

The Spectre of Joyce's 'Inartistic' Portraits of the Artist

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inartistic portraits of himself. . . (*FW* 182.13-19)

I have elsewhere commented on the proliferation of ghosts in James Joyce's fiction¹ and on the fictional artists that recurrently crowd the writer's works.² It is my intention, on this occasion, to propose a description of the Joycean fictional artist as a ghostly figure. Consequently, I intend to demonstrate, first, that James Joyce conceives his fictional characters' artistic identities in ghostly terms; and, second, that given this ghostly conception of the artistic identity, we cannot or should not speak, as criticism has traditionally done, of an alleged "identity" of the artist in terms of traditional notions related to this figure, such as "creative spirit," "prophet," "romantic hero," "divided self," "visionary," "marked man," etc. Finally, I shall revise briefly how these Joycean fictional artists have haunted and keep on haunting other twentieth-century writers in English—writers such as Dylan Thomas (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, 1940), John Barth (*Lost in the Funhouse*, 1968), Philip Roth (*The Ghost Writer*, 1979) or, more recently, Joseph Heller (*Portrait of an Artist as an Old Man*, 2000). We shall see, first, that these writers conceive their fictional characters' artistic identities in ghostly terms, just as Joyce had done in his portraits of the artist; and, second, that given this ghostly conception of the artistic identity, we cannot or should not speak of direct, objective, demonstrable literary influences—even though these can also be easily appreciated—but rather of a haunting process or, to put it another way, of the spectral effect of the Joycean fictional artist (whose artistic identity is

paradoxically questioned) that obsesses and keeps on reappearing in the texts of other writers—since, as Derrida has acknowledged, “everyone reads, acts, writes with *his* or *her* ghosts”.³

The assumed singularity of the artist’s identity and the sources of his/her creativity have traditionally appealed to specialists—philosophers, psychoanalysts—and ordinary human beings alike. Sigmund Freud, in his work “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (1907), has pointed out the interest that human beings have always had in the figure of the artist—he refers in particular to the creative writer—and explained that our curiosity is increased when we discover that the artist cannot provide us with a satisfactory explanation with regards to his/her condition as such:

We laymen have always been intensely curious to know . . . from what sources that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable. Our interest is only heightened the more by the fact that, if we ask him, the writer himself gives us no explanation, or none that is satisfactory.⁴

Freud has also acknowledged the creative writer’s recurrent attempt at lessening the distance that would separate him/her from commonplace human beings: “After all, creative writers themselves like to lessen the distance between their kind and the common run of humanity; they so often assure us that every man is a poet at heart and that the last poet will not perish till the last man does”.⁵ Despite this seemingly unavoidable difficulty of singling out the figure of the artist (in this case, of the creative writer), readers and critics keep on setting them apart. And those critics who have studied the artist as a character in fiction seem to have been projecting their desires and illusions onto their accounts of the character of the artist, and they have thus mainly offered different classifications of the artist figure and its portrayal. Therefore, they have spoken about Ivory Towers vs. Sacred Founts (Maurice Beebe), Byronic vs. Wordsworthian artists (Lee T. Lemon), Romantic vs. Modernist creators (Weldon Thornton), Modernist vs. Postmodernist artificers (Carl D. Malmgrem), etc.⁶ In my opinion, these proposals offer a restrictive and partial explanation of a literary figure that is very difficult to define and, consequently, almost impossible to encapsulate with a predetermined label. And what is more important, the authors who have provided those portraits of the artist seem to have been more aware of the difficulties of delimiting their subject than the critics that have later on attempted to interpret them.⁷ This is especially the case in twentieth-century

fiction—where we find early enigmatic portraits of the artist in works by Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Marcel Proust, André Gide, Thomas Mann, etc.

I. Joyce's "Ghostly" Artist: "writing the mystery of himself in furniture?"

James Joyce's artists can be considered as clear and representative examples of the difficulties of dealing with, not to mention portraying, the artist's identity. We find in *Dubliners* a series of characters that can be interpreted as either "aspiring" or "frustrated" artists. We can relate figures such as the boys in the first three stories ("The Sisters," "Araby" and "An Encounter"), Little Chandler, the protagonist of "A Little Cloud," Mr. James Duffy in "A Painful Case" or Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead," to the figure of the artist. This is due to the fact that they are attracted to language, or because of their introspective stance, the reflexive attitude that they adopt and that leads them to muse over their own condition as human beings and as artists, and their conflicting relationship with the circumstances that surround them that force them into a sort of spiritual exile. It is true that in all these cases Joyce seems to be evoking a romantic notion of the artist that is at the same time being parodied by the author, as in "A Little Cloud":

Could he write something original? He was not sure what idea he wished to express but the thought that a poetic moment had touched him took life within him like an infant hope. . . . He tried to weigh his soul to see if it was a poet's soul. Melancholy was the dominant note of his temperament, he thought, but it was a melancholy tempered by the recurrences of faith and resignation and simple joy. If he could give expression to it in a book of poems perhaps men would listen.⁸

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is traditionally considered to be Joyce's paradigmatic portrait of the artist. In this work, as well as in those which preceded it and which served Joyce to formulate and reformulate his own notion of the sources of artistic vocation ("A Portrait of the Artist" and *Stephen Hero*), Joyce exposes the complexities and ambiguities of his young aspiring artist Stephen Dedalus. This complex and ambiguous portrait has provoked a critical debate that has traditionally separated those critics who defend Stephen's portrayal as a future successful artist (Scholes, Mitchell) from others who have read the character of Stephen as that of an uncertain, dubitative young man of

whose artistry we cannot be sure at the end of the *Portrait* (Kenner, Harkness).⁹ Phillip F. Herring has asserted that the topic of the novel is “aspiration, *not* its fulfilment.” (172)¹⁰

In *A Portrait* we certainly detect Stephen’s special concern with and sensitivity towards language and the power that words hold, a language that, as Katie Wales acknowledges, Stephen “both struggles to make sense of . . . and yet playfully manipulates”.¹¹ In this sense, Stephen attempts, first, to understand the meaning of words; second, he establishes relationships between words and his own experiences; and finally, he learns to manipulate language. On the other hand, the reader witnesses throughout the novel the portrait of a dubitative young man who adopts several traditions and identities only to finally discard them. The entries in the diary that appear at the very end are not terribly positive with regard to the young man’s future as an artist:

25 March, morning: A troubled night of dreams. Want to get them off my chest.

A long curving gallery. From the floor ascend pillars of dark vapours. It is peopled by the images of fabulous kings, set in stone. Their hands are folded upon their knees in token of weariness and their eyes are darkened for the errors of men go up before them for ever as dark vapours. . . . They peer at me and their eyes seem to ask me something.¹²

. . . vague words for a vague emotion. (P 274)

Talked rapidly of myself and my plans. In the midst of it unluckily I made a sudden gesture of a revolutionary nature. I must have looked like a fellow throwing a handful of peas into the air. (P 275)

Even if we focus on the artistic value of the only creative composition that he has been able to produce, the “Villanelle,” we must acknowledge that it has been the object of much critical debate.¹³

In *Ulysses* we find again the Stephen Dedalus that finished *A Portrait* planning to “forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race” (P 275-76). Stephen himself remembers at the beginning of *Ulysses* his artistic aims:

Books you were going to write with letters for titles. Have you read his F? O yes, but I prefer Q. Yes, but W is wonderful. O yes, W. Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves,

deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria?¹⁴

We are given surprisingly little information about Stephen's commitment to art and literature throughout *Ulysses*. In "Proteus" we find him composing a poem after seeing a girl at the seaside:

He comes pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails
bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss. . . . Paper. The
banknotes, blast them. Old Deasey's letter. Here. Thanking you
for hospitality tear the blank end off. Turning his back to the
sun he bent over far to a table of rock and scribbled words. (*U*
47-48)

Four chapters later, the poem that Stephen has created reappears:

*On swift sail flaming
From storm and south
He comes, pale vampire,
Mouth to my mouth. (U 127)*

The problem is that, as Hugh Kenner has demonstrated, this poem is a mere variation of a stanza of Douglas Hyde's *Love Songs of Connacht*.¹⁵

Despite his occasional publishing of articles for the literary magazine *Dana*,¹⁶ Stephen is not seriously taken into consideration by the literary world of Dublin. This is most clearly seen when he is not invited to the literary meeting that George Moore is going to celebrate at his home the afternoon in which the events of the novel take place:

—They say we are to have a literary surprise, the quaker librarian said, friendly and earnest. Mr Russell, rumour has it, is gathering together a sheaf of our younger poets' verses. We are all looking forward anxiously. . . .

Young Colum and Starkey. George Roberts is doing the commercial part. Longworth will give it a good puff in the Express. O, will he? I liked Colum's Drover. Yes, I think he has that queer thing, genius. Do you think he has genius really? Yeats admired his line: *As in wild earth a Grecian vase*. Did he? I hope you'll be able to come tonight. Malachi Mulligan is coming too. Moore asked him to bring Haines. Did you hear Miss Mitchell's joke about Moore and Martyn? (*U* 184-185)

Stephen's resentment is obvious in the text, and this seems to be especially cruel after the young man's exposition of his theory on Shakespeare at the Library: "See this. Remember" (*U* 184).

Notwithstanding all the above-mentioned problems, there are some voices in *Ulysses* that still believe in Stephen's future as an artist. This is the case of Haines, who confesses to Mulligan that he wouldn't be surprised if Stephen published something of value: "I shouldn't wonder if he did after all" (*U* 239); or Vincent Lynch, who in a burlesque tone affirms that Stephen's literary success is enthusiastically awaited by his friends:

I, Bous Stephanoumenos, bullockbefriending bard, am lord and giver of their life. He encircled his gadding hair with a coronal of vineleaves, smiling at Vincent. That answer and those leaves, Vincent said to him, will adorn you more fitly when something more, and greatly more, than a capful of light odes can call your genius father. All who wish you well hope this for you. All desire to see you bring forth the work you meditate. I heartily wish you may not fail them. O no, Vincent, Lenehan said, laying a hand on the shoulder near him, have no fear. He could not leave his mother an orphan. (*U* 394-395)

Stephen Dedalus, to put it short, could be considered as what James H. Maddox has defined as a "hyper-literary mind": "Stephen's weakness is not that he is bookish but that he is so *exclusively* bookish. His mind contains the intellectual categories but not the experience itself".¹⁷

There is another portrait of an "aspiring artist" in Joyce's *Ulysses*: that of Leopold Bloom.¹⁸ Like Stephen, Bloom also has literary aspirations that lead him to envy Mr Philip Beaufoy, who has just published a story that has been awarded a prize: "He envied kindly Mr Beaufoy who had written it and received payment of three pounds thirteen and six" (*U* 67). And he even considers it possible for him to write something similar: "Might manage a sketch. By Mr and Mrs. L. M. Bloom. Invent a story for some proverb which? Time I used to try jotting down on my cuff what she said dressing" (*U* 67). In "Nausicaa" Bloom imagines a story written by him on the mysterious man that he sees on the beach: "*The Mystery Man on the Beach*, prize titbit story by Mr Leopold Bloom. Payment at the rate of one guinea per column" (*U* 358). And in "Circe", in one of his own fantasies, when a soldier asks Bloom about his profession, he answers that he is a journalist that has recently published a book of short stories:

Well, I follow a literary occupation. Author-journalist. In fact we are just bringing out a collection of prize stories of which I am the inventor, something that is an entirely new departure. I am connected with the British and the Irish press. If you ring up. . . . (U 434)

Bloom also provides the reader with his own poetic reflections: “Poetical idea pink, then golden, then grey, then black. Still true to life also. Day, then the night” (U 67); or his theories on the process of poetic composition:

*The hungry famished gull.
Flaps o'er the waters dull.*

That is how poets write, the similar sounds. But then Shakespeare has no rhymes: blank verse. The flow of the language it is. The thoughts. Solemn.

*Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit
Doomed for a certain time to walk the earth.* (U 146)

In addition, there are other characters who also acknowledge an artistic vein in Bloom's character: this is the case of Lenihan, who asserts: “—He's a cultured allroundman, Bloom is, he said seriously. He's not one of your common or garden . . . you know. . . . There's a touch of the artist about old Bloom” (U 225).

In fact, when Bloom was only 11 years old, he composed his first poem, whose last lines are offered to the reader:

What lines concluded his first piece of original verse written by him, potential poet, at the age of 11 in 1877 on the occasion of the offering of three prizes of 10/-, 5/- and 2/6 respectively by the *Shamrock*, a weakly newspaper?

*An ambition to squint
At my verses in print
Makes me hope that for these you'll find room
If you so condescend
Then please place at the end
The name of yours truly, L. Bloom.* (U 630)

And he created an acrostic to seduce his wife:

What acrostic upon the abbreviation of his first name had he (kinetic poet) sent to Miss Marion Tweedy on the 14 February 1888?

Poets oft have sung in rhyme

*Of music sweet their praise divine.
Let them hymn it nine times nine.
Dearer far than song or wine.
You are mine. The world is mine. (U 631)*

Some critics have gone as far as to consider that the chapter known as “Eumaeus” could have been composed by Bloom himself.¹⁹ This idea can be grounded on the fact that Bloom mentions this very same possibility: “Suppose he were to pen something out of the common groove (as he fully intended doing) at the rate of one guinea per column. *My Experiences*, let us say, *in a Cabman’s Shelter*” (U 601). We should also take into account the narrative style of the chapter, described, for instance, as a “stylistic disaster”,²⁰ as “pretentious, verbose, and clichéd”,²¹ and as “[the] spirit of ordinary life”,²² descriptions that would answer quite well to Bloom’s own peculiarities of expression.

Shem the “penman” is the literary figure in *Finnegans Wake*, another portrait of the artist²³—partially blind, a great drinker, introverted, irreverent, bohemian, mysterious, and as is always the case with Joyce’s artists, a failure. His portrait is most clearly appreciated when in contrast to his twin brother, Shaun, “the postman”—extroverted, partially deaf, dogmatic, conservative, communicative, hypocritical, but a successful man.

The seventh chapter of the first book is where we find Shem’s portrait (“Shem is as short for Shemus as Jem is joky for Jacob” [*FW* 169.01]), and where his condition as a man of letters obsessed with language is emphasized:

Putting truth and untruth together a shot may be made at what this hybrid actually was like to look at.

Shem’s bodily getup, it seems, included an adze of a skull, an eight of a larkseye, the whoel of a nose, one numb arm up a sleeve, fortytwo hairs off his uncrown, eighteen to his mock lip, a trio of barbells from his megageg chin (sowman’s son), the wrong shoulder higher than the right, all ears, an artificial tongue with a natural curl, not a foot to stand on, a handful of thumbs, a blind stomach, a deaf heart, a loose liver, two fifths of two buttocks, one gleetsteen avoirdupoider for him, a manroot of all evil, a salmonkelt’s thinskin, eelsblood in his cold toes, a bladder tristended, so much so that young Master Shemmy on his very first debouch at the very dawn of protohistory seeing himself such and such, when playing with thistlewords in their garden nursery, Frefotrofio, at Phig Streat III, Shuvlin, Old Hoeland, . . . dictated to of all his little

brothron and sweestureens the fist riddle of the universe: asking, when is a man not a man?: telling them take their time. . . . All were wrong, so Shem himself, the doctator, took the cake, the correct solution being —all give it up?—; when he is a—yours till the rending of the rocks,— Sham. (*FW* 169.08-24-170.01-24)

. . . unconsciously explaining, for inkstands, with a meticulousity bordering on the insane, the various meanings of all the different foreign parts of speech he misused and cuttlefishing every lie unshrinkable about all the other people in the story, leaving out, of course, foreconsciously, the simple worf and plague and poison they had cornered him about until there was not a snoozer among them but was utterly undeceived in the heel of the reel by the recital of the rigmarole. (*FW* 173.33-36-174.01-04)

The description of Shem emphasizes his head, the part of his body that clearly characterises him. Shem's portrayal is mainly negative: his low origins (*FW* 169.01-08) as well as his vulgarity when eating and drinking (*FW* 170.25-174.21) are emphasized. Such points could be explained if we consider that this portrait is provided by his antagonist, his brother Shaun.²⁴

We find many negative references to Shem's condition as artist, and neither are the references to his works exactly positive: "his Ballade Imaginaire which was to be dubbed *Wine, Woman and Waterclocks*, or *How a Guy Finks and Fawkes When He Is Going Batty*, by Mister Sheames de la Plume, some most dreadful stuff in a murderous mirrorhand" (*FW* 177.26-30), or "his usylessly unreadable Blue Book of Eccles, *edition de ténèbres*" (*FW* 179.26-27)—a clear allusion to *Ulysses*. His work is summarised and described as "rancid Shem stuff" (*FW* 182.17) and "obscene matter" (*FW* 185.30), the product of a rebel—"Shehohem, that you will neither serve not let serve, pray nor let pray?" (*FW* 188.18-19)—and a crazy man: "Sh! Shem, you are. Sh! You are mad!" (*FW* 193.27-28).

As an artist, Shem displays the concerns of a literary man: the process of characterisation and the relationships between human beings and the characters that represent them in literature; he wonders, "*Are We Fairlys Represented?*" (*FW* 176.07). His brother Shaun mentions the most important topics that preoccupy Shem the artist: ". . . he scabbled and scratched and scribbled and skrevented nameless shamlessness about everybody ever he met, . . . this rancid Shem stuff the evilsmeller . . .

used to stipple endlessly inartistic portraits of himself” (*FW* 182.13-19), “writing the mystery of himself in furniture” (*FW* 184.09-10). Consequently, Shem seems to be intent on appraising and understanding his own human condition—“haunted by a convulsionary sense of not having been or being all” (*FW* 193.35-36)—and, as Nicholas Fagnoli and Michael Gillespie have asserted, it is precisely this obsession that defines him as artist: “. . . he strives to define himself as an artist. . . . Shem in the meantime has immersed himself in a solipsistic concern with his own nature, the better to come to grips with his own creative powers”.²⁵

In *Finnegans Wake* we can even find what can be considered and interpreted as a Shemian literary theory:

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

Shem seems to be proposing a notion of language according to which reality is not something prior to language but rather created by it. Thus, Shem represents another instance of the complexities and ambiguities of the artist’s identity. Shem, according to his brother, spends his life “stippling endlessly inartistic portraits of himself,” the same as James Joyce had done, as we have seen, throughout his fiction. And what is more, the final message sent to the reader of Joyce’s fictional artists seems to be that they are artists because they have been named so: “This exists that isits after having been said we know” (*FW* 186.02-09).

As we have seen, Joyce, just like Shem, associated with the figure of the artist features such as uncertainty, insecurity and indeterminacy; and, deconstructing any predetermined essentialist conception of the artistic identity, he reduced it to language and the process of naming—we cannot know what an artist is, only that some people are named so.

II. “The Spectre of Joyce’s ‘Inartistic’ Portraits of the Artist”

The artist’s condition and identity are, thus, clearly questioned in Joyce’s fictional creators, and it can be even said that for the Irish writer this had an “uncanny” dimension—at once familiar but which he did not

know his way about.²⁶ This uncanny figure that seems to have haunted Joyce has also haunted other twentieth-century writers. And what is more, in the case of the authors I am going to mention—Dylan Thomas, John Barth, Philip Roth and Joseph Heller—we can easily appreciate that not only did they conceive the figure of the artist in similarly Joycean and “uncanny” terms but they are also haunted by Joyce and his ghostly artists. What these selected texts have in common with Joyce’s fictional artists is a more-or-less radical, but clearly progressive questioning of the alleged “identity” of the artist, which leads to a demystification of traditional notions related to this figure, such as “creative spirit,” “prophet,” “romantic hero,” “divided self,” “visionary,” “marked man,” etc. And I think that if Maurice Beebe considered that after Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, nothing significant had been said about the artist in fiction,²⁷ Dylan Thomas, John Barth, Philip Roth and Joseph Heller demonstrate that they kept on reading Joyce’s portraits of the artists in the works that followed *A Portrait*, portraits that kept on going further in the deconstruction of traditional versions of the figure of the artist.

Dylan Thomas, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*

Dylan Thomas, the well known Welsh poet, denied any influence of Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* on his own *Portrait of the Artist as Young Dog* (1940).²⁸ Despite this, any reader can easily appreciate that Thomas’s work is full of evocations of Joyce’s fictional artists.

Thomas wrote an article on modern poetry in 1929, when he was fifteen years old, in which even then he mentioned James Joyce:

The most important element that characterizes our poetical modernity is freedom—essential and unlimited—freedom of form, of structure, of imagery and of idea. . . . Assuming that no subject is an unpoetical subject, the neo-Romanticists (headed by T.S. Eliot, and, in the majority of his moments, by James Joyce) give us a succession of sordid details, their damp despondent atmosphere, and their attraction of the gutter. . . .²⁹

And he paid tribute to Joyce’s *Dubliners* when referring to his own *Portrait of the Artist*, as John Ackerman writes:

He does add, however, that ‘the shaping of some of my *Portrait* stories might owe something to Joyce’s stories in the

volume *Dubliners*. But then *Dubliners* was a pioneering work in the world of the short story, and no good storywriter since can have failed, in some way, however little, to have benefited by it'. Certainly as Joyce's *Dubliners* encapsulates a people, time and place, so does Dylan Thomas's *Portrait*, albeit in illuminated recollection, more painting than photograph. 'Swansea—city of laughter, little Dublin', said Dylan.³⁰

Despite Thomas's attempt to deny that he had Joyce's *Portrait* in mind when composing his own work, critics such as Ann Elizabeth Mayer have openly related Thomas's and Joyce's portraits of the artist:

Just as Joyce's relation to Stephen Dedalus is a complex one, so too is Thomas's relation to his fictionalised earlier self. Thomas's self-portrait, in dialogue with Joyce's, serves as an exploration of the role of the artist in relation to both art and society. By placing himself explicitly in relation to Joyce in the *Portrait*, Thomas comments on his relation to certain modernist tendencies, in terms of both similarities and differences, not just with regard to Joyce but with regard to modernism in general.³¹

Thomas's *Künstlerroman* can, in fact, be considered as a rewriting of the literary subgenre in the form of interrelated short narratives. This disruption of the traditional narrative form seems especially appropriate for the discontinuous and ghostly portrait of his artist, who is at the same time a young dog—and we should not forget Thomas's love of anagrams, which will make the reader interpret dog as "GOD" in reverse.

In any case, by means of his young artist, Thomas explores "the central themes common to the artist novel, such as the artistic temperament, the creative process, the artist's relationship to society, and the equation of art with experience".³² Mayer relates the young artist that appears in Thomas's portrait mainly to Joyce's Stephen Dedalus of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. But if we look closely at some episodes of Thomas's work, we see how the Welsh writer also had *Ulysses* in mind.

First of all, the young "aspiring" artist of Dylan Thomas's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* seems to be also reluctant to conform to any predetermined notion of what a poet is or should be:

He thought: Poets live and walk with their poems; a man with visions needs no other company; Saturday is a crude day; I must go home and sit in my bedroom by the boiler. But he was

not a poet living and walking, he was a young man in a sea town on a warm bank holiday, with two pounds to spend; he had no visions, only two pounds and a small body with its feet on the littered sand; serenity was for old men; and he moved away, over the railway points, on to the tramlined road.³³

The stories are constantly and consciously evoking a previous portrait of the artist, the Stephen Dedalus of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and of *Ulysses*:

I wrote my name, 'Reporters' Room, *Tawe News*, Tawe, South Wales, England, Europe, The Earth'. And a list of books I had not written: 'Land of My Fathers, a Study of the Welsh Character in all its aspects'; 'Eighteen, a Provincial Autobiography'; 'The Merciless Ladies, a Novel.' Still Mr Farr did not look up. I wrote 'Hamlet.' (91)

Compare this to Joyce's *A Portrait* or *Ulysses*:

He turned to the flyleaf of the geography and read what he had written there: himself, his name and where he was.

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kidare
Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe. (P 12)

Books you were going to write with letters for titles. Have you read his F? O yes, but I prefer Q. Yes, but W is wonderful. O yes, W. Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria? (U 40-41)

There are many other passages that evoke Stephen Dedalus's experiences in *A Portrait*, such as young Thomas's refusal to confess—which echoes Stephen's playing with the idea of "apologise":

'Now you confess,' said Gwilym.
'What have I got to confess?'
'The worst thing you've done.'

I let Edgar Reynolds be whipped because I had taken his homework; I stole from my mother's bag; I stole from Gwyneth's bag; I stole twelve books in three visits from the library, and threw them away in the park; I drank a cup of my water to see what it tasted like; I beat a dog with a stick so that it would roll over and lick my hand afterwards; I looked with Dan Jones through the keyhole while his maid had a bath; I cut my knee with a penknife, and put the blood on my handkerchief and said it had come out of my ears so that I could pretend I was ill and frighten my mother; I pulled my trousers down and showed Jack Williams; I saw Billy Jones beat a pigeon to death with a fire-shovel, and laughed and got sick; Cedric Williams and I broke into Mrs Samuels' house and poured ink over the bedclothes.

I said: 'I haven't done anything bad.'

'Go on, confess,' said Gwilym. He was frowning down at me.

'I can't! I can't!' I said. 'I haven't done anything bad.'

'Go on, confess!'

'I won't! I won't!' (15)

Or the reference to the young man's embarrassing feelings about his mother:

When she had gone, Dan said: 'Why is a man always ashamed of his mother?'

'Perhaps he isn't when he is older,' I said, but I doubted it. The week before I was walking down High Street with three boys after school, and I saw my mother with a Mrs Partridge outside the Kardomah. I knew she would stop me in front of the others and say, 'Now you be home early for tea,' and I wanted High Street to open and suck me down. I loved her and disowned her. 'Let's cross over,' I said, 'there's some sailors' boots in Griffith's window.' But there was only a dummy with a golf suit on, and a roll of tweed. (40-41)

It is true that there are also differences, since this young man enjoys himself as much making up stories as being in the company of friends and wondering about the female sex. His discontinuous identity as an artist is, thus, perfectly mirrored by the disrupted narrative that describes his experiences.

The aspiring artist is constantly aware of language, the sound of words, or the stories that he keeps on inventing—"A story I had made in the warm, safe island of my bed, with sleepy midnight Swansea flowing

and rolling round outside the house, came blowing down to me then with a noise on the cobbles" (4); "There, playing Indians in the evening, I was aware of me myself in the exact middle of a living story, and my body was my adventure and my name" (14). We are also informed about his literary tastes: "On my bedroom walls were pictures of Shakespeare, Walter de la Mare torn from my father's Christmas *Bookman*, Robert Browning, Stacy Aumonier, Rupert Brooke. . ." (36-37). And we even get to know that he has already published a poem in the "Wales Day by Day" column of the *Western Mail*. (37)

This young man acknowledges his gift and has, accordingly, planned a future: "The future spread out beyond the window, over Singleton Park crowded with lovers messing about, and into smoky London paved with poems." (40)

Despite this, Thomas's young artist is not as self-absorbed, and self-alienated, as Stephen Dedalus, and in fact he also takes into consideration the possibility of failure: he is aware of literary projects that he has not been able to finish, such as his "The Merciless Ladies" (92) and, in general, he thinks of all "the paragraphs I would never write" (89), and is thus able to sit "alone with the shadows of his failure at his side" (100).

It is also interesting to notice that throughout the different stories we usually see the young artist in the company of friends, girls, or colleagues. Ann Elizabeth Mayer has acknowledged that "[t]he eventual portrait that develops is of an artist who seems to reject what Dedalus aspires to, not soaring to heights above the mundane world but plunging into the ordinary life around him",³⁴ and in fact, young Thomas asserts that he is more interested—also from a literary point of view—in "the everyday man" than in the "neurotic poets of Bloomsbury" (69).

John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*

The American writer of novels and short stories John Barth (Cambridge, Maryland 1930), also a former professor of creative writing at the Johns Hopkins University, has acknowledged on different occasions his literary debts to authors such as James Joyce, William Faulkner or Jorge Luis Borges:

Having resolved somewhat quixotically to become a fiction writer, it remained for me to learn how to write fiction; that art requires more than knowing what the first quixotic moment is in *Don Quijote*. Like most of my U.S. contemporaries in the

1940s and fifties, I cut my apprentice teeth on the great Modernists, especially James Joyce and William Faulkner, though I was also deeply impressed by certain older storytellers, in particular Scheherezade. For several years I wrote bad imitations of those writers, attempting to do with tidewater Maryland what Joyce had done with Dublin and Faulkner with Mississippi. Fortunately, none of that apprentice-work was published.³⁵

The writer of these words is a fifty-eight-year-old storyteller, mainly a novelist, who—as a student in the 1940s and Fifties—cut his apprentice literary teeth on the likes of Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound: the old masters of what we now call literary High Modernism, as that last term is understood in many parts of the world.³⁶

Barth wondered how it was possible for writers of his generation not only to succeed the Modernist writers but also those who followed them:

In my essay “The Literature of Exhaustion,” I had made the remarkably fatuous assertion that for my “postmodern” literary generation the question was how to succeed “not Joyce and Kafka, but those who *succeeded* Joyce and Kafka and are now in the evenings of their own careers.” I was referring, grandly, to Nabokov, Beckett, and Borges.³⁷

I am going to refer mainly to Barth’s collection of short narratives, *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968). In the Author’s Foreword to the edition published in 1988, while describing his intention when writing the book, he immediately mentions Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*:

I decide at the outset to write not simply some short stories but a *book* of short stories: a sequence or series rather than a mere assortment. Though the several stories would more or less stand alone (and therefore be anthologizable), the series would be strung together on a few echoed and developed themes and would circle back upon itself: not to close a simple circuit like that of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, emblematic of Victorian eternal return, but to make a circuit with a twist to it.³⁸

Although most of the stories that appear in the collection deal with the figure and the identity of the artist and are self-conscious reflections on the process of literary creation, “Ambrose His Mark” and “Lost in the

Funhouse” are the stories in which the reader most clearly perceives what can be considered as Barth’s attempt at a portrait of the artist as a young man. Ambrose is a self-conscious young man (eleven years old in “Lost in the Funhouse”) who has had identity problems since his birth—his mother, who wanted to have a girl, spent a lot of time deciding on a name for her unexpected son. On the other hand, he is born with a mark—a wine stain near one of his eyes—and it is thought by his uncle to be a sign of his genius: ““That’s a sign of brains,’ he declared. ‘This boy could be our pride and saving’” (18).

Ambrose is a self-conscious young man who is clearly contrasted with his elder brother Peter, who is able to enjoy life—metonymically represented by the Funhouse that they visit with their parents—while Ambrose, unable to participate actively in life, literally gets lost in it:

Ambrose wandered, languished, dozed. Now and then he fell into his habit of rehearsing to himself the unadventurous story of his life, narrated from the third-person point of view, from his earliest memory parenthesis of maple leaves stirring in the summer breath of tidewater Maryland end of parenthesis to the present moment. Its principal events, on this telling, would appear to have been *A, B, C, and D.* (96)

In fact, as the narrator says, “[t]herefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator—though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed” (97).

The narrator also says that Ambrose is at “that awkward age” in between childhood and adulthood, sexuality and vocation, etc. And, as an acutely self-aware young man, he becomes conscious of the multiplicity of his selfhood: “You think you’re yourself, but there are other persons in you. Ambrose gets hard when Ambrose doesn’t want to, *and obversely*” (85). This stance reminds us of Stephen’s when in *Ulysses* he says, “one feels that one is at one with one who once” (*U* 41), or “My soul walks with me, form of forms” (*U* 45).

In addition, we find at least a couple of direct references to Joyce in this story:

The fragrance of the ocean came strong to the picnic ground where they always stopped for lunch, two miles inland from Ocean City. . . . The Irish author James Joyce, in his unusual novel entitled *Ulysses*, now available in this country, uses the adjectives *snot-green* and *scrotum-tightening* to describe the sea. Visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory. (74)

The town, the river, himself, were not imaginary; time roared in his ears like wind; the world was *going on!* This part ought to be dramatized. The Irish author James Joyce once wrote. Ambrose M__ is going to scream. (89)

But there are many other episodes in other stories and passages which clearly remind us of Joyce's works and characters. The twin brothers of the story entitled "Petition," who have been born fastened "front to rear—my belly to the small of his back—by a leash of flesh heartbreakingly short" (61), and who clearly need each other so as to complete their identities, remind us very much of Shem and Shaun in *Finnegans Wake*:

He's incoherent but vocal; I'm articulate and mute. He's ignorant but full of guile; I think I may call myself reasonably educated, and if ingenuous, no more so I hope than the run of scholars. My brother is gregarious: he deals with the public; earns and spends our income; tends (but slovenly) the house and grounds; makes, entertains, and loses friends; indulges in hobbies; pursues ambitions and women. For my part, I am by nature withdrawn, even solitary: an observer of life, a meditator, a taker of notes, a dreamer if you will—yet not a brooder; it's he who moods and broods, today hilarious, tomorrow despondent; I myself am stoical, detached as it were—of necessity, or I'd have long since perished of despair. More to the point, what intelligence my brother has is inclined to synthesis, mine to analysis; he denies that we are two, yet refuses to compromise and cooperate; I affirm our difference—all the difference in the world!—but have endeavoured in vain to work out with him a reasonable cohabitation. (62)

Carl D. Malmgrem has paid attention to Barth's references to Joyce, which he defines as examples of intertextuality rather than as influences or sources:

As self-reflexive text, it is free to acknowledge the texts in which it finds itself, not as influences or sources . . . but as an ineluctable seamless web of inter-textuality. The narrator of "Lost in the Funhouse" inscribes his story within a rich tradition of narrative fiction, an awareness of which serves to diminish the resources of his narrative imagination.³⁹

This unavoidable and ineluctable intertextuality leads inevitably to a sense of anxiety, to a literary cul-de-sac that the narrator of the story entitled “Title” expresses: “No turning back now, we’ve gone too far. Everything’s finished. Name eight. Story, novel, literature, art, humanism, humanity, the self itself” (107-08).

In short, the theme of most of the stories in *Lost in the Funhouse* is very well summarised in the following words of the narrator of the homonymous short story: “One reason for not writing a lost-in-the-funhouse story is that either everybody’s felt what Ambrose feels, in which case it goes without saying, or else no normal person feels such things, in which case Ambrose is a freak. ‘Is anything more tiresome, in fiction, than the problems of sensitive adolescents?’” (91-92).

In “Life Story,” the narrator finally alerts the reader to the proliferation of portraits of the artist in twentieth-century literature and advises us never to forget that they are mere artifice:

. . . self-conscious, vertiginously arch, fashionable solipsistic, unoriginal—in fact a convention of twentieth-century literature. Another story about a writer writing a story! Another regressus in infinitum! Who doesn’t prefer art that at least overtly imitates something other than its own processes? That doesn’t continually proclaim “Don’t forget I’m an artifice!”? (117)

Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer*

In Philip Roth’s *The Ghost Writer* (1979), we find another ghostly portrait of an aspiring young artist, Nathan Zuckerman, 23, who has already published four short stories and is in the process of gestation of his own *Bildungsroman*:

It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago—I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories, and like many a *Bildungsroman* hero before me, already contemplating my own massive *Bildungsroman*—when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man.⁴⁰

Nathan is in search of a “spiritual father-figure”, who he thinks could be the well-known Jewish writer E. I. Lonoff, 56, whom he is going to visit:

For I had come, you see, to submit myself for candidacy as nothing less than E. I. Lonoff's spiritual son, to petition for his moral sponsorship and to win, if I could, the magical protection of his advocacy and his love. Of course, I had a loving father of my own, whom I could ask the world of any day of the week, but my father was a foot doctor and not an artist, and lately we had been having serious trouble in the family because of a new story of mine. He was so bewildered by what I had written that he had gone running to *his* moral mentor, a certain Judge Leopold Wapter, to get the judge to get his son to see the light. As a result, after two decades of a more or less unbroken amiable conversation, we had not been speaking for nearly five weeks now, and I was off and away seeking patriarchal validation elsewhere. (9-10)

In a similar pose to that of Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait*, Nathan Zuckerman had previously chosen, though unsuccessfully, other father-figures, such as the writer Felix Abravanel (57), and the young man recalls the "flaming Dedalian formula to ignite *my* soul's smithy" (49).

Chapter two of *The Ghost Writer* is significantly entitled "Nathan Dedalus," and the reader learns that, just as Stephen, Nathan is trying to fly beyond those nets that bind him. In fact, he has written a short story entitled "High Education", which irritated his father and the Jewish community since it presented an ill-favoured portrait of the Jews:

"Nathan, your story, as far as Gentiles are concerned, is about one thing only. Listen to me, before you go. It is about kikes. Kikes and their love of money. That is all our good Christian friends will see, I guarantee you. It is not about the scientists and teachers and lawyers they become and the things such people accomplish for others. It is not about the immigrants like Chaya who worked and saved and sacrificed to get a decent footing in America. It is not about the wonderful peaceful days and nights you spent growing up in our house. It is not about the lovely friends you always had. No, it's about Essie and her hammer, and Sidney and his chorus girls, and that shyster of Essie's and his filthy mouth, and, as best I can see, about what a jerk I was begging them to reach a decent compromise before the whole family had to be dragged up in front of a *goyisher* judge." (94)

This story was based on a family quarrel over an inheritance, and Nathan is considered as a betrayer of his family and of his own race because of the publication of the affair. In an episode that recalls Stephen's

experiences in *A Portrait*, Nathan's father and Judge Wapter remind him of the responsibility that awaits him towards the Jewish community to which he belongs:

You are a young man of great promise and, we all think, of potentially great talent. But with great talent come great responsibilities, and an obligation to those who have stood behind you in the early days so that your talent might come to fruition. (102)

Nathan's mother is also involved and she tries to intercede, begging her son to change his attitude (104-105). However, Nathan is going to pronounce his own *Non Serviam*, recalling precisely, if not Stephen's, certainly Joyce's case, and the Irish writer's having been accused of disloyalty and immorality:

Hadn't Joyce, hadn't Flaubert, hadn't Thomas Wolfe, the romantic genius of my high-school reading list, all been condemned for disloyalty or treachery or immorality by those who say themselves as slandered in their works? As even the judge knew, literary history was in part the history of novelists infuriating fellow countrymen, family, and friends. To be sure, our dispute hadn't achieved the luster of literary history quite yet, but still, writers weren't writers, I told myself, if they didn't have the strength to face the insolubility of that conflict and go on. (110)

Another interesting episode in Nathan's early experiences as a writer, one that also evokes Stephen Dedalus falling in love with E-C- in Joyce's *Portrait*, has to do with the young man's infatuation with Lonoff's former student Amy Labelle. When Nathan sees her helping Lonoff to sort out his manuscripts, the young artist immediately falls in love and begins to make up stories about her, in which the girl becomes an Anne Frank who would have survived the holocaust but who conceals her true identity. This Anne is at the same time considered by Nathan as a "*Femme Fatale*" (this being the title of the third chapter, in which Nathan's imaginative account of this Anne Frank's survival is presented), a *femme fatale* attempting to seduce Lonoff, who has been married for thirty-five years:

Of course he told Hope nothing about who Amy thought she was. But he didn't have to, he could guess what she would say if he did: it was for him, the great writer, that Amy had chosen

to become Anne Frank; that explained it all, no psychiatrist required. For him, as a consequence of her infatuation: to enchant him, to bewitch him, to break through the scrupulosity and the wisdom and the virtue into his imagination, and there, as Anne Frank, to become E. I. Lonoff's *femme fatale*. (155)

But I could not really think of her as Amy any longer. Instead I was continually drawn back into the fiction I had evolved about her and the Lonoffs while I lay in the dark study, transported by his praise and throbbing with resentment of my disapproving father—and, of course, overcome by what had passed between my idol and the marvellous young woman before he had manfully gone back to bed with his wife. (157)

A further relevant aspect in the characterisation of this young artist is the contrast that is established in the text between his romantic idealisation of his chosen experienced writer, Lonoff, and the unfashionable portrait and life of the aged literary man. Lonoff is old, fat, weak and leads a monotonous existence that exasperates his own wife:

Nothing can be touched, nothing can be changed, everybody must be quiet, the children must shut up, their friends must stay away until four. There is his religion of art, my young successor: rejecting life! *Not* living is what he makes his beautiful fiction *out* of! (174-75)

As we have seen in Joyce's fiction, the ghostly dimension of the identity of the fictional artist becomes manifest not only "as a young man" but also as an adult. Philip Roth's portrait of the mature artist, Lonoff, defies any predetermined labelling of the artistic identity. And Joseph Heller has provided us, quite recently, with another example of the difficulty of portraying a mature artist and of defining what an artist is.

Joseph Heller, *Portrait of the Artist, as an Old Man*

Joseph Heller is the author of many novels, among them *Catch-22* (1961), *Something Happened* (1974), *Good as Gold* (1979), *God Knows* (1984), *No Laughing Matter* (1986), *Picture This* (1988), *Closing Time* (1994) or *Now and Then* (1998). He has acknowledged in several interviews his admiration for the work of Joyce, which he considers to be an example of a type of literature difficult and not pleasurable but nonetheless indispensable.⁴¹ Heller is not only familiar with Joyce's texts

but also a great admirer of Richard Ellmann's seminal biography of the Irish writer.⁴²

Heller's admiration and respect for Joyce can be clearly seen when he declares that he would like to think that his most famous work, *Catch-22*, shares with Joyce's masterpiece *Ulysses* what he calls a meticulous construction under an apparent formlessness:

Catch-22 is not to my mind a far-out novel; it is not to my mind a formless novel. If anything, it was constructed almost meticulously, and with a meticulous concern to give the appearance of a formless novel. Now that's much different, in much the same way as with Joyce's *Ulysses*, which is possibly one of the most confusing novels when you first approach it, and yet there's a structure and tension in virtually every word.⁴³

The narrator of Heller's *Portrait of an Artist, as an Old Man* (published posthumously in 2000) explains to the reader that the portrait of the artist he is presenting—Eugene Pota's—is something different from what has been done up to then:

This is a book about a well-known, aging author trying to close out his career with a crowning achievement, with a laudable bang that would embellish his reputation rather than with a fainthearted whimper that would bring him only condescension and insult. We, he and I, don't have leisure or patience for a book ponderous with descriptive details of characters and place, although we still have reverence for works dense with them, by Tolstoy, Proust, Joyce, to name but a few . . . and Dickens too, whose "solitary as an oyster" alone should put him in some hall of fame for similes.⁴⁴

At the end of the novel we discover that the narrator is Pota himself, writing about his problems as an old artist. The meagre and demystifying account we are provided with about his vocation and his career equates him with many other artists: ". . . he had earned, and suffered, the illustrious fate he had hungered for from the start, the station of finding himself prominent, acknowledged, accepted, assimilated, and . . . familiar. *Taken for granted*" (37, emphasis mine).

Eugene Pota's problem, rather than with imagination or with inspiration, is with the literary tradition. The protagonist of Joseph Heller's *Portrait of an Artist, as an Old Man* has been a more or less successful writer. Now that he is seventy years old he wants to write his

last literary work of art. The problem is that, in his opinion, everything has been said before by him or by others:

The artificer who lives long enough, particularly the writer of fictions for page and stage, may come to a time in his life when he feels he has nothing new to write about but wishes to continue anyway. (19)

Then what else? Where on earth could he find something different and new that neither he nor scores of others had not already written about or were not in the process of completing even while he dawdled? (25)

He even wonders “[w]here James Joyce could possibly have gone after *Finnegans Wake*” (227).

Pota’s problem is that, although he has a satisfactory financial situation, he is not able to do anything else but write: “Like others with the same high calling, there was not much else he could fancy in the matter of preoccupying physical hobbies or diversions” (20). His maxim, in these circumstances, is found in the concluding words of the voice in Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnameable*: “I must go on. I can’t go on. I’ll go on”.⁴⁵

What Pota realises from the very beginning is that he “was definitely not going to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of the world, or his race . . . [in] this last portrait in literary form by the artist as an old man” (10), and he asserts that “not even James Joyce had succeeded in making that long stretch to metaphysical perfection in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*” (10).

Thus, Pota thinks about many literary possibilities: writing a parody of Tom Sawyer (10), a subtly pornographic book that could be entitled “A Sexual Biography of My Wife” (49), a book about Isaac from the Old Testament, or a novel entitled Tom Sawyer Novelist. Pota offers us fragments of these possible novels that he begins but that he is not able to finish.

Of particular interest is the case of *Tom Sawyer Novelist*. Tom Sawyer wants to learn how to become a famous novelist, and so he goes in search of Mark Twain, Jack London, Bret Hart, Ambrose Bierce, Frank Norris, etc., looking for advice. What Tom discovers is that these literary celebrities were really suffering heroes with failed lives, that is, simply human beings:

His literary ambition had waned, his curiosity was sated with discoveries about the lives of literary celebrities that were cumulatively appalling. His travels through the literary hall of fame of America had steered him into a mortuary of a museum with the failed lives and careers of suffering heroes who were only human. These were not the heroes of the ancient Greeks and Trojans like Achilles, Hector, Zeus, and Hera. These were only driven human beings of high intentions who wished to be writers and who, in most other respects, seemed more than normally touchy, neurotic, mixed up, and unhappy. (160)

Not only Joyce's main works are mentioned in Heller's novel but also, John Barth's and Philip Roth's. And it is especially interesting that Pota mentions precisely works by these authors that deal with fictional portraits of the artist.

Finally, and even though Pota had previously discarded the possibility, he decides to write a novel about himself. When he had previously rejected the idea, he explained that it was an overused category:

A novel about a novelist was ineluctably not a consideration, already passé in a category already made too full by a swelling number of published American authors. Definitely out of the question. (22)

All you would get if I were to write with such undeviating tranquillity about Pota and Polly would be an even and even-tempered portrait of the artist, Pota, as an old man, and who would want to read much of that? The Confessions of Zeno had never been made into a blockbuster movie, and Svevo's sequel, The Further Confessions of Zeno, had not been a world shaker either. After all, what more can happen to a man moving up in age past seventy-five? Illness, accident, bewilderedly hammered about disastrously again in another costly, time-consuming divorce? (71)

His editor, Paul, suggests the following idea to Pota:

"By now I think writing is about the only way I can define myself. I won't know who I am or what I'm doing with my life any longer if I'm not working on a book".

"And why do you persist in going so preposterously far afield for subject matter? To gods, to myths, the Bible, to the fictions of other authors. All of them far-fetched novelties".

“Novelties?”

“Yes. Wouldn’t you say so? You want to be serious and you keep fooling around with outlandish ideas that don’t go far enough. Why don’t you write about real people again? About yourself?”

“Paul, real people are not impressive anymore. Or even convincing. We’re trite, overdone. So are you. And everything realistic I think of writing about I feel I’ve written before, or am in the process of reading by somebody else.” (226)

I find it extremely interesting that his editor mentions the fact that the seed for his novel is in his name rather than in his career or in his being an artist:

“I have another good idea for you, maybe even a better one. Why don’t you do what you’ve been doing and talking to me about for almost a whole year? Although you don’t seem to realize it.”

“What’s that?”

“Why don’t you write a portrait of the artist as an old man?”

“What?”

“Don’t get angry. You’ve even got the right name for it. Pota, a perfect acronym. Portrait . . . of . . . the . . . artist. P-O-T-A. I can already see the book jacket and the catalogue copy”. Paul lifted his eyes reflectively and made a frame of his hands. “*Portrait of the Artist, as an Old Man.*” He looked down and cringed away with a start from the searing glare focused on him. “Or . . .,” he hastened to add.

“Or?”

“Or, maybe also on the title page, as a subtitle, an alternate, *Or, A Sexual Biography of My Wife.* That way we can suck in an extra, unsuspecting audience who will think it’s your intimate pornographic sex book. Maybe we can even get that Hollywood sale you want so much.” (228-229)

Pota, who delivers a lecture significantly entitled “The Literature of Despair”—a title that may remind us of John Barth’s famous article “The Literature of Exhaustion”—presents the following description of the creative personality:

There are factors in the life of creative writing that stem, I believe, from, *one*, something in the nature of the occupation itself; *two*, something unhappy in the early experience of the

person that antedates the occupation; *three*, a tendency in early childhood for dreaming extravagant wishes for a much richer life than one is experiencing; *four*, a wish to be—most important, I'd say—a wish to be outstanding, to excel at almost *anything* that will excite admiration from family and friends and society at large, and writing for them offers a promising outlet; and, *four*—did I just do number four?—anyway, *four*, most probably, a combination of some, or *all*. (169-170)

This vague and inconsistent account, and the fact that, at the end of the novel, Pota finds his only justification to write his portrait of the artist as an old man in his own name, makes the reader realise that it is as if of the traditional notion of the artist what has remained is simply the name. And this was precisely the conclusion Shem seemed to have arrived at in *Finnegans Wake*: “This exists that isits after having been said we know” (*FW* 186.02-09).

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida, in the *Exordium* to his seminal *Specters of Marx* (1993), stated:

But to learn to live, to learn it *from oneself and by oneself*, all alone, to teach *oneself* to live (“I would like to learn to live finally”), is that not impossible for a living being? Is it not what logic itself forbids? To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border, it is a heterodidactics between life and death.⁴⁶

According to Derrida, this learning to live from and with “the other at the edge of life” has an ethical dimension and, consequently, has to do with justice: “If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, not presently living, either to us, in us, outside us, it is in the name of *justice*”.⁴⁷ Thus, it is in the name of justice that we have spoken about the portrait of artists in twentieth-century fiction in English, about Joyce’s pioneering portrayal of the complexities of the artist’s identity, and about what could be considered, in Nicholas Royle’s terms, “Phantom Texts”—that is, “textual phantoms which do not necessarily have the solidity or objectivity of a quotation, an intertext or explicit, acknowledged presence and which do not in fact come to rest *anywhere*. Phantom texts are fleeting, continually moving on, leading us away”.⁴⁸

According to Stephen Dedalus's definition of a ghost in *Ulysses*, namely "One who has faded into impalpability *through death, through absence, through change of manners*" (*U* 180; emphasis added), we can certainly conclude that the trope of the ghost is a very suitable one to describe Joyce's conception of the identity of the artist, a figure that haunted him and haunts his texts and whose spectre reappears in many twentieth-century writers who have transmuted Joyce's portraits of the artist into phantom texts.

Notes

¹ Margarita Estévez Saá, "The 'Ghost' of Identity in *Finnegans Wake*", in *Silverpowdered Olivetrees: Reading Joyce in Spain*, eds. Jefferey Simons, José M^a Tejedor Cabrera, Margarita Estévez Saá and Rafael I. García León (Sevilla: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 2003) 283-290.

² Margarita Estévez Saá, "Little Chandler, Mr. James Duffy and Gabriel Conroy as Sketches for the 'Artist' in James Joyce's Fiction," in *Many Sundry Wits Gathered Together*, ed. Santiago González Fernández-Corrugedo (A Coruña: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de A Coruña, 1996) 145-154; and Margarita Estévez Saá, *El problema de la caracterización en la obra de James Joyce: el artista y sus personajes* (Santiago de Compostela: Servicio de Publicaciones e Intercambio Científico, 2002).

³ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994) 139.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming", in *On Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming"*, eds. Ethel Spector Person et al. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) 3-13.

⁵ Freud 3.

⁶ Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (New York: New York University Press, 1964); Lee T. Lemon, *Portraits of the Artist in Contemporary Fiction* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); Weldon Thornton, *The Antimodernism of Joyce's "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994); and Carl D. Malmgren, "'From Work to Text': The Modernist and Postmodernist Künstlerroman Novel", *A Forum on Fiction* 21 (Fall 1987) 5-28.

⁷ I would like, however, to emphasize the importance of these critical approaches to the figure of the fictional artist, since there is not much criticism devoted to the study of it in literature, something quite surprising given the proliferation of portraits of the artist in the twentieth-century.

⁸ James Joyce, *Dubliners*, ed. Terence Brown (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1992) 68.

⁹ Robert Scholes, "Stephen Dedalus, Poet or Esthete?" in *James Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man": Text, Criticism and Notes*, ed. Chester G. Anderson (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968) 468-480; Breon Mitchell, "A Portrait and the *Bildungsroman* Tradition," in *Approaches to Joyce's "Portrait": Ten Essays*, eds. Thomas F. Staley and Bernard Benstock (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976) 61-76; Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); and Margueritte Harkness, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man": *Voices of the Text* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

¹⁰ Phillip F. Herring, *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987) 172.

¹¹ Katie Wales, *The Language of James Joyce* (London: Macmillan, 1992) 56.

¹² James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Ed. Seamus Deane (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1992) 272; henceforth parenthetically cited in the text.

¹³ Robert Scholes has interpreted the poem as a proof of Stephen's artistic maturity ("Stephen Dedalus, Poet or Esthete?" in *James Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man": Text, Criticism and Notes*, ed. Chester G. Anderson [New York: Viking Penguin, 1968] 468-480); Wayne C. Booth has pointed out in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* the difficulty of knowing whether Joyce wanted the poem to be taken as a genuine example of Stephen's creativity (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983); and Bernard Benstock ("The Temptation of St. Stephen: A View of the Villanelle," *James Joyce Quarterly* 14 [Fall 1976]: 31-38.), Charles Rossman ("Stephen Dedalus' Villanelle," *James Joyce Quarterly* 12.3 [Spring 1975]: 281-293), and Rick Bowers ("Stephen's Practical Artistic Development," *James Joyce Quarterly* 21.3 [Spring 1984]: 231-243) have opted for questioning the aesthetic value of the poem and for considering it a further sign of Stephen's artistic immaturity.

¹⁴ James Joyce, *Ulysses. The 1922 Text*. Ed. Jeri Johnson. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 41; henceforth parenthetically cited in the text.

¹⁵ Hugh Kenner, "Ulysses" (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 57.

¹⁶ John Eglinton tells Stephen: "—You are the only contributor to *Dana* who asks for pieces of silver. Then I don't know about the next number. Fred Ryan wants space for an article on economics" (*U* 205). We also get to know that Stephen has published in this magazine a quite negative review of a book by Lady Gregory, the person who, according to Buck Mulligan, had helped Stephen to get this job: "—Longworth is awfully sick, he said, after what you wrote about that old hake Gregory. O you inquisitional drunken jew Jesuit! She gets you a job on the paper and then you go and slate her drivel to Jaysus. Couldn't you do the Yeats' touch?" (*U* 208). These episodes are based on Joyce's own

experiences. Joyce himself had worked for *Dana*, where he published several reviews. On March 26th 1903 he also published in the *Daily Express* an adverse review of Lady Gregory's book *Poets and Dreamers*, entitled "The Soul of Ireland."

¹⁷ Maddox 5.

¹⁸ Rafael I. García León, who has also dealt with Joyce's portrait of failed writers in his article "'Books You Were Going to Write with Letters as Titles': Writing as a Failure in *Ulysses*," refers also to Molly Bloom's literary aspirations. See the essay quoted in *Papers on Joyce* 6 (2000) 9-15.

¹⁹ Similarly, the chapter known as "Oxen of the Sun" has been attributed to Stephen Dedalus: "'Oxen' seems like a chapter Stephen Dedalus would like to have written, and indeed, it is, as I have said, the *Book's* piece of literary criticism that complements Stephen's own fancywork in the library." See Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in "Ulysses"* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) 144.

²⁰ Kenner 68.

²¹ Lawrence 166.

²² Gerald L. Bruns, "Eumaeus," in *James Joyce's "Ulysses": Critical Essays*, eds. Clive Hart and David Hayman (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1974) 364.

²³ We also find the figure of the artist in Joyce's play *Exiles*, displayed in two characters, the seemingly frustrated artist—Robert Hand—and the apparently successful one—Richard Rowan. I do not refer to them here since the play does not deal at large with the question of artistic identity and it is most clearly concerned with an account of the affective triangles Richard-Bertha-Robert, Robert-Beatrice-Richard and Bertha-Richard-Beatrice, and with their attitude towards love, jealousy, betrayal, doubt, etc.

²⁴ See William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959) 278 and *A Reader's Guide to "Finnegans Wake"* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996) 132; see also Patrick A. McCarthy, "The Structures and Meanings of *Finnegans Wake*," in *A Companion to Joyce Studies*, eds. Zack Bowen and James F. Carens (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1984) 601.

²⁵ Nicholas Fargnoli, and Michael P. Gillespie, *James Joyce A to Z. The Essential Reference to the Life and Work* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 203.

²⁶ Sigmund Freud addressed the subject of the "uncanny" as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar," and in spite of which, "would always . . . be something one does not know one's way about in." Freud has also specified the most prominent themes of uncanniness in literature:

These themes are all concerned with the phenomenon of the 'double,' which appears in every shape and in every degree of development. Thus we have characters who are to be

considered identical because they look alike. . . . Or it is marked by the fact that *the subject identifies himself with someone else*, or that *he is in doubt as to which his self is*, or *substitutes the extraneous self for his own*. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. (629-30, emphasis added)

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

²⁷ Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (New York: New York University Press, 1964).

²⁸ John Ackerman explains that the poet "denied the influence of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, saying that 'the name given to . . . portrait paintings by their artists is "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man". . . . I made a bit of doggish fun of the *painting*-title and . . . intended no possible reference to Joyce.'" See John Ackerman, *A Dylan Thomas Companion: Life, Poetry and Prose* (London: Macmillan, 1991) 185.

²⁹ Qtd. in Ackerman 10.

³⁰ Ackerman 10.

³¹ Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Artists in Dylan Thomas's Prose Works. Adam Naming and Aesop Fabling*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

³² Mayer 93.

³³ Dylan Thomas, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*. 1940. (London: Phoenix, 2001) 102-03; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

³⁴ Mayer 95.

³⁵ John Barth, *Further Fridays: Essays, Lectures, and Other Nonfiction, 1984-1994* (Boston & New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995) 44.

³⁶ Barth, *Further Fridays* 117.

³⁷ Barth, *Further Fridays* 174.

³⁸ John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988[1968]) vii; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

³⁹ Carl D. Malmgren, "'From Work to Text': The Modernist and Postmodernist *Künstlerroman*", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 21 (Fall 1987) 12.

⁴⁰ Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 3; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴¹ J. A. Sorkin, ed., *Conversations with Joseph Heller* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993) 97, 161.

⁴² Sorkin 263.

⁴³ Qtd. in Sorkin 10.

⁴⁴ Joseph Heller, *Portrait of an Artist, as an Old Man* (London: Scribner, 2000) 40; hereafter quoted parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁵ Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (New York: Grove, 1970) 21.

⁴⁶ Derrida xviii.

⁴⁷ Derrida xix.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 280.