ARTICLES

Talking with Ghosts: Spectrality in John Huston's *The Dead*

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At a certain moment in John Huston's film *The Dead* (1987), the camera leaves the room where the characters have assembled to listen to a musical performance, ascends the stairs and enters a bedroom. It spends time perusing the items it finds there. It is as though the camera has no interest in staying for the performance, as if – impelled by its own motives – it had other places it would rather be. In his analysis of *The Dead*, Kevin Barry remarks on this moment, arguing that the camera's lingering gaze on photographs and mementos can be read in parallel with the final sequence of the film. This concluding sequence presents a series of still shots of snow-covered crosses, trees, and graves. Barry argues that these two sequences serve to "define two different time-scales of death [in the film]: one, the dead that it brings to life [...] who can enjoy the party, sing and talk; two, the dead whom these living dead remember and regret" (2001, 29). Barry's assessment of the significance of these elements to the *mise en scène* highlights a central focus of Huston's adaptation: that of a sustained interest in the spectral or hauntological qualities of James Joyce's short story from *Dubliners*. The ghostly elements of the film – the haunting refrain of the song "The Lass of Aughrim", the photographs of dead relatives, the flash-forward to Aunt Julia's death, and the lingering shots of a graveyard in the West of Ireland – are, I argue, presented within a wider aesthetic system of spectrality. Drawing primarily on Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, this paper offers a definition of hauntology as it pertains to spectrality and aesthetics in cinema. It also engages Anne Keithline and Jacek Mydla's theories of the spectral camera, which usefully articulate a kind of ghostly perspective in film that invites the viewer into a sympathetic dialogue with the spectral presence. This concept intersects productively with Derrida's notion of hauntology. However, Keithline and Mydla acknowledge that their analysis does not address sound (2017, 124). To extend their insights beyond the visual, this paper also draws on Michel Chion's writings on the *acousmêtre*, allowing for a consideration of how audio can contribute to cinematic spectrality. By foregrounding these aesthetic elements, this paper explores the ways in which Huston centralises the post-mortem perspective of the character Michael Furey, thereby revealing the latent hauntological core of the text. Hauntology is considered here not only as *The Dead*'s overarching semiotic and ideological impulse but also as a foundation for its aesthetic approach. This reading demonstrates Huston's sustained engagement with spectral aesthetics and shows how haunting is mobilised to interrogate class relations and historical injustice. In doing so, the paper contributes to scholarship on spectral and hauntological aesthetics in cinema.

In its engagement with the past as persistent – as an event that continues to haunt the story s present – *The Dead* lends itself readily to a hauntological reading. The term "hauntology" was initially introduced by Jacques Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* (1993), where he reflects on Marxism s relationship to history and legacy. Derrida argues that the present is never free from the past; instead, what we call "the present" is made up of hauntings, pasts imposing upon us. Derrida refutes cultural notions of linear temporality and contends that the present is not a discrete, self-contained moment separate from what has come before, but is instead shaped by traces, absences, and unresolved histories; ghosts, that have the power to structure and influence the world of the living. Hauntology understands life as intimately bound up with and influenced by death. Mark Fisher later developed Derrida s concept extensively, particularly through his concept of "lost futures" (2012, 16), a term that articulates the ways in which post-industrial and neoliberal culture forecloses the possibility of genuinely new, emancipatory futures, leaving the present haunted by the failure of these futures to arrive. While Fisher s concepts of "lost futures" and "cultural impasse" (2012, 16) are compelling – and could productively be applied to *The Dead*, particularly in relation to the film s negotiation of Irish identity – such an analysis lies beyond the scope of the present article. For the purposes of developing a cohesive theoretical framework for analysing spectral aesthetics, this paper will confine itself to hauntology and spectrality as articulated by Derrida, drawing on his original formulation of hauntology, which remains especially useful for analysing how cinematic form destabilises temporal certainty and foregrounds the past within the present. Derrida defines hauntology by insisting that haunting must be understood as fundamental to thought itself. He writes:

To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology" (1994, 202). What Derrida proposes here is a radical challenge to classical ontology: rather than treating being and time as stable, knowable categories grounded in presence, hauntology insists that they are always already disrupted by what is absent, deferred, or unresolved. In short, haunting becomes a condition of the world. Elsewhere, Derrida elaborates on this destabilisation of presence, arguing that spectrality troubles the very distinction between what is present and what is absent:

> If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general, and so forth. There is first of all the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself. Before knowing whether one can differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future, of the past present and the future present, one must perhaps ask oneself whether the spectrality effect does not consist in

> undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other. (1994, 48)

Here, Derrida emphasises that haunting collapses the binary opposition between presence and absence. The present is never fully itself, never entirely *with* itself. Instead, it is marked by temporal disjunctions in which past and future mingle and intersect. Spectrality here functions as a disturbance of certainty, calling into question the assumption that the present can be fully known or quantified. Weinstock argues that, in cultural texts,

> spectrality is expressed as a paradigmatically deconstructive gesture, the dark third" or trace of an absence that undermines the fixedness of binary oppositions (such as those between life and death, visible and invisible, real and virtual, authentic and replica, wakefulness and sleep, absence and presence) by subverting the chronological dimension of time and history. (2004, 4)

In this analysis "spectral aesthetics" refers to the formal and stylistic choices that foreground the hauntological, the persistence of the past within the present. They are, specifically, aesthetic approaches that destabilise the notion of the present as a safe, self-contained temporal space. Such aesthetics also draw attention to occluded histories of suffering, to colonial history, to labour, and to the ways in which the past continues to structure the present from within the diegesis. In mobilising haunting as an aesthetic principle, *The Dead* asks viewers to align themselves ethically with ghosts, to speak with them, and to recognise their claims on the living in the context of historic injustice.

The Dead was Huston's final film, and it was released four months after his death in December 1987. The film was predominantly shot, not in Dublin where the film is set, but on a sound stage in California. This was to facilitate Huston's presence on set for filming, in spite of his declining health which made travel to Ireland's capital an impossibility. He was at the time suffering from emphysema. He directed the film from a wheelchair and was reliant on an oxygen tank throughout production. The film is very much a family project. Huston's son Tony was the screenwriter and his son Danny led a second production unit in Dublin (responsible for capturing the exterior shots of the city). His daughter Anjelica starred in the film as Gretta – the wife of the film's protagonist Gabriel – for whom the memory of lost love is triggered by the song "The Lass of Aughrim". The story centres on Gabriel and Gretta Conroy as they attend an annual party at the home of Gabriel's aunts, on the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6th). The film follows the anxious, self-conscious Gabriel as he navigates the event, socialising with friends and relatives. At the end of the party, as he and his wife are preparing to leave, Gabriel observes Gretta standing on the stairs listening to a party guest singing "The Lass of Aughrim". As they travel back to their hotel Gabriel observes that his wife is lost in thought, deeply affected by something. When they arrive in their room, Gretta tearfully reveals that the

song reminded her of a boy named Michael Furey, who used to sing the same tune, and whom she had loved when she was a young woman in Galway, before she had ever met Gabriel. Gretta confesses that she believes Furey died of love for her. Gabriel is deeply disturbed by this revelation. The film concludes with Gabriel considering the profound implications of this personal autobiography, both for his relationship with his wife, and in respect of himself. Barry argues that Huston in a "reticent act of fidelity [...] allows *The Dead* to remain a story in which the most powerful character, Michael Furey, does not put in an appearance" (2001, 23). While it is true that for the characters within the diegesis Furey never materialises in any way visibly perceivable way, his "presence" is undeniable. Michael Furey is patently present in the film through a kind of cinematic possession. An analysis of the use of shadow in the scene at the Gresham Hotel, the camerawork and point of view employed throughout the film, the film's experimentation with sound and its absence, and its relationship to time (both human and narrative) reveals that the *mise en scène* of the film is infused and inhabited by Furey from beyond the grave, and the diegetic space.

Much of the scholarship on Huston's film has tended to consider it as at best a fatally flawed attempt to adapt the "unadaptable" James Joyce. Azra Ghandeharion and Roya Abbaszadeh describe the inability of the film to offer the audience insight into Gabriel's character (2020, 7). Rawan Althunyan describes the film's "mute and external camera" (2019, 2) and notes the lack of clarity around the intended protagonist of the film, arguing that viewers could easily believe it to be Gretta or even Freddy Malins, Gabriel's cousin (2019, 4). This lack of context is also picked up by Althunyan, who argues that "most of [the Conroys'] history is absent in the film" (2019, 5), as there is no omniscient narrator to guide the audience. Several criticisms of the film consider the degree to which audiences will be unable to – and indeed cannot be expected to – feel sympathy for or identify with Gabriel (2001, 73). In addition to this, Anelise Corseuil criticises the lack of "focalisation" in the film, arguing that it serves to create a "rupture between narrative development and description – as if the descriptions were 'frozen' in time" (2001, 68). Corseuil argues that this lack of sustained focalisation (that is the camera's tendency to move through the party without attaching itself to any one character) jeopardises the viewer s engagement with Gabriel s epiphany. Corseuil's comments are of particular relevance to this discussion. While her criticism of the film is intended to highlight the film's deficiencies in translating Gabriel's interior life to the audience, the references to focalisation are prescient. In spite of the film's deviation from Joyce's text, an interior life is nonetheless being communicated to us in *The Dead*: it is simply not Gabriel's. Gabriel in Huston's film is not expected to invoke sympathy. Nor are we asked to enter exclusively into his worldview as we do in Joyce's story. The lack of focalisation in the film and the subsequent lack of sympathy that the audience is encouraged to feel for Gabriel, stems from the centralised perspective of Michael Furey. Kevin Barry states that "James Joyce s 'The

Dead' is, among other things, a ghost story. A corpse rises from the dead and overwhelms Gretta and Gabriel Conroy as they leave the Misses Morkans' party and arrive at the Gresham Hotel" (2001, 23). Although Barry argues that the "film, deliberately, does not show us on screen this ghost at the centre of Joyce s story" (2001, 23), I argue that Michael Furey is present throughout the diegesis. Luke Gibbons also notes the presence of Furey, describing him as "something of an uninvited guest at the party" (2002, 132). He cites Huston's film as an example of cinema "opening up the past, bringing to mind things that are 'almost forgotten' – like the memory of the dead perhaps or, in this instance, of adaptations from novels, traces of the words that are absent on the screen" (128). Gibbons and Barry both gesture to a haunting in Huston s film and locate it in the film s navigation of theme, in its relationship to nostalgia, and in the inherent "haunting" of strings of cultural association. I argue that in Huston's adaptation, aesthetics of spectrality are also employed to allow the audience to commune with the ghost of Michael Furey.

It is worth setting out here Barry and Gibbon's analyses usefully foreground the film's thematic navigation of haunting. Gibbons identifies a socio-economically engaged haunting-by-association. He argues that Lily, the servant girl whom the Morkans employ, is economically, socially, culturally, and visually linked with Gretta throughout the film (2002, 140). This linkage unsettles readings of Gretta as straightforwardly middle class. He also argues that the song "The Lass of Aughrim" holds particular significance in the context of Lily s class and employment, as she, like the woman in the ballad, is at an economic disadvantage. Her survival is contingent on the behaviour and choices of those with greater socio-economic mobility. The associations generated by both the song and Lily s onscreen presence gesture to histories of the domestic underworld of bourgeois households [where] one of the main casualties of the sexual propriety of the respectable classes upstairs were the servant classes downstairs" (2002, 130). Barry also connects the character of Lily with conversations about class and economics explicitly in his analysis, noting that Huston dedicates *The Dead* to his last and, in his own words, his most beloved companion, an illegal alien in the United States, Maricela Hernandez, a Mexican who had worked as a maid to Huston s fifth wife, Cici" (2001, 7). Barry conjectures that this connection is echoed further in the monitory, off-centre presence of [Lily] at intense moments in the film s narrative" (2001, 7). Gibbons also argues that the Irish ballad evokes the painful inheritance of the vanquished in history, the cultural order which was devastated at the battle of Aughrim" (2002, 141). Gibbons' analysis of the film recalls Derrida s innumerable singular sites of suffering" (1994, 106), highlighting the degree to which every element of the film s *mise en scène* carries with it a string of socio-cultural, political, and economic considerations which colour and inflect the diegesis. Of Joyce s story Kevin Barry writes:

> [it is] about a diverse group of people who are, to different degrees, haunted by a past that is lost. The story, therefore, is about nostalgia. But the narrative and thematic pattern of recollection, celebrated and regretted, should not mislead us into thinking that the story is, of itself, nostalgic. (2001, 26)

Drawing on Christian Metz' assertion that film "gives back to the dead a semblance of life, a fragile semblance, but one immediately strengthened by the wishful thinking of the viewer" (Metz quoted in Barry 2001, 1), he argues that "Huston s film aesthetic largely coheres with Metz s definition of cinema. Huston is preoccupied by the interplay between the flickering ghosts we see on the screen and our nostalgic wish to see those ghosts alive" (Barry 2001, 30). As such, Barry pays particular attention to the prevalence of the photographs in the scene outlined earlier in this piece. He argues for their significance in a film which refutes easy nostalgia of a much-romanticised era. Barry takes Metz' claim further, stating in his conclusion that the "camera shows immediately the surfaces of things [and Huston's film], therefore, has served to rescue the story from readings that are overly symbolic or thematic: readings that have, for example, trivialized the life of the party or abstracted a cultural politics from the story s ending" (2001, 100). In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida identifies the obstacles that prevent meaningful engagement with such spectres, noting a particular academic tendency toward detached observation. He remarks that as theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that looking is sufficient" (1994, 11). As Barry and Gibbons identify, Huston s *The Dead* resists this prosaic mode of looking. Both for Joyce scholars and for viewers encountering the narrative for the first time, the film rejects passive spectatorship through its sustained attention to the political and economic realities shaping its characters' lives. Drawing on Derrida s hauntological framework, the remainder of this paper extends Barry s and Gibbons' analyses of the film s haunting qualities by explaining how this "prosaic mode of looking" is prohibited by the film's spectral aesthetics.

When Gabriel and Gretta return to their hotel room, where Gretta reveals the history of Michael Furey, Huston employs shadow in striking ways which emphatically supports the argument that the ghost of Michael Furey is not simply an ideological or metaphorical concept. At first, during this sequence as Gretta begins her story, her shadow, cast against the wall, is visible in the mirror. When Gabriel goes to stand with her, both of their shadows are cast against the wall. Subsequently, Gretta sits and only Gabriel's shadow remains. Following this Gabriel sits beside Gretta and his shadow remains visible, hovering over the two figures and their bed. When Gretta crosses the room, going to sit in a chair as she recounts the circumstances of Furey's death, her shadow can be seen partially against the wall, although it is for the most part blocked by Gabriel's body. When she finishes her story and throws herself onto the bed in grief, Gabriel's shadow manifests again, standing over her as he approaches, mirroring his attempts to comfort her. After this sequence, Gabriel's monologue begins

and we do not see the shadow again. This particular element of the *mise en scène* is significant in the context of spectral aesthetics. Firstly, it can be argued that the shadow harks back quite literally to the language of Joyce's short story, where he wrote: "Poor Aunt Julia! She, too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. [...] One by one, they were all becoming shades" (2000, 239). Shade and shadow are etymologically connected and Huston's lighting design in this scene gestures to the use of the word in Joyce's text. This manipulation of shadow also relates to an understanding of and relationship to representing ghosts with both the story's setting and the life and works of James Joyce. In *Ulysses* (1920) Joyce writes Our Saviour. Wake up in the dead of night and see him on the wall, hanging. Pepper's Ghost idea". The "Pepper s Ghost" referred to in this line was a theatre technique with which Joyce and much of contemporary Dublin would have been familiar (Binnie). It is an illusion technique that uses a reflective surface, such as glass or plastic, angled at 45 degrees to project an image of an offstage object or recorded display, making it appear on stage as a translucent, floating ghost. By the time Huston came to film *The Dead* he was deeply familiar with Joyce's work, in particular with *Ulysses*, which he had first read as a teenager, a copy of which had been smuggled into the United States by his mother in the late 1920s. Huston also worked towards the preservation of locations from *Ulysses*. He made a donation "towards the creation of the James Joyce Museum in the 19th-century Martello Tower at Sandycove, Dublin, where the first episode of *Ulysses* is set" (Burke 2025). In the final scene of *The Dead*, we experience a haunting within a haunting. As an adaptation, *The Dead* carries traces of the original text, carries socio-cultural relationships to Joyce's texts and contains the potential to diverge wildly from that text. As Miriam Catina argues:

> Spectrality is the soul of adaptation, for the latter derives its being not only from a source text but, just as crucially, from a myriad of influences that can include, and even transcend, the multiplicity of literary and/or visual interpretations that such a source could have already generated.

Complementing the haunting process of adaptation, the lighting design of the film also produces a spectral aesthetic. While Gabriel s shadow in Huston s film is not a perfect recreation of the effect (which tends to produce a light filled shape, rather than one defined by light) the idea of an offstage performer serving as the body double for an on-stage ghost is prescient. As Stanislaus Joyce argued "*The Dead* is also, in its way, a story of ghosts, of the dead who return in envy of the living" (Donoghue 1988, 18–19). The challenge was how to have Michael Furey enter the diegetic space without presenting a concrete manifestation of the character. How might Huston incarnate the envy of the dead, otherwise excluded from the lives of the living? Gabriel s shadow in the final scene is frequently positioned between himself and Gretta, or hovering over them. When Gretta is not beside Gabriel, Gabriel s own shadow is strikingly

distant from him, as though it were not really his own, but instead the ghost of Michael Furey insinuating himself between the couple. Through light and shadow Huston both *suggests* Furey's presence in the style of a Pepper's Ghost trick, while also allowing Gabriel's failures to be underscored by an oversized double. This allusion to the Pepper s Ghost technique speaks to a certain manifestation of Michael Furey in the film, but also guides viewer s understanding of the relationship between Gretta and Gabriel. Viewers become aware of the extreme emphasis placed on Gabriel s shadow. It redoubles his inability to comfort Gretta, as he places a hand on her head, recognise his failure and turn away from her following his personal epiphany. Michael Furey is equally impotent in this scene: the dead can haunt but, as Derrida reminds us, that haunting is contingent on the awareness of those being haunted. We might also consider the brief moment when Gretta and Gabriel s shadows embrace. The fact that they do not come together again in this sequence again emphasises an emotional estrangement, but from a supernatural standpoint it recalls the past and the romance between Gretta and Michael Furey. Attentive viewers will sense a doubled male presence in the room, but only when Gretta Conroy recounts the story of Michael s life.

Spectral aesthetics in *The Dead* can also be uncovered in the film's relationship to narrative time. Joyce described his tale as a ghost story (2002, 69). As such, that it should be set over the Christmas period (specifically the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th) is not surprising. *The Dead* is part of a wider tradition of midwinter ghost stories, beginning with an historic oral tradition and extending into the present day with modern iterations such as the BBC's *Ghost Stories for Christmas* series (1971–), or the perennially reinvigorated *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Midwinter in the Northern Hemisphere, with its attendant darkness, cold and potential for material scarcity, is a time which naturally conjures anxieties around mortality, both its permanence and – in the case of the ghost story – its potential impermanence. As an annual festival Christmas is also multiple and recurrent" (Derrida 1994, 92). It is an event during which the same narrative, traditions and events reappear and are renegotiated, although not always in the same way. Through its annual repetition, the seasonal festival occurs as a kind of perennial haunting. Although it is not performed as a duplicated or perfect repetition. Derrida writes on the imperfect nature of repetition, working through the idea of the "eternal return" as first posited by Friedrich Nietzsche. The poststructuralist has written:

> The page is dated. To date is to sign. And to 'date from' is also to indicate the place of the signature. This page is in a certain way dated because it says 'today' and today 'my birthday,' the anniversary of my birth. The anniversary is the moment when the year turns back on itself, forms a ring or annulus with itself, annuls itself and begins anew. (1988, 11)

Here Derrida uses the concept of the anniversary to illustrate how time does not simply progress linearly, but folds back upon itself. Furthermore, the return is never identical; each repetition both recalls "what has been"

and simultaneously contributes to the transformation of the “having been”. It bears difference within apparent continuity. Derrida does not conceive of any return as a perfect replica, but rather, an event that carries an essential difference. For example, in *Spectres of Marx* Derrida states that his enduring faith in the potential of Marxism stems not from its ability to endure through time unchanged, but rather from its ability “to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organisation” (1994, 117). In this context, the elements of tradition and ritual – particularly in an occasion as adorned with cultural, religious, and economic significance as Christmas is – cannot be read as qualities of fixed tradition, but as providing a space in which the potential for transformation is inherent. Christmas is a container wherein the appearance of continuity can – and frequently does in literature (we need only look at *A Christmas Carol* as an example) – generate something entirely new. In both Huston and Joyce s *The Dead*, we understand that the Misses Morkans’ party is an annual event. Likewise, Gabriel s speech is an annual occurrence. In his peroration, he insists that he will not linger on the past”. But this statement is disingenuous: it comes after he has already spoken about traditions of hospitality, the many other times they have gathered for this party, and the absent friends who are missed. Although Gabriel insists that it is better not to dwell on them, all the better to go on bravely with our work among the living”, he constantly looks to the past as a source of staid comfort, the place from which continuity emerges. However, after Gretta s revelation Gabriel is confronted by a return of a history he had never anticipated or imagined, and he is forced to reconsider his relationship to the past entirely.

It is at this point in Huston s adaptation that Gabriel s interior world is communicated to us through a string of images that are simultaneously interconnected and yet disparate from each other. Up to this point, Gabriel has entertained an understanding of the past as stable, unchanging, incapable of disrupting the present, powerless to generating transformative action. His revelation, then, is one that acknowledges history as composed of innumerable singular sites of suffering” (1994, 106) which continue to reverberate into the present. He emerges from a kind of half-life into a searing awareness of humanity. The eternal return here wakes Gabriel from a stupor, and he is left to mourn his previous understanding of the world and of his own life. Scott notes that rituals of mourning in all their diversity facilitate our renegotiation of reality” (2009, 79), the mourning that Gabriel undertakes in the Gresham hotel, as his previously held convictions about the world are proven to be false, is no different. Barry notes that “in the final three paragraphs of the story, the reader must read and reread the sentences on the page, adjusting and readjusting the sense, according to the indeterminacy of whatever answer is provisionally given to the question: “Who speaks these words?” (2001,100) The indeterminacy Joyce communicates through shifting language is communicated by Huston as a renegotiation of spatiotemporal logic and narrative time in the film. While looking out the window of the hotel room, Gabriel slips into a reverie as he muses on the inevitability of death. We are presented with a series of

images; Gabriel and Aunt Julia dancing in a room – possibly in her house on Usher's Island – then Aunt Julia laid out for burial, with Gabriel, Gretta, Kate and Mary-Jane sitting vigil. The film returns briefly to Gabriel at the window, before commencing another journey, this time across Ireland. We observe snow-covered fields, graves and Celtic crosses, ruins, a round tower, a graveyard, and plants buried beneath snow, before the camera tilts towards the sky from which the snow is falling. Until this sequence, the spatiotemporal logic of the film is fixed within the emerging present. During this sequence however time spins out into the future (we see Aunt Julia s death and the gravestones and ruins which gesture towards the inevitability of mortality for all things) but also tantalisingly into the past. The ruins and gravestones foreground the dead, who endure in their ability to shape the world of the living. In their return, they – to paraphrase Derrida – annul the world as it is, and force its inhabitants to begin it anew.

This destabilisation of time is not only articulated narratively but it is also rendered formally through Huston's camerawork. The first image in Gabriel's epiphany sequence, that of him dancing with Aunt Julia, recalls a perspective which we have seen at various points throughout the film. It is striking that Gabriel imagines this moment from outside the upper floor window of the house. The camera hangs outside the window, before pulling in closer, but it stops short of entering the room. While we may interpret that Gabriel has placed a physical or visual barrier between his present and imagined future self is certainly open to us, the distinct perspective of this shot has already been employed at various points throughout the film. These precedents mean that the technique is not one that can be readily, or automatically, associated with Gabriel. Instead, the sequence is indicative more generally of the film's "spectral gaze". Keithline and Mydla describe the spectral gaze as dominating "the on-screen victims of haunting, showing them at their most vulnerable, and [enabling] the viewer to participate in all the voyeurism and sadism associated with cinematic gazing" (2017, 122), in short to identify – through the gaze – with the ghost. Keithline and Mydla specifically consider the degree to which the spectral gaze is enmeshed with place in the 1968 BBC adaptation of M R James' ghost story *Oh, Whistle and I ll Come to You, My Lad*. They argue that in this context, the gaze is communicated through

> point-of-view shots and other camera techniques [that] are used to assign a spectral consciousness, with its own subjective gaze, to the terrain itself. Walls, trees, gravestones, furniture, and so on seem to watch the protagonist, and the viewer experiences much, if not all, of the film through the eyes of this spectral setting. (2017, 122)

The ghostly presence of the BBC version is several degrees removed from the ghost M R Jame's invented for his short story. The ghost of the adaptation is a "postwar, postcolonial [and] postmodern" (2017, 131) entity, and asks very different questions about the nature of personhood and haunting in the reincarnated narrative. The spectral gaze identified by

Keithline and Mydla implicitly connects the viewer to the spectral setting, in a "'sympathetic spectreship' of sorts [...] and problematizes the very concept of the gaze by subverting the privilege traditionally accorded to the gazer even while it emphasizes the voyeurism and sadism inherent in all forms of the gaze" (2017, 124). The viewer is inducted into the experience of both the perpetrator and the victim of the haunting, becoming "both the subject and the object of haunting" (2017, 124). This significantly complicates the power dynamics of the gaze, inviting viewers to identify with the ghost, even as they recoil from it.

> the question, 'what if such a thing should happen to me?' takes on a different character when the 'me' in question is no longer the human 'patient' of a ghostly haunting, but the ghostly victim of a human intrusion [...] The basic question that spooks the reader of the original, 'What if I should be visited by a ghost?' becomes, in the adaptation, 'What if I should *be* a ghost?' (2017, 130–131)

Keithline and Mydla argue that the adaptation fundamentally shifts the question of haunting from one of being visited by a ghost to the unsettling possibility of occupying the position of the ghost oneself. By aligning the viewer with the spectral rather than the haunted, the film reframes the gaze as something marginalised, displaced, and ethically compromised. We see a similar sympathetic spectreship at work in *The Dead*. As the camera moves through the Morkan's home, the dynamics of the gaze are not of an empowered voyeur antagonising a prospective victim, but rather a marginalised onlooker, who nonetheless through the process of looking has the power to disrupt the notions of class and society held by the characters onscreen. *The Dead* opens with an exterior shot of the Morkan's house, from across the street. We might initially imagine this as the perspective of a passerby or of a guest who will presently join the party. However, the subsequent shot reveals Gabriel s aunts gathered at the top of the staircase, looking down anxiously, awaiting Gabriel s arrival. This shot is set from below, farther down the staircase, as though the perspective is that of a person looking up at them, although no ostensible presence is acknowledged (either diegetically or extra-diegetically). The gaze and perspective which we will later see used in Gabriel's reverie is already evident. After this shot, and quite suddenly we find ourselves outside again, watching guests arrive, but notably, from a distance. There is no close-up on any of the guests' faces. With as much abruptness, our position shifts back to the interior of the aunts' house, before quickly moving to the exterior of house again as the guests are admitted. The next shot is another interior, which follows Lily as she comes down the stairs, where we see her from an area to the boot room. The camera's movement back and forth between the interior and exterior of the house is remarkable for several reasons. It functions in provision of a certain mapping out, or a discovery of the geography of the house, albeit one initially confined to its lower levels. While in the context of an adaptation, this functions in service of fidelity – in Joyce s story we don t move upstairs until Gabriel himself

arrives and ascends – the overall effect means that the house is visually dissected by this process into discrete sections: the exterior, and the interior with its upstairs (associated with the aunts, parties and leisure) and the downstairs area (associated with Lily and work). The angles of the camera are also noteworthy. When Lily first descends the steps, we cannot fully see the doors of the house because they are cut off by the stairs. With this choice of angles, Huston brings a furtive quality to the shot, as if the camera were actively endeavouring to remain out of sight.

The camera also exhibits partiality in unexpected ways. When Gabriel and Gretta arrive, the camera completely disregards Gabriel. It follows Gretta. As she moves across the hall, it pans with her and then stops, watching her climb the stairs. A cut moves it to the top of the stairs where it waits for her. It is only then that the camera hovers over Gabriel s shoulder, situated with unconventional proximity to him. In the following scene, as Gretta changes her shoes, at first the camera remains at a distance, then finds her feet and zooms in, voyeuristically, before she covers them with her dress. The intimacy of the shot is striking, but there is no one present to whom we can attribute this charged intimacy. As I have indicated above, critics have noted the lack of connection an audience is likely to feel with Gabriel, the possibility that Huston resists his being positioned as the main character of story. He is not focalised in any conventional way for the spectator. The opening scenes especially confirm this position. However, it is worth unpacking and reconsidering the reasons for Huston's stylistic choices in these visual constructions. Arguably, neither version of *The Dead* is actually *about* Gabriel, or rather not merely about Gabriel. By the conclusion of the narrative, the character of Gabriel as he was initially presented no longer exists. The narrative concludes with the death of Gabriel's ego, the collapse of his conviction that he is the central protagonist in Gretta's life. In so doing, both Gabriel and the story admit an awareness of an instability and permeability as it pertains to time, persona and relationships to history. Joyce wrote:

> Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling. (2000, 240)

That the camera constantly seeks out Gretta's face, that it lingers on her reaction to the recitation of the poem "Broken Vows", and that it moves through the crowd of dancers towards her, even when Gabriel is not dancing, and details that should indicate to us that it is not Gabriel's perspective that is being privileged, but the perspective of an invisible, but no less potent presence.

This is not to claim that *The Dead* is a film only about Michael Furey; but rather that Michael Furey and his relationship to Gretta and the socio-economic and cultural world of upper-middle-class Catholic Dublin at the turn of the century are the ideological and aesthetic forces that shape the

film. The objects and characters deliberately foregrounded through camerawork signal a conscious disruption of a narrow, élite, socio-economic portrait of the period and underscore the ethical, emotional, and spectral force that guide the narrative. Gibbons has argued that the appearance of Lily in the *mise en scène* during Mr Grace s recitation of the Lady Gregory translation highlights a hidden working-class history. I would add that as well as through her presence, it is the system of looking through which Lily is presented that ultimately engenders the revelation of this history. When Mr Grace performs the piece, the shot is framed so that the door is in view. Those listening to the piece have their attention focused on the speaker, but the camera anticipates Lily s presence. The camera – the spectral camera – actively anticipates labour. It understands that this evening of culture and pleasure cannot be facilitated without Lily s work, with her exclusion from the event. The sequence I outlined at the beginning of this paper, where the camera leaves the party and goes upstairs, warrants consideration in this context. One possible interpretation of this scene is that we have entered into a sort of trance state with Aunt Julia who, as she sings, travels upstairs in her mind's eye and looks fondly at the paraphernalia of what we assume to be the childhood of her niece, Mary-Jan: a dollhouse, trinkets, religious images, a bible, and rosary beads. This reading might be further supported by reference to Aunt Kate s outburst after the performance, when she describes the thankless way in which Julia s labour as a singer in Adam and Eve s choir had been rewarded. The fact invites us to consider more broadly the ways in which the three women have been required to earn money, and the limits of respectability within which this work can take place in order for them to maintain their middle-class standing. It is possible to infer that Aunt Julia s talents, (like Mary Jane s – who works as a piano teacher) have had to be "legitimized" as labour within an economic value system. The focus in this scene on material objects suggests not only the monetary cost of these things but also the economic demands on her in supporting Mary-Jane. Attributing this cinematic *dérive* to Aunt Julia, however, may be challenged when one considers the diegetic sound of the sequence. If "Arrayed for the Bridal" – the song Aunt Julia performs – marks a shift in the acoustic register from diegetic to non-diegetic, the song might be read as a vehicle for Aunt Julia's reverie. The sound however remains firmly diegetic. It is as if an unnamed guest has slipped up the stairs, and away from the party so that we hear the song distantly, muted and muffled. The camera at this moment pushes the boundaries of spatiotemporal and narrative logic: the astute observer may ask why we have left the party? With whom have we left? This subtle movement away from the principal action is important. It might be interpreted as Michael Furey's withdrawal from the social world of the living, his gaze lingering instead on the detritus of girlhood with a tenderness that mirrors the earlier shot of Gretta's face. The scene produces intimacy without a body to anchor it, an act of looking unmoored from any visible or observing subject. In sympathising with this absent onlooker and sharing in the voyeuristic pleasure of the gaze, the viewer is

aligned with a presence defined precisely by virtue of its lack of physical form, in a way that validates the operation of the spectral camera.

The suggestion that *The Dead* employs the spectral gaze should not be interpreted as the literalised presence of Michael Furey at the party, but as an argument for the total aesthetic suffusion into the space of Michael Furey, his life, and the lives of young men like him. As a more grounded political gesture, he might be read metonymically for a generation of young men who were employed in dangerous labour conditions, with limited access to medical care, who had low life expectancy, and suffered difficult lives in a colonised country where their bodies served the purpose of enriching both empire and those who benefitted from their socio-economic subordination. Poetically, Huston tapped into resonances he found in Joyce's narrative. Michael Furey and men like him, both the living and the dead, were always the ghosts at the feast, because it was their invisible and unacknowledged labour that made those festivities possible. Even as he complicated it, Joyce did not reject this ideological perspective in his writing, and his story explicitly and implicitly refers to Ireland's colonial past and its uncertain future. Huston embraces this perspective of Joyce's text and choses aesthetically to foreground the life and labour of Michael Furey. He mobilises technical and conventional capacities of the cinematic apparatus to represent the party from the perspective of an unseen, unacknowledged presence which, otherwise unable to infiltrate the diegetic spaces of the Morkans' home, ultimately disrupts passive engagement with middle-class interpretations of history. That the film and story end with images representing a dreamlike journey across Ireland is equally relevant. In Huston's film, the images of Aunt Julia's funeral, of graveyards and round towers again break with the established spatiotemporal logic of the film, but by this point we have emphatically entered into Gabriel's consciousness and his perspective. Michael Furey has been exorcised. As noted above, this sequence speaks to a return, the eternal recurrence of the dead and the way that this return reforms the present and the future. Gabriel's world has been irrevocably changed by his acknowledgement of the presence of Furey in it. That change is reflected cinematically as Furey's perspective, the perspective of the dead, and becomes Gabriel's. As Jacques Derrida notes at the conclusion of *Spectres of Marx*:

> Could one address oneself in general if already some ghost did not come back? If he loves justice at least, the scholar" of the future, the intellectual" of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet. (1994, 221)

In the concluding moments of the film we enter the Ireland of Gabriel's imagination where the past, the present, and the future cohabit,

linked across time by the powerful symbol of snow that falls "on both the living and the dead". At this moment, the spectral gaze is as much Gabriel's as it was Michael's: it is no longer possible for Gabriel, or indeed for the spectator to perceive the film world in any other way.

It is worth concluding by returning briefly to Keithline and Mydla's theories of spectrality, and to move beyond a visual register by considering a variation of Michel Chion's *acousmêtre*, where the *acousmêtre* is defined not by sound, but by the absence of sound, by its inability to speak. Evidently the same hauntological logic governs absence across both the film's visual and auditory registers. Chion describes the *acousmêtre* as a phantom character, one both omniscient and omnipotent. He writes:

> First, the acousmêtre has the power of seeing all; second, the power of omniscience; and third, the *omnipotence* to act on the situation. Let us add that in many cases there is also a gift of *ubiquity* – the acousmêtre seems to be able to be anywhere he or she wishes. These powers, however, often have limits we do not know about, and are thereby all the more disconcerting. (1994, 129–30; *emphasis in original*)

Chion's description of the *acousmêtre* would initially seem to exclude any and all characters in *The Dead*. When Chion proposes that the presence of the *acousmêtre* is "based on their character's very absence from the core of the image" (1994, 129), we might be reminded of Derrida's claims in *Spectres of Marx*, in which he also speaks about presence, noting that it is essentially composed of absence. Specifically, when Derrida argues that it is "enjoined (*verfugt*), ordered, distributed in the two directions of absence, at the articulation of what is no longer and what is not yet" (1994, 30), he holds that presence is never self-sufficient, but is constituted through what has passed and what has yet to arrive. Absence is not opposed to presence but is essential to its formation. It is the presence/absence of the *acousmêtre* that defines them, the presence of the voice and the absence of a body. In *The Dead* we encounter a cinematic rendering of the absence of both voice and body. However, importantly for Huston, the bodily absence is not a *complete* absence and the ghosts *do* speak. While the absent body is made present through camerawork, narrative, and lighting, the absent voice is made present through a self-conscious foregrounding of that absence. Barry highlights the emphasis Huston places on Aunt Kate's reminiscences of "the pure, sweet, mellow, English tenor voice of Parkinson" (2001, 20). He has contextualised this within the film's structural and stylistic design, arguing that the scene mirrors Mr Grace's recitation which similarly concludes with irresolute "silence and stillness" (2001, 20). This remains until the threat of narrative stasis is "deflected by Lily" who arrives with tangential interruptions throughout the film to announce, variously, that dinner is served, the pudding is ready, and that there are fresh towels in the bathroom. The sequence around the dinner table plays out and the conversations about the great singers of the past – in particular Aunt Kate s favourite tenor – all falter around similar disruptions and the desire, ultimately impossible to fulfil, to hear the voices of the dead. These

voices are of course irrevocably lost to the past, and yet for those who have heard them, they remain a part of the present – although degraded and imperfect – as memories that persist. These recollections temporarily guard against their ultimate effacement and obscurity. Simultaneously we and the characters derive a morbid pleasure from their absence, or their being merely fragments of presence – impossible to reproduce – that persist in their haunting. This construction brings to mind Derrida's reworking of the eternal return, where that which comes back does so in an altered state, marked by loss and difference, and charged with a demand to be acknowledged anew. The scene might be interpreted as a séance: the characters gathered around a table, conjuring the dead, out of a desire to hear them speak. This desire is inevitably frustrated and the failure of these voices to materialise (or re-materialise) in the diegetic space might be read as an example of *inverted acousmêtre*: an offscreen voice, intimately connected to the events onscreen, that is itself incapable of speaking, but whose absence is aesthetically and semiotically foregrounded. Chion notes that "silence [in film] is never a neutral emptiness. It is the negative of sound we've heard beforehand or imagined; it is the product of a contrast" (1994, 57). In *The Dead* where we have heard so many different characters sing throughout the evening, the narrative and sonic space of the film are prepared for the imminent arrival of a voice. Its subsequent absence only serves to interrogate it ontological nature. Those, like Aunt Kate, who can recall the voices of the dead become in these moments "omniscient and omnipotent". Only they have access to a simulacrum of the past and, in describing their memories, that non-present voice becomes "acousmetric". Their silence is a form of speech, in that the absence of speech directs so much of the content of the conversations that follow.

Absent voices in *The Dead* also serve to prime the audience for Bartell D'Arcy's performance of "The Lass of Aughrim". Significantly, in the context of *acousmêtre*, we never see D'Arcy sing. D'Arcy's performance is repeatedly promised from the beginning of the story and the haunting leitmotif of "The Lass of Aughrim" is integrated into the film's non-diegetic score, also functioning as a sonic conjuring of Michael Furey. A heightened sense of expectation is created by D'Arcy's refusal to sing. Gretta's attempts to encourage him fail, provoking another stasis similar to that observed by Barry. It is also notable that D Arcy s performance should happen without our observation. Huston's decision sets the moment apart from the film's earlier recitations. Those were determinedly embodied and couched within the personalities of the performers. While the spatiotemporal logic of the film leaves no ambiguity that this is D Arcy s performance, (we see him both before and after the song and we know he is the only man upstairs), the voice itself enters the sonic landscape of the film as an independent entity. It floats down the stairs towards Gretta and emotionally overwhelms her. From a hauntological perspective, we might read this moment in the context of the concluding statements of Jacques Derrida s *Spectres of Marx* where he suggests that the ultimate aim of the "scholar should be to find a way to talk with the ghost and to return speech to them" (1994, 221). In this

sense, the disembodied voice of D Arcy which carries with it the latent authority, omniscience and omnipotence of the *acousmêtre*, becomes a proxy for Michael Furey. It is not only that the song serves as a portal to memory, but also that D Arcy s voice overcomes its earlier stasis. Although this occurs only as disembodied sound, perhaps it is that the desires of those at the dinner table to hear the voices of the dead once more have been fulfilled.

For Huston what follows is an expansion of Gabriel s world beyond the narrow confines of his previously held views into a place of uncertainty. The boundaries between the living and the dead dissolve as they do between the past, the present, and the future. It is precisely the kind of hauntological resolution that Derrida encourages us to occupy in *Spectres of Marx*. For the viewer the aesthetic approach produces an encounter with haunting that is subversive and strikingly tender. Through shadow, sound, camera movement, and temporal disruption, the film aligns spectators with a marginal, disembodied perspective that unsettles passive viewing. Spectrality is the structuring principle and, by extension, the thematic and ideological heart of the film. If Huston s adaptation has been variously read as a poor substitute for Joyce s original text, then this piece has aimed to argue for it as a powerful renegotiation of the story, which draws out the subversive class commentary of the ghost story" and foregrounds it, rendering through cinema what might be considered to be the most "un-adaptable" elements of Joyce s text: the complex interrelations of colonial and contemporary histories upon which *The Dead* is built. It is significant that Joyce sets his story on Usher s Island, that he invokes King Billy, snow, and "The Lass of Aughrim". With these points of references he directs his readers' attention to the past, towards those who live there, and across permeable temporal borders. Huston attempts a similar effect, but where Joyce makes Gabriel and his stream-of-consciousness our guide, Huston gives this narrative voice to a disembodied consciousness. Through the disruptive spectral gaze, Huston uncovers the innumerable singular sites of suffering" (1994, 106) of which history is composed. Ultimately, Huston's *The Dead* asks us to consider memory as an act of resistance and to consider the dead as agents of change, if only we will acknowledge their presence.

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