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TEXTUAL SPECTRALITIES: A HAUNTOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR READING FICTION

ESPECTRALIDADES TEXTUALES: UN MARCO HAUNTOLÓGICO PARA LEER FICCIÓN

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on Derrida's concept of *hauntology* and the "spectral turn", this paper proposes a hauntological analytical framework for literary texts, especially suited for fiction. It outlines five interrelated dimensions through which spectral elements in literature can be examined: textual, structural, thematic, narrative, and intertextual. The textual level focuses on microtextual aspects; the structural and thematic levels investigate the functions of literal and metaphorical ghosts and their role in articulating broader ideological concerns. The narrative level explores narrative strategies undermining time linearity and the narrator's authority. Finally, the intertextual level considers the spectral relationship between texts. This framework, as a critical strategy, foregrounds the spectral nature of literature and engages with tensions, marginalised voices, and suppressed narratives.

KEYWORDS: hauntology, spectrality, Derrida, literary theory, literary criticism.

RESUMEN: Partiendo del concepto derridiano de *hauntología* y el “giro espectral”, este artículo propone un marco de análisis hauntológico para textos literarios, especialmente para ficción. Este marco describe cinco dimensiones interrelacionadas a través de las cuales pueden examinarse los distintos elementos espectrales de la literatura: la dimensión textual, la estructural, la temática, la narrativa y la intertextual. El nivel textual se centra en aspectos microtextuales; el estructural y el temático abordan las funciones de fantasmas literales y metafóricos, así como su papel a la hora de articular cuestiones ideológicas. El nivel narrativo explora estrategias que erosionan la linealidad temporal y la autoridad narrativa. Por último, el nivel intertextual considera la relación espectral entre textos. Este marco, como estrategia crítica, arroja luz sobre la naturaleza espectral de la literatura y aborda sus tensiones, voces marginalizadas y relatos opacados.

PALABRAS CLAVE: hauntología, espectralidad, Derrida, teoría literaria, crítica literaria.

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1. *ENTER THE GHOST*: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO HAUNTOLOGY

In *Spectres de Marx*, Jacques Derrida (2006) opened a ghostly space in his philosophy—an odd and untimely opening towards an inconclusive path that has served as fertile ground for further developments of what he termed “hauntology”. Hauntology (from the French *hantologie*) is an elusive term that plays on its phonetic resemblance with “ontology/ontologie”. With hauntology, Derrida challenged prior assumptions regarding ontology and offered new paths to think present absences, the living dead, liminal beings, and the appearance of out-of-joint temporalities. Hence, hauntology is a notion that destabilises concepts such as full and self-identical presence, closed binaries, fixed meanings, and linear time, since it proves as a strong critique of the metaphysics of presence (Derrida, 1967). Problematising oppositions such as presence/absence through the motif of the ghost—what is there and what is not exactly there, not totally dead, not totally living, a being

from the past, but present now and with implications for the future—, Derrida continued his deconstructive project. As Mark Fisher (2012) pointed out, hauntology can be read as a development of Derrida's earlier work on concepts such as 'trace' or '*differáncé*' (p. 19), conceptual elements that already challenged notions of full and self-identical presence.

Even though, as Hägglund (2008) states, "Derrida's aim is to formulate a general 'hauntology' (*hantologie*), in contrast to the traditional 'ontology' that thinks being in terms of self-identical presence" (p. 82), its singular manifestations —ghosts, specters— speak about past and future violence, about how we welcome or reject the Other: "As soon as there is some spectre, hospitality, and exclusion go together" (Derrida, 2006, p. 176).¹ The ethical dimension that hauntology foregrounds involves motifs regarding justice, trauma, hospitality, and ethics, following a first phase in Derrida's work more focused on linguistic and textual aspects. It is no coincidence that hauntology emerged precisely in this second phase of Derrida's thought, more concerned with political and ethical dimensions, since, as it will be developed in this article, hauntology and ethics towards the Other are inextricable. Nevertheless, as Derrida himself stated in an interview with Thomas Assheuer, the ethical background of his theory, "was already legible. And always has been. But to know what is legible, you have to read" (Derrida, 2005, p. 134).

It is precisely the inconclusive dimension of *Spectres de Marx* —where Derrida, in his deconstructive vein, by no means develops a systematic approach to hauntology nor defines it in fixed terms— what offers us a spectral notion completely open to the future: a concept yet to be, a philosophy to come. And, as I will argue here, thanks to its spectral ontology in Derrida's philosophy, hauntology is the most fertile legacy of the philosopher to address contemporary anxieties. Hauntology was, in 1993, "out of joint", and as the philosopher wrote, analysing the appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet* and the reaction of the characters to this revenant:

¹ All quotations are extracted from their English translations when available.

Marcellus was perhaps anticipating the coming, one day, one night, several centuries later, of another “scholar”. The latter would finally be capable, beyond the opposition between presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life, of thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility. Better (or worse) he would know how to address himself to spirits. [...] In any case, here is someone mad enough to hope to unlock the possibility of such an address. (Derrida, 2006, p. 13)

Therefore, it is not surprising, once the possibility was “unlocked”, that, in the last decades, hauntology has found prominent philosophical developments beyond Derrida, as seen in the work of Mark Fisher (2009, 2014, 2016), who “played the greatest role in bringing this concept within the purview of popular culture” (Coverley, 2020, p. 2). Even more relevantly, hauntology has expanded to other fields, such as literary criticism, visual arts, music, law studies, gender studies, black studies, and translation studies —as a spectre walking through walls and disciplinary boundaries. “I believe that ghosts are a part of the future”, claimed Derrida in the film *Ghost Dance* (McMullen, 1983), and indeed, the pervasiveness of hauntological thinking and readings, and their manifold manifestations, are proof of the abundance of ghosts surrounding not only our communities and social structures but also their artistic expressions. Ghosts understood, as Fisher (2014) stated, not only as literal spectres, but as that which acts without materially speaking, the agency of the virtual. In this sense, as Blanco and Peeren (2013) termed, contemporary thinking has witnessed a “spectral turn” that will guide my approach in this article.

In this paper, I will delve into the connections between hauntology and literature, and I will develop a proposal for a hauntological approach to literary texts, especially suited for fiction. I will tackle questions such as: How can we define the spectral dimension and elements of literature? How can we approach spectral textualities? How literary ghosts make themselves present in texts? Which analytical elements may anchor a hauntological reading of literary texts? Hence, I will propose an exploratory five-dimensional approach

based on different critical elements and signifying levels of a literary text: the textual dimension; the structural and thematic dimension (analysed together); the narrative dimension, and the intertextual dimension. This approach by no means claims to be a closed methodology —which would contradict the logics of a hauntological lens— but, as Derrida (1998) stated of deconstruction itself, it is imaginative, it does not satisfy itself with methodical procedures, it opens a path and starts walking (p. 35). Therefore, far from proposing a closed set of steps to conduct a hauntological reading, my aim is to shed light on different dimensions of the spectral nature of literature. This will be combined with a varied set of questions and analytical tenets —expandable or reducible depending on the text— that can guide a hauntological reading. A lack of a closed method, “does not rule out a certain marching order” (Derrida, 1981, p. 271).

This approach means to offer a critical tool to prevent hauntology and the trope of haunting from becoming merely a poetics —given the powerful lure of the trope and its open semantic—, as Kirss (2013) warned. With that in mind, she added, we should develop a “rigorously conceptual vocabulary. The ‘work’ of the literary text must thus be situated among other kinds of cultural texts in which and through which the ‘ghost dance,’ the ‘ethical relation with history’ that Spivak calls for, can be observed” (p. 26). Furthermore, even though this paper focuses on literary texts, and mainly in fiction, in future works this analytical framework shall be expanded to other art forms, with attention to their singularities and signifying devices (for poetry, see Molines-Galarza, 2026b).

2. THE SPECTRALITY OF LITERARY TEXTS

Literary texts —even those that have nothing to do with actual ghosts— present a specific spectral dimension due to their intrinsic characteristics: openness of meaning, intertextuality, time disjuncture between the act of writing and the act of reading, and their ability to give voice to spectres (malaises, anxieties, otherness, voiceless subjectivities). As Wolfreys (2002) states, “to tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through

which something other returns, although never as a presence or to the present. Ghosts return via narratives, and come back, again and again, across centuries, every time a tale is unfolded” (p. 3).

Writing is always marked by certain non-presence and wildness —especially literary writing. Hence the Platonic and subsequent Western metaphysical critique of writing, understood as a dangerous supplement, a representational artefact devoid of life, unable to speak for itself and defend its truth, compared with a painting (Plato, 2025). Plato, speaking through Socrates, only excuses “fertile writing”: that does not disseminate its meaning, that upholds a single truth —likened to a seed that bears fruit. In contrast, he criticises those words “written in water” as mere gestures of “recreation or amusement”, a category that would include literature. In “Plato’s Pharmacy” (1981), in response to Plato’s negative view of writing, Derrida deepened his concept of *dissemination* —as the movement by which words and meanings never find closure in their signified dimensions, instead functioning as parts of meaning chains marked by traces, absences and presences. He also explored the notion of disseminative writing as a “pharmakon”, highlighting the indeterminacy of literary writing.

Following Derrida’s critique, literary works possess a disseminative nature that could be termed spectral: characterised by an unstable presence, ambiguity, partial visibility, at once present and absent, open to interpretation and future readings, while simultaneously bearing the imprint of past influences and traditions. As Kronick (1999) notes, “the spectral quality of literature [...] means that it is not an existent or being nor a localizable remains or archive, but belongs to the future, the promise that returns to haunt the present” (pp. 1-2). Furthermore, as Loevlie (2013) suggested, the shine of corporality of literature is but a cloak for something that is radically absent, literature cannot be: its ontology is quivering (p. 342).

As it has been seen above, literary texts are a fertile space for haunting textual movements. In literature, meaning adopts an errant, disseminating stance, far from the idea of “fertile writing” —unidirectional, unequivocal— presented above with Plato. Their

textual devices are prone to show spectral qualities thanks to different mechanisms, resources, and movements. Following the classic Jakobsonian definition of literature as “organized violence committed on ordinary speech”, as Eagleton addresses it (2011, p. 2), literature is seen as a kind of language that haunts, destabilises and challenges standard discourse modes. On the other hand, when we take another classical assumption of literature as “imaginative” writing, where fiction and reality are confronted, we see it as a haunting alternative to real life, another world coexisting with reality and haunting it with other narratives, possibilities, ways of life. In agreement with Eagleton (2011), who problematises both visions of literature —the formalist one and the one that considers it imaginative writing—, the definition itself of literature has been left open, present and non-present.

Literary texts can also be haunted themselves, as, for instance, Katy Shaw (2018) explores in *Hauntology: the Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature*, where she examines how the past permanently haunts English contemporary fiction, as English society is “more concerned with co-opting the past than embracing the future” (p. 2) —a perspective shared by Mark Fisher (2014), as can be seen in *Ghosts of my Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. In both views, the future dimension of the spectre —central to Derrida’s hauntology— lies behind, and it is worth continuing to explore how texts haunt us precisely because they point to alternative futures.²

Moreover, with regard to the future horizon outlined in Derrida’s work —closely linked to the idea of justice— it is important to note, following Kirss (2013) and Gordon (1997)—, that the ghostly haunt in a literary text is not the sign of a secret to be decoded which, once decoded, might free or heal readers and communities. On the contrary, the ghostly haunt is a way of voicing the unfinished nature of the past: something that still demands reckoning, that urges an ethical stance and witnessing, particularly in the face

² An example of the future/utopian dimension of hauntological texts may be seen in the analysis that I developed on the film *La Chimera* (Alice Rohrwacher, 2023), where the ghosts that appear, far from being a nostalgic narrative element, especially those that represent the Etruscan legacy, point to an alternative future where gender relations are more equal and fair (Molines-Galarza, 2026a).

of collective or structural traumas. The act of writing, reading, or translating such texts, paying attention to their spectral voices, places us within the hauntological project that Derrida envisioned as the injunction to learn to live with ghosts and begin a conversation with them (2006, pp. XVII-XVIII). As Kirss posits, referring to the haunting dimension of literary texts and life writing related to collective traumas:

Ghosts are more than literary personifications or theoretical metaphors. [...] Historical events of mass human destruction [...] urge the raising of questions about haunting that relate to remembering and the past. Among these is a range of complex phenomena through which suppressed, erased, unvoiced, and misappropriated aspects of the past reappear, or are explicitly and deliberately reconfigured. (Kirss, 2013, p. 22)

However, it is not only collective traumas that return to haunt literary texts; personal and singular traumatic experiences also haunt characters and literary works in general. Texts, as Wolfreys (2002) notes, are “neither dead nor alive, yet they hover at the very limits between living and dying. The text thus partakes in its own haunting, it is traced by its own phantoms, and it is this condition which reading must confront” (p. XII).

Taking this into account, the ghostly nature of literary texts may be analysed through different lenses. Wrethed (2023), for instance, proposes a topic-related approach—specifically for Gothic hauntology, although it may also be applicable to other literary periods—that revolves around the following themes: loss, guilt, and the uncanny. Shaw (2018) examines formal and thematic strategies as intertextuality, liminality, and the emergence of the past within the text. Coverley (2020) also follows the thread of the uncanny, addresses the motif of repetition, and adds a historical perspective, focusing largely on experiments with (disjointed) time present in the works he analyses. Fisher (2014), in his analyses of literary works, points to unreliable narrators, the presence of the past, and a libidinal orientation toward past times; additionally, he elaborates on the

weird and the eerie (2016) as haunting aesthetic categories. Arias and Pulham (2009), along with other contributors to the seminal volume *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, explored the spectral nature of the Victorian from a contemporary perspective, focusing on doublings, rewritings, renegotiations of tropes, and recreations of the past that continue to shape postmodern modes of nostalgia (p. xiii).

In my proposal, combining several elements present in other approaches, I will explore five main dimensions particularly suited to a hauntological analysis that bring together both topic-related and formal elements, and introduce literary theory elements from other traditions, enriching the analytical lens. I will thus elaborate on different elements that render a text haunted or haunting, corresponding to the textual, structural, thematic, narrative, and intertextual dimensions. In the following section, I will delve into these dimensions to assemble a hauntological-analytical framework for literary texts — mostly suited for fiction— that considers their multifaceted spectral nature, present not only in literal spectres (as in ghost stories), but in the very functioning and epistemology of literature itself. The examples provided serve solely illustrative and clarifying purposes, even though microanalysis are also presented to foster comprehension and to evidence the applicability of this model. For comprehensive analyses applying the dimensions outlined in this proposal, further in-depth studies and case-specific research will be required.

3. A PROPOSAL FOR A HAUNTOLOGICAL READING OF LITERARY TEXTS

3.1. The textual dimension

Starting with the dimension closer to the materiality of literary texts and their signifiers as a first step to guide our approach, the textual dimension of literary texts allows us to extract different elements to conduct a hauntological reading on a microtextual level. Among these, the most relevant ones could be: 1) Ambiguities, puns, double meanings. 2) Repetitions and recurring elements. 3) Language variation (chronolects, sociolects, geographic dialects).

Regarding the first aspect, ambiguities —also puns, double-meanings, i. e., open spaces for interpretation—, challenge the ideal of full presence and meaning unity. As Wolfreys (2002) explained, “to speak of the spectral, the ghostly, of haunting in general is to come face to face with that which plays on the very question of interpretation” (p. x). A pun, an ambiguous line or a double-meaning function as haunting elements because they prevent closure, they keep opening meaning, future readings, and interpretations. Their ambivalent/quivering ontological status —something that is and is not, that is multiple things at once— erode essentialist ideals such as “single correct” readings.

Empson’s classical work on ambiguities —*Seven Types of Ambiguities* (1930)—, though later elaborated and refined (see Ossa-Richardson, 2019; Strier, 2023), already gives us different examples of microtextual ambiguities. The first type are metaphors (when a detail serves several functions at once); the second type appears when different interpretations merge into a single, unified meaning, like in comparisons or analogies. The third type involves two unrelated meanings coexisting in the same expression, creating layered ambiguity. The fourth type reflects internal conflict or complexity, revealed through contradictory interpretations within the sentence structure, seen in its syntax or grammar. The fifth type arises when meaning becomes clear only after exploring several possible readings, often hinting at irony or unresolved ideas. The sixth type occurs when a word or phrase “says nothing” or falls into contradictions. Finally, the seventh type is when a full contradiction is presented, when “the two meanings of the word, the two values of ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context (Empson, 1949, p. 192).

Ambiguities have a hauntological stance because they combine temporalities — past writing, present reading, future multiple interpretations— and they have an ambivalent presence. Moreover, ambiguities function not only as a textual element preventing textual closure, but as a way to problematise hegemonic readings and smuggle alternative and marginalised discourses within a text. For instance, in Shakespeare’s *Henry V* (2015), the sexual double-meanings that pervade the play undermine the nobility

of conquest and war, and place the plot within an earthlier urge for power and control: a “ball’s issue” (Bach, 1999). To provide a more detailed example of the spectral nature of ambiguity, a close reading of several sections of Toni Morrison’s *Recitatif* (1980) will be presented. In *Recitatif*, Morrison plays with the racial ambiguity of the main characters—Twyla, the narrator, and Roberta, her friend—to puzzle the reader and challenge our prevailing prejudices and assumptions regarding race. The girls meet at St. Bonnys, a shelter for orphans or abandoned children; one is black, the other one is white —“we looked like salt and pepper” (Morrison, 1983, p. 244)— although we are never certain about who is white and who is black.

Morrison spreads several contradictory threads that can be read differently depending on the personal perspective of the reader: “One of the things she said was that *they* never washed their hair and they *smelled funny*. Roberta sure did. Smell *funny*, I mean” (p. 243, my italics). Here we have one of the first instances of the racial binary, the *we* versus *they*, that traverses the story. We can only infer the race of these “they” if we assume our own prejudices regarding whiteness or blackness. A bit later, additional pieces are added to the puzzle: “I sneaked a look at Roberta. Her mother had brought chicken legs and ham sandwiches and oranges and a whole box of chocolate-covered grahams. Roberta drank milk from a thermos while her mother read the Bible to her” (p. 248). The presentation of Roberta’s mother introduces further cultural elements—food and religion— while still preserving the ambiguity. Is Roberta white or black? Years later, when they meet again by chance, Twyla describes Roberta as follows: “Her own hair was so big and wild I could hardly see her face” (p. 249), and then Roberta explains that she and her friends are going to see Jimi Hendrix. The reference to the hair and to Jimi Hendrix may lead the reader into believing that Roberta is indeed black.

Nevertheless, Morrison keeps the game of ambiguity open. In a later encounter, several years on, Twyla finds Roberta in a particularly coded neighbourhood. As Zadie Smith (2022) notes in her essay about this story: “Geography, in America, is fundamental to racial codes, and Newburgh—sixty miles north of Manhattan—is an archetypal

racialized American city”. Twyla’s surprise at encountering Roberta there may therefore be read as a further contradictory clue. Additionally, she adds: “I was dying to know what happened to her, how she got from Jimi Hendrix to Annandale, a neighborhood full of doctors and IBM executives. Easy, I thought. Everything is so easy for *them*. *They* think they own the world” (Morrison, 1983, p. 252, my italics). Once again, the ambiguity of *them* is absolute. Readers fill it with their own assumptions about race. In Morrison’s story, textual ambiguity is a formal device that awakens the spectres of racial prejudices and the violent racial history in the United States. The absence—or, more precisely, the simultaneous absence and presence—of a definitive answer to the story’s central question—the racial identity of its characters—is itself the core narrative strategy that prevents meaning from closing and interpretations from coming to an end.

As for the second aspect, repetitions and recurring elements, it must be said that not every repetition or recurring element might be understood as a haunting device—it might simply be a poetic resource—but sometimes repetitions are signs of unresolved elements, personal obsessions, expelled voices that come back, past violences or traumas that reemerge in the narrative. As Shaw (2018) explained:

The return marks the beginning, rather than the end, of the spectral exchange. The ontology of the performance of the haunt is intimately tied to the here-and-now of the present and the necessary conditions of visibility through which the specter makes itself manifest. The significance of the specter lies in a recognition of this repetition, of a return that appears in changed contexts and times. (p. 8)

What is haunting about repetitions and elements that come back over and over is, on the one hand, the a-temporality of their appearance, their emergence in a new contextual framework: the appearance of the same in the different. On the other hand, it is their very insistence on coming back that haunts both the narrative and the reader, as the

ghost is an element that never stops returning, characterised by the return. Shaw herself analysed repetitions as hauntological literary devices in *NW*, by Zadie Smith (2012) and in *Patient X*, by David Peace (2018). Further examples could be found in Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" (1984 [1846]), where the narrator, who plans to murder Fortunato, repeats many times his offer to "come back" and leave the vaults. The intense repetition of his offer highlights its ironic effects, haunts and unsettles the reader, who already feels what is about to happen, yet, at the same time, is reading these seemingly sincere offerings and manifestations of worry for Fortunato's health. Another interesting example could be seen when the repetition affects the whole work, as in Borges' (1944) short fiction "Pierre Menard. Autor del Quijote", a repetition haunting both the status of the original author and the original work.

In the third place, language variation may also serve as a hauntological element. Considered as a deviation from what a linguistic community considers standard language, language variation—may it be in geographical, temporal, gender or class terms—allows *other* voices to emerge. An example could be when a character's voice is marked by the use of archaisms—as a voice from the past, from a time out of joint that does not fit within the narrative tense. Using a chronolect from another era that highlights the non-pertinence of a character, their spectral status as something from the past that comes back, opens up a time fissure within a narrative. This case may also be found when authors decide to use an archaic narrative voice to let the literary work be haunted by other times and past influences, as we can see as well in Edgar Allan Poe's writing or in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (2002 [1764]).

Something similar happens when the sociolect or the geographical dialect of a character allows otherness to step into the play and haunt established communities or modes of discourse. An example may be found in the sociolectal and geographical variation present in the different characters of *Girl, Woman, Other*, by Bernardine Evaristo (2019). Evaristo, exoticizing WASP English, its cultural references and modes of speech, allows other voices to gain literary status and deconstructs the dynamics of otherness in

British culture. A compelling example of this can be found in Carole's chapter, where italics and quotation marks are used to highlight highbrow British English as the language of *the Others*—white, rich people. In the following fragment, she exoticizes the world of Oxford, stressing the linguistic abyss between that fancy world and her poor neighbour:

[...] who passed on rituals the students found ridiculous such as 'donning your sub-fusc and walking backwards around the Fellows' Quad with a glass of port in your hand at two a.m. to stabilize the space-time continuum at the changing of the clock back to Greenwich Mean Time' faculty who probably found the idea of *not* eating dinner while facing a room full of future prime ministers and Nobel laureates *rather discombobulating*

Carole's school was renowned for producing teenage mothers and early career criminals

she preferred the pot noodles in her room route [...] (p. 135)

The contrast is articulated not only through typographical elements (italics, quotation marks, new lines), but also through syntactical complexity, the space allotted to each of these worlds, and the differing register and sociolect levels at play (with refined terms such as "donning", "continuum", "discombobulating" etc., vs. "early career criminals" or "pot noodles"). Tensions and asymmetries between these two worlds are conveyed not only through the action itself but, more significantly, through linguistic variation and the contrast in the ways speakers articulate themselves within each milieu:

Carole listened and learned from her new social circle

what would you like? instead of *whatdyawant?*

to whom were you speaking? instead of *who was you talking to?*

I'm just popping to the loo instead of *I'm gonna go piss.* (p. 136)

The variation shifts in the novel are a key formal tool to haunt standard English language and identity, surrounded and affected by the diverse linguistic communities that inhabit the United Kingdom nowadays and challenge notions such as standard, British, and national cultural references. This is evidenced through the inclusion of food, traditions, pieces of clothing or hairstyles from non-British cultures, which are never italicised in the novel—even though to WASP eyes these words may seem foreign, and the elements that Evaristo formally “exocitises” are those belonging to WASP English culture. In a similar vein, the case of *Lonely Londoners*, by the Trinidadian author Sam Selvon (2014 [1956]), mainly written in a creolised English, also supports this perspective. Selvon’s creolised English blends different migrant nationalities into a fictional language and creates a homogenised linguistic community of immigrants. The author aimed to “not to emphasize the Otherness of West Indian speech but rather naturalize[d] it within a narration that is West Indian as a whole” (Palacios Guerra, 2024, p. 172). Here, a non-standard English also obtains literary status and allows Caribbean migrants’ voices—the Windrush Generation that arrived in a postwar London—to emerge, tell their stories, and keep haunting British identities, language, and whiteness in a postcolonial era.

3.2. The structural and thematic dimension

Going a step beyond the textual level, structural and thematic elements also provide fertile ground for a hauntological analysis, both in their literal and figurative dimensions. As with the textual level, objects, characters, or spaces may appear as actual spectres—as in ghosts’ stories—or possess spectral qualities—ambiguous presence or meaning, an uncanny or unsettling tendency toward repetition and recurrence. In this section, I shall consider literal ghosts and spectral objects/characters separately, since, as I will argue, the structural functions of literal ghosts may serve as a foundation for understanding other spectral devices, both in structural and thematic terms.

3.2.1. Literal ghosts

To conduct an analysis of the narrative function of a ghost in a literary work, it is useful to follow Propp's classical definition of 'function' as "as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action" (Propp, 2009, p. 21). In other words, the narrative function of a character is related to its impact on the plot, the other characters, and the overall development of the story. Continuing with Propp's narratological framework, it is important to remember that functions must not be confused with individual personages, nor do they depend on the character performing them. Moreover, a function is typically expressed in the form of a noun and cannot be defined in isolation from its position within the plot. Additionally, Propp emphasises that the sequence of functions within a tale is always identical (p. 22).

The narratological and structural analysis proposed by Propp —originally designed for folktales— is also suitable for ghost stories, which can themselves be understood as folktales, and similar narratives. Among the functions he outlines, several are usually performed by ghosts in narrative texts. The most relevant, which often appear in combination in ghost stories, include: Function n. 9, "Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go, or he is dispatched. (Definition: mediation, the connective incident)" (p. 36); Function n. 24 "A difficult task is proposed to the hero. (Definition: difficult task)" (p. 60), and Function n. 21, "The hero is pursued. (Definition: pursuit, chase)" (p. 56).

Typically, ghosts return to haunt the hero or other characters (Function 21) and, eventually, reveal important knowledge from the past —usually, related to a misfortune, act of violence or a lack. Subsequently, they may ask for vengeance or reparation or issue a command (Functions 9 or 24). Building upon Propp's framework, the set of structural moves associated with ghosts may include the functions outlined in Table 1. These functions may appear in a different order or may not all be present in every plot; however, at least one of them will be identifiable:

Table 1. The Ghost's Functions.

FA	Appearance and haunting: the moment that sets the plot in motion, the inciting incident. (Haunting)
FB	The hero tries to solve the mystery of the ghost's appearance/to come to terms with the haunt. (Research)
FC	The ghost reveals some sort of knowledge of a past misfortune. (Revelation)
FD	The ghost asks for something (revenge, peace, burial, the correction of a transgression...). (Petition)
FE	The wrong is corrected/the ghost is revenged/its request is fulfilled. This function tends to close the narrative. (Reparation)

A very straightforward example could be the ghost of Hamlet's father in the eponymous play. If we carry out a brief structural analysis following the functions proposed above, it becomes clear that the appearance of the King's ghost is the narrative's inciting incident of the play (FA). After his initial appearance, the characters —Marcellus, the guards, and then Hamlet— attempt to solve the mystery surrounding his appearance (FB). When Hamlet finally confronts the spectre, his father's ghost reveals that he was murdered by his own brother, who conspired with Hamlet's mother (FC), and ultimately asks his son for revenge (FD), enacted in Act V (FE).

However, a complementary thematic analysis —useful for a deeper hauntological approach— can be conducted, including a series of topic-related analytical points offering us a more nuanced lens to understand textual and metatextual functions of the ghost and the characters interacting with them. Among the elements that could be considered, and are susceptible to further development in future work, the following may be highlighted:

1. Who sees the ghost/in front of whom does the ghost appear? Can everyone in the narrative see it?
2. What is the reaction of the person seeing the ghost?
3. How does the ghost appear? (With sounds? Visually? With missing elements?)
4. When does the ghost appear?
5. Does the ghost make a demand? Is it fulfilled? What are the consequences?
6. Does the ghost disappear after voicing its demand or once the request is fulfilled?

These considerations allow for a more fruitful understanding of the function of the ghost, as they account not only for the structural dimension—as in Propp’s model—, but also provide insights into the thematic, ideological, and narrative elements tied to its appearance and actions. For instance, it is noteworthy how in Gothic and Victorian ghost stories, gender and class issues are foregrounded precisely by the character to whom ghosts appear. Their reaction to the spectre, or, in cases where there is no literal apparition, their general stance toward the supernatural, are also relevant to the analysis. An illustrative example of this could be Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, where “haunted by the threat of violence, sceptical mistresses and superstitious servants share in the terrors of the supernatural, which condition the ways in which they navigate the patriarchal space of the labyrinthine castle” (Liggins, 2020, p. 9).

A similar pattern emerges when we apply this perspective to other ghost stories written by Victorian women authors, where ghosts tend to appear to men, who react foolishly to the apparition, thus depriving them of their manly features, according to social standards of the era. The emergence of a supernatural being offers here a means to draw an oblique critique or ridicule of masculinity. Examples such as stories by Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Vernon Lee or Catherine Crow are compelling in this respect. To highlight one of these examples, in “Napoleon and the Spectre” Brontë (1833) takes the emperor as the main character of the story, as her object of mockery and critique. While Napoleon is in bed, he hears weird sounds coming from the closet, and

his answer depicts a violent and authoritative masculine stance: “‘Who’s there?’ cried the Emperor, seizing his pistols. ‘Speak, or I’ll blow your brains out.’” The spectre laughs at his bravado, and Napoleon tries to confront the presence opening the closet, but there is nothing, and he feels ashamed —believing in ghosts was not a very masculine thing to do. After that, he tries to explain what happened in rational terms (“it was but an ocular delusion”). Soon, the spectre speaks directly to him and commands him to follow him, and the great emperor, devoid of agency, “controlled by a mysterious influence, which deprived him of the capability of either thinking or acting for himself, [obeys] in silence”. Finally, the spirit conducts him to a lofty house near the Seine, inside, “a row of fine female figures, richly attired, stood”. After having ghastly visions and a moment of confusion, Napoleon finally meets the eyes of Marie Louise, and the place that a minute before seemed hellish is now again a normal room filled with elegant people, astonished by the emperor’s reaction. At last, unable to understand what has just happened, and hearing Marie Louise’s tale, who figures that he was sleepwalking, he falls into a kind of catalepsy.

As we can see in the example above, the narrative functions set into motion in the story’s structure are FA (haunting), FB (research) and FD (petition). If we look closer, following the thematic questions proposed above, what is perhaps more relevant in Brontë’s take on the ghost story is who the haunted hero is: Napoleon, a mighty emperor and, additionally, an enemy of England. It is also noteworthy that he is the only one seeing the ghost and that his first reaction is denial, then an attempt to logically explain the weird sounds, and then surrendering. The ghost appears firstly aurally and then visually, it appears at nighttime, between wake and sleep, and has a demand for the emperor: follow me. The demand is fulfilled, since the emperor, now powerless, feels obliged to follow the spectre’s steps. The consequences of the ghost’s demands are striking: the emperor will make himself a fool in front of a smart group of women, among them, his wife. Thus, inverting social structures and power dynamics, Brontë, through the ghost’s making, depicts the formerly mighty emperor as the mad, irrational and foolish character that believes in ghosts. Meanwhile, his wife, Marie Louise, is the one who takes charge of the

situation, gives him a rational explanation of what happened and, as if Napoleon were a woman, she suggests him to “leave the apartment and retire to rest?”, after which, ironically, the emperor faints — “fell into a fit of catalepsy” — as a lady. The vengeance (FE), though not carried out directly by the character himself, is subtly executed by the author with the help of the ghost.

In conclusion, a broader comprehension of the ghost’s meaning and impact on the narrative can be presented by combining a structural analysis —looking upon the ghost’s functions in the narrative— with a thematic approach addressing questions related to the interconnections of the ghost with other characters, or how, when, and why it appears. As Dickerson (1996) signalled in her pioneer work on women writers and the supernatural, ghost stories and supernatural elements allowed them to write more freely, experiment and challenge social taboos (p. 113). As we have seen, this analytical dimension helps us to gain insights about ideological struggles and frictions in place in a particular period, as we have very summarily pointed out regarding the Victorian era.

3.2.2. Metaphorical ghosts

Beyond literal ghosts —spectres, phantoms, apparitions—, other narrative agents such as characters, objects, or spaces that share elements with these figures should also be considered within a hauntological analysis. This becomes especially relevant when fiction moves away from non-mimetic settings and uses “realistic” settings and narratives, departing from the traditional ghost story genre. Blanco and Peeren (2013) summarised some of the traits that metaphorical ghosts share with their literal counterparts, such as their liminal position in terms of visibility/invisibility, absence/ presence, life/death, materiality/immateriality, and their relationship with powerful affects as obsession or trauma. Moreover, they noted that “a specific metamorphosis occurred of ghosts and haunting from possible actual entities, plot devices, and clichés of common parlance [...]”

into influential conceptual metaphors permeating global (popular) culture and academia alike” (2013, p. 2).

In fiction, as it will be further outlined, we do not require literal ghosts —draped in white sheets or dragging a ball and chains— for the spectral to emerge. Likewise, as scholars, readers or writers, we do not need to believe in “real ghosts” to conduct a hauntological analysis and to identify spectral instances within texts that transcend the literal motif of the ghost. As Derrida (2006) observed, the traditional scholar

does not believe in ghosts—nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being [...], in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity. (p. 12)

Therefore, to identify spectral agents in mimetic narratives, we must look for unstable elements, characters, spaces, and objects that challenge objectivity, full presence, the radical opposition of life and death, presence and absence, or have ambiguous temporalities. Agents that return in some form and haunt other spaces and characters, disrupt temporal lines, or carry traces of the past that voice traumas, acts of violence or misdeeds. They keep speaking and making demands. These elements —organic or inorganic— gain agency precisely due to their haunting dimension: their effects on the affects of the reader and the diegetic characters.

A widely explored example is, of course, the haunted house.³ Though often still closely tied to non-mimetic genres through the presence of literal ghosts, certain literary houses and spaces —not haunted by visible apparitions— can function as narrative agents in their own right, gain agency and disturb their inhabitants. One compelling case is

³ For a comprehensive cultural story of haunted houses, see Couto-Ferreira (2021).

Manderley in *Rebecca*, by Daphne du Maurier (2018 [1938]), where the house itself, and the objects within, all marked with the initial of Mr. De Winter's murdered wife, Rebecca, appear repeatedly to haunt the unnamed narrator, and have an eerie effect on her:

There was notepaper also in the drawer [...] I took one out and looked at it, unwrapped it from its thin tissue of paper. "Mrs. M. de Winter" it said, and in the corner "Manderley." I put it back in the box again, and shut the drawer, feeling guilty suddenly, and deceitful, as though I were staying in somebody else's house and my hostess had said to me. (p. 94).

[...]

[The handkerchief] must have been in the mackintosh pocket for a long time. There was a monogram in the corner. A tall sloping R, with the letters de W interlaced. The R dwarfed the other letters, the tail of it ran down into the cambric, away from the laced edge. It was only a small handkerchief, quite a scrap of a thing. It had been rolled in a ball and put away in the pocket and forgotten. (p. 132).

These objects, and the house itself, serve as instruments of revenge, preventing closure and the erasure of the past crime. In the first case, the apparition of the stationary materials of Rebecca —with "Mrs. M. de Winter" written on them— inspire fear in the unnamed narrator, as if she were touching something unholy, dangerous ("I put it back in the box again, and shut the drawer, feeling guilty" (p. 95)). In the second case, the sudden appearance of the handkerchief (a trace from the past, a memento of Rebecca, that also carries her embroidered name) has a similar effect: she feels that the R —as a metonymy of Rebecca— dwarfs other letters, symbolically, everything else. The "dwarfing R" is, in fact, an idea that appears several times, as a revenant: "Rebecca stood out black and strong, the tall and sloping R dwarfing the other letters" (p. 36). Rebecca's ghost will be everywhere in Manderley, presented through these mementoes, which prevent the new

wife from becoming Mrs. De Winter —the narrator enunciates more than five times, with different phrasings, “I would be Mrs. de Winter”, never fully *being* her, spectralising her own presence at Manderley. She even considers herself dead when picking up a call aimed at her, the new lady of the house:

“I’m afraid you have made a mistake,” I said; “Mrs. de Winter has been dead for over a year.” I sat there, waiting, staring stupidly into the mouthpiece, and it was not until the name was repeated again, the voice incredulous, slightly raised, that I became aware, with a rush of color to my face, that I had blundered irretrievably, and could not take back my words. (p. 95)

Lastly, even after the house and all of its objects are destroyed in the fire that consumes the manor, these spectral mementoes of Rebecca continue to haunt the unnamed narrator, who still dreams of returning to Manderley. Even in dreams she is unable to enter the house as Mrs. de Winter, as we read in the opening of the novel: “Last night I dreamed I went to Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the drive, and for a while *I could not enter, for the way was barred to me*” (p. 1, my italics).

A similar example can be found in *Vera*, by Elizabeth von Arnim (2025 [1921]), a precursor of Du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, where the portrait of Mr. Wemyss’s first wife — Vera Wemyss— constitutes a spectral presence haunting the main character, the second wife, the naïve Lucy Entwistle. Lucy, thanks to the unsettling atmosphere of the family house and the pervasive presence of the late Mrs. Wemyss through her portrait, discovers the truth about Vera’s death and the dangerous nature of his husband. It is precisely looking at Vera’s spectral eyes —“how suitable, thought Lucy, gazing into her dead predecessor’s eyes”— that Lucy begins to shift perspectives, rejecting her husband’s narrative and seeking an alternative account of the past, especially regarding Vera’s

death. Her discoveries will reveal her husband's violent and manipulative nature, as though Vera's ghost were warning her.

Continuing with the characterisation of ghostly spaces and objects, key to approach spectrality in mimetic genres, recent research has explored the intersections of hauntology, gentrification and the urban abandonment due to financial crisis —particularly in the aftermath of the Lehman Brothers' collapse (Rodríguez Serrano, 2019; Bodnar, 2023; Lown, 2025). These explorations grasp the spectral dimension of contemporary fictional spaces in mimetic genres, which manifests in eerie neighbourhoods where the past has been erased —the old grocery store, the local bookshop, the butcher, the shoemaker, the old house— and replaced by an homogeneous landscape of a global nowhere, where the spectres of capitalist realism (Fisher, 2009) will haunt our urban experiences. As Lown (2025) poses:

Hauntings are the absence of a community through the presence of the things that caused that absence: brand new luxury apartment buildings, rehabilitated housing structures, trendy new cafes and restaurants, new park systems and bike paths. Hauntings are also present in the signifiers of a community's absence: changes in demographics, increased police presence, lower neighbourhood involvement in the day-to-day tasks of maintaining neighbourhood cleanliness and order. Hauntings are present in both the structures themselves and the absence of former centres of community. (p. 5)

The negative counterpart of those gentrified spaces are derelict areas —zones abandoned due to migration, economic collapse, or halted construction projects. A compelling literary example could be found in *Normal People*, by Sally Rooney (2018), where a neighbourhood, Mountain View, is described as a “ghost state”, where “the houses were huge, with bare concrete facades and overgrown front lawns. Some of the empty window holes were

covered over in plastic sheeting, which whipped around loudly in the wind” (p. 33). The main characters, Marianne and Connell, enter one of the houses, larger than their homes: an old and abandoned house, now a refuge for teenagers to drink, hide or have sex. They wonder why the houses are uninhabited and why the owners “can’t give them away if they can’t sell them”. Marianne replies: “It’s something to do with capitalism” (p. 34). From the haunted house of the traditional ghost story to haunted neighbourhoods and spaces of contemporary fiction, ghosts are no longer confined to the supernatural—such as the ghost of capitalism and its misdeeds—, and dwell and haunt both readers and the characters.

As seen with the examples above, the spectral dimension of objects, spaces, and materialities is also relevant in a hauntological reading. Like characters and spaces, inorganic agents may fulfil structural functions similar to those of literal ghosts and evoke analogous effects on readers and characters. In traditional ghost stories, misplaced objects, flying objects, and moving objects could be signs for ghosts or, at least, the suggestion of something eerie going on, as in the turned tables of a *séance*. Nevertheless, in mimetic genres, as we have seen, objects may also have a spectral function without the supernatural dimension of traditional ghost stories. Items from the dead, misplaced objects, anachronistic artefacts, or even digital platforms and virtual objects can all participate in the logic of spectrality.

3.3. The narrative dimension

Advancing to the macrotextual level—where the narrative architecture of literary texts comes into focus—relevant hauntological devices may also be found. At this level, spectrality mainly emerges through broken temporalities and focalisation shifts. As I will present through various examples, these narrative strategies—understood following Bal’s (1997) definition of narrative—present an inherent instability, a non-presence, or introduce a temporal disjunction. Broken temporalities and focalisation shifts allow a spectral

dimension to step into the text: they erode temporal unity, linearity, absolute presence, or the narrative authority. As Fisher (2012) observed: “haunting can be seen as intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space. It happens when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time” (p. 19).

As for temporality, the narrative can become haunted when we encounter the following elements: flashbacks, forebodings, and abrupt temporal shifts that fracture the plot’s linear progression. These elements allow the past and future to intrude upon the narrative present, destabilising it. The appearance of a literal ghost is always characterised by this same “out-of-joint” nature, as Hamlet famously expressed seeing his father’s phantom. Likewise, a flashback or a premonition introduces alternative temporalities haunting the present temporality. “The spectral is never *present as such*” (Derrida, 2006, p. xvii); it exists in a disarticulated temporality.

Moreover, flashbacks function both as repetition and as an event occurring for the first time—they are surprising and even traumatic because they irrupt into the present moment—, which is consistent with Derrida’s description of the motif of the ghost (2006, p. 10). Flashbacks are also frequently associated with repressed memories and traumas: events that the conscious mind attempted to forget or exorcise, but which nonetheless keep returning, resurfacing, haunting us in the present. A flashback, like a ghost that keeps returning, may constitute the recurrent expression of trauma; its resurfacing breaks the linear course of time by irrupting into the survivor’s life (Herman, 1998, p. 28).

At this juncture, literary trauma theory, postcolonial criticism, and hauntology converge, as Brisley (2015) has argued, since “narratological manifestations of the traumatic condition are regarded as ethical markers inasmuch as they resist the narrative closure that might signal the betrayal of the past and its victims” (p. 97). Similarly, as Pederson (2014) argues in his framework for a literary theory of trauma, one of the key analytical elements of this approach is the presence of “depictions of experiences that are temporally, physically, or ontologically distorted” (p. 339). Collective traumas—such

as those studied in postcolonial literary criticism— also exhibit these formal traits, insofar as asynchronicity and flashbacks constitute central formal devices within postcolonial poetics, as Tabunan (2022) has shown.

To analyse the haunting effects of the flashback, *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf (2025 [1925]) offers compelling evidence. In the novel, the use of the flashback is combined with numerous shifts in focalisation that contribute to the disruption of narrative linearity and authority. A particularly telling instance is Lucrezia's flashback moments after her husband, Septimus, has committed suicide, as if more benign memories from the past could shield her from the traumatic event:

But the clock went on striking, four, five, six and Mrs. Filmer waving her apron (they wouldn't bring the body in here, would they?) seemed part of that garden; or a flag. She had once seen a flag slowly rippling out from a mast when she stayed with her aunt at Venice. Men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the War. Of her memories, most were happy.

She put on her hat, and ran through cornfields—where could it have been?— on to some hill, somewhere near the sea, for there were ships, gulls, butterflies; they sat on a cliff. In London too, there they sat, and, half dreaming, came to her through the bedroom door, rain falling, whisperings, stirrings among dry corn, the caress of the sea, as it seemed to her, hollowing them in its arched shell and murmuring to her laid on shore, strewn she felt, like flying flowers over some tomb. (pp. 227-228).

The apron, as a visual trigger, fosters the association with the flag and prompts the rapid emergence of Lucrezia's wartime memories, marked by a sense of happiness and security. These memories sharply contrast with the traumatic experiences Septimus endured on the battlefield, which ultimately led him to develop PTSD —formally represented in the

novel through recurrent flashbacks and hallucinations. In Lucrezia's case, however, and in a mirror movement to the disturbing visions that have haunted her husband throughout the narrative, the flashback functions, contrarily, as a temporary refuge: it allows her to withdraw from the unbearable present —her husband's dead body after his leap onto Mrs. Filmer's area railings— and to inhabit, however briefly, moments from a distant past, far from London, in Venice, among cornfields and by the sea.

Finally, focalisation shifts also present a hauntological dimension. These shifts deconstruct the authority of a single narrative voice, erode the notion of full presence and allow multiple perspectives to surface, following the movement of the *différance*. They may produce unreliable narrators or even cast suspicion over the literary artefact as a whole. *Mrs. Dalloway* once again is a very representative example of this formal device and its hauntological function, as it enables for alternative perceptions of that single morning in mid-June in London to emerge and challenge a unified narrative perspective. For instance, when focalisation shifts to Septimus, readers are able to feel the fractured reality he inhabits: ordinary sounds and images, harmless to everyone else, are transformed, within his fractured mind, into threatening reminders of the wartime trauma: “[A]nd this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames” (p. 21).

An additional and more contemporary example of the haunting effects of focalisation shifts may be found in Hernan Díaz's *Trust* (2022), where four different versions of a similar story unfold through distinct voices and characters, sometimes conflicting. The repetition of events across these four accounts, in conjunction with the shifting focalisation, fosters a spectral texture, a haunted reading, one where initially well-defined characters dissolve into ghostly doubles in later sections. They become both real and unreal, simultaneously existing and fictional, while the purported truth of the narrated events is repeatedly called into question by each new version, ultimately leaving readers without stable answers regarding the story's “truth”.

Furthermore, this device enables the emergence of repressed or marginalised perspectives, which are central to hauntological analysis, as spectral voices that remain outside the centre of the narrative stage. For instance, the story of the supposedly “mad” wife, Mildred Bevel, is repeatedly challenged and appears as a spectral counter-narrative through shifts in focalisation and the combination of different narrative voices. In this sense, spectrality operates as a method of unravelling “official” versions, “solidified history”. As Kirss (2013) argues:

Spectrality may be seen as a threshold phenomenon rendered potentially and intermittently visible between what Jan and Aleida Assmann have called “communicative memory” and “cultural memory,” before official versions of history solidify, often minimizing and erasing the traces of violence. (p. 24).

In conclusion, focalisation shifts and the use of multiple narrative voices are especially significant in a hauntological reading when they allow for alternative discourses to emerge from different characters’ viewpoints —as seen with *Mrs. Dalloway* or *Trust*—. This is often achieved by combining what Bal (1997) refers to as ‘character-bound’ or ‘internal focalisation’ with ‘external focalisation’. Oscillating between external and internal perspectives, or changing the object of focalisation, enables previously suppressed discourses, traits, or readings to rise to the surface, thus injecting ambiguity or challenging one-sided interpretations.

3.4. The intertextual dimension

Intertextuality plays a crucial role in hauntological readings, as it foregrounds the text’s openness to other texts. These *other* texts, as traces from the past, are never fully present nor fully absent. They lurk spectrally in their non-presence and out-of-joint temporality, undermining the ideal of textual unity and blurring the boundaries of

authorship and influence. When considering the relationship between a literary work and its predecessors—or even future texts—as a hauntological phenomenon, intertextuality may adopt manifold forms: literal citation, paraphrase, veiled allusion, rephrasing, rewriting, or adaptation. Translation would also be included in this dimension—as explored in previous works (Molines-Galarza, 2025)—since it constitutes a specifically spectral task, dealing with absence/presence, past and future temporalities, otherness and hospitality. It blurs binarisms and boundaries between original and copy, past and future, self and other.

Previous works have already considered the connections between hauntology and intertextuality (Lorek-Jezińska, 2013; Shaw, 2018; Leblond, 2020, Fontaine, 2024). It constitutes a very prolific pairing, since the ghost “is both an apparition and a figure of discourse [...]. Hauntological thinking, therefore, is productive for the literary critic in that it connects with literature’s history *qua* intertextuality” (Leblond, 2020, p. 1311). On her side, Shaw (2018), alluding to the hauntological dimension of intertextuality, adds that texts function as amalgams of prior materials, creating a network of texts outside themselves, connecting past narratives and reengaging with them in different times and contexts (p. 17). Derrida (2006) captured this dynamic as follows: “What happens between two, and between all the “two’s” one likes, such as between life and death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghost [s’entretenir de quelque fantôme]. So it would be necessary to learn Spirits” (p. xvii).

In this *à deux* relationship, the ghostly emerges with particular force, and it is of paramount importance to consider the liminal space of in-between texts. The liminal space between texts becomes a site where the spectral presence of other works offers new insights—both into the newly contextualised source texts and into the work at hand, haunted by literary history, influence, and otherness. Following Wolfreys (2002), when analysing instances of intertextuality, “we read the trace, the phantom-text, and what Derrida calls [...] the act of phantomizing the text, as the haunting disturbance within the textual mechanics of representation” (p. 123). Moreover, these intertexts may be intended by the

author or activated by the reader's experience, functioning as hovering, ghostly threads within the text that deconstruct its unity and open it to other spaces and temporalities.

It should be noted that intertextual devices can be doubly haunting, since both texts involved in the intertextual relation can be affected by their ghostly contact. Their different temporalities, styles, and proper names collide, offering new agencies and potentialities for each. Contemporary rewritings of canonical works, for instance, offer alternative readings that voice shadowy or marginalised elements on the previous work. In this vein, Shaw proposes a compelling analysis of the phantasmal intertexts in Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* (2011 [2009]), a text that is "haunted by the pervading presence of a series of intertextual ghosts that function to extend the influence of events on stage, enabling his contemporary drama to stage debates about English culture and identity in the post-millennial period" (p. 44). In this case, Butterworth proposes an intertextual play with Blake's eponymous poem and offers new layers of meaning while addressing contemporary anxieties and issues.

A ghostly contact may affect the original text even more directly, as illustrated in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë (1847) and Jean Rhys's rewriting of Bertha Mason's story in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). As Choudhury (1996) notes in her analysis of the postcolonial intertextuality of Rhys' novel, "through the rupture of temporalities, reversal of effects, identifications and doublings —those devices of subversion that mark its difference— *Wide Sargasso Sea* ends up completing and problematizing the canonical text" (p. 318). Or, as Butler (2014) adds, analysing the same pair of novels and Rhys' reimagining of the "mad woman in the attic", "hauntological readings demonstrate that the literary ghosts of one text can haunt others [...] and enriched readings emerge" (p. 130).

To include the intertextual dimension in a hauntological approach to literary texts, aspects such as the following could be considered:

1. How does the presence or absence of the other text(s) affect the analysed text (AT)?

2. How does the recontextualisation of the other text (OT) alter its original meaning or reception?
3. Does the intertextual engagement reveal alternative readings or previously latent elements in the OT?
4. What is the narrative, thematic, or stylistic function of the intertext within the AT?

In conclusion, intertextuality, within a hauntological framework, reveals the spectral entanglements between texts in which past and present coexist in a state of productive tension. Far from being static echoes, intertexts become dynamic presences—simultaneously shaping and being reshaped by their reappearances. Through these ghostly dialogues, marginalised voices, and dormant meanings resurface, challenging canonical authority and opening new interpretative pathways. By examining how texts haunt and are haunted—through thematic, stylistic, narrative echoes, and even paratextual devices—we gain a richer understanding of literature's temporal complexities and the enduring resonance of cultural memory.

4. FINAL REMARKS

Following the spectral turn that humanities and other disciplines have experienced in the past decades, a critical lens to cultural and social constructions, such as hauntology, makes room for the emergence of the spectral veins present in past and contemporary texts. Voicing the spectral dimension of literary texts unsettles homogeneous readings, offers new insights on canonical interpretations and gives us an ethical framework based on the act of listening to the ghosts, their demands, the individual and collective traumas they represent, and the alternative futures they point at. Hauntological criticism may also be understood as an extension of deconstructive criticism, one that incorporates insights from other approaches in literary theory while emphasising the ethical responsibility toward the Other.

This paper has sought to propose a hauntological approach to literary texts, specifically for fiction, not as a rigid method but as a flexible strategy or lens through which to explore spectrality in literature. As outlined above, this framework differs from previous approaches (see Section 2) in that it transcends the thematic and conceptual level and articulates both formal and topic-related elements to examine not only the presence of literal ghosts but also the spectral texture and devices of fiction on multiple levels. Moreover, the framework incorporates critical elements from other traditions in literary criticism —such as narratology and ambiguity studies— which provide additional tools for approaching literary texts from a hauntological perspective, thereby continuing and expanding deconstructive criticism. It also moves progressively from the microtextual to the macrotextual level, ultimately reaching intertextual/extratextual elements and thus offering a more comprehensive hauntological lens. This structured framework, defined with conceptual precision and substantiated through close-reading examples, which should be expanded in future works, offers an exploratory analytical tool for hauntological criticism. Establishing a methodological tool may help mitigate the potential problem identified by Kirss (2013): hauntology and the trope of haunting risk becoming merely a poetics unless a rigorously conceptual vocabulary is developed. Nevertheless, as an initial exploratory proposal, the model remains flexible and open to refinement as additional in-depth case studies are undertaken.

To this end, as addressed above, five interrelated analytical dimensions have been outlined. First, the textual level, where microtextual spectral aspects appear. Among them, ambiguities, puns, double meanings, repetitions, recurring elements, and language variation have been explored. Beyond the textual level, the structural and thematic dimensions have been charted, following narratological approaches. Here, a set of structural functions associated with literal ghosts was identified and explored alongside thematic concerns, such as the ghost's relation to other narrative components. This dual focus of the second and third dimensions offered a more nuanced lens to approach their structural and thematic relevance within narrative architectures. The analysis then extended to metaphorical

ghosts and other spectral figures —entities that, while not literally undead, share formal and functional traits with ghosts and thus warrant inclusion in a hauntological reading. Subsequently, stepping into a more macrotextual level, different narrative elements, such as focalisation or narrative temporalities, have been examined and illuminated with examples to offer a fourth analytical dimension. Broken temporalities and focalisation shifts emerged as key hauntological markers, as they disrupt narrative coherence, unsettle voice and authority, and create fissures in time that allow past or anticipated futures to infiltrate the narrative present with alternative discourses. Lastly, considering previous works linking hauntology and intertextuality, a fifth analytical dimension was proposed, the intertextual one. Within this category, an emphasis has been placed on how the intertextual interplay haunts and affects both the analysed text and the other text, and how this interplay may rewrite and illuminate spectral elements in them, and renegotiate meanings and readings.

Taken together, these five dimensions —textual, structural/thematic, narrative, and intertextual— form a flexible framework for hauntological literary analysis. Rather than offering a prescriptive or closed methodology, this methodological tool aims to illuminate the multifaceted ways spectrality manifests in texts, allowing for interpretive flexibility and adaptability to specific contexts, analytical interests, and literary works.

In future work, this approach could be fruitfully adapted to other media and art forms —such as film, photography, or music, among others— by attending to formal and structural elements specific to each signifying system. Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge that the examples used throughout this paper were solely illustrative, given the scope and limitations of the study, which aimed to offer an exploratory framework for future analysis and case-specific research. Ultimately, the hauntological reading strategy proposed in this paper invites us to attend to the traces, absences, and revenants that structure literary meaning —reminding us that texts are never wholly present, never fully closed, and always haunted by other times, voices, and possibilities.

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