Ghostly Trajectories: The Supernatural Theme in Henry James and James Joyce

Melany Barr
University of Pennsylvania

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Abstract
James Joyce and Henry James are brought together by a set of well-explored aesthetic and biographical similarities, namely their commitment to an elliptical, ambiguous style; their cosmopolitan, émigré lifestyles; and their frequent returns to their homelands in writing. In both authors' work, the questions of exile and nationality are often explored through supernatural devices, with such stories as "The Jolly Corner" and "The Dead" reaching their narrative climax through the appearance of a ghost. This suggests that the natural experience of exile contains something beyond realist or 'natural' notation, something that poses a representational problem solved through supernatural means. The investigation of the stakes of this problem and effects of its resolution in the two authors' work will serve to illuminate the core problem of the representation of the movement between center and periphery exhibited by émigrés like themselves.

Keywords
Henry James, James Joyce

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Ghostly Trajectories:  
The Supernatural Theme in Henry James and James Joyce

Melany Barr

2012-2013 Penn Humanities Forum Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Research Fellow  
University of Pennsylvania

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Dr. Jed Esty, Faculty Director  
Dr. Zachary Lesser, Honors Program Director
The relationship of James Joyce to Henry James, like any of a legendary artist to an equally legendary predecessor, is a troubled paradox of rejection and assimilation. For James Joyce as well as his colleagues in the early moments of Modernism, Henry James was laughably outdated, the last of the Victorians, a stiff and finicky writer whose flowery style was gladly left to the 19th century. According to Daniel Mark Fogel,¹ James was the inspiration for *Ulysses’* heavily satirized Philip Beaufoy, fictional author of “Matcham’s Masterstroke,” the novel perused by Leopold Bloom during the (in)famous defecation scene:

Asquat on the cuckstool he folded out his paper turning its pages over on his bared knees.

Something new and easy. No great hurry. Keep it a bit. Our prize tidbit. *Matcham’s Masterstroke.* Written by Mr Philip Beaufoy, Playgoer’s club, London. […] Quietly he read, restraining himself, the first column and, yielding but resisting, began the second. Midway, his resistance yielding, he allowed his bowels to ease themselves quietly as he read, reading still patiently that slight constipation of yesterday quite gone. […] He glanced back through what he had read and, while feeling his water flow quietly, he envied kindly Mr. Beaufoy who had written it and received payment of three pounds thirteen and six.”²

This vividly scatological passage echoes a feeling shared by many of Joyce’s modernist colleagues, albeit less graphically expressed for the most part. For Virginia Woolf, for example, James’ prose contains nothing “but faintly tinged rose water, urbane and sleek, but…pale as

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Walter Lamb.”

Persevering beyond this dismissive surface, however, one may find depths of a truer, more sincere modernist engagement with James’ work. These are the “covert relations” which Fogel seeks to illuminate in his study of James’ influence on Joyce and Woolf. Working through Joyce’s letters and manuscripts, Fogel charts the impact of James’ *Portrait of a Lady* on Joyce’s *Portrait of an Artist*, and signals passages of particularly Jamesian prose in the stylistic pastiches of *Ulysses*’ sixteenth episode, “Eumaeus.” For Fogel, Joyce’s engagement with James constitutes a covert recognition of the latter as his literary forefather, as the “father of modernism.” This conclusion is, perhaps, too strong for its evidence; but the data put forth by Fogel does rectify a persistent overlooking of James’ lasting influence, making a strong case for the suitability and even necessity of a comparative reading of James’ and Joyce’s work.

Indeed these two are brought together by a set of important aesthetic and biographical parallels. Both are committed to an elliptical, ambiguous style that leaves its detractors wondering whether their works are even readable. Both belong to a vocationally cosmopolitan generation of artists, a group of expatriates having forsaken their homelands for the sake of their art. Both ceaselessly return to their forgone homelands in writing, James endlessly revisiting the character of the American girl, and Joyce endlessly grappling with Dublin. And both show a career-long preoccupation with the question of haunting, their stories and novels often featuring the appearance of some ghost, of a deceased character who manifests his or her presence to the living characters. Among these are Stephen’s mother, Bloom’s son, or even Shakespeare appear to Stephen and Bloom in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Peter Quint appears to the governess in James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, and Perdita to Viola in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” to name a

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In both authors’ work, the supernatural themes are treated in similar manners, with the ghosts operating as mysterious, polyvalent signifiers, yet also ultimately as important moments of meaning for the characters encountering them. This is especially true of Henry James’ “The Jolly Corner” and James Joyce’s “The Dead,” two stories which reach their narrative climax through ghostly interference – of an alter ego in “The Jolly Corner” and a romantic rival in “The Dead.” In both cases, the ghostly encounter has a profound impact on the protagonists, but in ways which are difficultly accounted for, such that readers are left with multiple explanations for what exactly occurred at the moment of the encounter, how it impacted the protagonist, and what the future holds for them. The stories also share a strong investment of the issue of haunting with the problem of nationality, which forms the general context for the stories and their ghost plots. In “The Jolly Corner,” Spencer Brydon must reckon with his decision to leave New York and live out his adulthood in Europe, abandoning the American work on economic expansion and modernization in favor of a more intellectual and aesthetic life of the mind. And in “The Dead,” Gabriel Conroy must confront his choice to live a cerebral, apolitical life in the Continental tradition rather than an active, politically engaged life as prescribed by the context of Irish revivalism and its efforts to free Ireland of its colonial burdens.

The structural similarities between these stories enable a productive juxtaposition of Jamesian and Joycean imaginings of the ghostly. A comparative reading will illuminate these imaginings by paying close attention to the language surrounding the moment of haunting, and by investigating the commonalities and contrasts between each author’s deployment of that language. For while the overall plot and thematic structures of the stories form strong parallels to each other, the particular patternings and shadings of this structure are at times completely
opposed. In both cases, the protagonists follow a trajectory between two modes of life: concrete and sedentary on one hand, and abstract and nomadic on the other. The movements between these two poles, however, are inverted: while Spencer Brydon moves from the nomadic to the sedentary, Gabriel Conroy moves from the sedentary to the nomadic. This key difference between the texts mirrors the difference between their respective author’s exilic ideal, such that an investigation of the dynamics of the characters’ ghost-induced trajectories speaks to the dynamics of the author’s exilic trajectories.

A comparative reading of these two stories will thus illuminate the two authors’ very different exilic models by working through the commonalities and contrasts between their deployment of a supernatural language, of ghost plots in the service of themes of nationality, self-perception and self-actualization. This reading will serve to inform a deeper understanding of the relationship between the authors’ work and the experience of exile, showing how exilic movement informs the literary in a profoundly mimetic way.

I

An initial approach to “The Jolly Corner” and “The Dead” reveals a number of shared characteristics connected to the genre of the ghost story. While “The Dead” less obviously belongs to the genre, having no proper apparition to speak of, both stories are structured around climactic moments of manifestations of the presence of the dead and their effect on the living. And both chart the progress of the vague yet impactful violence of confrontations with the supernatural, with the first half of the text slowly accreting tension which explodes on ghostly impact, and recedes as the characters are left to reflect on what comes next.
In James’ “The Jolly Corner,” protagonist Spencer Brydon, returning to his now vacant childhood home in New York after an adulthood spent in Europe, finds himself haunting the place, roaming its many rooms and halls late at night. But the haunter becomes the haunted as Brydon begins to sense the distant presence of a ghostly alter-ego attending his every move, gradually drawing closer before finally issuing a challenge. “He’s there, at the top, and waiting – not, as in general, falling back for disappearance. He’s holding his ground, and it’s the first time…He has been dodging, retreating, hiding, but now, worked up to anger, he’ll fight!” (461). Finally, the ghost appears to him: “rigid and conscious, spectral yet human, a man of his own substance and stature waited there to measure himself with his power to dismay” (475). Overcome with horror, Brydon loses consciousness.

This confrontation is loosely sketched, such that its content remains shrouded, its nature the object of multiple possible interpretations or explanations, both for Brydon himself and consequently for the reader. The language describing the confrontation is entirely figurative:

“the stranger, whoever he might be, evil, odious, blatant, vulgar, had advanced as for aggression, and he knew himself give ground. The harder pressed still, sick with the force of his shock, and falling back as under the hot breath and the roused passion of a life larger than his own, a rage of personality before which his own collapsed, he felt the whole vision turn to his darkness and his very feet give way” (477).

The encounter, couched as it is in similes, is only tangentially described, creating an aura of mystery and of ineffability. But despite its enigmatic, unaccountable nature, this confrontation greatly impacts Brydon, such that upon waking from a subsequent loss of consciousness, he is

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brought to look at the elements of his life quite differently. Chief among these altered elements is his relationship to his old friend and flame Alice Staverton. For Brydon, there is the “‘old’ life and relation” with her and the new, the two parts set apart by his supernatural encounter (481).

This same narrative arc structures “The Dead,” the final story of Joyce’s *Dubliners*. As readers follow protagonist Gabriel Conroy through a vividly described Dublin party, a certain kind of narrative energy gathers around Gabriel’s sense of social discomfort, and then around his gradually rekindled affection for his wife Gretta and his anticipation of a reconciliation with her. This tension explodes with Gretta’s revelation that she has been preoccupied not with nostalgia for her former relation to her husband, but rather with nostalgia for a former lover. Her first love, Michael Furey, died for her: bedridden and “in decline,” he was unable to visit her; but learning of her impending departure for Dublin, he ran through the rain to say goodbye, despite the danger to his health, and passed away a week later (220). Confronted with this ghost from his wife’s past, Gabriel’s mood turns from amorous to contemplative, as the past, present, and future fall under his panoramic gaze, bringing the story to a close with a sweeping passage taking in all three, all blanketed under the winter’s snow.

So though “The Dead” does not feature anything like the “rigid and conscious, spectral yet human” apparition of “The Jolly Corner,” its construction around this moment of revelation of a former lover’s hold on Gabriel via his wife is essentially a tale of the interference of the dead with the living, which is the core movement of a traditional ghost story. And indeed Gabriel experiences this interference with all of the fear one would expect from characters witnessing an apparition: “A vague terror seized Gabriel at this answer as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against

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him in its vague world” (220). Though Michael has not appeared to Gabriel in spectral form, he still violently manifests himself as a romantic rival from beyond the grave, inspiring “terror” in his opponent. So for Gabriel, as for Spencer Brydon, the experience of haunting is that of an act of violence, an act of aggression of the dead toward the living.

In both cases, this act of violence is a site of unaccountability or unknowability. When Brydon wakes up in Alice Staverton’s arms on the morning following his ghostly encounter, he struggles to make sense of what occurred: “‘Where have I been,’ he vaguely wailed, ‘where have I been?’” (481). In “The Dead,” Gabriel also struggles to account for ‘where he has been’: his terror is “vague,” his assailant “impalpable,” and the latter’s provenance again “vague” (220). The moment of haunting, then, is a moment lying outside the knowable; a moment which, perceived through these vague and hazy modes of intuition and feeling, can only be intellectually grappled with in retrospect.

Yet something about the perception, hazy as it may be, is intensely epiphanic for the stories’ protagonists. Spencer Brydon, returning to consciousness, feels “a treasure of intelligence waiting all round him for quiet appropriation” (478), and his first act of appropriation is to ask Alice to “keep” him, clinging closer to her in a “seal of their situation – of which he tasted the impress for a long blissful moment in silence” (480-1). For Gabriel, the moment is more serene than blissful, as he finally exits his anxious egotism to find a tranquil, more generous point of view than had characterized him previously: he is filled with “a strange friendly pity” and sheds “generous tears” for his wife’s loss (222, 223). Both characters, then, have experienced some sort of sea change, which shows how heavily they have been impacted by their enigmatic, intuitive experiences of ghostly interference.

In both stories, then, the ghosts are confrontational and threatening to the protagonist; and
the moment of haunting is the site of great meaning and impact, but also the site of great instability and incomprehensibility. From this initial approach to the texts, it seems that the literary function of the supernatural would be to signal toward that which is unknowable except through intuition, to that which lies beyond cognitive grasp, and therefore also beyond realistic or natural inscription. But this does not really address the question of their core, their essence, beyond the identification of a certain enigmatic quality, a certain resistance to the characters’ and consequently to the reader’ cognitive understanding. What is the ghost, really? And why does it have such an important place in James’ and Joyce’s fiction?

II

Before investigating the relevance of ghosts to James and Joyce particularly, it is necessary to look into their relevance to modernity more generally. Why is modern culture so interested in the supernatural? Modernity is usually thought of as a movement away from traditional (medieval, feudal, agrarian) societies and toward the contemporary models of a capitalistic, industrial, secular, rational age. For many, the actual belief in the supernatural, in true apparitions for example, belongs to pre-modern superstition. In the age of Reason and Science, of the rational and the natural, it would seem that there is little place for the ghost or for the larger realm of the supernatural. Yet modern culture has never ceased its investment in supernatural matters. As Helen Sword demonstrates in her study of the modern attraction to the occult, twentieth-century literature is deeply steeped in paranormal, mystical, mediumistic traditions, such that all the biggest names have their stories of séances or encounters with the occult: W.B. Yeats, H.D., Rainer Maria Rilke, T.S. Eliot, Thomas Mann, D.H. Lawrence,
Virginia Woolf, and our very own James Joyce.⁶

According to Maud Ellmann’s thinking in an article on “The Ghosts of Ulysses,” the modern commitment to the natural above the supernatural, to science above superstition, is a sort of repression of the irrational figure of the ghost, a willful underestimation of “the vigor of the dead, or the irrepresible activities of emptiness.”⁷ She writes:

“What could be blinder than refusing to believe in ghosts? Our ghost-free civilization is based upon the myth that presence is superior to absence, and that absence is a lack of presence rather than an independent power. [...] We persevere in vivacentrism, the fiercest and perhaps the founding bigotry of all: the illusion that living may eradicate the dead through burial, cremation, and forgetfulness. It is to protect the living from the dead that our culture insists upon their opposition, policing those extravagant and erring spirits who refuse to be confined to either realm.”⁸

This idea of a policing of the barrier between living and dead, similar to that of the barrier between masculine and feminine, can begin to explain the modernists’ engagement with ghosts, since so much of modernist art takes aim at social constructs and illusions. The model, then, would be of a “real” world swirling with “all the living and the dead,” as in the final frame of “The Dead,” as opposed to a fabricated social, rational world segregating the two, assigning to each mode of being its separate world.

This all seems to pose an epistemological question: if the ghost signals to an irrational truth, to a reality beyond reason, then what kind of knowledge can be reached though the

⁸ Ibid. 83-4.
supernatural? What can we learn when thinking through the ghost? Avery Gordon’s sociological investigation of ghosts stresses their appeal to affective, intuitive knowledge. As she writes:

“The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition.,”9

The ghost, according to this line of thought, is a figure of liminality pointing beyond the bounds of “cold knowledge” – scientific, rational, natural – toward that which is known only though a “structure of feeling” – affective, intuitive, supernatural – which is experienced as “transformative recognition,” as a powerful and impactful moment of recognition rather than cognition. The ghost does not live in the traditional and biological sense of “animate existence,” the “possession of which one is deprived by death.”10 Yet it does still live in the emotional, intellectual and narratorial form of a powerful impact on the living through those moments of “transformative recognition.” The ghostly, then, appeals to an emotional or intuitive form of knowledge rather than a rational or deductive form. We can feel a haunting, but it will always remain beyond our cognitive grasp, always somehow shapeless, somewhat unknown.

This phenomenological account of the ghost comes with its linguistic corollary, a discursive account of the paradox between significance and shapelessness, meaning and

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emptiness. This discursive account is taken up by Luke Thurston in his study of literary ghosts.\textsuperscript{11} For Thurston, the ghost’s liminality, its precarious positioning between meaning and meaninglessness, life and death, explains the emotional impact of ghost literature, which takes as its center “what Dickens makes visible in \textit{Our Mutual Friend} as a ‘token of life’ – a strange sensory irruption or suspension of diegetic reality itself, the uncanny manifestation of something vital that is incompatible with the logic of the signifier.”\textsuperscript{12} In other words, the importance of the ghost would lie in its “asemic vitality,”\textsuperscript{13} in its disruptive yet energizing lack of semantic content.

This is, of course, a heavily post-structuralist approach to the ghost, one that puts front and center the functioning of the ghost beyond traditional structures of meaning. And indeed Thurston evokes Lacan and Derrida’s influence over his theoretical approach to the question, crediting them for their “fundamental commitment to conceptualizing an ontological register ‘beyond the signifier,’ impossible to decode or analyze exclusively in terms of a consistent semiotic system,”\textsuperscript{14} that is to say, for their repeated attempts to point out that reality which lies beyond discursive grasp. That reality, that mode of being beyond language, is precisely what Thurston sees operating in “The Jolly Corner,” when the narrator, in a rare first-person intrusion into his narrative, admits his inability to capture the moment of Brydon’s epiphanic realization of the “ineffable identity” of his ghost: “There came to him, as I say – but determined by an influence beyond my notation! – the acuteness of this certainty” (461).

Helen Sword expresses some skepticism toward this post-structuralist emphasis on

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. 3.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 4.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. 4.
semiology, fearing that it leads only to a generalized “hauntology,” a study of metaphorical ghosts:

“Ghosts, after all, are hermeneutic entities, both etymologically – like Hermes, the Greek messenger god, they possess a privileged ability to pass between the worlds of the living and the dead – and practically: all ghosts demand interpretation. Their indeterminacy appeals mightily, as we have seen, to a postmodern sensibility. Yet their very insubstantiality also offers a kind of interpretive cloud cover, an exhilarating opportunity for those who invoke them to escape semantic precision. [...] And how many words in our language can match the extraordinary flexibility of ‘haunt’? Virtually no literary or interpretive act, it seems, is exempted from this modest verb’s metaphorical reach.”

To avoid falling prey to the semantic openness of haunting, then, Sword adopts a historiographical approach to the subject, exploring the evidence of various modernists’ engagement with the occult through historical documentation of séances, sessions with mediums or Ouija boards, and so on. Sword’s study very capably sidesteps the “cloud cover” of haunting, evading the metaphorical possibilities for the term by embracing a very literal approach to it. However as Jean-Michel Rabaté writes in his review of the Sword’s book, “literary ghosts have a textual life of their own, and cannot be reduced to the stable inscription of documentary evidence.” Post-structuralist, deconstructionist vocabularies, off-putting as they may seem, do approach literary ghosts in a manner which respects their essential elusion or instability, which refuses to stabilize figures whose very nature is liminality.

Between the post-structural, metaphorical “hauntology” and Swords’ own historiography

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15 Sword, Helen. 165.
of haunting, however, there is the possibility of mediation. Sarah Cole finds her own middle ground in her study of another, equally metaphorized term – violence. In a description of her approach to it, she writes: “For all its sublimity, […] which at times seems to render it beyond comprehension or articulation, violence, like everything else is subject to words and to the imagination. It has its language.”\(^{17}\) The study of the supernatural can benefit from a similarly clear-headed approach: the ghost, too, “has its language.” It is a challenge to writing which is met by a set of literary inflections, bending the stories’ surfaces and altering their textures in ways which can be comprehended and articulated.

**III**

By pushing beyond the notion of instability or unknowability, then, and taking a closer look at the language of ghostliness, it should be possible to develop an understanding of the workings of the ghost beyond semiotics. The analysis of the ghost in Henry James and James Joyce, taking all of these concerns into account, should focus on the structural and textural particularities of the ghost, the points of comparison and contrast between each author’s respective language of ghostliness helping to build a better understanding of the function of the supernatural.

One key point of comparison between “The Jolly Corner” and “The Dead” is their shared involvement with questions of intimacy. “The Jolly Corner” and “The Dead” follow a similar general structure, tracing their protagonists’ paths from disconnected egotism to a more connected form of interactions with others. But the inner configurations of this structure are specific to each story, with great effects on the overall treatment of and impact of the ghostly.

The variables of this configuration are a set of binaries governing the characters’ trajectories through the stories, their trajectories between a nomadic and abstract state, or a more sedentary and concrete one.

For Spencer Brydon, the trajectory is from nomadic to sedentary, abstract to concrete, a revolution with the ghost’s apparition as its catalyst. His initial state in “The Jolly Corner” is that of a wanderer, having spent most of his adulthood in Europe, living a ‘life of the mind,’ his “back so turned to [practical, business] concerns and his face addressed to those of so different an order” (438). His return to New York is marked by a turn away from this abstracted mode of life, in favor of a more practical, material, “American” approach. After his ghostly encounter, it is the body which wins its contest against the mind, as Brydon is brought back to life in the “ample and perfect cushion” of Alice Staverton’s lap, and since the possibility of a better future, the “seal” of his new relationship to her, is signaled corporeally by Brydon’s movement “close, clinging close” to Alice (480).

Gabriel Conroy’s trajectory through “The Dead” follows a pattern similar to Spencer Brydon’s in terms of the movement away from self-centeredness; but for Gabriel, this movement is effected through an inverted structure, as a self-centered or sedentary corporality or yields to a more selfless or nomadic abstractedness. In the beginning of the story, Gabriel is painfully bodied, with a social discomfort which flushes his cheeks and creates odd, evasive mannerisms, such as follow from his failed interaction with his aunts’ help, Lily: “Gabriel colored as if he felt he had made a mistake and, without looking at her, kicked off his galoshes and flicked actively with his muffler at his patent-leather shoes” (178).

Then following the party, it is lust which takes a hold of his body, as he observes his wife with renewed affection: “the blood went bounding along his veins; and the thoughts went rioting
through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous” (213). This lustfulness is not built a mutual feeling or moment of connectedness, but rather on his own observations of his wife’s attire or carriage and unilateral feeling of revived attraction. The description of the moment reviving emphasizes this one-sidedness by stressing a chain of unilateral gazes:

“[Gabriel] was in a dark part of the hall gazing up the staircase. A woman was standing near the top of the first flight, in the shadow also. He could not see her face but he could see the terracotta and salmon pink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white. It was his wife. She was leaning on the banisters, listening to something.” (209)

Gabriel, then, is watching his wife, unobserved by her, while she is listening to Bartell D’Arcy singing, unobserved by him. This play on gazes, as well as the retrospective identification of the figure as his wife, suggests that Gabriel is indeed feeling lust rather than love, is feeling a desire without true feelings of love or consideration for her.

Gabriel’s state after Michael Furey’s interference lies at polar opposites with this state of physical entrapment in the self, this sense of a body which imposes a division between self and other. This is emphasized in the text as Gabriel contemplates the boundless love the young boy must have had for Gretta:

“He had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. 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 world itself which these dead had one time reared and lied in was dissolving and dwindling.” (223)

Here, we find Gabriel in a much more abstract state, his movements spiritual rather than physical. As “his own world” – the world of the living, but also his own interior world – goes on “dissolving and dwindling,” Gabriel too dissolves, escaping his bodily entrapment in the self in favor of an almost nirvana-like state of unity with those who had “one time reared and lied in” this world. At this point, Gabriel’s state is abstracted and nomadic, as opposed to the sedentary and concrete state at the beginning of the story.

This release from the self is, of course, greatly ambiguous. It is anchored within language which has been interpreted as either compressing or expanding the self, either liberating Gabriel or destroying him through the total shedding of his ego. The range of possible readings of the concluding passage of “The Dead” is particularly evident in discussions of the snow which is “softly falling” all through the final frame of the final story of Dubliners. For Richard Ellmann, for example, the wintery imagery signals compression rather than release, awakening a “sense of crowding and quiet pressure” through the connectedness of all these beings covered by the snow, and a “sense that none has his being alone”18. For Allen Tate, however, the snow is “a symbol of warmth, of expanded consciousness,” standing for “Gabriel’s escape from his own ego into the larger world of humanity”19. Evidence for such a reading might be found in the “softly falling” snow which forms this concluding passage’s incantatory refrain, its melodic repetition instilling a great sense of calm as it is heard “falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead” (224). The softness of snowfall

seems like a moment of serenity after the frenzy of anxiety and lust and anger which had formed Gabriel’s experience of his aunts’ get-together.

It is important to note, then, that Gabriel’s final state of egolessness, of release from the self, is anchored within much more ambiguous language than Spencer Brydon’s state at the end of “The Jolly Corner.” Regardless, Gabriel’s roving, itinerant final state is starkly contrasted with Spencer Brydon’s sedentary, securely corporeal state at the end of “The Jolly Corner.” Spencer Brydon’s trajectory through “The Jolly Corner” takes him from nomadic abstraction to sedentary concreteness, while Gabriel’s trajectory through “The Dead” takes him from a rooted, bodied, and static egocentrism to a more rootless, disembodied, nomadic egolessness.

IV

In these two stories, then, we have traced the characters’ trajectories through the stories as organized around the moment of haunting, of ghostly impact on the living. The effect of haunting is to rouse the protagonist, to shock him into a different mode of being. And the nature of this movement, particular to each story, maps onto the nature of its ghost.

In “The Jolly Corner,” Brydon’s evolution from abstraction to corporality is mirrored by the evolution of the ghost, which moves from figurativeness to literality. In the opening pages of the story, the narrator describes Brydon’s state of bewilderment upon his return to New York in the following terms:

“It had begun to be present to him after the first fortnight, it had broken out with the oddest abruptness, this particular wanton wonderment: it met him there – and this was the image under which he himself judged the matter, or at least, not a little, thrilled and flushed with it – very much as he might have been met by some strange figure, some
unexpected occupant, at a turn of one of the dim passages of an empty house. The quaint analogy quite hauntingly remained with him…” (441, emphasis added)

This passage is, of course, part of the traditional structures of suspense and forewarning that one would expect from a ghost story. The ghost is already present here as a figurative thought, an image or analogy for Brydon’s sense of astonishment. Its appearance later on in the story, taking the exact imagined form of the “unexpected occupant,” is then a literalization or materialization of an image, a translation of the abstract into the “concrete” form of a literal apparition.

Moreover, this ghost appears in a very substantive form, with the passage describing the apparition emphasizing the corporality of the apparition: the ghost is “rigid and conscious, spectral yet human, a man of his own substance and stature waited there to measure himself with his power to dismay” (475). This instance on the materiality of the ghost only deepens the sense of a process of concretization throughout the story. This logic is natural to the process of the ghost story, of the haunted’s movement from suspicion of haunting to the conviction of being haunted. But it is also and perhaps more importantly significant in its mirroring of Brydon’s general movement from nomadic egocentrism to sedentary selflessness.

The movement of the ghost in “The Dead” also mirrors its protagonist’s movement, again inverted relative to Brydon’s. For Gabriel, then, the shift from a very material and bodied self-centeredness to an immaterial and spiritual state of selflessness is effected by a ghost which does not make a proper appearance, but rather remains immaterial and spiritual. It is a conceptual rather than actual haunting. The moment of haunting is described through simile, through figurative rather than literal language: “a vague terror seized Gabriel at this answer as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world” (220). Gabriel’s movement toward a more
nomadic, abstract state is then effected by a nomadic and abstract ghost, unlocatable and unsubstantiated.

The nature of the ghost in “The Dead” is thus opposed to that in “The Jolly Corner,” just as the trajectories of the protagonists are opposed. Accordingly the structure of forewarning in “The Dead” is inverted relative to that in “The Jolly Corner”: while “The Jolly Corner” features a process of literalization, the figurative haunting becoming literal, “The Dead” exhibits a process of metaphorization, with the natural environment of lights gradually ceding to the supernatural environment of spirits. John Gordon’s study of the use of the gaslight in “The Dead” ably establishes the connection between the two environments, showing how the gaslight which illuminates many of the scenes in the story paves the way for the ghost which sheds light on Gabriel’s marriage. Throughout “The Dead,” the interplay between firelight and gaslight highlights the gap between past love and present emptiness for Gabriel. Memories of his early years with Gretta are semantically linked to firelight: “he was standing with her in the cold, looking in through a grated window at a man making bottles in a roaring furnace” (213), “like the tender fires of stars moments of their life together…broke upon an illuminated his memory” (213), “their souls’ tender fires” (214), “the kindling again of so many memories” (215).

This firelight recedes in the face of the gaslight which marks the present time, dulling and washing out faces and scenes throughout the night, and finally opening up a space for Michael Furey in the hotel room where the story breathes its last. When Gabriel and Gretta arrive at their hotel for the night, they are accompanied by candlelight due to an electrical outage; and upon their arrival in their room, Gabriel asks the porter to remove the candle and leave them in darkness. This strange request is generally thought of as part of Gabriel’s attempts to orchestrate

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a bedtime reunion with his wife. But this stratagem fails since it lets in “a ghostly light from the street lamp,” which lies “in a long shaft from one window to the door” (216). As John Gordon notes, “sending away the old-fashioned candle, let down by the new-fangled electricity, Gabriel has inadvertently cleared the field for a third kind of light, manifest in that ‘ghostly’ shaft, and with it the spirit who will, on this night, put an end to any romantic plans.”

This gaslight is then linked to the story’s ghost through its disruption of Gabriel’s plans. The connection is deepened when readers learn that Michael Furey “was in the gasworks” (219). According to Gordon, this calls up “connotations of danger, illness, and dirt, associations which, in ‘The Dead,’ can only be heightened by Michael’s origin in the west, the old heart of the Famine, of Irish destitution and death.”

The provenance of the gaslight from the underground furthers this suggestion of a “proletariat nativist uprising,” as Gordon suggests. All of this contributes to the coloring of the gaslight as a ghastly or ghostly rival to Gabriel. Michael Furey hangs in the air of the story far before he is ever named, a naturalistic detail slowly showing its true colors as supernatural haunting.

In this manner, the structure of forewarning in “The Dead” can be read as a process of natural or material detailing leading to a supernatural or conceptual apparition. The foreshadowing thus progresses through metaphorization or abstraction, a passage from the literal and natural language of gaslight to the figurative and supernatural language of ghostlight. This ghostly trajectory maps onto Gabriel’s trajectory from a very physical and sedentary state to a spiritual and nomadic one, both movements tending toward abstraction from a concrete and rooted initial state.

21 Gordon, John. 20.
22 Gordon, John. 23.
In both stories then, the means of effecting change are adapted to their ends, with the movement from sedentary to nomadic effected by a nomadic and conceptual ghost and a metaphorizing shift from foreshadowing to haunting (“The Dead”), and the movement from nomadic to sedentary effected by a sedentary and material ghost and a literalizing shift from foreshadowing to haunting (“The Jolly Corner”). For both James and Joyce, therefore, the nature of the ghost and the trajectory from foreshadowing to haunting are intimately intertwined with the trajectory of the protagonist through the story.

The analysis of the language of ghostliness conducted thus far has led to a sort of grid, charting the structural and textural particularities of each story’s treatment of the ghostly, and highlighting their positions as inversions of each other. Where “The Dead” comes to rest in an open-ended, spiritual, nomadic space, “The Jolly Corner” ends on a more closed, corporeal, and sedentary space. This chiasmic relationship between the two stories’ endpoints is all the more interesting when read against the two authors’ exilic models, since each story’s final situation in space, time and the self is reflective of the logic of its author’s exilic ideal.

In both stories, as was briefly mentioned, the ghost plot is anchored within stories which are largely preoccupied with the problem of national belonging. Spencer Brydon, returning to New York after decades of absence, must contemplate the implications of his abandonment of his homeland and nationality in favor of the adoption of a European way of life. And Gabriel Conroy, provoked by the intense interrogation from Ms. Ivors, must question the politics of his engagement with the Continent, and disconnection from the language and culture of his compatriots.
This thematic treatment of nationality and exile has in both cases been thought of as semi-autobiographical, drawn largely from the authors’ own self-imposed exiles. This trope of Jamesian and Joycean criticism has been well-explored, but its connection to the overall movement of the two stories studied here has been as of yet neglected. An examination of this stylistic engagement with the question of exile will be all the more productive in the light of the juxtaposition of James and Joyce, whose exilic ideals stand at opposite sides of the exilic spectrum, despite their frequent grouping together under the blanket-term of exiled artists. While Henry James chose to pass from one national space to another, trading his American citizenship to become a British national, James Joyce chose to quit national space altogether, trading his Irish nationality to adopt a cosmopolitan identity.

The general narrative for Henry James’ departure from the United States is legible between the lines of his work in *Hawthorne*, a book which highlights his admiration for Nathaniel Hawthorne while deploping the cultural paucity of the United States. For James, art needs history: “the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, and it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature,” as he writes in a chapter on Hawthorne’s early years. However the soil in America is, according to James, too shallow for truly great art:

“History, as yet, has left in the United States but so thin and impalpable a deposit that we very soon touch the hard substratum of nature; and nature herself, in the western world, has the peculiarity of seeming rather crude and immature. The very air looks new and young; the light of the sun seems fresh and innocent, as if it knew as yet but few of the secrets of the world and none of the weariness of shining; the vegetation has the

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24 See: Richard Ellmann (“The Backgrounds of ‘The Dead’”) and Deborah Esch (“A Jamesian About-Face”)
appearance of not having reached its majority. A large juvenility is stamped upon the face of things, and in the vividness of the present, the past, which died so young and had time to produce so little, attracts but scanty attention.”26

For James, then, the passage from the United States to the United Kingdom is the passage from a natural to a historical nation, a juvenile to a mature culture, the former conducive only to a certain, “primitive” art (Hawthorne’s), and the second, conducive to sophisticated, high art (James’). Following this, it will come as no surprise that James sought to wholly embrace the society he immigrated to, venturing even to give up his American nationality in favor of British citizenship. In a letter to the Prime Minister on June 28th, 1915, James offered himself for naturalization: “I find my wish to testify at this crisis to the force of my attachment and devotion to England… I can only testify by laying at her feet my explicit, my maternal and spiritual allegiance, and throwing into the scale of her fortune my all but imponderable moral weight.”27

James Joyce’s model is at odds with this Jamesian model of transplantation. The Jamesian passage from one nationality to another, from one young culture to another, older and more imbricate, would have in Joyce’s parlance been the passage from one “net” to another, one prison to another. Indeed Joyce’s attitude toward nationality is often thought of in terms of a passage of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, wherein Stephen Dedalus expresses his wish to liberate himself from the enclosures of nationality: “when the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight,” says Dedalus. “You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.”28 Those “nets” were particularly thick for a writer in Ireland, with the general climate of hostility toward colonial English forces

26 James, Henry. 12-13.
limiting the artist’s freedom by suggesting that there was no art but politically engaged art. For Joyce, then, departure from Ireland signaled a release from the constraints of politics, of an English language resisted as part of a larger, alien, colonial apparatus, of a religion which sternly guarded conservative moral standards.

Once out of Ireland, Joyce elected to live a rather unsettled life, moving between Trieste, Rome, Zurich and Paris, as opposed to the Jamesian model of a settled, naturalized life in a new nation. The Joycean model, then, is the passage from a national space to a cosmopolitan and transnational or anti-national space, a model of nomadism. So while James traded one nationality for the other, one culture for another far more steeped in history and tradition, Joyce chose to trade one culture in for a broader, cosmopolitan cultural matrix, a sense of belonging to a greater world which liberated him from the particular burdens of national politics and history.

These contrasted exilic models fit rather nicely onto the contrasted ghost models discussed above. The general structure exhumed in “The Jolly Corner” was the movement from nomadic to sedentary effected by a sedentary and material ghost and a literalizing shift from foreshadowing to haunting, while “The Dead” followed a movement from sedentary to nomadic effected by a nomadic and conceptual ghost and a metaphorizing shift from foreshadowing to haunting. The logic of each of these movements mirrors that of each author’s exilic model. For James, the stakes were a movement from a thin, weak, ahistorical cultural fabric to a thickly woven, strong, deeply historical one, therefore a movement from a restless to a steadier, more sedentary state, the same structure as that of Spencer Brydon’s progress through “The Jolly Corner.” For Joyce, the stakes were a movement from a thick, mired web of policed literary, religious, and moral constraints to a state of spiritual, moral, and national freedom, a movement from a static, mired state to a nomadic or boundless one.
This study of the supernatural theme in James and Joyce thus reveals a matrix of interrelated terms, as questions of intimacy, space and exile all funnel into the language and texture of the ghostly in “The Dead” and “The Jolly Corner.” The stories exhibit very similar structures centered around climactic moments of manifestations of the presence of the dead and their effect on the living. Their protagonists both move from an initial state of egoism to a final state of egolessness. The climactic moment of haunting and its foreshadowing traces the trajectories of the haunted and its haunter between binaries which are also common to both stories: nomadism / sedentariness, abstraction / concreteness, spirituality / materiality, body / mind, and literality / figurativeness. These convergences between the two texts emphasize the polyvalence of the ghost, which, in its capacity as a liminal figure between life and death, is particularly equipped to move between other dichotomous pairings: for what could better signal the passage from body to mind, spirituality to materiality, and so on, than that eerie threshold figure which passes from death to life?

As we have seen, however, within the overarching, convergent structures “The Jolly Corner” and “The Dead” differ to the point of inversion, charting trajectories between the same sets of binaries, but adopting different directions between the dichotomous terms. The protagonists’ final states, after transformations elicited by the experience of haunting, are polar opposites: Spencer Brydon’s sedentary, securely corporeal state opposite Gabriel Conroy’s nomadic, uprooted and spiritual state. To each of these poles corresponds a ghost tailored to its protagonist’s needs, and a structure of foreshadowing mirroring his shift from one state to the next: Spencer Brydon meets a concrete, material ghost after a shift from figurative to literal haunting, while Gabriel Conroy meets a much more conceptual and nomadic ghost after a shift
from natural to supernatural haunting.

The language of the ghostly thus structures “The Jolly Corner” and “The Dead” along similar arcs, but with wildly different patternings and shadings; and these, according to their author’s exilic model: of transplantation for Henry James, and of nomadism for James Joyce. The exilic movement, into another culture for James and out of nation altogether for Joyce, informs the literary movement of their respective stories in a profoundly mimetic way. The experience of exile, far from simply inspiring the content of the stories, seems to have steeped into every aspect of the stories’ chosen styles, their particular deployment of foreshadowing, haunting, haunter and haunted.

The relationship between ghostly and exilic models having been established, it is important to consider the implications of their connection: why must the exilic be expressed as the ghostly, and the ghostly as exilic in both of these texts? There is, of course, the traditional Freudian notion of the “return of the repressed,” the idea that both authors were ‘haunted’ by their abandonment of their homelands. But this hypothesis doesn’t seem to fit the evidence, which is filled with much more than just regret. Rather, it seems that for both authors the question of exile and its companion the ghost are both met with a deep sense of ambivalence.

This ambivalence is carried by both stories’ double potentials, their essential ambiguity or irony. The final flight of “The Dead” is read both as compressing or paralyzing and intensely liberating for Gabriel. And in “The Jolly Corner,” though Spencer Brydon’s outcome is less contested than Gabriel’s, the ghost’s identity remains a question mark: for Marius Bewley, and indeed the majority of James critics, the ghost’s hideous face is an American face, and the story therefore an anti-American one, while Saul Rosenzweig reads it as Brydon’s reconciliation

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29 See: Bewley, Marius. The Complex Fate: Hawthorne, Henry James, and some other American writers. Staten
with an American self he had been evading.\textsuperscript{30} And finally for Floyd Stovall, “the true Spencer Brydon, the buried self, that Alice’s love releases, is not necessarily either anti- or pro-American,” but simply a figure of reawakened love.\textsuperscript{31}

This core ambiguity of each story’s denouement suggests its author’s irresoluteness, a sort of ambivalence regarding his exilic project. Though both authors expressed their motivations for leaving in no uncertain terms, their stories reveal much more complex situations, their tropes of exile and belonging containing both success and failure in equal measure. And it is the supernatural coding of both stories which allows for the survival of this profound ambivalence, thanks to the essential polyvalence of the ghost.

Helen Sword traces Derrida’s obsession with the terms of haunting and ghostliness with a seemingly endless list of those of his ideas which involve themselves with specters.\textsuperscript{32} But if Derrida tends to employ time and time again the vocabulary of haunting, it is because, as Sword says herself, not many words “can match the extraordinary flexibility of ‘haunt.’”\textsuperscript{33} The ghost’s flexibility makes it the ideal object of deconstructionist work, the perfect example of the need for open-ended readings such as Derrida’s own, or Barthes’ disseminative strategy.\textsuperscript{34} And thus, the perfect tool for Henry James and James Joyce to portray their own unrest about their exilic projects, the ways in which their decisions to leave contained both redemption and some form of paralysis, both freedom and a kind of oppression. The complex nature of these contradictory
feelings leads to two stories textured by the intertwining of haunting and exile, mind and body, spirituality and materiality, abstraction and concreteness, nomadism and sedentariness.

In his “Reflections of Exile,” Edward Said writes that “for an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally.” Just like for the ghost, the manifestations in the present occur against the memory of the past, the environment of the living (material, concrete, sedentary) and that of the dead (spiritual, abstract, nomadic) occurring together contrapuntally.

The unique situation of the exile, suspended between two worlds, finds an inimitable counterpart in the unique situation of the ghost, and this close relationship is that which is exhibited by the joint movements of “The Jolly Corner” and “The Dead,” their mimetic structures of exile and haunting.

**Works Cited**


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