

‘Novel’ Reality Calling and Telepathy in Nicholas Royle’s *Quilt*

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Abstract

In *The Uncanny* Nicholas Royle defined Freud’s *Unheimlichkeit* and the experience of an “unreal reality” as “another thinking of beginning”. But if we are to take him at his word, “the beginning is already haunted” and we may wish to interpret his debut novel *Quilt* as spectrally haunted by the critic’s earlier theory. The essay, which is structured telephonically, since it refers both to Royle’s view of literature as telepathy (i.e. another form of ‘tele-’) and the beginning of the novel, reads *Quilt* from its “Afterward”, to unveil two main ghosts haunting Royle’s novel: that of Jacques Derrida and that of James Joyce. *Quilt* revisits his critical works in order to construct an alternative literary reality, in an experiment in which “spectrality cohabits with writing” (“Clipping”) and which Royle’s “Afterward” to the novel called for in the name of “reality literature”. As part of the author’s uncanny strategies of defamiliarization, which ultimately inform the question “what is the responsibility of ‘novel’ literature in today’s world and its sense of the urgency of the ‘real’?”, is an attempt to “strive for English to appear [...] as a foreign language”. I will therefore also endeavour to show how Royle “makes trouble in and with language” as a disorienting move to plunge the reader into a spectral, virtual, telepathic world – instanced by the narrator-protagonist’s increasing obsession with building an aquarium for the stingrays, whose bony spines are as serrated as Royle’s razor-sharp novelistic techniques.

Keywords: *telepathy, spectre, Quilt, Nicholas Royle, Jacques Derrida, James Joyce*

In his essay “Clipping”, Nicholas Royle advises us to move very fast, to “clip by”, as our new era no longer resorts to ontology, but to hauntology. “Increasing spectralization is the disorder of the day”, Royle suggests, quoting Jacques Derrida’s remark that “[g]hosts always pass quickly, with the infinite speed of a furtive apparition, in an instant without duration, presence without present of a present which, coming back, only *haunts*.”¹ Royle intends to catch that fleeting instant and clip it in his writing, no matter whether it is literary, critical, political, or something else.² In like manner, I will try to follow his lead and catch the ghost(s) when I can, and clip it (them) fast. The two

¹ Jacques Derrida quoted in Nicholas Royle, “Clipping,” in *Forum. University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts* 7 (2008): 2, accessed March 2, 2013, <http://www.forumjournal.org/site/issue/07>.

² Royle, “Clipping,” 2.

main ghosts I will attempt to **clip** to Royle’s novel *Quilt*³ are the usual ghost in his critical thinking, that of Jacques Derrida, and a rather unusual ghost in his creative writing, that of James Joyce, which comes via Derrida’s essay “Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce”.

Derrida’s gramophone transforms the phonographic voice into writing. There is writing-ahead-of-speech that the ghost brings; the ghost comes with “telegramphonic obsessions”.⁴ This is precisely the case of Royle’s ghosts that can be seen from a distance (the Greek *τήλε*, *tele*), are absent rather than present (*gramma* represents the mark of absence), but which also speak from afar, making themselves present (*phonè*).⁵

In his homage *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*, Royle referred to images containing Jacques Derrida’s language that “cropped up” in his head; his text communicates telepathically, via *πάθεια* (*pathe* or *patheia* meaning ‘feeling’, ‘perception’, ‘passion’, ‘affliction’). The text is written via “a spectral machine”, “a mad line drawing, with remarkable hatching, done blind”.⁶ Nevertheless, what Derrida means by spectrality is very much “in the machine, in every programme, and is to be thought, too, in terms of the actuvirtual, the tele-effect, and so on.”⁷ Royle admitted:

– ‘Some singular utterance, whispered like a secret, can still, incalculably, over the centuries . . . Hello?’ I am quoting again. All of Derrida’s thinking is to be traced here, in this abyssal ‘telephonic “hallo”’, this ‘primary yes’ as he calls it, in this thought of ‘some singular utterance’ the effects of which we have still to hear.⁸



In his essay “Two Words for Joyce”, Derrida considered that it was ‘too

In his 2008 essay “The Medium is the Maker: Browning, Freud, Derrida, and the New Telepathic Ecotechnologies”, J. Hillis Miller mentioned that technology helped him find on the net Robert Browning’s reading of “How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix”. Browning was born on May 7th, 1812 and died on December 12th, 1889, yet Miller could hear his voice via a “website reference in two minutes by way of Google”, an experience which he declared “[s]pooky!” (J. Hillis Miller, “The Medium is the Maker: Browning, Freud, Derrida, and the New Telepathic Ecotechnologies”, *Oxford Literary Review* 30.2 (2008): 168. Imitating Miller’s gesture, or rather “clipping” it to my own telepathy, I google Joyce, Anna Livia Plurabelle, audio; I get to youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klFcSGDgU8Q>) and can likewise exclaim: “Spooky Joyce!” – alluding to Finn Fordham’s review of Derek Attridge’s *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Casebook*, “Spooky Joyce”, *Modernism, Modernity* 13.2 (2006): 367-73.

³ Nicholas Royle, *Quilt* (Brighton: Myriad Editions, 2010), 18. Henceforth *Q*, followed by the page number in the text.

⁴ See Jacques Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce,” trans. François Raffoul, in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, eds Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 51.

⁵ There is no ontology of the ghost. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, with an Introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 53.

⁶ Nicholas Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University of Press, 2009), 95.

⁷ Simon Morgan Wortham, *The Derrida Dictionary* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 197.

⁸ Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*, 95. See also Royle’s discussion on the same quotation in “Oujiamiflip,” *Oxford Literary Review* 30.2 (2008): 239.

late with Joyce.’⁹ Yet it is not too late. Not too late for Joyce, even if the protagonist of *Quilt* thinks that “[e]verything is so too late.” (*Q*, 18)

Royle starts his novel with a phone-call: “In the middle of the night the phone rings, over and over, but I don’t hear it.” (*Q*, 3) That calling that the reader can hear and that the protagonist would not take is related to what J. Hillis Miller called “a gigantic frightening system of irresistible telepathic transfer”.¹⁰ The phone buzzes, but even if “plugged in” the system, to use a favourite phrase of Derrida’s and Royle’s linguistic telepathy, the first-person protagonist would not answer it, as he knows it is the telepathic phone-call of death: “First it is the hospital, then the police.” (*Q*, 3)

Reading Royle’s novel, we have to take the novelist at his word when he expresses the thought that the telephone can be “novel-friendly” and invites us to accept its call. Under the pressure of accepting his call, we are plugged in a medium that Avital Ronell defined as “somewhere between science, poesy, and thinking”.¹¹ Using technology, tele-technics and the techno-mediatic, we need to accept its “many *spectral* effects, the new speed of *apparition* [...] of the simulacrum, the synthetic or prosthetic image, and the virtual event, cyberspace and surveillance, the control, appropriations, and speculations that today deploy unheard-of powers.”¹² Nicholas Royle’s novel is both a phone call and ‘novel’ reality; it can break up, interrupt, slow down (see “Afterward” in *Q*, 157) to bring death, give love and time.

- **Hello? Do you accept the call?**
- **Who’s calling?**
- **Death’s call(ing).**

With Joyce, death came via a misspelt telegram, in which the word ‘mother’ is changed to ‘nother’: “a blue French telegram, curiosity to show: – Nother dying come home father.”¹³ In *Quilt*, death calls many times, or rather, as the narrator explains, “more times” than the people at the hospital where his father was “care to remember” (*Q*, 19). The protagonist is never asked whether he accepts the phone-call, a “staccato punctuation to a death-sentence” (*Q*, 39). Neither was Bloom asked whether he accepted the call of his father’s death. In the “Telegraph” office, Bloom looks at a typewriter and reads backwards, making out Dignam’s name. He has to make a phone-call and while making the call, he remembers his dead father reading the Haggadah in the same way.¹⁴

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Two Words for Joyce,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, eds Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 22.

¹⁰ Hillis Miller, “The Medium is the Maker,” 165.

¹¹ Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 84.

¹² Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 54.

¹³ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior, Afterword by Michael Groden (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 3.197-99. Henceforth *U*, followed by chapter number and line number in the text.

¹⁴ See also Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone,” 51.

Royle's character would not pick up the call: "It rings and rings, but I don't hear it." (*Q*, 17) The next day, when he goes to see his father, the bed is empty. The nurse pities him, offers him her support to impart the news of his father's death to anybody he thinks of calling:

– There's a telephone here. If you want to call anybody, please feel free. 'call someone, yes [...] no matter, all the same, any random number, put me through, chance following the international country code, speak English, no, not a word, nary that, all awry, telephoning home, no, never mind, already impossible, hallo, my father has died, he's gone, given the world the slip, I am sorry I can't linger, Tibet, I haven't phoned Madagascar. So many calls to make, call alarm system that is me, not in, not on, no one dead-end no answer, not a word. I remain *unmoving* in my seat. (*Q*, 20-21; emphasis mine)

– Reality literature speaking.

In his first monograph, Royle explored his fascination for the telepathic power of books and the fact that they "read your mind, see you coming from a distance, tell you what you are thinking, tell you what you have been perceiving all along without realizing."¹⁵ But in our epoch dominated by reality TV and its sensational treatment of news, he has proposed as an alternative "reality literature", which should be born from the duality between "a literary reality" and "literature of reality" (see the "Afterword" to *Quilt*). For Royle, reality is not a *summum* of "credible characters, places, experiences and events, furniture and food, sadness and street-corners, and so many other narrative details", but "telepathy and clairvoyance", "reading the thoughts of others" (*Q*, 158).

As he is sorting out "every object in the room, every item of their [his dead parents'] clothing, every inch of their hair and skin" that "endures scarcely longer than the time it takes to transport a car-load of rubbish bags to the tip" (*Q*, 44), the novel's main character, sometimes first-person narrator, a son looking for a father, wonders what to do: destroy or retain? (*Q*, 43) What does *Quilt* demolish? What does it retain? It destroys what could correspond to the superficial construction of reality by 'reality TV', the straightforward recounting of events that have occurred. Opposed to the rampant practice of television shows that trivialize the real by reducing it to 'live', superficial facts (important as they may be), "reality literature" aspires to a 'deeper' reality whose virtual possibilities, based on telepathy, spectrality and uncanniness, can be re(dis)covered via another kind of fictional language and narration. It proposes *reality-literature*, an attack on reality TV in the name of a literature that is concerned with telepathy and with a protagonist who somehow "refines himself out of existence", reminding us of Stephen Dedalus' gesture: "He had been lost or had wandered out of existence for he no longer existed."¹⁶

The house has its own signature that the protagonist loves: it is "an olfactory imprint different from anything else in the world, irreproducible and irreplaceable." (*Q*, 43) It needs to be kept, to be preserved, bottled and sold back to his mournful self "on a demented black-market of grief" (*Q*, 44). This reality is more profound, and it opens up the possibility of ghosts and telepathic communication. For Royle in "Clipping", the era we are living in is that of haunting: "we find ourselves engaging with the "ethics of the

¹⁵ Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 75.

¹⁶ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Text, Criticism, and Notes*, ed. Chester G. Anderson (New York: Viking, 1964), 93.

spectral text", "spectral and textual haunting", and "ghostly narrative" (as distinct from narrative *about* the ghostly).¹⁷ Such a phrase would call to mind a "disorder" and it would "seek a place, a haunt, in which spectrality cohabits with writing, text and narrative".¹⁸



In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida had shown that we cannot control the coming and going of ghosts, as any ghost "begins by coming back".¹⁹ In this context, if we are to take both Royle and Derrida at their word, we can see that the ghost is repetition: "What is a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *prudence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, unsubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up?"²⁰

Yet ghosts did not belong only to the past for Derrida but could also represent a sign from the future.²¹ Starting from the apparition of the ghost in *Hamlet*, more precisely Marcellus' question "What, ha's that thing appear'd againe tonight?" (1.1.21), Derrida ventured a few definitions of 'scholars'. In *Hamlet*, unable to communicate with the ghost, Marcellus calls in desperation for Horatio as a "scholar" who can converse with the spectral entity. Traditional scholars, Derrida went on in *Specters of Marx*, believed in the difference between the real and the unreal, between the actual and the possible, the living and the non-living, being and not being. For them the difference between "to be" and "not to be" was quite clear.²² Following such a definition, Royle cannot be regarded as a "traditional scholar", otherwise he would neither believe in ghosts, nor in what is called virtuality or **spectrality**.²³ His attempt would be to read people's minds; quite unlike Horatio, he would not try to make the ghost speak, to question it, to stop it. He would just attempt to speak its language, by catching what it thinks.

To be able to penetrate other beings' thoughts without physical interaction, one would need to have access to their brains. Reading characters' thoughts, with their complexity of associations, impressions and uncertainties, might make one immediately think of the modernist experiment. David Lodge considered that Joyce's *Ulysses* had achieved such a connection with somebody's brain without physical interaction:



One might remember Jacques Derrida's famous tirade to actress Pascale Ogier in Ken McMullen's film *Ghost Dance* about why he believed in ghosts, in which the French philosopher expressed his certainty that the modern technology of images (cinematography, telecommunication) enhances the power of ghosts.

¹⁷ Royle, "Clipping," 1.

¹⁸ Royle, "Clipping," 1.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11.

²⁰ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10, translation modified.

²¹ See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 39 and especially 99.

²² See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11.

²³ See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11.

For the reader, it's rather like wearing earphones plugged into someone's brain, and monitoring an endless tape-recording of the subject's impressions, reflections, questions, memories and fantasies, as they are triggered either by physical sensations or the association of ideas.²⁴



At the beginning of the twentieth century, Joyce's means to penetrate the mind of a character was through interior monologue and epiphanies. To discover the hidden triggers of the mind, he could not make use of all types of teletechnology that Royle does at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Nowadays one can hear spectral voices from the past, not only by using phones and recordings, but also by means of paging systems, the internet, the ability to google anybody and anything or search on Wikipedia, to upload and download documents, pictures and videos, to chat online, to back up, to send e-mails, attachments, e-cards.

With technology developing in the twentieth century very fast, everyday telepathy became slightly different from what Joyce, the contemporary of Freud, might have had in mind. In our age, that clairvoyant awareness of what someone else thinks or feels has turned into what J. Hillis Miller coined "telecom telepathy", which can still make us hear and see at distance, yet as "in television news".²⁵ Royle remarked that like Mark Twain, Marcel Proust and Franz Kafka, James Joyce was fascinated by "the strange voice-at-a-distance that the telephone literally was" (*Q*, 156). Joyce was a contemporary of Freud's and rewrote the telepathic dreams of his characters through interior monologue and epiphanies. *Finnegans Wake* was a constantly rewritten or replayed dream. There are many phone conversations in Joyce's *Ulysses*, as well as many postcards and letters and telegrams. Joyce made Derrida think of "telegraphic order: hear say yes in Joyce."²⁶

The story of the strange telepathic encounters between Derrida and Jean-Michel Rabaté that the French philosopher recounts in "Ulysses Gramophone", which was initially presented as a keynote lecture at the Ninth James Joyce Symposium in Frankfurt in 1984, is a trip into the uncanny. During a phone conversation with Rabaté, Derrida thought of a paper whose title he concocted on the spot, looking at his notes that he had previously made on Joyce. For some strange reason, it was quite similar to Rabaté's own title of the fourth chapter of *James Joyce, Authorized Reader* that Derrida was going to receive through his letter box some time later. Speaking of Bloom's "coincidence of meeting" later on, Derrida recounted how he bumped into Rabaté somewhat by chance in the street: he thought that "this coincidence had to have been "telegraphed",²⁷ as it were, through a rigorous program whose pre-recorded necessity –

²⁴ David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1992), 47.

²⁵ See Hillis Miller, "The Medium is the Maker," 162-63.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone," 49.

²⁷ In fact this is an interesting example of (mis)translation: the French in such cases is usually translated into English as 'telegraphed'. I am grateful to Laurent Milesi for pointing this out.

as on an answering machine, and even if it went through a great number of wires – must have gathered in some central site and acted upon us, one with or on the other, one before the other without any possibility of assigning any legitimate belonging.”²⁸

– **Bzzzzzz zzzz**

“Oui, oui, you are receiving me”, Derrida hears, and Bloom thinks “Better phone him up.” (*U* 7.119) For Derrida, all begins with a phone-call:

Before the act, or the word, was the telephone. In the beginning was the telephone. We can hear this *coup de téléphone* which plays on apparently random numbers and on which there would be much to say, ring all the time. And it opens within itself this *yes* toward which we slowly return, circling around it.²⁹

In his essay “Ouijamiflip”, Royle agreed with Derrida and believed that indeed in the beginning were the telephone, telephony and telepathy:

Some single utterance, like the “come” that would be ““anterior” to all logical and grammatical *categories* of order, of desire as these have come to be determined in Western grammar or logic”; like the “yes” that would be “more ancient than knowledge”, evoked as a sort of “primary telephonic “Hello””: to be heard or felt within oneself in the form of an insupportable vibration, an experiencing of the impossible [...], like the *big bang* that “would, let us say at the origin of the universe, have produced a noise that one can consider as still not having reached us”.³⁰

Performing a backward reading, from the “Afterward” to the novel, one can see that Royle believes in deconstruction and that “deconstruction must have the afterword that it cannot have”.³¹ For, always incomplete, of an incompleteness which is not the negativity of a lack, it is interminable, an “interminable analysis” (“theoretical and practical”, as one used to say).³² The “Afterward” explains that the novel can be interpreted as “a kind of weird telephone exchange” in an age when mobile phones speed up life and communication (“Afterward” in *Q*, 157). For Royle, mobile phones have the role of anticipating events and make postponement more complex (see “Afterward” in *Q*, 156).



If we follow Derrida’s advice that “a masterpiece always moves by definition, in the manner of a ghost”,³³ and **clip** Royle’s text to a ghostly moment, we could

Still in Ken McMullen’s movie *Ghost Dance*, while Derrida is explaining why he believes in ghosts, the phone rings; the phone-call becomes the ghost haunting the ones talking about ghosts: an American calls Derrida to ask about the French thinker’s seminars that he would like to attend. As Derrida declares, the phantom voice came from somebody he did not know. What Kafka considered to be true about the epistolary turned out to be true for telephonic communication as well.

²⁸ Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone,” 50.

²⁹ Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone,” 51.

³⁰ Royle, “Ouijamiflip,” 239.

³¹ Cf. Derrida’s own “*Afterw.rd*”, in response to questions by Royle, mentioned in *The Uncanny* – and which also has a remark about a word not belonging to a “dictionary”.

³² Jacques Derrida quoted by Nicholas Royle in “Telepathies”, *Oxford Literary Review* 30.2 (2008): v.

³³ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 18.

think of Joyce's "Proteus" chapter in *Ulysses*, when Stephen does not call his aunt but imagines that all umbilical cords are connected into one giant telephone cord: "A misbirth with a trailing navelcord, hushed in ruddy wool. The chords of all link back strandentwining cable of all flesh. That is why mystic monks. Will you be as gods? Gaze in your *omphalos*. Hello! Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought." (*U* 3.36-40)

But who can Royle's protagonist and Joyce's character call? Derrida called Freud: "The demon calls, Socrates picks up, wait here's Freud: (what a difference a very important time difference (*décalage horaire*) and the demon speaks to Freud, directly, from the beyond, like his ghost which says to him "wait," *hold on*. Come back with your spool, don't hang up, here's Heidegger."³⁴ A certain Heidegger had called Derrida, as the French thinker recalled in the anecdote that appears as a footnote in "Envois": while he was preparing *La carte postale*, the phone rang. The American operator asked him if he accepted a "collect call" coming from Martin (which she pronounced *Martine* or *martini*) Heidegger. Derrida bypassed the operator. Royle picks up the phone and accepts the chance of the telephone, the chance of a new novel. Royle accepts Heidegger's call, as telepathy achieves the Heideggerian deconstruction of *Entfernung*: for Royle, distance is what is nearest by communicating instantly across space. Yet Royle takes the call not merely to being, being as a call, but a call beyond being.

– Put me through, then. I accept the call.

In *Quilt*, when his father dies, after the protagonist sorts out his father's possessions, he takes care of his fish (the rays). He embarks on an eccentric project of building a bigger tank for his father's *Potamotrygon motoro* freshwater stingrays: Taylor, Audrey, Hilary and Mallarmé. His aunt has told him that the house cannot be sold for a good price with that "kerplomp in the middle of it" (*Q*, 70). At his father's funeral, the protagonist warns the other mourners in the house: "These rays have not had their stings removed and this is not, I repeat, not a touchpool" (*Q*, 73). At this point he starts making it bigger and Royle seems to warn his reader that his novel is not "a touchpool". As the rays can sting badly, in its urgency of the real, the novel is an attempt to revolutionize linguistics, since it "makes trouble in and with language" ("Afterward" in *Q*, 155). Hence the language that people know well may appear as a foreign language. Royle's novel is written in English and in our age of "international English", or "Anglo-American", "the *lingua franca* of imperialist exploitation", this language in particular is "the imposing medium of freedom, as well as of inequality, hegemony and exploitation across the world." ("Afterward" in *Q*, 154-155) Royle reroutes the reader to new horizons of novel-writing through language as he believes that "the novel has to resist and twist, accommodate and diverge." ("Afterward" in *Q*, 157)

³⁴ Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans., Intro. and Additional Notes by Alan Bass (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 31.

In *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, Derrida was interested in discovering a language through which to speak to the dead or of the dead, and in his *Specters of Marx*, he also analysed how the dead speak to us. For him, “to let the dead speak requires a self-probing, multi-layered textuality which both strains to give voice to the dead other and remains maximally lucid in the face of the impossibility of the endeavour.”³⁵ Derrida was aware of the impossibility of his task. At a certain point in the novel, Royle’s character no longer speaks to the living. He no longer seems to speak to his partner on the phone, but rather to the rays, and the dead man who put them in the house. The language he speaks makes him an unreliable narrator and his partner takes over the narrative, initially thinking that everything seemed fine: “There’s nothing out of the ordinary here [...]” (*Q*, 120). Yet something is wrong between him, her and the telephone:

[t]he horrifying conviction comes when he tells me about some writing project he’s begun elaborating and proceeds to read it aloud to me over the phone. It is a work of lexicography devoted to the buried life of anagrams³⁶ and homophones, each word with its own idiosyncratic definition, a dictionaray, yes, as he is pleased to declare: the world’s first English dictionaray. It would be a verbal laboratory, a dictionary testamentary to the way the ray leaves its mark in everyday language, a vocabulary that might constitute a new species of bestiary, and generate an altogether other estuary English.” (*Q*, 121).

A “dictionaray” allows rays to speak through, it produces definitions of the anxieties of its haunted author. No change of tone, no joke, no pause. She thinks he reads from an already written work, yet he contradicts her: “I don’t have anything written down yet: I was making it up as I went along.” (*Q*, 143) She no longer knows whether his words are his own or those of the rays or those of his dead father; she cannot understand whether he is haunted by past, future ghosts of fish and human beings or by his own imagination.

One central section of the novel turns into a mini-dictionary listing the ‘raw’ lexemes containing the letters of the alphabet, displayed as a stingray. The dictionaray breaks words, resists and twists like the huge mantra ray in the new language aquarium; it accommodates sounds, it reroutes words:

Ranarian
 Rabies
 Restrain
 Race
 Racy
 Rabbity
 Radiate
 Radiator
 Radiant
 Raise
 Raven
 Rayon
 Radically
 Rationally (*Q*, 136-137).

³⁵ Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 138.

³⁶ Such a work is reminiscent of Saussure’s own *Anagram* project.

Rationality gives way, words are inhabited, letting the rays and the dead speak: "The eerie framing of rationality, this new English dictionary on hysterical principles, this division of voices and hearts of hundreds of miles of cold deep sea" (*Q*, 144) makes the female narrator realize that her partner could not be left alone any longer. Derrida had written *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, a book of mourning, in the language of the dead. Royle writes his dictionary, in which words are dead, in which words kill the language, enraging English, which becomes exploratory, extraordinary, extravagant, erratic, in a highly experimental work:

Enrage
Exploration
Exploratory
Exhortatory
Extraordinary
Essayer
Earnestly
Entreaty
Errancy
Estravagancy
Erratically
Exaggerate
Eternally
Embrace
Experimentally (*Q*, 127)

The female narrator is one more time on the phone. She tells him she is coming:

It wasn't the best line. I remember saying it's not the best line and he thought I said best man. And at another moment he talked of a 'real surprise', so I thought, but actually it was, as he had to clarify, 'getting ray supplies'. Then he said, if I heard correctly, that he was 'after life' or 'after my life' or 'more life': the reception was very poor. The line went dead, or possibly he hung up. (*Q*, 144)

The receiver falls to the ground. She calls back and gets no answer. With dead language or the language with the dead, "the line went dead" as well. From this moment on, the phone-call becomes what Ronell has conceived as an "uncanny gathering of voices" and asks "the question of *Unheimlichkeit*" that "awaits restlessly": "does the telephone, despite mere appearances, not fundamentally belong to the structure of not being-at-home, of a being expropriated from a *chez-soi*?"³⁷

³⁷ Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 51. For an essay developing how telephony is inseparably 'hooked up' to telepathy, see Roger Luckhurst, "(Touching On) Tele-Technology," in *Applying: To Derrida*, ed. John Brannigan, Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (London: Macmillan, 1996), 180.

The novel operates, as Nick Royle admits in his *Afterword*, “at top speed, gone before [one] can say.” It becomes the space of ‘quilting’ thinking. Examining Derrida’s “*Che cos’è la poesia?*” in his text “**Ouijamiflip**”, Royle called it a “hydrapoetics” or “hydrapoematics”.³⁸ With *ouijamiflip*, Royle “lost touch”, “flipped”, through telepathy and telepassion.³⁹ Quite strangely Royle’s novel is itself a hydrapoetics that tantalizes the reader with its immobility. The immobility of the text is the immobility of the rays: “The ray is stationary even when it moves, shooting through water at unnerving speed, propelled by the pectoral fins that form the hem of the body, close to complete circularity, as the axis of the body remains unaltering.” (*Q*, 39)

The four rays that the reader came across at the beginning of the novel become ray-ghosts and give birth to new ghosts: twelve more companions, Eagle rays (*Rhinoptera bonasus*), all with the ‘ray’ sequence, either graphically or phonetically: Larry, Gary, Harry, Andrea, Lorraine, Hardy, Cary, Marty Barry, Bryan, Ryan, Raymond. They inhabit the drawing room that the female narrator discovers in the absence of her partner, refurbished, having in the middle a circular couch, “surrounded from floor to ceiling by water.” (*Q*, 146) They seem “underwater birds in a phantom aviary”. (*Q*, 147). When moving, they make the huge tank shift. The female narrator “loses all sense” of her elements in front of the new world her lover had created: “a world of braking and accelerating, altering shapes and directions, a busy submarine airport, [...] they looked like water-filled white paper bags, the next they were dreaming and slow-winged as flamingos, flapping up into the ether.” (*Q*, 147) The reader starts losing any sense of plot and language. The dictionary is as out of place in the novel as the aquaria are in the house.

The protagonist has left the door of his novel-phone booth open, but did not come back. Similarly to Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he is “passing out of existence”.⁴⁰ From this moment on, the male character is relieved of his body, he becomes an apparition of the ethereal and the immaterial, or, in Derridean terms, he is inhabited and invaded by his own spectre.⁴¹



For Derrida, a phone call, even if denied or rejected, always presupposes an originary ‘yes’ in response to the other: oui-ja (yes, yes). A ‘ouija board’, spirit board (or talking board) is a round board marked with the letters of the alphabet, the numbers zero to nine, the words ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘hello’ (occasionally) and ‘good bye’. In his essay “*Ouijamiflip*”, Royle lists a series of definition of the *ouija* board, among which the one from *Chambers Dictionary*, which “maintains a sense of experiment and uncertainty”. According to this dictionary, ‘ouija’ is spelt with a superscript as ‘Ouija[®]... n.’; the superscript hovers in the air. ‘Ouija’ used as a *planchette* by which one can receive messages from the dead. Royle considers the term ‘unpatentable’ and quite stimulating for the actual analysis; clipping *Quilt* not only to Derrida’s critical thinking, but also to Joyce’s modernist literary techniques, Royle asserts: “At any rate, the Ouija of “*ouijamiflip*” would be unpatentable. It is no more Derrida’s (or, say, Joyce’s) than anyone else’s.” (Royle, “*Ouijamiflip*,” 237). Royle’s essay showed the moment in his theoretical work when he used the *ouijaboard* as “a space for new experiences of the aleatory ant telepathic, for new ways of listening to voices of the dead” (including his own voice), and of new ways of conceiving philosophy, poetry and literature. (Royle, “*Ouijamiflip*,” 237)

³⁸ Royle, “*Ouijamiflip*,” 244.

³⁹ Royle, “*Ouijamiflip*,” 247.

⁴⁰ Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 93.

⁴¹ See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 134.

The caller (former narrator) is out of the novel but he keeps calling and insisting beyond words. He has no body anymore; he is, as Blanchot might say, a body without body,⁴² a spectre. The house bears so many traces of the departed and is haunted in absentia. The female-character (narrator at this point) does not have any certainty about who is there, she calls out his name over and over again: "I felt again an estranging taciturnity in the sound of my voice, even within the space of my own head." (*Q*, 148) Heidegger appears to confirm this "estranging taciturnity of one's voice" in his definition of Uncanniness: "Uncanniness is the basic kind of Being-in-the-world, even though in an everyday way it *has been covered up*."⁴³ *Quilt*, and like-sounding words (*quill, will, kill, ill, kilt, wilt, quilt, it*, with all *quilt*), "with all it covers and uncovers, as well as its distance from a world of simple surfaces and depths, concealment or revelation" ("Afterward" in *Q*, 159), displays "the space of quilted thinking" which represents the "only true afterward" ("Afterward" in *Q*, 159) to the novel. It is the *quilt* (as a noun), the bedcover that *covers* the Being-in-the-world, that *quilts* (as a verb meaning *to swallow*) everything the novel meant before; Royle enumerates narrative perspective, first-person narration, indirect discourse, point of view, focalisation – to which we can add interior monologue, sense perceptions, overt and covert narrators, the history of literature – and exhibits a beautiful manta ray that gives shivers and an uncanny feeling to the narrator who ends the novel, overwhelmed by the unreal atmosphere of the house in which the fish have become the inhabitants and the masters of the house, watching her from their cave.

Royle's "Afterward" outlives the novel, survives beyond it, "lives on", to allude to Derrida's essay "Living On: Border Lines" that focuses on Blanchot's *récit Death Sentence*, analysed via Shelley's poem "The Triumph of Life". Derrida wondered whether "living is worth all the trouble", or "in other words [...] what is life".⁴⁴ The example he selected in order to illustrate the triumph of life was the appearance of Nathalie immediately after the blank space left for the reader to come to terms with J.'s death. Nathalie was for Derrida "the triumph of life", and her name referred to Nativity.⁴⁵ In Royle's novel, similarly to J., the protagonist disappears before the end of the novel. Regardless whether he is an alter-ego of Nicholas Royle, whether he has merely left the house for good or something more serious has befallen him, he is replaced by the novel's 'author' who lives on, as Nathalie lives on after J.'s death, to create a post-scriptum. The name of 'Nicholas', inventor and giver of a 'novel' literature, becomes another name for Nativity and fictional renaissance, and *Quilt* spawns an "Afterward" living on when the story comes to a close.



Rereading Derrida's "Living On: Border Lines", written at a time when Derrida could not anticipate that

⁴² A reference to Maurice Blanchot's formula "X without X", whose insistent recurrence was pointed out by Jacques Derrida in *Parages*, ed. John P. Leavey, trans. Tim Conley, James Hulbert, John P. Leavey, and Avital Ronell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), *passim*.

⁴³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1966), 277; emphasis mine.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Living on: Border Lines," in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 79.

⁴⁵ See Derrida, "Living On," 143.

Nicholas Royle would publish *Quilt* over thirty years later, through some sort of telepathic encounter, we almost shiver and have the same uncanny feeling the female character experiences in *Quilt*. It is as if Derrida had substituted for Royle's manta ray and had become his own ghost, writing from a distance and from the past on the future. It is Blanchot's *Death Sentence* he writes about, yet it prefigures Royle's *Quilt* and distance (tele-) in all its forms: teleo-graphy, tele-writing, telepathy:

"Living, living on" differs and defers, like "differance," beyond identity and difference. Its domain is indeed in a narrative formed out of traces, writing, distance, teleo-graphy. Tele-phone and telegram are only two modes of this teleography in which the trace, the grapheme in general, does not come to attach secondarily to the telic structure but rather marks it *a priori*.⁴⁶

All the concrete objects from the house Royle's protagonist inherited from his parents are discarded and superseded by the aquarium where the rays live. If the house with all its paraphernalia corresponds to the immediate concreteness of reality TV, reality literature is born with the rays and their space as well as the ghostly disappearance of an increasingly self-virtualizing protagonist, ousting reality TV for good. Royle's hydrapoetics covers up the whole narrative: his parents' room incorporating the en-suite bathroom was transformed into "a translucent cave", the centre of the abstract ode of a huge mantra, "the biggest ray, the strangest thing" the narrator had ever seen in a house. "It seemed, indeed, bigger than the house, arching like a rainbow, majestically large, its great wings black and thin, conforming exactly with that cloak concealing nothing that its name implies." (*Q*, 148) Hydrapoetics casts shadows and allows uncertainty to flicker; it is new literature calling us, touching us, even if it is ahead of us, looking at us with "inhuman inquisitiveness" (*Q*, 149).

Afterthought

Whereas Royle's "Afterword" is a sort of quilt with "pockets of voices, feelings and thoughts" ("Afterword" in *Q*, 159), his novel might be regarded as an "Afterward" to Derrida's work, explained in another "Afterw.rd".

Royle's protagonist chats with his father about trivial things, without realizing it is their last moment together. He feels the need to tell his father that his affection for him has not changed with the years as he grew up. No longer a child needing his

⁴⁶ Derrida, "Living On," 136.

father's protection, he can see that his aged father is the one who can no longer take care of himself and now needs his help.⁴⁷ He cannot help his emotions:

- I love you, Dad, I say, now standing up between his bed and hers, holding him by the hand.
- I love you too, mate, he says, and the tears flow from me with renewed force, impossible to restrain, strain stain in tears. My father says: don't worry, it's all right. Or he doesn't, no, not that exactly. The precise words are delivered as if from such an unfathomable distance I hardly recognise them:
- These things happen from time to time. (*Q*, 7)

At an unfathomable distance, let us telepathically imagine Royle's last discussion with Jacques Derrida, without him realizing that this was their last meeting. Or let us imagine Royle watching the great ending of Safaa Fathy's film, *D'ailleurs Derrida*, in which the French philosopher urges his audience to listen to the unconscious and almost says goodbye to his friends, while still being alive and behaving as if he were nearing the end of his life and reviewing it. We can trace several genealogies from Joyce to Derrida, from Derrida to Royle. Joyce's Stephen is looking for a father; Leopold Bloom is looking for a son, while weeping for both his son and his father; Royle's protagonist is looking for a father. Royle's protagonist buys more ray supplies to quell his sorrow after the loss of his father, Royle-the-critic starts building a fictional work to come to terms with having lost Jacques Derrida, yet what is Royle-the novelist doing? The spirit of the character's father is brought back by the translucent caves filled with rays that the protagonist builds inside the house, the spirit of Jacques Derrida is brought back through the novel itself. *Quilt* can be said to be a sort of "I love you, Jacques, my spiritual dad." It may be criticism turned into creative writing and bringing peace to the 'melancholic' critic, Nicholas Royle, mourning for the thinker who had defined himself as 'melancholic'. Derrida's article, written after the demise of Jean François Lyotard and published in *Libération* in 1998, claimed to recall the term 'melancholic' from his obituary written for the same newspaper three years before, after the death of Gilles Deleuze. In fact, the homage to Deleuze does not make any reference to the 'generation' of 'melancholic' French thinkers that included Derrida himself, but was first mentioned in 1998:

I think I can remember having said that I could feel that from now on we were quite alone, Jean-François Lyotard and I, the only survivors of what people think they can identify as a 'generation' – of which I am the last-born, the most melancholic of the group [*le plus mélancolique de la bande*], there is no doubt about it (they were all more cheerful than me).⁴⁸

Yet melancholia begins the moment "the crypt begins to crumble", Davis warns us in his *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead*.⁴⁹ When the crypt crumbled, Royle must have said:

⁴⁷ The scene is somehow reminiscent of *Camera Lucida*, where Roland Barthes describes his inverted relation to his mother-as-child: "During her illness, I nursed her, held the bowl of tea she liked because it was easier to drink from than from a cup; she had become my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she was in her first photograph." See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections of Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 72.

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida quoted in Davis, *Haunted Subjects*, 130.

⁴⁹ Davis, *Haunted Subjects*, 134.


- I miss Jacques Derrida.
- With his death in October 2004, what have we lost? I believe that we have lost, among so many other things, the most canny, the most knowing, shrewd, lucid and insightful analyst of the world situation.⁵⁰

And he reiterated that with more force, with all his trembling *plural* voice, a few pages further:

- I miss Jacques Derrida.
- Me too. In almost every sense, I miss him, keep missing him.
- *We* do. Yes.
- Yes.⁵¹ (emphasis mine)

In the final section, “Last”, included in *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*, Royle somehow refused to say farewell to his French spiritual father and brought him back. He inserted his **dream**, “an instantaneous lasting response, the most calming and magnificent of dreams”, which he transcribed in the book soon after waking up.

Jumping back where we started from, from the primary telephonic yes, we might end the “Afterward” on another ghostly moment to be clipped fast in a final gesture. Both Derrida and Royle after him frequently recalled Freud’s suggestion that there were no contradictions in the unconscious.⁵² Like all Derrida’s friends and most of his acquaintances, and many people who read and admired him, Royle experienced what the French philosopher had called “impossible mourning”, that state in which one cannot get over the death of the beloved. After the sudden and unexpected death of Paul de Man, Derrida wrote *Memoires for Paul de Man*, describing the experience of bereaved memory. For Derrida, all his great dead friends continued to live on in such a way that they haunted him. Such a feeling contradicted Freud’s urge to “normal mourning”, where one’s ego must recover its completeness and go on without the friend who left him on his own,⁵³ departing to the world of the dead. Derrida did not attempt to get over such events but went on living, always allowing spectres, revenants, the unconscious to come and go as they please: “the unconscious knows nothing of the *no*”, he had said in “Ulysses Gramophone”.⁵⁴ Royle’s unconscious knew nothing of ‘no’ to Jacques Derrida’s ghosts.

 *Tonight I dreamt he was alive again – and was with me in some far off place, very green (“Annihilating all that’s made / In a green thought in a green shade”:⁵¹ does he cite that in *Memoirs of the Blind*?) – he was being, as ever, very warm, loving and friendly – but he became anxious, wanting to call his two sons – there was no telephone we could find – then the agitation he showed passed and we were talking again – and I asked him what year it was – he must have seen that I was asking this question as a visitor, or not in the same world as him, for he laughed (very beautifully) and replied in a reassuring simple fashion: “Oh, it’s no problem. I can jump around from one time to the other.”⁵²*

⁵⁰ Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*, 103.

⁵¹ Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*, 108.

⁵² See Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*, 100.

⁵³ For an instance of Derrida expressing his loneliness after a departed friend, see his funeral speech after Deleuze’s death, “I’m Going to Have to Wander All Alone,” in *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 192-95 (originally published in *Libération*, November 7, 1995: 37).

⁵⁴ Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone,” 66.

In Derrida's view, ghosts appeared only "by means of figure or fiction."⁵⁵ The critic Nicholas Royle shifted from criticism to fiction, or in other words, Royle called Derrida. If Eric Prenowitz thought that Jacques Derrida spent a lifetime thinking and speaking on Hélène Cixous's telephone, which is to say "in it, into it and out of it, through it, as well as of it, and even into it of it, all at once",⁵⁶ one can easily paraphrase Prenowitz, and ascertain that with *Quilt*, Royle will most likely spend the rest of his life thinking and speaking on Jacques Derrida's phone, letting the dead speak.

Bzzzzzzzzzz zzzzzzzzzz.

– Hello?

– Such things happen from time to time.

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Apel la 'noua' realitate a romanului și telepatie în *Quilt* [Macat] al lui Nicholas Royle

În *The Uncanny* [Stranietatea], Nicholas Royle a definit conceptul lui Freud de *Unheimlichkeit* (stranietatea) și experiența unei „realități ireale” ca „altă formă de a gândi începutul”. Dar dacă ne propunem să îl credem, „începutul este întotdeauna bântuit” și suntem nevoiți să interpretăm romanul său de debut *Quilt* [Macat] ca bântuit de spectrul criticului Nicholas Royle din scrierile de dinaintea romanului. Eseul, care are o structură telefonică, deoarece se referă atât la viziunea lui Royle asupra literaturii ca telepatie (o altă formă de ‘tele-’) și la începutul romanului, analizează *Quilt* dinspre final spre început, pornind de la “Afterward” [Postfață], cu scopul de a dezvălui cele două stăpîni care bântuie proza lui Royle, cea a lui Jacques Derrida și cea a lui James Joyce. *Quilt* revizitează opera critică a scriitorului pentru a construi o realitate literară alternativă, într-un experiment prin care „spectralitatea coabitează cu scrierea” (“Clipping” [Tăietură]) și pe care Postfața lui Royle a chemat-o în numele „realității literatură”. Ca parte a strategiilor stranii ale autorului de a produce defamiliarizarea, care în cele din urmă răspund la întrebarea „care este responsabilitatea ‘noii’ literaturi din zilele noastre și care este sensul său de urgență a ‘realului?’”, am remarcat o încercare de a „forța limba engleză să apară [...] ca limbă străină”. Din acest punct de vedere, eseul demonstrează cum Royle „provoacă probleme în și prin limbă”, dezorientând cititorul și forțându-l să comunice cu lumea spectrelor, a virtualului, a telepatiei – așa cum o arată obsesia protagonistului-narator de a construi un acvariu pentru pisicile sale de mare, ale căror șire ale spinării, pline de oase subțiri, sunt la fel de fine și flexibile precum tehnicile narrative ale romancierului.