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Beyond the Limits of the Body, within the Possibilities of Fiction: Posthumous Narration in Neil Jordan's *Shade*

Bedenin Sınırlarının Ötesinde, Kurgunun Olanakları Dâhilinde: Neil Jordan'ın *Gölge* Romanında Ölüm Sonrası Anlatım

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Abstract

This paper examines Neil Jordan's *Shade* through the lens of posthumous narration, focusing on the complex interplay between body, soul, and narrative form. It argues that the novel's ghost narrator, Nina Hardy, embodies an "absent presence" that challenges conventional narrative authority by inhabiting a liminal space beyond physical and temporal constraints. Drawing on philosophical traditions from Plato's dualism to Merleau-Ponty's embodied phenomenology, the analysis situates Nina's ghost as a spectral figure that transcends the boundaries of life and death while retaining narrative agency. The novel's unnatural narratology, characterized by fluid temporality, circular structure, and self-reflexive commentary, destabilizes linear storytelling and contributes to the unusual situation of a ghost narrator maintaining its ties with the world of the living through storytelling. It is argued that in Jordan's *Shade,* posthumous narration serves to draw attention to the possibility of fiction representing what lies beyond the limits of the body by complicating the conventional narrative premises and "natural" narrators.

Keywords

Neil Jordan, *Shade*, posthumous narration, unnatural narratology, ghost narrator

Öz

Bu makale, Neil Jordan'ın *Gölge* romanını ölüm sonrası anlatım perspektifinden inceleyerek beden, ruh ve anlatı biçimi arasındaki karmaşık etkileşime odaklanmaktadır. Makalede, romanın hayalet anlatıcısı Nina Hardy'nin, fiziksel ve zamansal kısıtlamaların ötesindeki bir sınır alanında var olarak geleneksel anlatı otoritesine meydan okuyan bir "yokluk içindeki varlık"ı örneklendirdiği savunulmaktadır. Platon'un dualizminden Merleau-Ponty'nin bedenlenmiş fenomenolojisine kadar uzanan felsefi geleneklerden yararlanarak yapılan analiz, Nina'nın hayaleti, anlatı öznelliğini korurken yaşam ve ölüm sınırlarını aşan hayaletvari bir figür olarak konumlandırmaktadır. Akışkan zamansallık, döngüsel yapı ve öz-yansıtıcı yorumlarla karakterize edilen romanın doğal olmayan anlatıbilimi, doğrusal hikâye anlatımını sarsar ve hayalet anlatıcının hikâye anlatımı yoluyla yaşayanlar dünyasıyla bağlarını sürdürdüğü alışılmadık bir duruma katkıda bulunur. Jordan'ın *Gölge* adlı eserinde, ölüm sonrası anlatımın, geleneksel anlatı öncüllerini ve "doğal" anlatıcıları karmaşıklaştırarak, bedenin sınırlarının ötesindekini temsil etme konusunda kurgunun sunduğu olasılıklara dikkat çekmeye hizmet ettiği savunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Neil Jordan, *Gölge*, ölüm sonrası anlatım, doğal olmayan anlatı bilimi, hayalet anlatıcı

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Introduction

Literature has always been a site of imagination for writers and readers; thanks to literary works, an author can write about the real and the unreal, the known and the unknown, the living and the dead. Readers' fascination with the unreal, the unknown, and the dead has encouraged authors to explore these phenomena more extensively. The dead and ghostly characters have been a part of canonical literature from Dante's *Inferno* (c. 1321) to *Everyman* (c. 1510), and to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c. 1601). With the rise of the novel in the 18th century, in speculative fiction and the gothic, spectral characters proliferated, and thereafter dead bodies have acted as tools to explore fear, sex, greed, guilt, innocence, and grief. In contemporary fiction, there has been an unprecedented increase in narratives dealing with the dead.[1] Neil Jordan's *Shade* (2004) is one of the exemplars of narratives dealing with what happens after human beings die; it presents an answer to the question of whether the soul continues to exist after the body is destroyed.

Shade revolves around the memoirs of the autodiegetic narrator Nina Hardy, who announces that she has been killed. The narrative oscillates between past and present (between 1900 and 1950) and discloses the events of Nina's childhood, her adult life as an actress, and the circumstances of her death. Though the main focaliser is Nina throughout the narrative, the focal characters alternate between her half-brother Gregory, her friends Janie and Janie's brother George, as well as Nina's parents. Murdered by the mentally unstable George whom she employed as a gardener, Nina's ghost goes on to tell her story while her body slowly decomposes in the septic tank of her family house. In an interview, Jordan labels *Shade* as "a circular novel"[2] because the story of Nina starts from the end of her life and time is rewound to her childhood, from which onwards it is narrated until the moment she is killed. It is also hinted that the ghost has always been there to observe Nina while she grows up, and she and George mention seeing a ghost just like the grown-up Nina. Jordan also comments that the ghost has "a strange way of traveling through time";[3] unlike her body which is decapitated and lying dead in the septic tank, her soul is not bound by spatiotemporal limits and enjoys the freedom of coming and going back in time. Though ignorant of this fact, little Nina is haunted by her own ghost. Given Nina's peculiar simultaneous existence as a ghost and a living being, this paper argues that in Jordan's *Shade,* posthumous narration serves to draw attention to the possibility of fiction representing what lies ahead of the limits of the body by complicating conventional narrative premises and "natural" narrators. Within this context, Jordan's use of

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1 The narrators of William Golding's *Pincher Martin* (1954), Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (1967), Nabokov's *Transparent Things* (1972), Robertson Davies's *Murther and Walking Spirits* (1991), Percival Everett's *American Desert* (2004), one of the narrators of Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* (2001), and Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* (2002) are all dead.

2 Neil Jordan, "The Storykeeper: An Interview with Neil Jordan," interview by Amy R. Handler, *Film Threat,* August 4, 2010, https://filmthreat.com/interviews/the-storykeeper-an-interview-with-neil-jordan/

3 Jordan, interview.

posthumous narration representing what lies beyond the limits of embodied bodies will be dwelt on in this paper.

Neil Patrick Jordan was born on 25 February 1950 in Sligo, Ireland. Mostly acclaimed for his screenwriting and directing talents, Jordan has also been praised for his fictional works; for instance, he was awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize in 1979 for *Night in Tunisia and Other Stories* (1976). He also won the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 1993 for his film *The Crying Game* (1992). As Bertrand Cardin acknowledges, Jordan is an "important figure in contemporary Irish cultural life, but his twofold creative output is not equally recognized,"[4] which could be caused by his focusing more on his cinematic career. What is recurrent in his creative output is "an interest in the irrational and supernatural."[5] Another common aspect of his works is his treatment of "[c]hildhood [as] a way of seeing things. It means approaching reality, time and space . . . from a different angle that both annihilates time and inhabits space."[6] Jordan's *Shade* is a literary work which has attracted little scholarly attention. Val Nolan, in his narratological analysis focusing on space and time in John Banville's and Jordan's fiction, underlines the unconventional representation of time in *Shade:* "the past and the present, the living and the dead co-exist, and so [it is] a narrative where binary structures are simply inapplicable."[7] Evaluating the work as an exemplar of traditional gothic,[8] Richard Haslam argues that "the reinvigoration of Irish Catholic Gothic continues in the new millennium with Neil Jordan's *Shade* (2004), which introduces Irish mythology as well as folklore."[9] In his fiction, "the weight of the past in the author's home country" can easily be recognized by the readers and "a sense of Ireland's history or of Ireland's place within a larger, generally European, historical framework"[10] is mostly felt in the background. Jordan's third novel, *Shade*, is not an exception; a part of the narrative deals with the Great War and how the Irish youth went to war to fight for England, touching upon the traumatic effects of war on individuals and society. The novel also displays the Catholic heritage of Ireland in representing a ghost in between life and death, which is in line with "the medieval Catholic concept of purgatory – the intermediate state in which the souls of the dead suffered for

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4 Bertrand Cardin, *Neil Jordan, Author and Screenwriter: The Imagination of Transgression* (Peter Lang, 2023), 4.

5 Cardin, *Neil Jordan, Author and Screenwriter, 6.*

6 Maguy Pernot-Deschamps, *The Fictional Imagination of Neil Jordan, Irish Novelist and Film Maker: A Study of Literary Style* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 58.

7 Val Nolan, "The Aesthetics of Space and Time in the Fiction of John Banville and Neil Jordan," *Nordic Irish Studies* 9 (2010): 39.

8 Charles Maturin's gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) is worth mentioning here. Written by an Irish clergyman, the novel features Melmoth who makes a diabolical pact and is condemned to roam the earth. Occupying a liminal, quasi-spectral position, Melmoth has a silent presence throughout the narrative.

9 Richard Haslam, "Irish Gothic: A Rhetorical Hermeneutics Approach," *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror* Studies 2 (2007): 12.

10 Pernot-Deschamps, *The Fictional Imagination of Neil Jordan, 3.*

their sins before being allowed into heaven."[11] While there is no explicit commentary about the sins of the ghost, its absent presence can be related to this Catholic belief.

Philosophical Thoughts on Body and Soul

Philosophers' postulations of the relationship between body and soul illustrate a transition from dualism to a unified embodiment. In Jordan's *Shade*, the ghostly narrator, Nina's deceased form, and the living Nina are the foci of the narration; that is why reviewing the different viewpoints on spiritual and physical substances would contribute to an appreciation of the novel. The body, defined as "the physical structure of a person,"[12] serves as the primary source of information about the self, society, and the world. From a scientific perspective, there is no other way of existence in this spatiotemporal world in which the body witnesses the earthly experience from the beginning to the end—from birth to death. In various cultures and at various times, the human body has been understood and conceptualized in diverse ways; however, its fundamental meaning as the physical structure of a person is the same and reflects the primary involvement of all humanity in the material world. The ultimate end of a human's life on earth and the uncertainty about death make it a widely debated topic of philosophy as well as literature.

The works of ancient Greek philosopher Plato are the earliest philosophical treatises to dwell on the body and soul dichotomy. In the dialogue "Phaedo" (c. 360 BCE), Plato expresses his belief that ideas constitute the primary being and the soul somehow binds a person to the realm of ideas. Plato holds that human beings are a kind of microcosm, an aggregate of body and soul, where both soma and psyche are essential. Yet the soul is superior to the body which is the source of appetite, distraction, and impurity. While the body perishes, the soul survives death. For him, it is important to cast away one's carnality with its sensual existence. Instead, human beings should take care of their souls and commit themselves to philosophy, which prepares them for death and a happy existence beyond earthly, spatiotemporal life. In Plato's philosophy, "the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intelligible, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and the body is in the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintelligible, and multiform, and dissoluble, and changeable."[13] Plato also distinguishes between pure and impure soul as follows: "the soul which is pure at departing draws after her no bodily taint," while the impure soul is "cloyed with sight and therefore visible."[14] Naturally, the ontological statuses of the soul and the body are different. The human soul, for Plato, is unbegotten, everlasting, undivided, and indestructible, whereas the body is complex, destructible, and begotten.

Several centuries later, in the 17th century, René Descartes imagined the body as a complex machine, the physiological functions of which can be explained by mechanical processes and movements of the body parts. Descartes' dualistic perspective, which posits the existence of both

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11 Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.
12 Michael Rundell, ed. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Longman, 2000), 133.
13 Plato, *Six Great Dialogues* (Dover Publications, 2007), 58.
14 Plato, *Six Great Dialogues, 59.*

a material body and an immaterial mind or soul, continues to inform modern investigations into the nature of consciousness. For Cartesian dualism, the immaterial thinking substance is the true self and is considered superior to the material body. However, Descartes favors a full union of the soul and the body, rather than "like a pilot in a ship, unless perhaps to move its members, but that it is necessary for it [the soul] to be joined and united more closely to the body."[15] In this context, the question of what happens to the soul after the body dies arises. Within the scope of Cartesian thinking, the notion of the soul is in parallel with "an entity both simple and enduring, transcending the material realm to persist as an immaterial essence beyond the veil of mortality."[16] According to Cartesian philosophy, while the body ceases to be, the soul is eternal.

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty rejects the prioritization of the mental above the physical in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). He considers the body both lived and corporeal because it gains meaning as long as individuals perceive, act, and relate to the world through their bodies. Unlike Descartes, he equates the mind and body by saying, "I am my body."[17] In his philosophy, the body "exceeds ontological categories of subjectivity versus objectivity, presence versus absence."[18] Rather than being merely a container for the soul, the body is an embodied substance in which the subject and the world coexist. He emphasizes that "the body is our anchorage in the world";[19] namely, it serves as a harbor to secure ourselves in this world.

Read together, these three positions display a philosophical shift from strict dualism to embodied unity in the soul-body relationship. Plato views the soul as divine and separate from the body, which is a corrupt prison that can be escaped through philosophical thought. Descartes sees the mind as a distinct thinking substance apart from the mechanistic body, but recognizes their intimate union via lived sensations. Merleau-Ponty rejects dualism entirely, arguing that the body is the medium of selfhood and experience, which marks a progression toward inseparable, embodied consciousness. In Jordan's *Shade,* three main existential conditions are narrated through the ghost narrator, the dead body of Nina, and the living beings (mainly via Nina and her friends). Nina's ghost represents the soul as an absent presence throughout the narrative. Ghosts usually escape comprehension, yet they can be considered traces of the body; and the trace; in Jacques Derrida's postulation is "the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present."[20] In line with this, the term "absent presence" is commonly attributed to Derrida who

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15 René Descartes, "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 141.

16 Joshua R Farris, *Why Souls? A Mirror to the Universe* (Iff Books, 2026), 113.

17 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (Routledge, 2012), 151.

18 David Morris, "Body," in *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts,* ed. Rosalyn Diprose and Jack Reynolds (Routledge, 2014), 113.

19 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 144.

20 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xvii.

challenges the assumption that meaning is derived from what is immediately present, which he calls the metaphysics of presence. He implies that presence is always constituted through absence: "The living present springs forth out of its non-identity with itself and from the possibility of the retentional trace."[21] Presence is, therefore, never immediate or self-identical but always constituted through what is absent. Thus, the ghost emerges as an entity which haunts the present in its non-being. The corpse of Nina exemplifies the material body, and is absent from most of the narrative. In the story world, separated from Nina's body, her soul emerges as a distinct substance that has thoughts and memories while retaining the sensations of the body, which aligns Jordan's representation with Descartes' philosophy of the soul and body. Jordan characterizes Nina's living self as an embodied consciousness in which body and soul unite harmoniously, echoing Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Unlike the ghost/soul and the dead body, Nina's existence as a human being is foregrounded by her strong presence in the novel. Bringing all these together in the story results in some violations of conventional narrative characteristics. As suggested by Alice Bennett, the novel investigates "the problems that arise for narrative when characters and narrators do not inhabit the same physical or diegetic world."[22] This situation is explicated through the dichotomy of spiritual and material substances, as well as embodied consciousness.

Unnatural Narratology, Dead Narrators, and Posthumous Narration

Traditionally, when storytelling is the issue, readers think of a flesh-and-blood human narrator. Mieke Bal provides the following definition: "The narrator is the agent that utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text."[23] Clearly, a person is needed to enunciate the words implied with this statement. As for readers, Monika Fludernik argues that when people read narratives, they tend to imagine comparable real-world situations: readers "project real-life parameters into the reading process and, if at all possible, treat the text as a real-life instance of narrating."[24] A narrator who speaks from beyond the grave violates the most basic mimetic assumptions of narrative theory: that voice belongs to a living body, that the act of narration presupposes an embodied, temporally located speaker, and that narrative authority is grounded in the narrator's presence to the events recounted. Ghost and/or dead narrators, who recount their own deaths, address the living from an impossible elsewhere, or persist after biological death as speaking subjects.

Narration beyond the limits of humanity has been theorized by narratologists such as Brian Richardson and Jan Alber, each ending up with their own conceptual terminology. Richardson defines unnatural narratives as the ones characterized by "significant antimimetic events,

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21 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Northwestern University Press, 1973), 85.

22 Alice Bennett, "Unquiet Spirits: Death Writing in Contemporary Fiction," *Textual Practice* 23, no. 3 (2009): 464.

23 Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (University of Toronto Press, 1997), 18.

24 Monika Fludernik, "New Wine in Old Bottles? Voice, Focalization, and New Writing," *New Literary History* 32, no. 3 (2001): 623.

characters, settings, or frames . . . representations that contravene the presuppositions of nonfictional narratives, violate mimetic conventions and the practices of realism, and defy the conventions of existing, established genres."[25] While Richardson implies that such narratives are recounted by "impossible" narrators, Alber dubs them "unnatural, (i.e., physically, logically, or humanly impossible) scenarios and events that challenge our real- world knowledge."[26] He explains that unnatural scenarios may transcend "physical laws, logical principles, or standard human limitations of knowledge and ability, and such experiences are restricted to the world of fiction."[27] Thanks to fictitious characters and settings, the illogical and the unnatural can be narrated. Another concept to explain the circumstances regarding ghost narrators is posthumous narration, which is defined by Philipp Carrard as "a narrative performed 'from beyond the grave' by one or several dead characters" and it has "become an established subgenre of the current literary scene."[28] It is worth noting that ghost stories and their first-person "narrators provide data they [dead character-narrators] have no way of accessing, whether we take as a yardstick the limits of human cognition and perception or the usual protocols of homodiegetic narrative."[29] Carrard's understanding is in agreement with Alber's unnatural narratology; there seems to be a consensus among scholars about the deviant characteristics of ghost narrators; while the terminology changes, what they mean seems quite similar.

Dead narrators can be classified as a subcategory of unnatural narration. As Alber states, dead narrators and characters are "an interesting phenomenon because they cut across the fundamental distinction between life and death. On the one hand, they are deceased and thus no longer there, but on the other hand, they are still able to think, speak, or act and often try to influence figures that are still alive."[30] Alber identifies three recurrent functions of the dead narrator: confession of personal secrets, satire and social criticism, and voicing of forgotten marginalized voices.[31] While Nina's story embodies all these functions to a certain extent, the focus of this study is the liminal space embodied by the narrator and how, through posthumous narration, the ghost is able to have an absent presence.

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25 Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative: Theory, History, and Practice* (Ohio State University Press, 2015), 3.

26 Jan Alber, *Unnatural Narrative: Impossible Worlds in Fiction and Drama* (University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 3.

27 Alber, *Unnatural Narrative,* 7.

28 Philipp Carrard, "Dead Man/and Woman Talking: Narratives from Beyond the Grave," in *The Routledge Companion to Death and Literature*, ed. W. Michelle Wang, Daniel K. Jernigan, and Neil Murphy (Routledge, 2021), 71.

29 Carrard, "Dead Man/and Woman Talking," 76.

30 Jan Alber, "Forbidden Mental Fruit? Dead Narrators and Characters from Medieval to Postmodernist Narratives," in *The Routledge Companion to Death and Literature*, ed. W. Michelle Wang, Daniel K. Jernigan, and Neil Murphy (Routledge, 2021), 42.

31 Alber, *Unnatural Narrative, 5–6*.

Nina as a Ghost Narrator: An Absent Presence

The narrator describes itself[32] as the "Shade of what was. I am that oddest of things, an absence now. A rumour, a shade within a shadow, a remembrance of a memory, my own."[33] The ghost embodies a place in between the material and spiritual worlds, and as an absent presence in the Derridean sense, it continues to speak and make claims upon the present. The title of the novel names this liminal ontology, the limbo of in-between. A shade is neither presence nor nothingness; it is a dim after-image or the trace of a body that once cast a shadow. Jordan thus makes ontology itself the subject of the narrative form: what does it mean to *be* when one's mode of being is narration? Nina's story is also a form of death-writing, which "creates presence where absence existed, the written remembrance corporeal and material, a relic that can be touched and handled."[34] Although Nina's dead body cannot be found by the officers, and her ghost is physically absent, the ghost has a remarkable presence in the narrative. The figure of the ghost is described as something "which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive."[35] Likewise, being caught in between past and present, and the living and the dead, the narrator of *Shade* is both absent and present. Much as narrative agency is provided to the ghost of Nina, as a narrator it is suspended in-between the real and imaginary worlds, and its spectral status is somewhat similar to that of a lost soul. Although Nina's body is not present in the narrative, she remains present through memory and thanks to the ghost's storytelling. In this regard, the ghost is a trace and/or an absence that continues to operate within presence.

Ontological Status of the Narrator

From the beginning to the end of the narrative, the preoccupation with being and existing through storytelling is sustained. The novel opens with an epigraph by the Irish poet William Butler Yeats: "Dear shadows, now you know it all,"[36] the first line of the second stanza of the poet's 1927 poem titled "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," written as a mourning for the death of two sisters. "Dear shadows" is an apostrophe to the dead women, and the poem highlights that political tensions are futile and that life, as well as beauty, yields to time. With this epigraph, two central issues the novel deals with are hinted at: ghostly presence and its continuous concern with temporal fluidity.

Nina is an autodiegetic narrator who tells the story of her life and death. Her reach as a narrator extends beyond ordinary retrospection because she is able to go back in time and observe herself and her parents. She is also capable of listening to the conversations between other characters after her death and conveying those dialogues to the reader. Although in most parts of

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32 To differentiate between Nina (as the embodied consciousness and the main focalizer) and her ghost, the pronoun "it" is preferred for the ghost narrator.

33 Neil Jordan, *Shade* (Bloomsbury, 2004), 23.

34 Kathleen M. Oliver, *Narrative Mourning: Death and Its Relics in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Bucknell University Press, 2020), 149.

35 Davies, *The Haunted,* 373.

36 Jordan, *Shade,* 11.

the novel, the narrative gives the impression of a story conveyed by "an ordinary omniscient narrator, … Nina can pass through rooms unseen and relate the characters' thoughts."[37] Observing her father and narrating his feelings, as a self-conscious narrator, the ghost underlines its omnipresence with the following words: "I know now, of course, what he had left. How do I know this? It is the only grace of my state. I am everywhere being nowhere, the narrative sublime."[38] It seems to enjoy this god-like authority over the story it narrates, namely the state of knowing almost everything. This idea of passively watching and recording what happens or has happened finds expression in its acknowledgement, stating, "observation is all I am."[39] Without any possibility of interfering in the events, it simply observes. However, the narrative suggests that the ghost's presence contributes to Nina's murder. As argued by Bennett, "the plot ultimately identifies her doubling (and her narration) as a contributory factor in her murder."[40] It could be argued that George kills Nina because the ghost of her shows itself frequently to George or is around Nina and her friends. The visibility of the soul could be considered within the scope of Plato's understanding of the impure soul as well as the Catholic belief in purgatory, in which the dead are believed to suffer for their sins (Nina, when she was young, indulged in sex with various partners, including George and her half-brother Gregory, and her mother forced her to have an abortion). Despite being rare, the ghost is visible; especially Nina and George report that they see a ghost whose appearance matches that of adult Nina, and Nina calls it "Hester." Years later, when the crime is committed, the following conversation takes place between the siblings:

> "Why did you kill her, George?" Janie says slowly.
> "Kill who?" says George.
> "Nina," says Janie, and her closed fist scratches again at her eyelid.
> "Didn't kill Nina," says George. "I killed Hester."[41]

George, after attending the WWI, had several injuries on his face and lost a finger. When he returned, his trauma hindered him from continuing his life, and he was institutionalized. As it can be understood from his words, he is not a mentally healthy individual. As an individual living with psychological distress, he is not even aware of the seriousness of his act of killing. Janie describes Hester to the police officers investigating the murder as "Nina's doll. Nina's ghost. Whatever Nina wanted her to be."[42] George, in his childhood naivety, seems to be the only one implying that Hester and Nina are one yet of different substances. When he says, "Thank you Hester," Nina answers, "Don't thank Hester, thank me." George asks: "Are you not Hester?"[43] In a later incident, George says to Nina that he speaks to Hester and it tells him,

> "What you want, what you're thinking."

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37 Alice Bennett, *Afterlife and Narrative in Contemporary Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 154.
38 Jordan, *Shade,* 29.
39 Jordan, *Shade,* 69.
40 Bennett, *Afterlife and Narrative*, 155.
41 Jordan, *Shade,* 66.
42 Jordan, *Shade,* 67.
43 Jordan, *Shade,* 57.

"How could Hester know, when most times I don't know myself?"
"Because, maybe, she hasn't died yet."[44]

On a deeper level, George may have felt that what he sees is the ghost of Nina, which travels through time. Seeing the ghost frequently may have contributed to his insanity.

Although the story starts as a first-person narrative, and the narrator announces "I know exactly when I died. It was twenty past three on the fourteenth of January of the year nineteen fifty,"[45] soon the ghost narrator distances itself from the object of narration (focalized) Nina by referring to her as "she." The ghost's use of "I" versus "she" operates at the sentence level to create ontological instability. The separation of the ghost from the body defamiliarizes it from the body once it inhabited. For instance, when it tells about the circumstances after she was born, it recounts: "The child's eyes opened in the room above and no effort of the suckling showed in them and she stared above the nurse's crowblack hair."[46] This is another indication that the soul and body of Nina are separate substances having individual qualities. Now that the body is decomposing, the soul assumes a separate identity.

The ghost narrator differentiates between body and soul; in its thinking, the former refers to material substance and occupies a place in the world of the living, while the latter refers to being because it says: "being I have and substance none."[47] Perhaps because of its liminal space between life and death, it says: "And the thought strikes me, if thoughts can strike something such as me, that that old oak table . . . has more substance than I have" (104). In this statement, the table's having more substance than itself could be explained through its non-existence or absence from the land of the living while the table has a presence in the empirical world. The ghost narrator distinguishes between material substance and soul, yet it accepts having a soul as a human quality "to say the house grows quiet in my absence would be to humanize it, and houses, as we know, aren't human. They may, though, have human qualities, and this one does have me."[48] This approach to human beings as an amalgam of substance and soul echoes the Cartesian duality.

The ghost frequently contrasts its absent state with Nina's embodied presence: "I am beyond her and she is here, she is me, of course, and over the gap of years I am amazed by her patience, her presentness, and her calm acceptance of the fact that she is observed. . . . I am the figure she occasionally notices, her guardian angel or hidden sister."[49] When its absentness is juxtaposed with the presentness of lively Nina, the distinction between them becomes clearer. The ghost yearns for presence and for being recognized by others, for it recounts: Nina "looks at me again, her only true familiar, and I realise again what a comfort it is, to be perceived"[50]. It also confesses that "[d]eath

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44 Jordan, *Shade,* 130.
45 Jordan, *Shade,* 16.
46 Jordan, *Shade,* 32.
47 Jordan, *Shade,* 97.
48 Jordan, *Shade,* 241.
49 Jordan, *Shade,* 42.
50 Jordan, *Shade,* 82.

envies life. It longs, weeps, pines, retches for that condition even at its bleakest."[51] Here, the craving of the ghost for life and presentness is obvious, and due to being an absent presence, it feels the lack of a solid presence.

Nina's body is hidden, decomposing, and undiscovered by the police who frequent the house. Her being, in any corporeal sense, has collapsed into abjection and absence. The ghost is a remainder, a residue of consciousness that can review but never alter the events leading to its death. In fact, Nina's "afterlife is an aesthetic exercise drawing on the landscapes of her imagination, an act of fiction-making rooted in corporal existence and so all the better to relive it."[52] Although separated from the body, the ghost can still retain meaning and feelings. The ghost's narration persists in direct proportion to the body's dissolution and the tension between the two. Being in the world is what fails; writing is what endures, but it endures precisely as a memorial to that failure.

Temporality and Peculiarity of the Narrative

The ghost narrator's perception and representation of time are unusual compared to that of an omniscient narrator. After the death of the body, it is only possible through writing that the soul finds a place to exist, which makes the story non-linear. Referring to the moment Nina dies, the ghost recounts: "Time ended for me then, but nothing else did. I can't explain that fact, merely marvel at the narrative that unravels, the most impossible and yet the commonest in the books."[53] Abstracted from a human body, the ghost can have control over the narrative and is not obliged to narrate events chronologically. Self-consciously it also calls its narrative "impossible." It hovers around the characters and defines itself as a narrator "for whom past, present and to some extent the future are the same, who flips between them with inhuman ease."[54] Time in *Shade* is accordingly folding on itself rather than sequential, ranging freely between different timescapes. As opposed to the linear being of the living body, the ghost is a non-linear substance. Yet, to exist in the realm of the living, it applies the temporal logic of writing, where the sequence is an artifact of arrangement. The ghost's impotence in altering the progress of events is the very thing that allows it to tell its story in the form of a meaningful whole. As suggested by Nolan, Jordan's "experiments with narrative, his applications of devices such as flashforwards and causality loops, represent an effort to overcome the linearity of time as experienced by human beings."[55]

The ghost is aware of its imprisonment in a time loop. Gazing at a library full of novels, it compares itself to fictional characters,

> My memories, frosted like theirs, as yet untitled. . . . Now that time has stopped do I remember, no, I read, as if within those frozen spines, the book whose ending I didn't write, written for me by one who

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51 Jordan, *Shade,* 112.
52 Nolan, "The Aesthetics of Space," 41.
53 Jordan, *Shade,* 17.
54 Jordan, *Shade,* 17.
55 Nolan, "The Aesthetics of Space," 35.

> hardly learned to write. I give it chapter headings, turn the non-existent pages, inhabit the story, delight in it, weep in it, die in it. But can I change the conclusion? Not a whit. The end began it and beginning ended it.[56]

Several features of the ghost are voiced in this excerpt: The progression of time has halted for it; it is now an absent presence, just like the story it narrates; and it is still able to feel emotions such as joy and sadness. The inevitability of its ghostly condition is also underlined with the last sentence, which comments on the story's circular nature: having died, Nina's life ended, yet the ghost's existence began, the story of which, in turn, makes both exist. It becomes apparent that the only possible way of existing in the world of the living is through storytelling; in other words, just like numerous other fictional characters, it can merely exist on the diegetic (story) level.

Foreshadowing in the novel acts as a manifestation that embodied consciousnesses have glimpses of the future. In narratological terms, prolepsis is explained as "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later."[57] A few instances of prolepsis could be given: (1) After telling Gregory that the house is "haunted," Nina goes on to mention a ghost whose "name's Hester and she's always a little sad."[58] Towards the end of the narrative, the ghost admits the fact that the house is haunted by itself. (2) When he is a little boy, Gregory, in an attempt to conceive what Hester is, creates a story about it and imagines that "the ghost was an actress."[59] Years later, Nina goes to America to be an actress and becomes very successful. (3) George is the one implying that Hester and Nina are the same, or it has not died yet. These prolepses reinforce the idea that there are inescapable outcomes in life and that these embodied bodies, in harmony with their souls, can rarely foretell certain events.

Much as the narrator enjoys the freedom to tell readers whatever it chooses from whichever time it desires, it has its shortcomings and unconventional features. It makes its inexperience apparent by speaking to its narratee sincerely:

> How I am everywhere and nowhere? The moments I have lived unwind before with the moments unlived, both numbered by the same clock. I am your perfect narrator, inhabit then and now, dance between both, am nothing but my story and my story seems already endless. There are rules to my condition but I haven't learned them yet.[60]

Its condition is highly paradoxical: it knows that the story is the only place it can exist, yet it is hesitant about the story it narrates. Observing Nina's father when he reads the letter, the ghost ponders: "And perhaps this is the story I have to tell, the one without me in it."[61] In a later incident, it is uncertain about the number of beverages consumed: "Janie sleeps the sleep of nine whiskies

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56 Jordan, *Shade,* 78–79.
57 Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cornell University Press, 1980), 40.
58 Jordan, *Shade,* 93.
59 Jordan, *Shade,* 108.
60 Jordan, *Shade,* 97.
61 Jordan, *Shade,* 241.

or was it ten, and dreams of the September morning."[62] Its narrative is proleptic and metafictional, telling the reader about the story and what will happen in the lives of the characters; for instance, about Nina, it tells: "So her narrative begins, as it will end, with a ghost."[63] It is highly self-revelatory, and as an overt narrator, it makes itself obvious as the teller of the story. When the ghost visits seven-year-old Nina, it realizes the fact that it has been haunting her for years: "staring at the tall, sad woman who is staring back at me, dressed in a grey fur coat, black beret and a pair of Wellington boots. This woman is me . . . I am my own ghost."[64] Another example of the expression of its ubiquity occurs when Nina meets her half-brother Gregory. She wants to introduce him to Hester, saying "she's there," the ghost adds in narratorial commentary, "And I am there, of course, always there, can see them both against the dark hulk of the instrument [the piano]."[65] Although it is ubiquitous, it has to remain passive; it can only watch them and is not capable of interacting with them.

Conclusion

A complex interplay between body, soul, and narrative that challenges conventional storytelling boundaries can be observed in *Shade*, which invites readers into a multifaceted exploration of existence beyond physical limits. Through the posthumous narration of Nina's ghost, this study has examined the ontological tension between material substance and immaterial presence, engaging with philosophical traditions that span from Plato and Descartes to Merleau-Ponty. Nina's ghost functions as an *absent presence*, inhabiting a liminal space that transcends linear temporality and physical constraints, thereby exemplifying the potential of fiction to represent experiences that exceed the corporeal confines of human life. When considered in Derridean terms, the story of the ghost is meaningful because it carries traces of what is absent.

Shade foregrounds the power of storytelling as a mode of existence beyond the grave. The act of narration itself becomes a form of being, where the ghost's voice preserves presence in the face of corporeal absence. Such a posthumous narration not only complicates traditional narrative authority but also invites reflection on the porous boundaries between life, death, and narrative representation. By doing so, the novel articulates a profound meditation on how fiction can give voice and presence to those inhabiting the thresholds between being and non-being, thus expanding the possibilities of literary expression. While the ghost observes, recounts, and mourns her own demise, it creates a fluid temporal narrative with a circular structure. This narrative strategy disrupts the conventional assumptions of narrative authority, which typically rely on a living, embodied speaker, and instead situates the narrator in a spectral position that blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead. The ghost's ability to move freely through time, observing the past and present without the constraints of physical embodiment, offers a unique vantage point

62 Jordan, *Shade,* 139.
63 Jordan, *Shade,* 19.
64 Jordan, *Shade,* 17.
65 Jordan, *Shade,* 105.

that enriches the narrative complexity and deepens the thematic engagement with memory, identity, and mortality.

The ontological ambiguity embodied by Nina's ghost resonates with philosophical inquiries into the nature of self and existence. Drawing on Platonic dualism, it is argued that the soul is represented as distinct and superior to the body, capable of enduring beyond physical destruction. In parallel, Cartesian dualism is reflected in the separation of thinking substance and material substance, where the soul retains consciousness and memory independent of the decaying body. Besides, the narrative gestures toward Merleau-Ponty's embodied phenomenology by depicting Nina's living self as an integrated unity of body and soul, thereby emphasizing the embodied nature of presence. This philosophical layering enriches the text's exploration of what it means to "be" when traditional ontological categories are destabilized. In short, the novel exemplifies how fiction can transcend the limitations of the physical world to engage with existential questions through innovative narrative techniques. By giving voice to a posthumous narrator who inhabits the interstices of life and death, Jordan's novel challenges readers to reconsider the boundaries of narrative authority, presence, and being. It affirms the enduring power of storytelling as a means to articulate and preserve human experience beyond the corporeal, offering a haunting meditation on mortality, memory, and the spectral possibilities of fiction.

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