

# Visitors from beyond the Grave

## Ghosts in World Literature

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- Perhaps they are ghosts who lived in this house before and who... I've already told you (...) ghosts go about in white sheets and carry chains and go...

- Anne, why do you make up such stories?

- I don't. I read them in books.

*The Others* (2001)

It was not until as recently as 1972, in Toronto (Ontario), that the so-called "Philip experiment" would cast serious doubts regarding our whole knowledge of phantasmagorical entities. Under the direction of the mathematician A.R.G. Owen and the supervision of the psychologist J. Whitton, a small diverse group of people were brought together for no reason other than to father a ghost. From lines written by the Irish partakers and chroniclers M. Owen and Margaret Sparrow in *Conjuring up Philip: An Adventure in Psychokinesis* (New York 1976), we know that the experiment began in a childish way, when the research group made up the story of the fictional Philip Aylesford. His background, in spite of some incongruities and historical mistakes, reflects the creativity of the group when it came to plausibility. The story went that Philip was originally a young Cavalier during the English Civil War, born in Warwickshire in 1624, married twice, once in his twenties to Dorothea, and then again in his thirties to Margo. He finally died in the year 1654 (see also, Colombo <sup>4</sup>2002: 122-127).

From this basic framework, the members of the group devised the rest of Philip's details in order to construct a realistic figure. After the first meetings, each member was individually called into a sealed room in order to try and communicate with Philip. Evidently, these early weeks did not yield any results, so the supervisors decided to change the decoration of the usual rooms accustomed to the *séances* of the day, and bring all the members together. Now the group communicated with the invented ghost of Philip through scratches and raps in the table, and enjoyed conversations with him such as the following:

Group: "Did you ever get drunk?"

Philip: (Rap) "Yes."

G.: "But not too often?"

Ph.: (Rap, rap) "No."

All in all, notwithstanding the weight of the members' subconscious influencing these conversations, which may have accounted for everything, the group finished by constructing the story of a young Philip who joined the army at sixteen, was married first to the cold Dorothea because his parents obliged, and then fell in love with the gypsy Margo who, having been accused of

witchcraft, was burned at the stake. Philip, then, committed suicide at the young age of thirty.

The conclusions of the so-called “Philip Experiment” keep in limbo questions such as whether ghosts exist or not, but at least provide an example of a pseudo-scientific conception of an invented and literary phantom, which serves as the main topic of the pages that follow.

The next seventeen chapters deal with the topic of ghosts in universal literature from a polyhedral perspective, making use of different perspectives, all of which highlight the resilience of these figures from the very beginning of literature up to the present day. Therefore, the aim of this volume is to focus on how ghosts have been translated and transformed over the years within literature written in the following languages: classical Greek and Latin, Spanish, Italian, and English.

The source of these tributaries in the long river of literature is well known. The ghost of Enkidu, who died in the prime of his youth, in the *Poem of Gilgamesh* (2500-2000 BC), comes back from the hereafter to visit his friend and the main protagonist of the saga, the king of Uruk, Gilgamesh, to inform him of afterlife in the underworld. Later on in the occidental literature of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Homeric *Iliad* features the spectre of Patroclus, who appeared to Achilles in dreams to ask that his corpse should be buried in the proper way. Since this scene, phantasmagorical entities have not been absent from Hellenic literature from any literary genre or historical age.

With the aim of inquiring into these origins, Consuelo Ruiz-Montero (University of Murcia), in “Ghosts Stories in the Greek Novel: a Typology Attempt”, focuses on the use of ghosts in the Greek novel of the Hellenistic ages. Ruiz-Montero analyses nine episodes transmitted by papyrus under the titles of *Ephesiaca* by Xenophon of Ephesus, *Callirhoe* by Chariton, and *Babyloniaca* by Iamblichus. The author classifies these passages depending on whether the stories are related in the first person to the ghost, or in the third person by another feature. She then evaluates several of the text’s qualities, such as the grade of credibility of falsehood given to the story, the nomenclature of the spirits, their appearance and common motifs – such as the feminine guile to solve situations, the eroticism of the ghost’s presence, the conversation between two ghosts, etc. Finally, the interesting conclusions to the chapter open up the field of study by breaking the fictitious boundaries between Greek and Latin literatures.

Dámaris Romero (University of Córdoba), in her own way, focuses her chapter “The Function of Dream-Stories in Plutarch’s *Lives*” on Imperial Greek literature, specifically on the apparition of ghosts in three dreams narrated by Plutarch in the *Vitae* of Caesar-Brutus, Caius Gracchus, and Cimon. The researcher divides her chapter into two clear sections: a) an analysis of the literary form of ghostly dreams; and b) a development of the proper analysis of the passages, goals and intentions of these dreams in Plutarch’s narrative, and

the different elements used by the Chaeronean to accomplish them.

The third chapter, “Menippus, a Truly Live Ghost in Lucian’s *Necromancy*”, by Pilar Gómez (University of Barcelona), provides an interesting analysis into the figure of the philosopher Menippus and his travel to the hereafter in the works of Lucian. In her view, the passage provides a path to observance of the meaning of human life, as well as the doctrines of philosophers, which have failed in the age of the Second Sophistic. Thus, through parody and humour, the motif of Menippus’s journey to Hades allowed Lucian not only to entertain his audience, but also to enquire about ethical and philosophical issues.

Daniel Ogden (University of Exeter) in “Lies Too Good to Lay to Rest: The Survival of Pagan Ghost Stories in Early Christian Literature” breaks down the boundaries between Christian and pagan literature to deal with the transmission of three ghost stories from Greek and Latin literature to the early Christian corpus, in order to evaluate how the Christian authors re-create and adapt these stories in order to christianise them. In doing so, the author focuses his chapter on several traditional and typical scenes, to wit, ‘the haunted house’, ‘the ghost who locates a lost deposit’, and ‘the mistaken underworld escort’.

Finally, Manuel Bermúdez Vázquez (University of Córdoba) with “Demons, Ghosts and Spirits in the Philosophical Tradition” ends this section regarding Greek literature by linking the views of three philosophers on a common topic in their philosophical works: the *daimones*, or spirits. Indeed, Socrates, Descartes, and Hegel all resort to the figure of the daemon in order to illustrate their philosophical concepts. Thus, according to the author, these three philosophers used the *daimon* as a force that put them “in the path of the search for truth and philosophical inquiry” (p. 84) by combining irrational magical-religious aspects with philosophical reason.

From these first literary motifs, that show the evolution, dispersion, and influence of the concept of ghosts across diverse literary genres and fields, Latin literature then developed the topic by creating some of the most interesting scenes in the occidental cultural tradition. The use of ghosts as a concept in arguments between philosophical schools is beyond any kind of doubt: the phantom was not only a reality in irrational Greek folklore – to use Dodds’s terminology – but was also a philosophical entity worthy of rational speculation. This development was evident since the Hellenistic ages, with a special peak in interest during the Second Sophistic age in Greek and Latin literature.

Following this stream of philosophical interpretations of ghost stories, Ángel J. Traver Vera (independent research), in “The Atomistic Denial of Ghosts: From Democritus to Lucretius”, discusses the atomistic premises against the existence of ghosts. In dealing with this topic, Traver Vera first establishes the philosophical principles of the atomistic philosophers, in order to argue the inexistence of ghosts from an atomistic point of view, as merely “printed images”. Indeed, the physical proposals of Leucippus that

were allegedly qualified by Democritus suggest, although in a veiled manner, that atoms, by “falling”, were able to create images by keeping themselves ingrained in the eyes and minds of individuals. Consequently, due to the fact that these images could remain in the observer even when the object had died and decomposed, paranormal phenomena received an almost-plausible explanation. Following a similar path, Lucretius also resorted in his *Rerum Natura* (1. 127-135; 4. 26-109; 724-822) to the proposals of Democritus and Leucippus to explain the same problems.

In order to apply different angles to the Roman *corpora*, the next chapter by Miguel Rodríguez-Pantoja (University of Córdoba), “The Role of the Ghosts in Seneca’s Tragedies”, begins with a brief characterisation, on the one hand, of Seneca’s tragedies, and, on the other, of the phantasmagorical apparitions that come from Hades, or from the other side, in those tragedies. Once the researcher has framed his main topic, he attends to the heart of his investigation, namely, the typology of apparitions among the numerous examples extracted from the plays of the Cordovan tragedian. The interesting conclusions of this chapter show the value of these apparitions beyond their origins in Seneca’s *corpus*.

A diachronic overview of a wide range of cultures, from Roman ages to current occidental, is provided by Gabriel Laguna Mariscal (University of Córdoba) in “Ghosts of Girlfriends Past: Development of a Literary Episode”, in which the researcher analyses the main reasons for the return of the ghost to his lover, be it for asking something about the past, giving advice, or instructing about the future. To do so, Laguna Mariscal begins his chapter with the aforementioned Greek passage of Patroclus and Achilles (*Iliad* 23), and continues with Latin sources, in particular the elegies of Propertius to the already-dead Cynthia. To conclude, the author looks forward to the current Spanish literature by observing how essential elements of the topic live on safe and sound in some important poets, such as Petrarch, Luis Martín de Plaza, Jaime Gil de Biedma, and Luis Alberto de Cuenca.

It seems clear that up to this moment that there are two main lines of thought with respect to the topic that overwhelm occidental culture: one folkloric, whose sources are difficult to define, and a second literary-rationalistic one, having evident common points with the first, but keeping several constant elements that can be summed up as follows:

a) Spectres appear unexpectedly to individuals in high-stress situations, whether after a beloved’s death, before a battle, or just because they find themselves in an alien place.

b) The ghost tends to materialise in a precise moment, in the peacefulness of the hours from twilight to deepest night.

c) As far as the seer is concerned, there are two possibilities:

1) The seer was known to the ghost in life. Consequently, recognition takes place during the scene.

2) The seer can be a wise philosopher who, by means of a message from the other side, achieves a knowledge veiled from the majority.

As for the other character in the scene, the ghost, it is remarkable that his appearance is difficult to determine due to his versatility. We observe in the precedent papers that a ghost's aspect depends on the various conditions of the deceased, that is, whether they died young or old, the kind of life they lived, and especially the circumstances of their death; in particular, whether they died violently or not. In this respect, it must be emphasised that a good number of phantoms maintain their living appearance, although they still keep their wounds, burns, or even bandages. Likewise, most of the ghosts are not free from another human feature: their memory. This is implied in their professed purpose for visiting the living, be it to protect or to advise someone about an imminent danger, to avenge someone or himself, to conclude some activity that his sudden passing left as a pending matter, or to ask for a worthy burial. In any case, the spectre seems to be poised between two sides, life and death, and thereby has the ability to know the past, the present, and the future, as he confirms through his message.

This literary conception of phantasmagorical entities permeates deeply through the next occidental literature to be examined, even if each author adapts the motifs for his own time and to his own agenda. From the authors that are taken into account in the following pages it is worthwhile to mention Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Richard III*, and in the Hispanic letters *El burlador de Sevilla* attributed to Tirso de Molina. Likewise, the topic of terror as a basic playful element is analysed in the chapter that regards *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole.

Consequently, these topics will eventually constitute the most common characteristics of ghost stories, by fixing in the imagination some common elements, such as the scene of an ancient place outside of civilisation; a medieval castle, or later an inhospitable house; a location with a sterile and nebulous ambience; being in a current moment but stagnated by the past; features that are not really what they seem to be given their obscure and traumatic backgrounds; and, of course, ghosts that appear as visions or dreams to remember that their presence is a guaranteed sign of an accursed place.

These characteristics can all be traced in the works of Boccaccio, who comes to the fore in the third section of this volume.

Francisco José Rodríguez Mesa (University of Córdoba) starts his chapter entitled "On Women's Faithfulness and Ghosts: About *Decameron* 7.1" with a brief analysis of the Italian terms 'fantasma' and 'fantasima', *ghost*, in medieval Italian literature, to bring to light the importance of Boccaccio for a discussion of

this topic. Boccaccio established in his works a curious relationship, in a comic context, between ‘fantasima’ and the tricky conduct of women. The researcher inquires into the reasons behind the feminine conduct by taking into account not only the roles that both male and female characters play in the *Decameron*, but also the roles they have in the real world.

The next section, dealing with Spanish literature, focuses on two authors from the 15th and 17th centuries, Lope de Barrientos and Calderón de la Barca.

In “‘Ghost’ in the Magic Treatises of Lope de Barrientos”, Antonia Rísquez Madrid with (University of Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona) deals with the interesting and almost-unknown figure of the bishop Barrientos (1382-1469), a prominent figure in the intellectual life of his age. Rísquez Madrid focuses her attention on the concept of ‘fantasma’, *ghost*, in the scholastic and didactic works of the Spanish writer. As a result, the chapter moves from an analysis of the phantom to a reflection regarding the tradition of Aristotelian gnosiology and the theories about the external and internal senses in Barrientos, whose theological meaning is unavoidable.

Ane Zapatero Molinuevo (University of Vitoria), in “‘Phantom Ladies’ and ‘Ghost Gallants’: The Motif of Supernatural Lovers in the Spanish Golden Age Theatre”, analyses the variations of the concept of the ghost, specifically the ‘phantom lady’ on the one hand and the ‘ghost gallant’ on the other, as recurrent motifs in the comedies of the Golden Age of Spanish literature. Here the goal of this motif was to allow for a meeting between lovers overcoming the boundaries of death. The researcher also focuses on the Calderonian treatment of these invented male and female ghosts, and bases her arguments on *La dama duende* and *El galán fantasma*. Right after the analysis of both plays, Zapatero Molinero concludes her chapter by establishing the theoretical framework in which these *loci comunes* are used in comedy.

Evidently, ghost stories are not restricted to Romanic literature; German and English literature is where most of the popular current topics flourish. The researchers will continue to find examples of ghosts in the classical sense, but given metaphorical meaning, with such features defined by Peeren as the “lack of social visibility, unobtrusiveness, enigmatic abilities or uncertain status between life and death” (Peeren 2014: 5). In order to deal with both meanings, the classical one and the new defined by Peeren, the rich Anglo-Saxon literature is the focus for the fifth section of the volume. Four of the most prominent authors from all ages are examined from different angles: the plays of Shakespeare; the influence of the gothic novel on H.P. Lovecraft and another modern author, Stephen King; and, finally, postcolonial literature is analysed through the figure of Jean Rhys.

To begin with, Mónica M. Martínez Sariago (University of Las Palmas), saddled between English and Spanish literatures, provides the next chapter, “‘Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me’: Haunting Ghosts, Remorse and Guilt

in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and Javier Marías". Here, the researcher focuses on the ghosts that torment Richard III in Shakespeare's tragedy, which, in Martínez Sariego's view, are plausibly the subtext and the source of the novel *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* by Javier Marías. In her view, these ghosts allow the Spanish writer to reflect on culpability and remorse, essential topics in his novels.

Juan L. Pérez-de-Luque (University of Córdoba) takes into account the traditional gothic novel in "Ghostly Presences in H.P. Lovecraft's 'Cool Air' and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*". In his analysis, the researcher takes as a theoretical framework the works of Derrida, Brogan, and Hogle, to establish a clear relationship between Lovecraft's narrative features and traditional gothic ghosts.

In her own way, Cristina A. Huertas Abril (University of Córdoba), in "The Influence of *The Castle of Otranto* in *The Shining*, or the Reception of the Eighteenth-Century Gothic in Stephen King's Literature", continues with gothic literature, but now focused on a current and modern classical author of the terror genre, Stephen King. The researcher begins with a short overview of the work that opens the doors to American gothic literature, *The Castle of Otranto* by Walpole, and offers parameters for regarding the evolution of the genre, before consequently analysing the cinematic novel of Stephen King, *The Shining*.

Different approaches are proposed by María J. López (University of Córdoba) in "The Ghostly, the Uncanny and the Abject in Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*", who focuses her study on postcolonial literature. Here, the researcher enquires into the meaning of the characters' search for their own identity, in a way that we can consider those characters as real and 'living ghosts'. In doing so, López takes account of elements within the gothic genre, such as the use of the ghost, and Freud's notions related to the uncanny and the abject.

Finally, the last chapter of the section, by María Porras Sánchez (Complutense University of Madrid), "The Moroccan *Jinn* in the Anglo-American Literary and Ethnographic Tradition" widens the scope of study in this volume by attending to the figure of the Islamic *jinn* in Moroccan culture as a basis for showing its ethnographical influence on Anglo-American authors from Morocco, such as Paul Bowles and Tahir Shah, among others.

The last chapter of the book offers a fresh anthropological inquiry into some traditional songs whose origins are unknown, but are still nowadays sung in some small villages in the north of Andalusia. "The Purgatory in Los Pedroches: Anthropological Approach and Ethnographic Analysis on the Ceremony *Ánimas Benditas* in Dos Torres (Córdoba)", by Ignacio Alcaide (University of Córdoba), provides an analysis into the idea of purgatory and the souls linked to it, through ethnographic research focused on a local ceremony in the little village of Andalusia, Dos Torres. To do so, the researcher focuses his attention on ritual as a tool for social cohesion and the mirror of a group's cultural and religious values.



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Thanks are due to all the authors that contributed to this volume for their interest, enthusiasm, and support. Likewise, we would like to thank the reviewers, who anonymously carried out the arduous task of reviewing each paper, in order to achieve the necessary academic and formal quality the volume can now boast. And last but not least, we wish to acknowledge our appreciation for the patience of those that, during the preparation of this book, felt that the editors and authors were but ghosts in their homes.