference points would be other, equally uncertain texts. In "The Total Library," an essay that revisits the concept, Borges underlines not only the Library's dimensions, but also its contradictory nature. He writes that its "vertical wildernesses of books run the incessant risk of changing into others that affirm, deny, and confuse everything like a delirious god" (216). Whereas in the case of Funes, the store of knowledge does not allow for recombination, and in the case of the Library, knowledge has exhausted recombination, in both cases the radical inclusiveness of knowledge confines it and prevents it from exerting the least fragment of its power.

I propose to describe the problem illustrated in "Funes the Memorious" and "The Library of Babel" as the paradoxical notion that total meaning is meaningless. If in creating systems of meaning, our aim is to have these systems inform each other, so that a system can both be modified and produce effects outside itself—if, in other words, *by relevance we mean an interaction*—then total meaning, which is self-contained, is irrelevant. Meaning's totalization, for all its chaotic excess, also brings about the inertia of a uniformity lacking differentiation. It neither preserves nor diversifies meaning, but *solidifies* it into a state no longer open to interaction. Yet the idea of total meaning would hardly have the fascination it does in Borges's tales if it immediately led to such stalemates, and this is where I part ways with Novillo-Corvalán.

Pointing out that the writing of both Joyce and Borges "is centred neither in total recollection nor in absolute oblivion," Novillo-Corvalán ventures that their aim is "to achieve a higher synthesis" (83). This I subscribe to, but I cannot agree that the solution consists in "ordinary memory" (89) as rendered in Joyce's Bloom or the first-person narrator of "Funes the Memorious." Here, Novillo-Corvalán is too quick to posit Borges and Joyce "as the leading parodists of the twentieth century" (79) and to infer from this status that they can only be mocking the uselessness of any totalizing impulse. As far as Borges is concerned, she thus

comes close to a popular image that presents him as a producer of tongue-in-cheek parables such as the story of Pierre Menard rewriting *Don Quixote*. But we should keep in mind that an overwhelming number of his stories are quite serious, their common denominators being madness and pain.

The realm or object through which magical knowledge can be achieved in Borges's tales (the Library, the Circular Ruins, the Zahir, the Book of Sand, one's own or somebody else's memories) often possesses potent attractiveness, launching his characters on feverish and self-destructive quests. Funes and the librarians of Babel are no exceptions. The former can hardly find refuge from his own thoughts in sleep, and his attempts to catch up with his mnemonic gift have him devise absurd mental catalogues; the latter's desperate hunt for the ultimate book drives them to destruction and murder. I do not think that after a confrontation with these dangerous manifestations of desire, the focus can simply be shifted back to the reliability of average levels of knowledge. What prevails in Borges is not total knowledge, *nor the renunciation of the attempt at obtaining it*, but rather the violent struggle that results from the gap between the self-defeating nature of total knowledge and its powerful lure: a struggle that leads to the unsettlingly driven nature of many of his stories.

Perhaps the most impressive example in Borges's writing of this exegetical frenzy is the case in which a character convinces himself that he *does* possess knowledge that is total and that gives him omnipotence. This is the case of the prisoner in "The God's Script" (also translated as "The Writing of the God"). Having been thrown in a dungeon by the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado, the Maya priest Tzinacán convinces himself that the answer to his suffering lies in the jaguar he can see in the adjoining cell. He imagines the truth of all truths being inscribed in the spots of the animal's fur. In an excruciatingly slow process, he endeavors to learn, and then to interpret, the pattern. The eventual revelation of reading the spots includes the following description: "I saw an exceedingly high Wheel, which was not before my eyes, nor behind me, nor to the sides, but every place at one time. That Wheel was made of water, but also of fire, and it was (although the edge could be seen) infinite" (206). We can read this as an account of genuine enlightenment. But a more interesting and unnerving reading is one that conceives of the prisoner's triumph as delusional. The invocation of a vision in which all opposites coincide illustrates the frightful attraction of total meaning. On the one hand, such a totality no longer has an outside from which it could be found wrong or incomplete. On the other hand, by abolishing all difference, the vision becomes caught up in problems of scope, relation, decidability, and so on, and effectively becomes a meaningless delirium. The boundless expansion of knowledge coincides with the limitations of solidified meaning.

At such moments of outlandishness, the universe of Borges's fiction reflects on our everyday problems of interpretation. We do not, in interpreting texts, deal in readings that are boundless. But we do often attempt to develop self-contained readings not pierced by knowledge gaps. We thus typically conceive of relevance as of something that opposes uncertainty. By contrast, in

such stories as "Funes the Memorious," "The Library of Babel," and "The God's Script," we catch a glimpse of concepts of interpretation and relevance that are intimately *related to uncertainty*. What Borges shows us in these and other narratives is the solipsistic trap of an interpretation that loses itself within the text, unaware of the extent to which relevance is the result of a reading's interaction with its outside context.

There is thus an important ambivalence to the tension that Borges stages between our desire for total meaning and the self-defeating nature of totality. On the one hand, the lure of the absolute may lead us to accept a solidifying totality that cannot actually bring forth the relevance it promises: the image of the Universal Wheel can mean anything at all—as long as we do not ask what it means. On the other hand, the prisoner's situation demonstrates desire's capacity to produce meaning. In his particular case, the meaning is delirious, because constructed as total. Yet where we contemplate something *we know cannot be known*, our desire—our capacity for sustained fascination with what we know cannot be known—is precisely what enables us to transcend self-contained certainty. It can turn the encounter with a lack of knowledge into a fruitful interaction.

If we now return to Joyce, we find an example of this ambivalence in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses*. At its center stands Stephen Dedalus's interpretation of *Hamlet*, which at its surface is a rather inane example of a hunt for the key that would explain the entire play. Stephen's hypothesis is that in *Hamlet*'s Queen Gertrude, the playwright depicts the unfaithfulness of his own wife, "Ann Shakespeare, born Hathaway" (*U* 9.180). What is interesting about Stephen's presentation is that when he is asked: "Do you believe your own theory?", his answer is a simple "No" (*U* 9.1065–7). I hold that this response, far from indicating a merely capricious attitude, shows Stephen (and Joyce) to be aware of the limited significance of the issue he ostensibly addresses.[3] He is less interested in pronouncing final and irrelevant wisdom about *Hamlet* than in exploring the productiveness of what is not known, of the lacunae that open up in the homogeneity of the self-evident. "Scylla and Charybdis" provides a shorthand for projects of this sort in Stephen's claim that a genius's errors, far from representing breakdowns of meaning, "are the portals of discovery" (*U* 9.229).

Stephen's performance is itself structured by a gap. Colin MacCabe draws our attention to a crucial phrase, presumably representing Stephen's mental interpolation in the midst of the discussion: "*Sufflaminandus sum*" (*U* 9.765). This, MacCabe suggests, "is perhaps best translated as 'I ought to be repressed'" (197). In MacCabe's reading, Stephen's act of repression serves to avert the risk that his comments will become self-contained knowledge. MacCabe posits: "The dream of speaking everything will lead to the paralytic fixity of psychotic collapse" (198). By contrast, "[i]t is by repressing his desire to speak a truth so final that it will freeze speaker and audience in their place that Stephen can prepare the way for a writing which will promote amicability in the multitudinous possibilities that it opens up" (199). Note that what MacCabe refers to as "freezing" corresponds to what I term solidification.

Following MacCabe's interpretation of Stephen's silence, I suggest that Stephen, who has already said much when this interpolation occurs, chooses the partial silence of repressing an addition so as to avoid the total silence of a solidification. He gives rise to a silence in which suspense and the creation of meaning continue to exist; otherwise there would be a total silence putting an end to communication. Such total silence, moreover, would not be constituted by the absence of any statement but result from the "paralytic fixity" of wanting to speak everything, from a situation in which what is lacking is not information but the possibility of interacting with it.

In view of these considerations, Stephen's interruption of his own presentation can be related to an analysis Jean-Michel Rabaté provides of silence in Joyce. Rabaté develops this interpretation with regard to silences that occur in *Dubliners*, but it is in abstracting from those examples that he states: "Silence is not a mere symptom then, it defines the vanishing point of all assertion" (68). As in MacCabe's reading of Stephen's rhetorical procedure, silence is not an absolute break with meaning. It provides the limits of an imaginary scale: one on which meanings can be placed precisely insofar as some meanings (what I call solidified meanings) once again approach the state of silence. Drawing a parallel between the total silence of not saying anything and the total silence of saying too much, Rabaté writes that in instances of semantic overload, where an excess of information capsizes into an impediment,

> the text approaches the region where a supreme silence reigns, returning to the original condition from which it emerges. The space of our reading is suspended between these two blanks, which are necessary to understand our position as subjects of a desire to read, a desire which can be that of losing oneself in the difference of the written signs. (69)

What is this difference that characterizes the productive space between the uniformity of total silences? I suggest that, essentially, the point here is not to shy away from uncertainty. What is not known is not automatically irrelevant; this is intuitive enough. What is more difficult to accept—what I have also sought to demonstrate in the examples from Borges—is that the inverse can be true: certainty can be the most irrelevant of things, insofar as relevance itself is an *interruption* of unmovable certainty and tautological consistency. We should oppose to the one "blank" of which Rabaté speaks (total absence of knowledge), not the other blank (total presence of knowledge), but a movement *in between these limits*: a movement that includes encounters with partial silences. The troubling of certainty occasioned by these encounters is the opening from which differential—relational and thus relevant—knowledge can emerge.

The question of how this knowledge is produced brings us back to the problem of specters in *Ulysses*. Rudy's ghost is also silent. He reads "*inaudibly*," and he does not answer Bloom's exclamation of his name. Rudy's apparition thus figures as a scene of reading in more than one way. He is himself a reader, but he also exemplifies that reading can be conceived as an act of addressing oneself, like

Bloom, to a ghost. In reading, we are confronted with a mark of the author (a mark we can term a spectral presence). This specter is palpable, and prompts reactions on our part, yet at the same time it will use a partial silence to protect itself against a collapse into total silence. An encounter with this specter is possible only in what Rabaté calls the space between the two blanks, a space that an imaginary horizon of total knowledge has wrenched away from the silence of not saying anything, but that the actual unobtainability of total knowledge safeguards against the silence of paralyzing speech. The important link is therefore between Rudy's silence and the author's (for instance Joyce's) manipulation of our access to information. The text, like Rudy, does not answer the questions we may have; only its silence on certain points gives rise to our questions in the first place. Instead of casting texts as specters that make themselves known by speaking to us, I therefore propose to describe texts as specters that make themselves known by provoking questions. The problem of what constitutes relevant knowledge can then be rephrased as the problem of what constitutes the right kind of question: that is to say, the right interaction with what is not known.

Let me illustrate this by considering another ghost in "Circe," that of Stephen's mother. Although, unlike Rudy, this specter does eventually speak, her first act of communication consists in "*uttering a silent word*" (*U* 15.4161). More importantly, when Stephen implores her to tell him "[t]he word known to all men" (*U* 15.4192–3), something he has been pondering all day, she does not respond to his plea. However, there are hints as to what the answer might be. In the 1984 critical edition of *Ulysses*, Hans Walter Gabler includes five lines in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode (found in Joyce's manuscripts, but not in any of the other editions) that appear to answer the question. In this emendation, Stephen thinks to himself: "Love, yes. Word known to all men" (*U* 9.429–30). In the context of examining the correlations between reading and uncertainty, it is interesting that this editorial restoration has become one of the most hotly debated features of the Gabler edition. It is even more illuminating that only part of the debate is at all concerned with problems of editing. In Richard Ellmann's contribution to the 1985 conference dedicated to Gabler's edition, we read, with regard to the exchange between Stephen and his mother: "But of course the peculiar effect of the question, which comes at the climax of Circe, itself the climax of *Ulysses*, is lost if we have been told the answer by Stephen" ("A Crux" 30). Although in a monograph predating the Gabler edition, Ellmann argues that "love" is the correct answer, here, he insists that *what matters most is the question*.[4] To resolve the question, Ellmann maintains, constitutes an anti-climax in which what is most important is lost: the question's "peculiar effect," the mystifying silence of the specter.

In the confines of the present article, I cannot retrace the analyses of Gabler's emendation that have been performed, nor will I assess his decision myself.[5] I wish to argue that if Joyce's deletion of the answer enhances the text, as Ellmann suggests, then we can rephrase this by saying that to disclose the answer solidifies meaning. Thus we can relate the problem of solidification to authorial intention.

Not only does the "love passage" provide a striking example of the link between uncertainty and interest, it also demonstrates that this link does not result from willfully obscure interpretation that introduces uncertainty where none is given in the text.

The crux of Ellmann's argument is that the movement *towards* uncertainty is Joyce's, whereas movement *away* from it is criticism's, specifically Gabler's. That is to say, the partial silence of the text, its desire-inducing challenge to interpretation, is not necessarily an obstacle between reader and author, or reader and text. On the contrary, the caution with which Joyce treats the idea of certainty suggests that when we come across a mystifying moment in a text, we should not light-heartedly replace it with knowledge. Far from lending transparency to the author's creative gesture, such a procedure risks interfering with mechanisms the author purposely put in place. When we meet with the specter of an author, we should expect doubt to be a possible outcome of the encounter.

But what is the proper way for a reader to relate to an author who causes doubt, to a specter whose presence increases rather than reduces the number of things we do not know? When it comes to doubtful ghosts, one of the most canonical ones is the ghost Stephen is talking about in "Scylla and Charybdis": the ghost of King Hamlet, Hamlet's father. In Stephen's interpretation of the play, the apparition stands for an author, namely for Shakespeare himself. "It is the ghost, the king, a king and 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" (*U* 9.165–8).

Moreover, Joyce includes an allusion to the problem to which I briefly referred at the beginning of this article: Hamlet considered as part of the audience of *Hamlet*. To this effect, Joyce has one of the minor characters quote a prose poem in which Mallarmé describes Hamlet as "*reading the book of himself*" (*U* 9.115). Hamlet's confrontation with his father's ghost thus becomes yet another scene of a reader (Hamlet) addressing a writer (Shakespeare). It parallels the ghostly scene of reading we find in Bloom's encounter with the specter of Rudy, but it distributes the roles of reader and writer differently within the father-son relationship. The unsettled Bloom is looking for answers (an endeavor that puts him in the role of reader) from the ghost of his child, who puzzles the questioner by not responding. In *Hamlet*, by contrast, it is the son and heir who acts as reader and who is confronted by the father's ghost, an uncertain apparition in its own way: "Thou com'st in such a questionable shape" (*Ham*. 1.4.43).

At first, this interference of metaphors appears to raise the question of who exactly is father and who is son in the relationship between reader and author. Such clear-cut identification, however, cannot express how knowledge, authority, and origin are negotiated in the scene of reading—let alone resolve the gender issues involved. And Stephen could be said to argue as much, for his theory on *Hamlet* holds that "Paternity may be a legal fiction" (*U* 9.844). Stephen is contrasting paternity, which he portrays as radically hypothetical, to what he sees as the unproblematic nature of maternity. He posits that the seemingly straightforward

connection between fathering and paternal authority may be a cultural institution that pretends to derive, from a notion of origin, an authority that would be more truthfully described as that notion's *cause*. The specter of the author, I will now argue, resembles paternity as Stephen describes it, in that this specter, too, is characterized by both authority and inauthenticity.

Here, we can again turn to Borges, whose short story "Shakespeare's Memory" features the playwright's specter in a different, absolutely authentic form: his actual memories. Note that Borges's interest in Shakespeare's ghost is informed by Joyce's fictional debate on *Hamlet*. Given how frequently Borges associates books with labyrinths, it is possible that he was intrigued by Joyce's decision to place Stephen Dedalus (namesake of the builder of the Minotaur's labyrinth) in the National Library of Ireland, there to expound on the labyrinthine riddle of Shakespeare. There is ample evidence that "Scylla and Charybdis" was Borges's preferred section of *Ulysses*. Novillo-Corvalán documents what she refers to as "Borges's predilection for 'Scylla'" (154). With regard to another text by Borges about Shakespeare, "Everything and Nothing," Thomas Jackson Rice demonstrates that "[t]he Shakespeare of Borges' parable resembles Stephen Dedalus' construction in 'Scylla and Charybdis' in many respects" (61 n.63), noting similar treatment of Shakespeare's sexuality, his assumption of different identities, and his unromantic retirement.

Also like Joyce, Borges is interested in how Shakespeare's works are haunted by their author in a manner that raises questions about the process of reading itself. The narrator of "Shakespeare's Memory," a twentieth-century scholar, comes into possession of the Bard's memories. He soon finds, however, that this supernatural occurrence does not allow him to comprehend the playwright's work in the manner he imagined: "Chance, or fate, dealt Shakespeare those trivial terrible things that all men know; it was his gift to be able to transmute them into fables, into characters that were much more alive than the gray man who dreamed them, into verses which will never be abandoned, into verbal music" (129). The raw material of Shakespeare's knowledge—the banality of what "all men" already know, as with Joyce's "word known to all men"—is not a key to his artistic achievement. Instead, the narrator fears for his sanity, as Shakespeare's identity threatens to replace his own. "Shakespeare's Memory" is almost unique among Borges's narratives in that the main character eventually decides the magical knowledge is not worth the nightmarish dimension attached to it.

Borges insists on the unexpected triteness of the gift of Shakespeare's memory. The story suggests that this remainder, though absolutely authentic, also lacks authority: the reduction of interpretation to the knowledge of Shakespeare (or Borges, or Joyce) solidifies readings into private trivialities. The near proverbial mark of Shakespeare's genius—that each generation discovers its own Shakespeare, so that, as Borges puts it, the plays have a life that exceeds their maker's—illustrates that to fetishize a work's original context can profoundly miss the point of how a text achieves lasting relevance.[6] Such relevance results from readings that renew the work's existence. Of course, neither original context nor

any other information reaches us in the supernatural manner Borges considers; it is mediated, for instance through texts. In a fantastical manner, "Shakespeare's Memory" illustrates that the attempt to "become" the author and to remove all doubt neglects one crucial aspect of interpretation: the hermeneutical value of *interaction*. In the case that Borges allows himself to imagine, the elimination of one of the interacting perspectives leads not to insight, but to the destruction of identity. In lesser cases, such elimination will lead to solidified meaning that falls short of the work's scope because it no longer raises any questions.

If the reader is to renew the presence, relevance, and authority of the work by addressing questions to it, then clearly this interrogation must not consist in uninhibited invention either. There must be a stabilizing element that assures the identity of the work as well; the reader must not entirely shape the conversation. This co-dependence of interpreter and interpreted is examined by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* in a manner that lends itself to my argument about ghosts and their uncertainty. Likewise referring to the ghost of Hamlet's father, and to Marcellus's exclamation: "Thou art a scholar—speak to it, Horatio" (*Ham.* 1.1.41), Derrida writes: "He does not ask him merely to speak to the ghost, but to call it, interpellate it, interrogate it, more precisely, to question the Thing that it still is: 'Question it Horatio'" (12–3). In making this demand, Marcellus casts the scholar in the role of him who, as Derrida puts it, "would know how to address himself to spirits" (13). This is precisely the situation in which some of the texts and passages discussed above imagine the reader. Faced with a silent ghost, the reader must get an interaction underway, even if there will be no response: "It would be spoke to" (*Ham.* 1.1.44), and yet "'Tis gone and will not answer" (*Ham.* 1.1.51).

This task places us in the realm of *hauntology*, which combines ontology with haunting, thus signaling that to engage with the past is always to address oneself to a ghost. The past is summoned as a spectral presence: neither present nor absent, but something that makes itself known although it is no longer an actuality there to answer you. Derrida calls this an inheritance or legacy, and he specifies that, as it is no longer a given, it must be constructed. In order to inherit,

> *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause—natural or genetic. (18)

A secret, by contrast, produces a doubt or desire that cannot be resolved into one self-evident result. It gives rise to multiple possibilities between which we must actively choose. One could elaborate the position of these terms in Derrida's system, relating inheritance to what his earlier texts call iterability and the secret to what they call the trace.

My purpose here is different: Derrida's approach helps us understand that the partial uncertainty needed to ward off total irrelevance is an aspect of the other we can interact with, but not fathom. I contend that we cannot fathom it

because the other we thus address is a specter whose summoning encompasses decisions that *we* must make (filtering, interpreting, etc.). If partial silences are how we overcome the meaninglessness of a solid presence, the thing to realize is that their delineation takes place both in an author's always less than perfect message *and* in a reader's response to that message. In speaking to the specter, we will not receive an answer fully or purely from the other, and therefore, we will not fully comprehend the other on the basis of this answer. Total comprehension is a delusion, a solidification *interrupting* bilateral exchange and inheritance itself.

Still, the encounter with a specter is a genuine interaction. There is room in it for surprise, even revelation. By engaging in the activity of inheriting, we will come to realize there are questions we can and cannot ask a specter if we wish to establish and respect it as a coherent presence. Our task, therefore, is to show respect by finding questions that salvage the negotiation with the author's ghost both from banality and from arbitrariness. Yet it would be a mistake to imagine that the right questions are identifiable as those to which the text, or its avant-textes and paratexts, contain the answer. The textual record is how the absent author is brought before us, and it is precisely because this record appears in the absence of the person who formed it that it cannot itself react or respond. This is how Derrida applies the notion of the secret to interpretation. The secret is what a text cannot be made to reveal simply because a text has nothing to reveal. A text raises more questions than it answers; for all its creation of meaning, it will not actively change in order to accommodate our investigation. As J. Hillis Miller puts it in his commentary on Derrida's *Given Time*, specifically with regard to the literary text: "The reader cannot go behind it, or beneath it, or before and after it. Literature keeps its secret, but on the surface" (310). And he adds, in a register strikingly similar to what I have so far argued independently of reference to Derrida: "a work of literature, when we demand that it answer our questions, says, 'I would prefer not to'" (310).

What changes is our perspective, due to new insights, adjustments of methodology, and shifting contexts. This allows for effects of parallax (apparent motion of the object caused by actual motion of the observer), which are what keep texts from constituting instant solidifications with no interactive potential. If a conversation ensues, it will be a conversation among readers.[7] Spectrality shows us that such a conversation must occur through questions addressed to the author's silent specter, not because there will be an answer, but because it is necessary for the exchange to remain relevant to the text. This is a creative task, for which there are limits, but no formula. Its limits are prescribed by an interaction of questions and specters that reciprocally construe each other, not by a unilateral imperative. Thus, the hermeneutical productiveness of what we do not know—not what we remain ignorant of through our own fault, but rather what in a given situation *is not known*—lies in an opening that allows for an ongoing and collaborative investigation.

Regarding *Ulysses*, Derrida makes a similar suggestion. In "Ulysses Gramophone," he states that the book's "filiation machine—legitimate or illegitimate—is

functioning well, is ready for anything, to domesticate, to circumscribe or circumvent everything" (70), yet he also maintains that Joyce's "omnipotence remains a phantasm" (69). Joyce's linguistic performance is so all-encompassing that it threatens to re-incorporate our every interpretative move; what actually happens, however, is that *Ulysses* pushes us to keep asking questions. The sense that it anticipates these questions results from its complicating the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate inheritances. As with Stephen's radical skepticism regarding paternity, this complication problematizes the distinction, it does not abolish or disregard it. In other words, legality/legitimacy is revealed to be constructed, negotiated, spectral. Textual omnipotence could never be the result of a positive magnitude (which can always be exceeded). Such omnipotence results from strategically placed openings that have the potential to return even adventurous readings to a dialogue with a specter.

Yet for all this potential, *Ulysses* is hardly an example of boundless relativism. A specter does not manifest itself as a simple given, nor is it an equally unproblematic blank screen on which anything could appear. Parallax effects, which can let unpredictable shapes emerge, combined with the coherent construction of the specter's identity, mean that the specter presents itself as a *liminal object*: singular, yet eluding our grasp. To engage with such a specter requires our ability to think outside the automatisms of a scene of reading that might as well happen in our absence. In asking questions, we construe as well as address the specter. We thus give rise to an encounter whose possibility entirely depends on our desire, but whose outcome potentially transports us outside the limitations of our subjective position. Therefore, the first conclusion I propose is that in reading, our desire for what we do not know complicates the dividing line between the possible, obtainable, given, and the impossible, unobtainable, absent.

Secondly, I want to propose that this troubling of divisions is not imposed on Joyce and Borges through a retrofitting of theory. Their writings problematize totality, spectrality, and the unknown in ways we should take seriously, both in theoretical discussions touching on either of these authors, and in interpretations of their work more generally. The affinity with the Derridean project has often been remarked upon regarding Joyce's work, most recently in *Derrida and Joyce*. In their introduction, editors Mitchell and Slote argue that both Derrida and Joyce are engaged in "a relentless pursuit for the limits of any and all such efforts at totalization (appropriation, establishment, comprehension)" (2). As I hope to have demonstrated, this line of argument can be extended to include Borges. Both Borges and Joyce make it clear that certitude is a mirage we hunt at our own peril. What is more—though it has received insufficient attention—both sound this warning with a distinctly *longing* note. Their works are never far from dreams of totality. Their portrayal of readers and other investigators dramatizes how our insight into the inevitability of exegetical failure does not protect us from investment in exegesis, including emotional investment. Thus, Joyce and Borges stage an interpretative relevance of *affect* that critical theory has only very recently begun to consider. As readers—like the librarians of Babel, like

Alvarado's prisoner, like Stephen, like Bloom—we keep asking questions to which there are no answers.

What, then, does the ghost of Rudy represent? Why is he reading? And why won't he respond when his father calls him by name? *Ulysses* does not answer these questions; yet when we contemplate them, patterns of meaning emerge that would not make themselves known otherwise. One of these patterns is that Rudy's ghost takes on the function of a *mise en abyme* of just this process. Rudy's specter—silent, consoling, mocking, serene—can be seen to stand both for the lack of the hoped-for answer and for the emotional investment that takes us beyond this lack.

By looking at these aspects simultaneously, we can see the apparition of Rudy as an image for the productiveness of desire. At stake in the scene of reading is nothing less than this productiveness of not knowing. The depictions of this scene in both Joyce and Borges show us that knowledge and its absence are more inter-dependent than we may sometimes assume. Productiveness lies in the fluidity of the border separating them.

Notes

1. On the merging of realistic, thematic, and formal effects in "Circe" see Attridge.

2. The word count for *Ulysses* is usually given at around 265,000; it is difficult to say from where Borges derives the number 400,000 (he is unlikely to be referring to a Spanish edition, as the first complete Spanish translation of *Ulysses*, by Salas Subirat, was not published until 1945, whereas Borges's "Fragment" dates to 1941).

3. I agree with Uhlmann, who writes that whereas the predominant attitude in Joyce studies is to "discount [Stephen's] theory as intellectual pyrotechnics with no real content" (74), the chapter's Homeric framework requires us to be attentive to how "Stephen's thoughts vacillate between sense and nonsense, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of each position, in negotiating his way between Scylla and Charybdis" (76).

4. "The word known to all men which Stephen had vainly asked his mother is now revealed, though not named. It is love" (Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* 147).

5. For a summary of the key positions, see Finneran.

6. In "The Enigma of Shakespeare," Borges states that "a book of genius is a book that can be read in a slightly or very different way by each generation" (473).

7. This, perhaps, is one of the implications of the moment in "Circe" when Shakespeare's features appear as the mirror image of Bloom and Stephen combined: "*Stephen and Bloom gaze in the mirror. The face of William Shakespeare, beardless, appears there*" (*U* 15.3821–2). Intriguingly, when this fusion/apparition speaks, it is not in his own voice, but "*in dignified ventriloquy*" (*U* 15.3826). The notion of ventriloquism is one I draw on elsewhere (see Renggli), though not with reference to this passage, to argue that if a text never answers our questions in its own voice, acts of reading may be understood as providing the text with a ventriloquized voice.

Works Cited

Attridge, Derek. "Pararealism in 'Circe'." *Joycean Unions: Post-Millennial Essays from East to West*. Eds. R. Brandon Kershner and Tekla Mecsnóber. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013. 119–126. Print.

Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Enigma of Shakespeare." Trans. Esther Allen. *Total Library* 463–473.

———. "Everything and Nothing." Trans. James E. Irby. *Labyrinths* 284–285.

———. "A Fragment on Joyce." Trans. Esther Allen. *Total Library* 220–221.

———. "Funes the Memorious." Trans. James E. Irby. *Labyrinths* 87–95.

———. "The God's Script." Trans. L.A. Murillo. *Labyrinths* 203–207.

———. *Labyrinths*. Eds. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. London: Penguin, 2000. Print.

———. "The Library of Babel." Trans. James E. Irby. *Labyrinths* 78–86.

———. "Partial Magic in the *Quixote*." Trans. James E. Irby. *Labyrinths* 228–231.

———. "Shakespeare's Memory." *The Book of Sand and Shakespeare's Memory*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. London: Penguin, 2001. 122–131. Print.

———. "The Total Library." Trans. Eliot Weinberger. *Total Library* 214–216.

———. *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922–1986*. Ed. Eliot Weinberger. London: Penguin, 2001. Print.

Conley, Tim. *Joyces Mistakes: Problems of Intention, Irony, and Interpretation*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

———. "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce." Trans. François Raffoul. *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote. Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2013. 41–86. Print.

Ellmann, Maud. "The Ghosts of *Ulysses*." *James Joyce's* Ulysses*: A Casebook*. Ed. Derek Attridge. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 83–101. Print.

Ellmann, Richard. "A Crux in the New Edition." *Assessing the 1984 Ulysses*. Eds. C. George Sandulescu and Clive Hart. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986. 28–34. Print.

———. *Ulysses on the Liffey*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972. Print.

Finneran, Richard J. "'That Word Known to All Men' in *Ulysses*: A Reconsideration." *James Joyce Quarterly* 33.4 (Summer 1996): 569–82. Print.

Gifford, Don, and Robert J. Seidman. *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2008. Print.

Joyce, James. *Finnegans Wake*. Eds. Robbert-Jan Henkes, Erik Bindervoet, and Finn Fordham. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.

———. *Ulysses*. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler. London: The Bodley Head, 2008. Print.

MacCabe, Colin. *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. Second Edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Print.

Miller, J. Hillis. *Topographies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1995. Print.

Mitchell, Andrew J., and Sam Slote. "Derrida and Joyce: On Totality and Equivocation." *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote. Albany: State U of New York P, 2013. 1–16. Print.

Novillo-Corvalán, Patricia. *Borges and Joyce: An Infinite Conversation*. London: Maney, 2011. Print.

Rabaté, Jean-Michel. "Silence in *Dubliners*." *James Joyce: New Perspectives*. Ed. Colin MacCabe. Sussex: Harvester, 1982. 45–72. Print.

Renggli, Gabriel. "A Wakean Whodunit: Death and Authority in *Finnegans Wake*." *Joyce Studies Annual* (2014): 3–24. Print.

Rice, Thomas J. "Subtle Reflections of/upon Joyce in/by Borges." *Journal of Modern Literature* 24.1 (Fall 2000): 47–62. Print.

Salgado, César Augusto. "*Barroco* Joyce: Jorge Luis Borges's and José Lezama Lima's antagonistic readings." *Transcultural Joyce*. Ed. Karen R. Lawrence. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 63–93. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006. Print.

Spurr, David. *Joyce and the Scene of Modernity*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2002. Print.

Uhlmann, Anthony. *Thinking in Literature: Joyce, Woolf, Nabokov*. New York: Continuum, 2011. Print.