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The Figure of the Ghost: Textual and Diegetic Haunting in Chatterton, Hawksmoor and English Music by Peter Ackroyd

Abstract

Peter Ackroyd's novels explore encounters with the past in the present of literary creation. Through the figure of the ghost, the usual borders between past and present are crossed as elements or characters from the past resurface in the present. This analysis explores the ways in which Ackroyd's works engage with the past in three singular life narratives. It hovers around two main steps that highlight conversations with the past: the first one considers the textual instances of communication, while the second addresses diegetic components. Through 'transtextuality,' past words and texts are used again in the novels, emphasizing how the ghost of the English canon pervades and invades Ackroyd's works. Through the apparitions of spirits, along with the introduction of all-absorbing places, objects, or bodies of communication, spectral manifestations keep resurfacing in the novels. The ghost of the English literary tradition combined with specters and spirits embody how Ackroyd's life narratives enable conversations with the past.

Keywords: doppelgängers, the English canon, ghostly manifestations, haunting, past, present, temporality, textual hybridity, transtextuality

1. Introduction

Through the rewriting of the lives of famous past English writers or renowned figures, Peter Ackroyd's novels explore encounters with the past in the present of literary creation. As the writer mentions in Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination (2002), "The English tradition may itself then be glimpsed as a revenant, reaching out to the living with uplifted arms. That is why the ghost

story is recognised to be a quintessentially English form" (Ackroyd 423). This paper wishes to explore how the figure of the ghost enables a crossing of the pragmatic borders between past and present as elements or characters from the past resurface in the present. Contemporary writer Peter Ackroyd is known for his hybrid works on past English writers and cultural or artistic figures, as most of his novels offer fictional rewritings of their lives. The figure of the ghost has already been amply analyzed in the Ackroydian corpus. This topic is indeed at the heart of Catherine Bernard's article "Écriture et possession. La voix du fantôme dans la fiction d'A.S. Byatt et de Peter Ackroyd" (2005) or Susana Onega's monograph Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd (1999). As for textual hybridity, it has also been explored in different critical writings including Ukko Hanninen's Rewriting Literary History: Peter Ackroyd and Intertextuality (1997), or, more recently, Barry Lewis's My Words Echo Thus: Possessing the Past in Peter Ackroyd (2007) and Jean-Michel Ganteau's monograph Peter Ackroyd et la musique du passé (2008). The past has also been analyzed through the figure of the metropolis and its specificities in Ackroyd's writings with works such as Alex Murray's Recalling London: Literature and History in the Works of Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair (2007), or Berkem Gürenci Sağlam's "The Mystical City Universal": Representations of London in Peter Ackroyd's Fiction (2011). Ackroyd's novels have also been studied through the genre of historiographic metafictions as discussed by Chrystelle Claude in Le combinatoire de la biographie, de l'histoire et de la fiction chez P. Ackroyd, P. Quignard et A.S. Byatt (2007) and Susana Onega in Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd (1999). This paper wishes to provide a review of the different ways in which the figure of the ghost appears in narratives that present the self in a singular manner that hovers around the 'real' and the 'likely.' The life narratives that will be discussed evince conjunctions between fictive elements and factual references, and this is reminiscent of the figure of the ghost, an entity tangible and illusional at the same time. As a matter of fact, this demonstration will not include studies on Ackroyd's biographies, such as Dickens (1990), as they display mainly factual elements, nor the more recent entirely fictional narratives, such as Three Brothers (2013).

What I aim to do in the following lines is envisage the figure of the ghost in the light of textual hybridity, by relying on a corpus of life narratives that play with the blending of factual and fictional features. Hybridity refers to a process in which categories that exist in separate ways combine to

generate a new form or concept, which will lead me to consider textual hybridity as the intermingling of several texts within one narrative. This is tantamount to envisaging how two texts can co-exist, which echoes the concept of 'transtextuality' defined by Gérard Genette as "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (83) in Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree (1982). Life narratives can be defined as texts that relate the lives of protagonists by emphasizing some key aspects of their existence. These types of writings do not necessarily need to provide information that highlights the subject's entire life but aim at showing emblematic period(s) of their life![1]

My demonstration offers to explore three life narratives: Chatterton, English Music, and Hawksmoor. The first novel, Chatterton (1987), comprises three distinct viewpoints: the one of Charles Wychwood (a fictional character living in contemporary London), Thomas Chatterton's (the famous Romantic poet) and that of Henry Wallis (the renowned painter from the nineteenth century who created Chatterton's famous portrait featured on the cover of the edition referenced in the list of works cited). As Thomas Chatterton and Henry Wallis were real persons, Ackroyd intertwines fictional creation and factual elements, emphasizing how past (real) individuals can become fictional characters resurfacing in the present of literary creation. As explained later in the analysis, Thomas Chatterton comes back to haunt Charles Wychwood as a ghost from the Romantic period. The second novel, English Music (1992), relates the story of an odd family, the Harcombes and, more precisely, Clement, the father, and Timothy, his son, who live in Edwardian England. It presents sundry protagonists from English novels as Timothy, who enters the world of famous English works of fiction as a character when he dreams/in his dreams. Another element that echoes our previous notes on ghostly manifestations is the presence of spirits in the novel – both Timothy and Clement boast great psychic powers, as they can engage with ghosts. The last novel, Hawksmoor (1985), is a double narrative that follows the point of view of Nicholas Dyer, a famous architect and murderer from the eighteenth century, and that of Hawksmoor, a detective who investigates murders in contemporary London. Ackroyd's play on hybridity lies in his name reversal of the two protagonists. The real Nicholas Hawksmoor was a renowned English architect who designed numerous churches, while Nicholas Dyer is a pure Ackroydian invention based on the real Hawksmoor. The readers understand that the murders happening in contemporary London are

strongly connected with those perpetrated by Nicholas Dyer in the eighteenth century, creating some sort of haunting atmosphere uniting the past and the present. These three life narratives have been chosen for the diverse ways in which they tackle the lives of their protagonists using factual elements intermingled with fictional features. Through multiple narrations, a distinct focus on the biographical or a mirror-like temporal effect, they all offer different perspectives on addressing textual and diegetic forms of haunting.

The first step of this demonstration will highlight the way in which textual hybridity enables past words and texts to be used again in the novels, emphasizing how the ghost of the English canon pervades and invades Ackroyd's works. This is reminiscent of Bloom's Anxiety of Influence, which Ackroyd often uses to justify how the literary past leaves a permanent mark in and on his works – as it keeps coming back, it inevitably haunts the narratives. It also highlights the figure of literary inheritance that is so dear to the author. Furthermore, haunting occurs on a diegetic level as ghostly manifestations disrupt the chronology of the narratives and embody the effects of 'revenance' on the readers and characters alike. This term was coined by Derrida in Specters of Marx (1994), in which he indicates: "a specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back" (Derrida 11). Specters are the apparitions of individuals who are neither entirely part of the present nor part of the past, as they keep coming back, haunting the narratives, characters, and readers alike. Haunting represents the return or persistence of an entity in the present. The diegetic instances of haunting will be examined in the second part of the paper. Through the apparitions of spirits, along with the introduction of all-absorbing places, objects, or bodies of communication, ghosts keep resurfacing in the novels. The intermingling of the past and present enables Ackroyd's novels to display an all-pervasive sense of haunting. The ghost of the English literary tradition combined with specters and spirits embody how Ackroyd's life narratives convey conversations with the past.

2. Transtextuality and the Ghost of the English Canon

2.1. Past Words Resurfacing in the Present

Ackroyd is known for his hybrid literary works on past English writers and cultural or artistic figures. Most of his novels present fictional rewritings of their lives. Through his life narratives, Ackroyd introduces multiple protagonists whose lives are rendered accessible only via the writing of another singular peripheral life, as if one's life could be told only through that of another. The same process is at stake regarding words, as Ackroyd's use of textual hybridity enables past words to resurface in the present, embodying how the author engages with the past on a textual level. This process echoes the concept of transtextuality that was so dear to Gérard Genette in Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree, in which he defines it as the intermingling of two or several texts within one narrative.

As already mentioned, transtextuality has been repeatedly analyzed in the Ackroydian corpus, and my purpose here is to tackle this topic through a new lens that has not yet been explicitly discussed. That is why I address the way in which words and works from the past come to embody the ghost of the English canon in Ackroyd's life narratives.

The whole story of Chatterton is based on the rewriting of the life of Thomas Chatterton, a poet from the Romantic period. By writing a book on Thomas Chatterton in which the poet is part of the story as a character in his own right, Ackroyd shows us the first level of his referential writing. The book is divided into several sections following different focalizations – Thomas Chatterton, with himself as narrator, Charles Wychwood with an anonymous extradiegetic narrator, or Henry Wallis and George Meredith with the same impersonal narrator. Actual sentences from Thomas Chatterton's works reappear in the present of literary creation emphasizing what is known as transtextuality.[2] Sentences and quotations from Chatterton's poems are cited in the novel, which represents one type of transtextuality, i.e., intertextuality. For instance, at the beginning of three parts of the book, each following the different points of view previously mentioned, one or two stanzas from Chatterton's poems are written down as opening statements, such as: "[l]ook in his glommed face, his sprighte there scanne; Howe woe-be-gone, how withered, forwynd, deade!" (Ackroyd 5), lines that were originally written by Chatterton in An Excelente Balade of Charitie, a poem first published in 1777. Ackroyd's use of words from the past creates a certain spectral atmosphere as sentences reappear in the present, leaving a textual mark within the narrative.

These intertextual references appear out of context or connection, every now and then they emerge out of nowhere, which emphasizes the spectral atmosphere they convey.

In Hawksmoor, transtextuality is present more implicitly. Though famous cultural figures' works are interspersed within the narrative, the concept is mostly revealed through references to lullabies and children's songs that are part of the English popular tradition. Indeed, those types of intertexts are present in almost every chapter of the book, giving rhythm to the narrative. Most of the time, when an event (especially a murder) is going to happen, a song appears a few pages before:

> *He began to sing a verse which he had learnt many years before: Build it up with bricks and mortar, Bricks and mortar, Bricks and mortar, Build it up with bricks and mortar, My fair lady. Bricks and mortar will not stay, Will not stay, will not stay, Bricks and mortar will not stay, My fair lady. (Ackroyd 46-47)*

This children's song, "London Bridge is Falling Down," is widely known in the United Kingdom since children learn it at school. Thomas sings it while being lost in the labyrinth beneath a church in which he will soon find his death. This way of indexing songs to the narrative before each death enables a link between the murders of the eighteenth century and that of contemporary London. Songs work as intertextual portals into the past, opening up to the English tradition, echoing backward and forward across centuries, and directly soliciting the ears of contemporary readers. Other intertextual references can be found throughout Hawksmoor, including quotations from famous writers' works, such as Thomas De Quincey's, or some religious literary pieces, such as psalms or verses from the Bible. Similarly, the works of T.S. Eliot, which are so dear to our author, provide details on the matter. Ackroyd never ceases to summon them, and he even presents an account of Eliot's life in an eponymous biography published in 1984. In Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," published in The Sacred Wood in 1920, the writer indicates that each nation is governed by a form of writing that is specific to it: "Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind" (Eliot 42). This idea echoes Ackroyd's desire to put forward references to the English tradition, culture, myths, and literature.

Ackroyd's writing thrives from this use of textual hybridity both as a method and as the subject of his oeuvre. Most of his works offer rewritings of the lives of past famous English writers or cultural

and artistic figures, and life narratives thus enable references to literature in a broader manner, as Jeremy Wolfreys indicates in Writing London: Materiality, Memory, Spectrality (2004):

> *Ackroyd's multi- and cross-temporal and intertextual resonances are performative furthermore in this figural manner inasmuch as the text builds, through allusion and reference, the acknowledgement of other structures, other texts, into its own structure. (Wolfreys 133)*

Thus, not only does the reader go back to the past through literary references, but past words resurface in the present, embodying some form of spectral interventions that keep coming back to give rhythm to the narratives. The ghosts of past words are never too far, thereby emphasizing the performativity of referentiality along with that of haunting.

As a matter of fact, haunting is also conveyed through another textual play on words in Hawksmoor , i.e., repetitions. The beginning of most chapters uses the ending of the previous one, in the form of structural anadiplosis. For example, Chapter Four ends with the following sentence: "And then the shadow fell" (Ackroyd 105), while Chapter Five begins with: "The shaddowe falls naturally here" (Ackroyd 106). This process is repeated throughout the novel. Internal echoes and cross-references take over the external, transtextual ones, which have been analyzed throughout the beginning of the paper. Not only does this give continuity to the two intertwined narratives, but it also echoes the spectral dimension as words seem to be haunting the chapters along with the progression of the story.

Through textual references and repetitions, Ackroyd manages to unveil a deep-seated sense of haunting as though words from the past were resurfacing in the present to invade and pervade the narratives. If textual hybridity enables past words to resurface, it means that these past writings are available in the present.

2.2. The English Canon and Influence

In English Music, as Tim enters famous English novels when he sleeps, the reader comes across a variety of works from the English canon. The novel is structured around nineteen chapters that alternate between first-person narratives, relating to Timothy's life in an autobiographical way, and

third-person narratives, in which Timothy falls asleep and encounters various characters from famous literary pieces. Tim's life narrative enables the rewriting of other accounts that he experiences and entitles the reader to experience as well. Thus, no less than nine chapters of this lengthy novel offer rewritings of English masterpieces. The protagonist cannot control this power, and voices from the works often come back in the moments when he is wide awake as haunting entities whispering around him. If Tim feels overwhelmed at first, he eventually embraces being surrounded by these voices and stories, as indicated in chapter sixteen: "Timothy heard these songs and voices echoing around him, and he understood their name: they are named England" (Ackroyd 359). Ackroyd thereby implies that art is an eternal echo that creates the entire identity of one's culture or nation, which is reminiscent of Tim's final statement when he draws parallels between the English canon and England: "I am eternal for I am Albion" (Ackroyd 393). Through textual hybridity, the English canon seems to work as a form of cultural inheritance that pervades the characters and readers alike, especially English readers, admittedly. Once more, this idea was introduced by T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," an essay that has greatly inspired Ackroyd and in which Eliot emphasizes the interest of texts that resort to previous writings. According to him the most captivating and valid writing needs to be based on past stories that it should wish to perpetuate:

> *We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. (Eliot 43)*

In Chatterton, this very process is at stake. As mentioned above, numerous famous works from the English canon reappear in the text – the real cultural and artistic figures from the past become part of the novel. The first instance is Thomas Chatterton, the protagonist of one of the three narratives embedded in each other. Even though the author has rewritten his story for the most part, Chatterton's presence forces the characters and readers to go back in time to the English tradition, i.e., to his own works and the biographical and critical material devoted to his writings. The same happens for Henry Wallis, the protagonist of another of the three narratives. He was a renowned

painter from the nineteenth century, the creator of Chatterton's famous portrait that is the very cover of the book and is present in the story as a character in his own right. The texts call for other ones, sometimes of different natures or genres, highlighting the sense of hybridity and demonstrating how transtextuality works. Other references to the English canon are also present throughout the narrative, emphasizing a haunting recalling of the past.

In most of his theoretical writings, Ackroyd asserts his admiration for the English canon and tradition. According to him, the goal of contemporary literature should be to give the readers access to old English stories. These stories, Ackroyd states, are part of the English tradition, and one should ensure their inheritance. In "London Luminaries and Cockney Visionaries" (1993), he writes: "You may think I have been talking about the past, but all the time I am talking about the present. I am describing what is all around us still, if we cared to see it" (Ackroyd 344). Ackroyd often justifies this way of addressing the past and the present as closer than one might think as an inheritance of cultural tradition. By writing about past writers or artistic figures, not only does the author make sure their words persist, but he also strives to understand his own self better. As he indicates in an interview by Susana Onega,[3] constantly writing about those who come from the grand English tradition, allows him to get to know himself more both as a writer and as an Englishman:

> *I didn't feel what Bloom calls 'anxiety of influence,' nothing of that kind at all. I suppose I could describe it as a process of exploration of myself. That when I began writing about other people, I was also writing about myself essentially. (Onega, "Interview" 212)*

The anxiety of influence Ackroyd mentions here was analyzed by Harold Bloom in his eponymous monograph published in 1973. This concept testifies to how artists can suffer from anxiety due to the greatness of their predecessors' masterpieces. If Ackroyd implies that he did not suffer from any such form of anxiety, the notion of influence is nevertheless very much relevant to his writing. Works from other artists find their way back into the present through his words. As Gibson and Wolfreys mention in Peter Ackroyd: The Ludic and Labyrinthine Text (2000), the influence of the English tradition that governs Ackroyd's works is pushed to an extreme when the author

reproduces styles, dialogues, or even forms of English to match the context of his pieces. About The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde, they indicate:

> *Where that common ground [between biographer and novelist] exists, so also does the disruption and cross-contamination of conventional divisions between fact and fiction, between biography and fictional narrative, versions, visions and re-visions of the past and present. (…) Ackroyd employs in this novel the ventriloquism or pantomimickry that has become characteristic of many of his novels. (…) Ackroyd is experimentally adopting or impersonating a well-known 'style,' hauling it away from its historical context. (Gibson and Wolfreys 85)*

This applies to Ackroyd's life narratives. In Hawksmoor, the most poignant example is present throughout the novel. In the chapters dedicated to Dyer's narrative, Ackroyd wrote everything in Early Modern English following what the 'real' Nicholas Hawksmoor would have said and how he would have said it.

The importance granted to past artists in Ackroyd's works springs from a desire to reassert the English artistic tradition, which constantly calls for the inheritance of the past. In "London Luminaries and Cockney Visionaries," the author indicates: "And so here we have another continuing London tradition, this experimental and self-conscious use of past styles" (Ackroyd 348). The use of past writings in all three life narratives forces the reader to encounter past words, characters, and writers in present days. The Ackroydian life narratives thus share a purpose, which consists of presenting other multiple lives that are interwoven and clash against the lives depicted in the main narratives. It is only through Charles that the reader encounters Chatterton, and the same process is at stake regarding Dyer and Hawksmoor or all the characters from the English canon and Timothy. The lives depicted in each work seem to be intrinsically intertwined, and the characters cannot escape them. This idea echoes how ghostly manifestations appear in the novels as spirits that both surround and compel the characters through haunting.

3. Haunting and Ghostly Manifestations

3.1. Apparitions of Spirits and Doppelgängers

On a textual level, the figure of the past is transcribed through different processes, including that of textual hybridity and repetitions; the textual mark of the past always reappears as if the ghosts of words were haunting the narratives. On a diegetic level, the figure of the past is not only displayed through the very subject of Ackroyd's oeuvre, which is to rewrite the life of past famous English artists, but also through the omnipresence of spirits. The life narratives that have been chosen for this analysis all mix factual elements (including references to real people, a specific period, context, and biographical features) and fictional characteristics (Ackroyd's pure inventions). This blurring of the usual border between the 'real' and the 'likely' illustrates the principle of contradiction embodied by the ghost. Specters are the perfect combination between physical evidence of the past that one can see or feel and a hazy abstract 'thing' that one cannot entirely grasp. They also reveal how an entity can both be the trace of something that has existed and something that might still do, a point that may be addressed through the figures of 'doppelgängers' and portals of communication.

In English Music, Tim has the ability to enter into conversations with ghosts, allowing him to talk to them in order to make them find peace in the afterlife. The young protagonist inevitably encounters many specters throughout the novel. In Hawksmoor, the eighteenth-century murders occur again in present days, emphasizing connections between the past and present up to the point where several protagonists meet specters from Dyer's time prior to their deaths. The climax of the novel showcases Hawksmoor face-to-face with Dyer. It is not explicitly said that Dyer might be a ghost but what is suggested is that the two protagonists can communicate as if Hawksmoor's life narrative were undoubtedly paving the way for Dyer's, enabling it to be displayed in the present. Throughout the novel, the eighteenth-century characters work as specters coming back to invade contemporary London and its inhabitants. In Chatterton, the main ghost is Thomas Chatterton himself, who, once more, is not pictured as a specter but still manifests himself to Charles on several occasions and haunts the narrative along with the protagonists. This concept is very much in line with that of 'atemporality.' In Specters of Marx, Derrida analyses the encounter with ghosts as a moment that one cannot set in time and that embodies 'atemporality':

A spectral moment [is] a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: 'now,' future present). We are

questioning in this instant, we are asking ourselves about this instant that is not docile to time, at least to what we call time. Furtive and untimely, the apparition of the specter does not belong to that time. (Derrida XIX)

In the novels under study, 'atemporality' is determined by haunting. Indeed, through the intermingling of past and present, Ackroyd's works convey an inescapable sense of haunting, allowing past and present to co-exist through ghostly manifestations. Specters, because they begin by coming back (i.e., the concept of 'revenance' mentioned before) from another temporality, embody a disruption of time. They also represent a visual asymmetry as the encounter with the ghost is a physical experience with the past in the present. As Derrida states, this prolepsis shows temporal incoherence: "It de-synchronizes, it recalls us to anachrony" (Derrida 6).

Out of Chatterton emerges a dark and gloomy atmosphere certainly linked to the fact that it deals with the topic of death. Charles's storyline calls up 'uncanniness,' this strange and mysterious feeling that conveys an oddly familiar impression. As Nicholas Royle states in The Uncanny (2003), the 'uncanny'[4] refers to a sensation of oddness that is mixed with a feeling of familiarity: "[but] the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation. More specifically, it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" (1).

The most poignant example is when Charles dies. His death is sudden, and its cause unknown, but it echoes Chatterton's own demise, which gives the event a certain amount of strangeness along with a sense of déjà-vu. This very feeling of déjà-vu embodies the familiar dimension of the uncanny while the death, because it comes out of the blue, conjures up the unfamiliar. Indeed, both protagonists eventually die almost simultaneously. In chapter eleven, Charles dies after being transported to the nearby hospital, where he imagines he is sitting in Chatterton's room and that a young man is staring peacefully at him. The reader understands that this young man is Chatterton: "[I]n front of [him] stood a young man smiling and pointing to a small book which he was carrying in his right hand. "'Like the painting,' he said and everything moved away" (Ackroyd 165). This uncanny apparition of Chatterton foreshadows what is about to happen a few pages later – Chatterton's own death. One life narrative cannot exist without the other, almost as if the two protagonists could not exist independently of each other. This emphasizes how Thomas Chatterton can be considered as Charles's doppelgänger, a ghost from the past to whom Charles's fate is

immutably connected. Throughout the novel, this alter-ego haunts the protagonist up to the point where Charles becomes so obsessed that eventually, when he looks at the portrait, he sees Chatterton lying on the bed, believing the portrait to be alive. He even asks Edward (his son): “He’s alive in the picture, isn’t he?” (Ackroyd 129). This is another example of the uncanny, as featured by Charles’s obsession with Chatterton, which literally haunts him and eventually builds up to hallucinations.

In the three novels under study, ghosts are not mere entities hovering around the narratives. The main characters all coexist with another character who is indissociable from them and who works as some spectral doppelgänger. In Hawksmoor, the contemporary superintendent’s narrative is intermingled with that of Dyer, who could be considered a doppelgänger hailing from the past. When Hawksmoor and Dyer eventually come face-to-face, one can read:

> *[F]or when there was a shape there was a reflection, and when there was a light there was a shadow, and when there was a sound there was an echo, and who could say where one had ended and the other had begun? And when they spoke they spoke with one voice. (Ackroyd 270)*

This highlights the previous point – Dyer and Hawksmoor are so intrinsically connected that they eventually appear as the same entity.

In English Music, Tim’s double is immutably his father, Clement, as Tim states about him: “He was one version of what I might become; he was, perhaps, some ghost of the future” (Ackroyd 339). Once more, this sentence emphasizes how ‘doppelgängers,’ or alter egos, work as some sort of spectral representation of the protagonists. Spirits are paramount in novels that offer intertwined points of view: the first narrative cannot exist without the other, underlining another way of conveying a great sense of haunting experienced by the protagonists and readers alike. The apparitions of ghostly manifestations plunge the reader into a world where ghosts are all-pervasive, emphasizing ever more the performativity of the haunting process. The distortion of temporality through occult phenomena has an impact on characters and readers alike. As Gibson and Wolfreys state in Peter Ackroyd: The Ludic and Labyrinthine Text, this idea is reminiscent of Ackroyd’s way of writing: “Ackroyd’s interest is with spiritual or spectral topographies and architectural or architextural forms, reading the possible connections of which acknowledges the

haunting trace of otherness and the past within the present identity" (Gibson and Wolfreys 191). This emphasizes how Ackroyd plays with the retelling of the self, following a process that can be compared to nesting dolls. Within one life narrative, one can find other lives, including that of past artistic figures and ghostly entities, intertwined with one another and co-existing within each other.

3.2. Portals into the Past: Places, Objects, Bodies of Communication

In Hawksmoor, spiritual connections seem to occur in relation to singular churches in London. The story hinges around the investigation led by Detective Hawksmoor who tries to find the murderers of several Londoners. Each murder happens in or around a particular church in the city. As already mentioned, the same murders took place in the fictive past, but the murderer is known as he is the narrator of the other embedded story, Nicholas Dyer, the architect of the churches in which the murders take place. Once a murder is depicted in the eighteenth century, it happens in the present narrative almost simultaneously. As all murders occur on the churches' grounds, religious buildings seem to be working as portals of communication between past and present. Once again, the climax of the novel highlights this idea. Hawksmoor visits the last church in which he believes the final murder is going to happen, Little Saint Hughes, and having never once glimpsed his alter ego, Dyer, as soon as he crosses the threshold and enters the darkness of the church, he faces the reflection of the eighteenth-century murderer:

And his own Image was sitting beside him, pondering deeply and sighing, and when he put out his hand and touched him, he shuddered. But do not say that he touched him, say that they touched him. And when they looked at the space between them, they wept. The church trembled as the sun rose and fell, and the half-light was strewn across the floor like rushes. (Ackroyd 270)

This very paragraph emphasizes how the churches presented in the novel work as portals into the past. In Ackroyd's writings, places are central to the concept and performance of spectrality and haunting. Indeed, they are never used for their embodiment of the material but as giving way for a change of temporality that showcases spectrality. As Julian Wolfreys indicates in Haunted Selves, Haunted Places in English Literature & Culture: 1800-Present (2018),

Peter Ackroyd remains, even today, as the author of a neo-Victorianism that most attests to the relatedness of subject and site, and the dissolution of the 'present' as it gives way to a phenomenological 'now-time' where the spectral has greater force than the material. (Wolfreys 134)

The trembling of the final church, once Hawksmoor and Dyer are eventually reunited, highlights its agency – it enables connections between now and then. Churches play an important part in the gloominess and strangeness of haunting; not only do they involve mystic features, but they also reflect a dark and cold atmosphere. Moreover, the final church's role in the process of haunting is one of all-absorption – the linearity one usually pictures when thinking about time does not exist anymore, past and present become one, and so do the voices of the two protagonists. Interestingly, churches also epitomize ambiguity as they embody public spaces and places of intimacy at the same time, along with physical structures whose purpose is nothing less than creating bonds between a concrete, tangible world and a mystical, sacred one. This idea illustrates what has already been mentioned regarding ghosts and the Ackroydian life narratives – they all share a similar intermingling of the 'real' and the 'likely.'

The structural anadiplosis mentioned in the first step of this demonstration also allows for interactions between the two temporalities, and the very text works as a portal opening into the literary past. As Onega indicates in "Pattern and Magic in Hawksmoor" (1991):

These semantic connections between the chapters devoted to the eighteenth-century and the twentieth-century stories may be said to function as temporal bridges, rendering the time gaps that logically exist between the two soties ineffectual. (Onega 34)

In Chatterton, the portal is not a place but the very portrait on which the entire quest of the story is based – the sudden apparition of a portrait (and manuscript) that leave(s) plenty of room for puzzling questions. The quest becomes all-absorbing, especially for Charles, who even tells his friend Phillip and his son Edward: "The quest begins on Saturday" (Ackroyd 45). Through the painting and manuscript, the protagonists try to get access to the past so as to reveal some unknown information about the Romantic poet. The portrait and manuscript open new possibilities

regarding Thomas Chatterton as a poet, and major breakthroughs about Romantic literature and poetry. These objects enable Charles (and his family) to enter the realm of the past so as to search frenetically through it. As mentioned above, Thomas Chatterton's ghost sometimes appears in the novel, emphasizing the creation of a bridge between past and present. This is reminiscent of the already-mentioned episode in which Charles believes the painting to be alive as if Chatterton's ghost was able to survive time within the canvas. The picture and manuscript work as portals into the past that symbolize the object of communication. They enable Ackroyd to create bridges between two temporal realms crossed by the protagonists together with the readers; in Chatterton, the author provides the motto of his whole writing, "time past is time future" (Ackroyd 27).

In English Music, Timothy is the entity featuring the abstract portal that enables communication between past and present. Indeed, spiritual connections do not occur in relation to places or objects but to singular bodies including that of Clement – and mostly Tim's. The young protagonist boasts two great visionary powers that enable him to bridge the gap between past and present. The first ability is that of entering conversations with ghosts, which allows him to talk to them to make them find peace in the afterlife. It also enables him to feel the presence of his deceased mother as if her death was not an obstacle in his engaging with her. The usual gap between past and present is not uncrossable, and so is the one between the 'real' world and an alternative supernatural realm. This idea is highlighted when Tim indicates: "It was as if my mother—the shadow or ghost of my mother—had somehow entered my life" (Ackroyd 99). This is not the sole moment when Tim communicates with ghosts, as several other episodes punctuate the narrative, emphasizing how past and present can be intertwined. The figure of the psychic is here at the center of the spectral dimension since only Tim can guarantee communication between past and present. The second display of his power is entering famous English novels when he sleeps. Once more, this allows him to go back to past writings as a character and relive them in the present. Tim's body works as a portal that unites two temporal realms that usually do not co-exist.

Once again, on a diegetic level, the figure of the past is displayed through the omnipresence of spirits that keep coming back along with places, objects, or bodies working as portals and hence allowing communication between the two temporalities. Ghostly manifestations and spectral phenomena force the protagonists to a visual encounter with the supernatural realm that displays

one of the physical experiences of haunting. The 'revenance' of the past surpasses the textual and diegetic levels as senses are put to work. The readers are also driven to experience haunting physically as their hearing is solicited through the disruption of rhythm along with the notion of repetition.

4. Conclusion

Peter Ackroyd's life narratives explore encounters with the past in the present of literary creation. This paper offered to explore the way in which Ackroyd's works engage with the past in three life narratives: Chatterton, English Music, and Hawksmoor. Textual hybridity enables past words and texts to be used again in the novels, emphasizing how the ghost of the English canon pervades and invades Ackroyd's works. Ghostly manifestations disrupt the chronology of the narratives and embody the effects of haunting on the readers and characters alike. Indeed, haunting surpasses the textual and diegetic levels as the senses are put to work. Both the protagonists and readers are impelled to face physical encounters with specters, relying on seeing or hearing. Through the apparitions of spirits, along with the introduction of all-absorbing places, objects, or bodies of communication, ghosts keep resurfacing in the novels. Places play a central part in Ackroyd's singular use of spectrality; his works are always set in London, of which his writings seem to be exploring most areas. As Jean-Michel Ganteau explains in "London: The Biography, or, Peter Ackroyd's Sublime Geographies" (2003), the version of London that is depicted in the Ackroydian oeuvre is dominated by spectrality. It offers a way to show communications between past and present: "Hence, beneath the contemporary surface of buildings, the spectral presence of the dwellings of the past makes itself felt, and the general impression is that of a haunted present" (Ganteau 219). The omnipresence of spatiality that Ackroyd works with allows temporality to become central. This is furthered in his novel London: The Biography (2002), which offers a rewriting of the city as a cultural and historical piece, a biography, and a fictional historiography. As Ganteau mentions: "The echoic technique at work throughout [London: The Biography] is clearly designed to lend dynamism to the evocation of place, and once again to make the spatial a modality of the temporal" (Ganteau 221).

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[1] In “Histoire de vie (récit de vie)” (2022), Jean Guichard indicates: “A ‘life narrative’ is the account of one’s existence (in this case certain aspects of it) that a person formulates at a given time, with a given intention. […] The events that the life narrative refers to are thus selected, formatted, and articulated with each other, in a determined way, in order to be told in this specific way” (Guichard, my trans.; 243)

[2] This more precisely refers to intertextuality that Genette defines as “the actual presence of one text within another” (Genette 1).

[3] Interview conducted by Susana Onega in Twentieth Century Literature, Summer, 1996, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Summer, 1996), pp. 208-220.

[4] The concept was originally analyzed by Freud in an article entitled ‘Uncanny,’ published in 1919, in which he differentiates Heimlich, which he explains as something representing what is familiar, and Unheimlich, which he describes as its counterpart, being frightening because it is not familiar.