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Spectrality as Ethical Gift and the Chance for Justice: Living On and Dispossession in James Joyce's "The Dead" and John Banville's *Snow*

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This essay will explore the theoretical pertinence of the spectre in modern and contemporary Irish fiction as dislocating the sense of history as the modality of the present. I argue for the intertextuality residing between James Joyce's short story "The Dead" and John Banville's novel *Snow* not on the basis of a model of artistic derivativeness or disavowal, but as part of a dynamic of spectral inheritance that forces us to redefine notions of epistemic and ontological closure. Banville's image of being a "survivor" of Joyce provides me with the analytical apparatus to explore how survivability crucially depends on giving the past its futural chance. It is my argument that these conditions of living on and reckoning with the ghost in Joyce and Banville put in place a utopic and an-archic consideration of justice, which can ultimately only be given (over) to the ghostly other within the self.

Keywords

James Joyce; John Banville, Spectre; Hauntology; Jacques Derrida

Introduction: Reconsidering Joyce and Banville's literary relationship

John Banville's *Snow* (2020) is as haunted by the unspeakable acts of abuse and betrayal which steal the innocence of a generation as it is by a general literary condition of belatedness the self-reflexive author deliberately attributes to coming after the textured atmosphere of James Joyce's collection of short stories, as adroitly reflected by a knowing comment from the world-weary narrator that the people around him discountenanced by the brutal murder of a priest "were [all] Dubliners".

¹ In a number of interviews which span the length of nearly forty years, Banville speaks of his conflicted relationship with Joyce in terms of a *living on* and writing in the aftermath of a powerful intervention in the techniques of fictional realism. Speaking with Derek Hand in 2006, Banville recalls how he was "very taken" with *Dubliners* which was gifted to him as a present at the age of "about eleven or twelve"², which precipitated some similar imitations. However, despite intimations that Joyce's aesthetic craft has significantly influenced his subsequent career as a novelist, critical opinion has sought a more direct intertextual link between Banville and Samuel Beckett. Kersti Tarien Powell characterises this perspective as a willingness to see Banville as continuing Beckett's hermetic experimentations in linguistic ontology, while citing an earlier intertextual study by Ingo Berensmeyer arguing that Joyce exists as a "negative influence"³ on the writing. Instead of determining whether the relationship between Banville and these two towering figures of European modernist art can be so easily discerned as a dialectic between indebtedness and disavowal, I wish to consider a striking image which Banville employs in an essay in 1990 to characterise the sublimated affect inherent in the writing process when faced with an almost overwhelming Harold Bloomian literary forebear. For Banville, "when I think of Joyce I am split in two. To one side there falls the reader, kneeling speechless in filial admiration, and love; to the other side,

however, the writer stands, gnawing his knuckles, not a son, but a *survivor*”⁴ (emphasis mine). This suggestive image, which not only splits the difference between reverential reader and grudging writer but also links the creative experience to the (dis)ability to carry on after a traumatic encounter with an otherness that cannot be assimilated to the temporality of the present, has not yet been adequately theorised as a distinctly Banvillian approach to his intertextual link to Joyce.

To be sure, the image of Joyce as mediated through Banville sheds interesting critical detail on important aspects of the latter’s novelistic craft. Commenting on the 2004 publication of a book *James Joyce’s Photographs*, Banville notes that “no writer in the history of imaginative literature ... was as meticulous as Joyce in attention to the real, to the concrete, to the detail”.⁵ This focus on the mind’s search for a language adequate enough to encompass, or to make homely, the otherness of a world preceding the self delineates a phenomenological approach which helps to contextualise recent criticism on Banville. As John Kenny details, a phenomenological mode of inquiry “seek[s] to identify the processing patterns by which the mind, especially the creative mind, grasps reality”.⁶ Critics who stress the postmodern impulse in Banville accept the impasse between the constructions of subjectivity and objective statements about reality; as Elke D’Hoker notes, a “postmodern awareness [suggests] that literature does not simply represent reality but rather revisits and mediates earlier literary and aesthetic creations”.⁷ This strand of criticism thereby probes Banville’s metatextual links to other writers and artforms: Neil Murphy points out how “one of Banville’s recurring narrative strategies [is] to render his fictional surfaces self-evidently fictional, to saturate his storyworlds with intertextual references”⁸, and Kenny elsewhere orchestrates pictorial motifs in Banville’s fiction to probe the novelist’s stake in ekphrastic “stillness and silence”.⁹ This concentration on stasis and nothingness then aptly defines the

philosophical moorings of postmodern critique, for if an unbridgeable gap cleaves linguistic representation from existential truths, then the creative self exists in an ontological vacuum with his or her fictions; as Derek Hand argues, Banville's world "is a fallen one in which there is nothing left to other than endlessly tell one's own story again and again and again".¹⁰ This aesthetic stultification is also noted by Brendan MacNamee as such: "Banville's art portrays human consciousness in its perennial bind of being forever trapped in language".¹¹ In contrast to this more-established strand of commentary, other readers of Banville have tried to resist the paradigm of linguistic subjectivity as ideological prison-house by suggesting a will towards (re)invention and process which puts postmodern fragmentation in the positive service of redefinition. Michael Springer notes that the Banvillian imagination "reinvests the old with renewed significance"¹², and both Rebecca Downes and Joakim Wrethed employ Nietzschean-Deleuzian concepts to explore how "Banville invites the reader into a generous understanding of becoming and creativity".¹³

My approach in this article differs from these frameworks in its use of a phenomenology of spectrality. It is my argument that an intertextual reading of Joyce and Banville arises from a critical relationship with the present that is ethical to the extent that it opens up a dimension of hospitality towards unacknowledged historical trauma. The ghost therefore makes certain ethical demands upon the living which raises the question about whether personal and collective history might *have been* different – phenomenological intentionality towards the world is thereby imbued with the need to account, or at least witness, to the past. Rather than to shock or horrify, ghosts in Banville's fiction incarnate the affective dimensions of mournfulness that solicit a form of accountability for their presence-absence. In *Ghosts* (1993), Banville's narrator muses about the porous boundaries separating the living from the dead in order to suggest that "there is an onus on us, the living, to conjure

up our particular dead”¹⁴, the weight of the imperative implying a moral reckoning with the spectre. Elsewhere, in *Eclipse* (2000), Alexander Cleave’s intuition that the ghosts of his life present “something [that] is expected of me here, something [that] is being asked of me”¹⁵ crystallises the stakes of his ethical transactions with his family and his past. Analysing the place of spectrality in relationship to being a survivor of the past allows me to move past postmodern textuality in order to consider the phenomenological notion of “having a world” in terms of ethical considerations about how to live¹⁶ in (the) place of others. This is to also raise the question of being at home, which in its uncanny dialectic with unhomeliness and dispossession¹⁷, locates the impetuses of Banville’s *Snow* at a necessary displacement from Joyce in terms of the place of literary inheritance, filiation and disavowal. As I demonstrate later with respect to Derridean hauntology, intertextuality defines more than postmodern self-reflexivity – it delineates the condition of being haunted *from within*, which opens up an authentic possibility for reckoning with the effects of the past upon the present. In opposition to Gerry Smyth, I insist that spectrality within and between Joyce and Banville keeps in play ideas of “how it should have been or might have been”¹⁸, for this treatment becomes crucial in both texts’ bearing witness to victims of institutional and cultural violence embedded within the Irish psyche and landscape.

This essay thereby attempts to consider more fully the artistic implications of textual survivability through the ontological displacement that is occasioned when a survivor is thought of in relation to the figure of the spectre. In my reading, to be a survivor is precisely to carry on whilst being *both* dismissive of and beholden to the past. My comparison of Banville and Joyce goes beyond the question of a lineage between a “modernist” Joyce and a “postmodern” Banville in order to consider a haunted textual temporality that sustains complex semiotic effects which first open up questions about reading, and more importantly,

an ethical *afterimage* of the world as represented by literature. To put it more plainly, I wish to explore the spectral “lodging” of Joyce’s short story “The Dead” within Banville’s *Snow* as a way of folding in the uncanny disruption of the presential mode of temporality that the spectre effects with the necessarily incomplete introjections and abjections that funnel out a text’s relationship with another. That this metaphor of spatiality within a text is seen by Banville to be positively distinctive about the novel as a genre is attested to in an interview given in 2011 where he notes that the “wonderful thing about the novel [is that] it’s a house with many mansions in it”.¹⁹ Insofar as Banville knowingly draws upon the motif of the Irish Big House as an imaginative repository of national and personal identity as distended in time²⁰, he forges an intimate connection between the structure of the novel and memorialisation. The inseparability of personal loss and cultural paralysis thereby opens up a relationship with the collective past in terms of a haunting, which in turn shapes the possibilities of “living on” and “reckoning” with the debt this history imposes. Past readings of Banville’s connection with Joyce have tended to focus exclusively on the modernist aesthetic of textual self-expression to the effect of a narrow focus on linguistic performativity in the former: Terence Brown states that Joyce bequeaths to the Irish writer “a consciousness of the fictionality of writing”²¹, while Roberta Geftter Wondrich argues that “Banville is also the most distinguished successor to that “discrediting of the subject” practised by Joyce and so prominent in post-modernism”.²² However, I aim to show that the structure of haunting and hospitality of otherness within the self reflects an existential attunement towards history that the postmodern account of subjectivity unfairly reduces to inchoate fragmentation. It is thus not the case that “the defining and distinctive motif of a divided self”²³ is the aesthetic hallmark of Banville’s postmodernist scepticism; rather, the self grows to acknowledge the absolute divide between the lived experience of the moment and the failed but necessary attempt to recoup that existential intensity through memory and narrative memorialization.

Banville's carefully-crafted fictions bear the weight of a writerly responsibility in how they bring to bear a phenomenological sense of the world *at the same time as* language marks a spectral dissonance that splits the present moment from within. I thereby follow Hand in discerning a phenomenological approach to Banville by arguing that his characters think "about their place in the world and about their relationship to it"²⁴, but significantly nuance his argument by considering that this world, as it is tensed between Banville's claim to originality and a buried acknowledgment of Joyce as precursor, is determined by a spectral temporality opens up an altered experience of both presence and futurity. Indeed, as I will show, the dimensions of the spectre affect not only the past, but also an authentic chance for the future to happen *as future* – it dislodges the present in order to give to the future, and to open up the future as gift. In sum, this ethical possibility not only aligns Joyce and Banville's texts from within and in relationship to each other, but also provides an appropriate response to Richard Kearney's characterisation of the impasse dogging Irish cultural modernity:

How is one to confront the pervading sense of discontinuity ... the insecurities of fragmentation? Is it possible to make the transition between past and future, between that which is familiar to us and that which is foreign?²⁵

Hauntology, Phenomenology and the Justice "to-come": the betrayal and promise of the spectre

My theoretical approach to the significance of the spectre, or a presence which is inexorably split between the time of the present and the time of the other, draws close to the philosopher Jacques Derrida's analysis of hauntology as the ghostly supplement to ontology, fracturing it by troubling it from within. Derrida's focus on how the ghostly disrupts knowledge and a

secure sense of history by ceaselessly displacing itself from interpretive finality through insisting that “it *is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence”²⁶ has provided critics with a compelling theoretical model through which to read Joyce’s engagement with history as it is both constructed and *dislocated*. Matthew Schultz’s reading of spectres in *Finnegans Wake* aims to demonstrate how “the textual spectre—a non-present presence, a dual being and non-being—precisely symbolizes for Joyce, the overlap between Irish myth and Irish history”.²⁷ To that end, Schultz analyses the ways in which Joyce’s textuality deconstructs the opposition between fiction and history, with an eye to demonstrating how “the ghost can reconstruct, or re-signify, common pitfalls of historical representation: mis-remembering, misperceiving, and the “necessary falsification” of the past”.²⁸ For Schultz, the spectre ceaselessly recontextualises the past by recentring it around the playful deferral of meaning that “conflate[s] multiple spaces, temporalities, and languages”.²⁹ In Schultz’s reading, the dangers of a monolithically-coherent understanding of “Irishness” represent the repressing of spectrality in favour of “a singularly envisioned Irish identity and Irish history”.³⁰ Schultz’s reading of Derrida and Joyce therefore purports to weave together “historical events and literary discourse”, with the critical aim to seek the (textual) influence of “Ireland’s undead past”³¹ within the present moment. The significance of textuality in relation to ghosts in Joyce’s texts is again highlighted by Gabriel Renggli in terms of an unfinished conversation between the past and the present. Considering the scene of Leopold Bloom’s dead son Rudy reading a mysterious book in the “Circe” episode of *Ulysses* as capturing a metatextual moment of silent and secretive reading, Renggli argues that the spectre undercuts any pretence to interpretive totality by withholding or resisting itself to full comprehension. For Renggli, this opens up an important hermeneutic encounter between reader and text, wherein the reader must necessarily address the spectre of the author

– “spectrality shows us that such a conversation must occur through questions addressed to the author’s silent specter, not because there will be an answer, but because it is necessary for the exchange to remain relevant to the text”.³² The spectre therefore solicits the reader to *place* the significance of the text in terms of an interminable *displacement* that surfaces as traces which imprint the past onto the present. To the extent that this reading of the Joycean text has become noticeably “Derridean”, we might point to Joycean scholar Sam Slote’s observation that “Derrida emphasizes the *dispersal* of sense rather than the collection of various different meanings”.³³ The spectre in Joyce would thus ultimately be the figure of an-archic (i.e. without foundation, *arche*) reading, one that opens up the text to an untotalisable multiplicity because in the first place, “there was no inside, there was nothing inside before it”.³⁴

I would like to pursue a different emphasis of the Derridean spectre which, to my mind, has not been commented upon by readers eager to pursue the “textual” Joyce and his alignment with a poststructuralist understanding of language. This homology is characterised by Christine van Boheemen who gives an almost template-like mapping of the “Derrida [who] is transferentially involved with a ... Joyce who laughingly eludes the split between signifier and signified, and endlessly makes signification its own signified in the act of signifying”.³⁵ Schultz’s reading of the palimpsestic “imprinting” of the past onto the present in Derrida only presents us with half the picture that is developed in *Specters of Marx* (1994). For Derrida, the spectre does not only signify the introjection of an impossible mourning for the past into the present moment, for it also opens up the question of the *future*. As Derrida writes, “at bottom, the spectre is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back”.³⁶ If the spectre always disrupts the present moment by forcing us to consider the moments of absence and lacunae which nevertheless act or impinge

upon it, it also gestures towards a future which potentially redeems the past through a rendering of justice. In other words, the ghost comes to us from the future as an afterimage of what the past *might have been*. As Derrida argues,

No progress or knowledge could saturate an opening that must have nothing to do with knowing. Nor with ignorance. The opening must preserve this heterogeneity and the only chance of an affirmed or rather reaffirmed future. It is the future itself, it comes from there. The future is its memory. In the experience of the end, in its insistent, instant, always imminently eschatological coming, at the extremity of the extreme today, there would thus be announced the future of what comes.³⁷

Derrida's analysis of the spectre here is compelling insofar as it complicates the static notion of intertextuality by opening up the question of an ethics of reading. If, as I will demonstrate, Banville's text is inhabited by the spectral presence of Joyce's "The Dead", this textual memory becomes a readerly invitation to *re-member* the past by reconstituting it on the basis of a future which is always impending, or to-come. This critical gesture helps us contextualise Banville's remarks about being a survivor of Joyce: the chance that the survivor has for living on cannot be separated from the trauma of the past which must nevertheless be re-assumed if he or she is to carry on. Both Joyce and Banville's texts depict inauthentic ways through which the past is contained, either through suppression or simplistic memorialisation. Derrida's arguments allow us to understand how a lineage of Irish fiction which responds to the formation of national and cultural identity can be discerned by the marking of "the different ways [authors dealt with] loss that has never permitted any sense of closure".³⁸ Peach usefully notes how in the fiction, the secrecy that is associated with personal haunting "is concealed within the various private lives and histories constituting ...

different communities affects the ‘territory’ in which it is embedded”.³⁹ It is here that hauntology intersects with phenomenology, as place in Joyce and Banville becomes both saturated and dislocated by multiple un-synthesizable sense of temporalities. Hand’s observation that “Banville’s engagement with Irish history ... hopes to ... ‘open’ history up to new readings and interpretations, unlocking the past in order to free himself into a more productive encounter with the future”⁴⁰ can be understood more acutely by replacing the image of entrapment and will-towards-liberation with the notion of living *with* the spectre of the past/future. If the ghost functions as a metaphor for that which is hidden and repressed within the psyche, then it opens the possibility of haunting as a futural gesture – the spectre is what comes from the future as gift.

The theorist Mark Fisher carries on the Derridean notion of the spectre in the service of a mourning for a future which fundamentally incarnates a utopian impulse. As Fisher understands it, hauntology is “*the agency of the virtual*, with the spectre understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing”.⁴¹ For Fisher, the spectre refers *at the same time* to an absent past which inscribes its effects on the present and an as-yet unconceivable future that has been at work in the past. As Fisher explains

we can provisionally distinguish two directions in hauntology. The first refers to that which is (in actuality is) *no longer*, but which *remains* effective as a virtuality ... The second sense of hauntology refers to that which (in actuality) has *not yet* happened, but which is *already* effective in the virtual.⁴²

Read with a political dimension, Fisher argues that Derrida’s investment in the spectre of communism in Marx’s texts plays out in terms of a future which has always already haunted

capitalism from within. What Fisher helpfully alerts us to is precisely how the ghost, in its haunting, “constitutes a refusal to give up on the desire for the future”.⁴³ In this way, I argue that Banville’s novel takes up the ghost of Joyce’s story by refusing to give up its ghost – it survives in the mode of accounting for, or giving speech back to the ghosts of the past. For Joyce and Banville, the spectre (of history) cannot be confined to a particular moment in time; it appropriately destabilises the boundaries marking off the self from his or her world. As Banville notes, “the story to me is consequent upon the weather, part of the weather, the human figures are figures in a landscape, and the landscape is always important”.⁴⁴ This writerly attention to the phenomenology of the landscape will justify the link I draw between *Snow* and “The Dead” as narratives about the changing attunement characters display towards the weather (in both cases, snow). The weather functions as a correlative for the effects of spectrality because it defamiliarises what should be most secure and canny – the sense of place – from within. As Derrida notes, it is the house, or the homely, which become what is most threatening: “The most familiar becomes the most disquieting. The economic or egological home of the *oikos*, the nearby, the familiar, the domestic, or even the national (*heimlich*) frightens itself”.⁴⁵ In Joyce and Banville, private and public spaces similarly become *topoi* inhabited by ghosts that wrench time severely out of joint. In this way, as snow becomes the signifier for a generalised condition of being, the false security of the domicile crumbles away to reveal a history of suffering and unresolved trauma. The spectre is thus the motor of an unveiling which surfaces, both in the sense of “bringing to light” and spreading across the lived landscape, just like the snow which blankets Dublin and Ballycross. In the words of Gaston Bachelard,

[the] spirit, [or] shade ... may be heard on the outside without it being possible to be sure that it is inside ... Being is alternatively condensation that disperses with a burst,

or dispersion that flows back to a center. Outside and inside are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility.⁴⁶

I first turn to Joyce's "The Dead" in order to emphasise the different modes of coming to terms with the past which define the characters, and how the spectre not only opens up the home from within, but also demands an altered reckoning of time and of living with absence.

Modes of Temporality in "The Dead": The Question of Restitution and the Gift

Reading "The Dead" while paying attention to the relationship between spectrality and hospitality allows us to conceptualise its epiphanic moments as showcasing the haunting of the other within the self. The epiphanies demonstrate the ultimate inadequacy of Gabriel Conroy's attempts to inhabit the subject position of his wife Gretta. This in turn indicates a failure to "overmaster"⁴⁷ the asynchronous temporality that defines her mourning for the young man Michael Furey who died while longing for her. Furey's symbolic presence-in-absence, which is at one with the lingering atmospheric tone that closes the story, opens up a dimension of time which is ceaselessly given over to the future as surviving in the aftermath. In analysing the story in terms of the ghostly then, I aim to show how Joyce delineates a condition of subjectivity which preserves and conserves the spectre as the *condition* for living on; for me, this presents an alternative critical angle to an established trajectory of reading Gabriel's masculinity as being fractured and threatened from without. Marian Eide's feminist reading of the story focuses upon the interaction between Gabriel and Molly Ivors, the outspoken revivalist, in order to argue that his "own masculinity is portrayed both as a fiction and a negotiation, a series of failed approximations performed in response to continual threats to traditional constructions of his gender".⁴⁸ Gregory Castle's emphasis on the postcolonial

condition of subjectivity as it is paralysed by anxieties over the emergence of the Irish “nation” out of Anglo-metropolitanism results in him reading Gabriel as experiencing “the dissolution of his sense of solid identity” after confronting the “spectre of Michael Furey”.⁴⁹ I wish to suggest a different dynamic that emerges from this confrontation with the ghostly, one which does not just stop at the moment of dissolution that reifies Joyce’s oft-noted remark of paralysis, but also opens up questions of surviving in terms of bearing witness to the incommensurability of a past which cannot be restituted and reconstituted with respect to the present.

That this issue becomes central to the story is made evident through Joyce’s treatment of hospitality. Focusing the story around the (initially) clear demarcation between the warmth of the home and the cold sterility of the weather which lies outside the hearth sets up a tenuous boundary which puts the limits of hospitality under scrutiny. Gabriel’s long-awaited speech at the Christmas dinner party seizes upon the theme of hospitality for the purposes of commemorating the passage of time and marking the sense of the occasion, while also seeking to define an “Irish identity”. He therefore starts his speech by commenting upon “this hospitable roof” and “hospitable board”⁵⁰, thereby flattering his two aunties whilst celebrating a social mode of gentility that defines him and his relations. The notion of hospitality is broadened by Gabriel into an essentiality as he next comments on “the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality”.⁵¹ For Gabriel and the guests at Kate and Julia Morkan’s party, this hospitality is predicated upon the modality of the present and intimately associated with the homeliness of the domicile. More importantly, Gabriel’s speech in the context of the party functions as an attempt to humanise the impersonal passage of time, or to synchronise a lived sense of fullness with that which inexorably passes into oblivion. The event, as narrated and set in context through being commemorated and

remembered, crystallises a lingering within the present moment that brings together memory and history. The focus on synchronicity forms the theoretical basis for the philosopher Paul Ricoeur's investigations on narrative time. For Ricoeur, narrative functions as the great synthesiser between personal time and impersonal duration:

Nothing about any calendar day, taken by itself, says whether it is past, present or future ... To have a present ... someone must speak. The present is then indicated by the coincidence between an event and the discourse that states it. To rejoin lived time starting from chronological time, therefore, we have to pass through linguistic time, which refers to discourse ... [Narrative] cosmologizes lived time and humanizes cosmic time.⁵²

On one level, Joyce demonstrates the logic of the present moment as a phenomenology of commemoration, playing out in the story in terms of the repetition of the significance of the "annual"⁵³ party. Within the safety of the domicile (an objective correlative for the constitution of the subject), the memory of the dead can exert its affective power at a safe distance. This is emphasised in the later part of Gabriel's speech, where he brings up the past in order to recall "the memory of those dead and gone great ones whose fame the world will not willingly let die".⁵⁴ Gabriel's aestheticisation of the moment is indicated not only in this hazy generality, but also in the quoting from Milton. With respect to the larger divisions that structure the story, Gabriel's speech turns on tropes of inside/outside, present/past and life/death only to shore up a celebration of the current moment which "claim[s], and rightly claim[s], our strenuous efforts".⁵⁵ In sum, the focus of temporality in the mode of the present denies any efficacy of the ghostly – the dead can be easily and unambiguously consigned to the past.

However, Joyce undermines Gabriel's superficial understanding of hospitality by redefining it as a welcome of the other within the home of the self. In opposition to the time of the present which marks the Christmas party, the story opens up unreconciled vistas of absences which cannot be sublated within the economy of the domicile. Joyce hints subtly at this dimension at the start of the story, where Gabriel stands at the threshold of the house waiting to enter. Coming in from the outside, he carries with him "a light fringe of snow" which he dusts from his shoes, the image of the enveloping snow functioning as a preliminary correlative of the spectral presence-in-absence of the past which threatens to "escape from crevices and folds"⁵⁶ in order to disrupt and dislocate the characters' grasp of the present. A suitable shift in temporality is observed next in a little detail Joyce slips in: Gabriel observes that Lily the caretaker "has preceded him"; this barely noticeable phrase not only prompting the recollection of how Gabriel "had known her since she was a child"⁵⁷, but also foreshadowing his realisation of his belatedness in relation to Michael Furey. As a generalised condition of being which destabilises the urge towards unity that is reflected both in the conviviality of the party and in Gabriel's sexual desire for Gretta, the time of the past undermines masculine ideas of dominance and closure which form the basis of Gabriel's egotism and insensitivity. Joyce's story thus charts an inexorable passage towards separation and disavowal. The difference between Gabriel and Gretta is imbricated with the weather, emphasising how the latter is connected in some intimate way with (the) death (of the other): as Gabriel recounts "what a cold Gretta got out of"⁵⁸ last year's party, the reader senses the fragility of the body which is always exposed outwards, towards the limit-condition of language and subjectivity.

As Joyce develops it, this exposure cannot be recaptured and restored on the model of presentiality. In opposition to the inauthentic memorialisation of the past which structures not only the party but also Molly Ivors' insistence on the purity of a Gaelic past, Joyce foregrounds what I call a veritable "phenomenology of spectrality", centring the reader's attention towards the scene of what Derrida terms as "a mourning in fact and by right interminable, without possible normality, without reliable limit, in its reality and its concept".⁵⁹ In other words, mourning is always a mourning for the spectre which cannot be made present. As Gabriel stumbles upon Gretta in the privacy of her grief, Joyce's language stresses the inchoate pain which is (re)awakened by the sensorial force of music:

The song seemed to be in the old Irish tonality and the singer seemed uncertain both of his words and of his voice. The voice, made plaintive by distance and by the singer's hoarseness, faintly illuminated the cadence of the air with words expressing grief.⁶⁰

In this lyrical passage, Joyce crucially presents music as spectral, hovering between the presence of aurality and the absence of historical distance. More importantly, the song *The Lass of Aughrim* haunts Gretta from within, evoking a passion and a loss for which restitution cannot be made. Spectrality thus splits the difference between giving back and giving to. Joyce criticises Gabriel's reaction to Gretta's sorrow by depicting him as wanting to "be master of her strange mood"⁶¹, the language of domination signalling a futile attempt at *substituting* for a ghost which was never really there in the first place. Indeed, Gabriel's insensitive anecdote he tells Gretta about Freddie Malins giving "him back that sovereign"⁶² not only shows up Gabriel's superficial understanding of being "a very generous person"⁶³, but also points towards Joyce's critique of hospitality and generosity being structured around

a reconstituting of what has been lost based on the temporality of the present. It is therefore telling that Gretta emphasises that Michael Furey dies “for me”⁶⁴ – he gives his time and life as a gift for the other, without recompense and recovery. This an-economic and an-archic “essence” of the gift opens up time as an exposure towards alterity and manifests the spectre within the self. As Derrida elsewhere writes about the indelible link between time and the gift (or what is given), the time of the past is what gives the future a spectral possibility:

“To give time” in this sense ... means to give ... something other [than] that [which] is measured by time as its element. Beyond ... historical hardening or sedimentation, perhaps this idiomatic locution “to give time” gives one at least to think—to think the singular or double condition of the gift and time”.⁶⁵

Gabriel’s epiphany can be defined as an understanding of the condition of living on with the spectre. He understands this both in the context of not intruding upon the spectre of Gretta’s memory of Michael Furey, and in his distance from the “merry-making”⁶⁶ of the party which denies the inevitability of death. As R. Brandon Kershner notes, this stance is an ethical one insofar as it recognises “that his wife, like his country, has a history, one of which he was largely unaware until the moment it forced itself upon him”.⁶⁷ This understanding of the impact of trauma, in the subconscious fibre of the personal and the political, thus sets the conditions for existing as a survivor. Indeed, Gabriel learns from Gretta a quiet lesson about how to bear witness for the dead: as he reflects on how his aunt Julia “would soon be shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse”⁶⁸, he revises his earlier confidence (displayed during his speech) that “were we to brood upon [the dead] we could not find the heart to go on bravely with our work among the living”⁶⁹, for he “now needs to see himself as the surviving mourner”.⁷⁰ Joyce’s emphasis on the abiding with the spectre allows me to read

the falling of snow which closes the story differently from other Joycean critics, who have tended to stress a tenuous unity consonant with the image of a general blanketing: Michael Levinson argues that “an Ireland covered in snow ... has achieved a unity that its colonial status has long blocked”⁷¹, while Emer Nolan posits “a fading out of identity and meaning which threatens the living and the dead”⁷² and Vincent Cheng states the final image of the story “attempts to break down the barriers of difference”.⁷³ However, reading Joyce’s link between the snow and “the vast *hosts* of the dead”⁷⁴ (emphasis mine) in the context of the dynamics of hospitality makes it difficult to see the snow as bringing any sense of commensurate closure to the effects of spectrality that seem to dominate the tone of the story. Indeed, a reading of the phrase “hosts of the dead” yields the implication that the living have become ghostly onto themselves by being guests in the abode of the dead. Snow here represents the hollowing out of the spectral within the psychological and cultural landscape – the past must remain incommensurable with the present in order for the future to have any meaning. In turning to Banville’s novel, I am in agreement with Murphy that Banville carries on Joyce’s sense of “human epistemological failure”⁷⁵ presenting it not as a gap that can be filled, but as a spectral absence which prompts recovery only at the price of a deferral. Perhaps the ethical and political task in both writers is not really “the experience and expression of sympathy within the preservation of difference”⁷⁶ but the solicitation of a form of justice which speaks the language of the ghostly.

Banville and the Possibility of Justice: Conjuring the Past as Ghostly Speech in *Snow*

Speaking with Hand in 2006, Banville muses that for him, “puzzlement, bafflement ... is my strongest artistic sensation”.⁷⁷ This bafflement not only evinces in the mysterious groping after enlightenment which many of his characters feel, but also implies a particular attitude of

wonderment towards ontological being. This sentiment is echoed in a 2015 interview, in which Banville refers to an essay he wrote for the magazine *Science*, where “Leibnitz’s thrilling question “Why is there something rather than nothing””⁷⁸ is folded in with an essential self-consciousness about the world that defines our humanity. Having argued earlier that Banville displays a phenomenological stance towards reality, I wish to explore how *Snow* performs a dislocation similar to Joyce’s story. This rendering is, like in “The Dead”, presented through the spectral effects of the past with respect to the present. Banville simultaneously employs and deconstructs the narrative tropes of the detective story not only to fracture the sense of a homogeneous time, but also to suggest the traces of the ghostly that hopelessly defer any epistemological closure. In Banville’s mournful evocation of the Irish landscape torn apart by religious division and strife, the question of possible restitution for the dead becomes all the more pressing. I want to argue that contrary to Rüdiger Imhof’s suggestion that for Banville, “one cannot put politics, or at least politicking, into a novel without contaminating it”⁷⁹, Banville’s novel is consciously haunted by the possibility of rendering justice to past victims of violence and betrayal. In the terms of the argument I have been following so far, to be a survivor is to bear witness to the ghostly within the landscape and the world, and in so doing, opens up a futural dimension as gift to the other.

That Banville wears his intertextual relationship to *Dubliners* and “The Dead” on his sleeve is more than evident. Apart from being set at Christmas just like the Joycean story and having snow play an important geographical and metaphysical role, Banville has his erudite protagonist St John Strafford quote from Joyce quite literally when he communicates with his obtuse superior:

‘Yes, Chief. Snow is general over Ireland.’

‘Is it?’

‘It’s a quotation – never mind.’⁸⁰

Elsewhere, Banville echoes the opening sentence of Joyce’s “The Sisters” in the context of Strafford’s self-loathing appraisal of himself: “He was a hopeless case”.⁸¹ This intertextuality is magnified thematically, for like “The Sisters”, Banville’s novel centers around the death of a priest. Indeed, the echoes do not stop at Joyce, for Strafford’s own unique first name obviously recalls the character St. John Rivers from *Jane Eyre* (1847). Brontë’s novel also haunts Banville’s treatment of the shadowy history of the Osbornes, in whose house the priest Tom Lawless was killed, for the patriarch’s first wife exerts a subdued influence on the psychodynamics of the household not unlike Bertha Mason. Insofar as Banville employs the conventions of the Gothic novel and its focus on haunted rooms and houses while infusing this with nods to the tradition of Irish Big House fiction, we could argue that *Snow* occupies a liminal space between the aesthetic closure of nineteenth century writing and the openness of contemporary form. Thinking of Banville’s last novel before *Snow*, a studied continuation of Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and his foray into a more detached, less obsessive third person narrative voice, I argue that Banville self-consciously acknowledges his own ghostly debt to fictional “realism” which probes the relationship between artistic language and its construction of a world. As Banville states, “most Irish writing is within a nineteenth-century tradition where the world is regarded as given”.⁸² Disavowing Banville’s relationship to his Anglo-Irish precursors does not allow us to see how the question of his modernist aesthetics involves a reckoning and involvement with the past.

However, Banville is also determined to implode realism by demonstrating how a “spectral remainder” structures epistemology and ontology around a gap that cannot be restored. The detective figure not only incarnates the temporality of the narrative by providing the story with momentum, but also stands in for the reader’s desire-to-know, the basic hermeneutic impulse that opens up narrative in the first place. Banville’s deconstructive emphasis is thus predicated on the structure of an epistemic gap that the reader and character expect will be filled by the end of the narrative – who committed the crime and the motive behind it. This desire for totality is presented by Banville as Strafford’s *modus operandi*: as he reflects upon his methods, he muses that “the notion of being at once a part of the action and above it appealed to him”⁸³, the omniscient perspective being indicative of a final congruence between knowledge and reality. This attitude of Strafford’s is further emphasised later on when he reflects about the nature of criminal secrecy as such:

Everything had to him the aspect of a cipher. Life was a mundane mystery, the clues to the solving of which were strewn all about, concealed or, far more fascinatingly, hidden in plain view, for all to see but for him alone to recognise.⁸⁴

This presentation of cipher thereby assumes an epistemological hiddenness which can be restored on the basis of a full and transparent presence. What Strafford and the reader come to realise is that the effects of spectrality arrive to deconstruct this will towards closure and a full correspondence between the past (of the crime) and the present. Strafford slowly comes to understand that his belated attempts at restitution for the death of Tom Lawless prove to be futile in a broader sense, for acts of transgression and retaliation seem to be buried deep within the landscape. In other words, the establishment of justice as retributive proves an inadequate response to victims of cultural and historical trauma and pain. Strafford senses the

ancestral violence and loss which both exceed any singular act of reparation and dislocate an assured sense of origin and finality:

This was the life, and these its circumstances, that Strafford was thoroughly familiar with, and yet he felt estranged, an interloper in a foreign world of violence and malefactors, of stab wounds and blood.⁸⁵

The spectre therefore keeps its secrecy, a “vast and frozen silence”⁸⁶ which cannot be *anything* that can be revealed, but which is a condition of being deeply conditioning the Irish landscape. As the novel progresses, Banville illustrates such a history of repression and suffering. Tom Lawless has sexually violated multiple vulnerable children put under his charge, including the son of Colonel Osborne and the child of the local police superintendent. His thoughts and feelings are detailed in a section called “Interlude” which takes place ten years before the events of the main narrative. Told from the perspective of Lawless, it forces the reader to an ethical limit by inhabiting the mind of a sexual predator whose abuse of power destroys the innocence of the community. The silence and secrecy that result spread spectral effects which cannot be localised and contained. Banville thereby uses the image of snow to represent this spreading, culminating in a haunting blanketing all over Ballygrass: “It might go on falling for ever, steadily, silently, muffling all sound, all movement”.⁸⁷ The ultimate inability to completely ascertain who killed Lawless is an appropriate (non)conclusion to a narrative in which the burden of guilt is essentially unlocatable and unlocalisable – Lawless himself is a product of his violent familial past, and the priest’s killing is possibly a shadowy repetition of the death of Osborne’s first wife. Indeed, Lawless’ violent castration points towards the radically absent centre of desire, the phallogentric loss of which distributes its spectral effects throughout the entire text.

It is then in reckoning with the dead that hauntology opens the possibility for justice. Banville demonstrates how this utopic impulse comes to pass through Strafford becoming ghostly onto himself. As Strafford listens to the crackles on the intercom which crucially depend on a delay or “lapse” between speaker and receiver, the presence of the ghostly intrudes as such: “It fascinated him, this eerie, cacophonous music, and gave him a shiver, too. It was as if the hosts of the dead were singing to him out of the ether”.⁸⁸ This temporal dislocation maps nicely onto Fisher’s analogy between the aural quality of crackling and hauntology: “Crackle makes us aware that we are listening to a time which is out of joint; it won’t allow us to fall into the illusion of presence”.⁸⁹ As with *The Lass of Aughrim* in “The Dead”, listening exposes the core of subjectivity to a spectral otherness which fails to be assimilated, but which solicits a witnessing of its own mode of temporality. As Strafford’s own difficult past gets intertwined with the history of Ballyglass House where the murder occurs, an indelible haunting within the self takes place wherein the image of a lost future imprints itself upon the mind and landscape. Strafford thereby feels that “he seemed to himself the ghost of what he might have been”⁹⁰, with Banville’s use of the past participle highlighting the ghostly possibilities of the future coming back from the past. Later on, as Strafford visits the barracks, he imagines the spectres of “a successful solicitor”⁹¹ and his family who could have resided in the town house the barracks replace, his own regrets about not being a lawyer at his father’s behest bleeding into the affective contours of the place.

This sense of lost possibility provides the crucial paradigm shift in Strafford’s conception of himself as detective. In contrast to the efforts of the Archbishop to bury the details of Lawless’ death, Strafford chooses to bear witness for the other. As he wonders, “he had long lost faith in the notion of justice, but might he not make kind of a reckoning?”.⁹²

Insofar as the word “reckon” implies the concept of justice as accountability, it also opens up the notion of accounting, or giving witness, for the other. In this way, the just calculation of reward and punishment cannot be separated from the incalculable singularity of the spectre. In this way, to live on and to survive is precisely the chance for justice, in that it opens a future of reckoning. As Derrida writes,

There is a beyond [of] the economy of repression whose law impels it to *exceed itself, of itself* in the course of a history ... Not for calculable equality, therefore, not for the symmetrizing and synchronic accountability or imputability of subjects or objects, not for a *rendering justice* that would be limited to sanctioning, to restituting, and to *doing right*, but for justice as incalculability of the gift and singularity of the an-economic ex-position to others.⁹³

Banville therefore shows up the inadequacy of the image of “rough justice”⁹⁴ wherein retaliation and retribution function as failed attempts to restore what has originally been lost, and the pressing need to give voice to that which refuses mastery and can only be brought, or conjured, “on the brink of being”.⁹⁵ Powell’s observation that “Banville’s narrators choose to ‘go on’, as the abysses of meaning and silence are unfathomable [and need] to be vanquished on the surface of the page and filled with the narrating voice”⁹⁶ needs to be deconstructed with respect to the pertinence of hauntology – these silences “fill” the narrating voice by absenting themselves. It is ultimately the spectral other within the self which survives and “goes on” as voice and text.

Conclusion: The Ethical Image of the World in Joyce and Banville

In his book chapter on Joyce and Banville, Brown brings up an interesting claim that Banville insists upon “the moral demands of the given”.⁹⁷ This statement sounds an ethical note tying together the paradoxical demands of being responsible for what we cannot control, and an aesthetic imperative to imagine what the “given” would be like. This essay has analysed the pertinence of the given in terms of a spectral inheritance of history and the image of futurity that must be realised as ghostly possibility. To put it in phenomenological terms, what is at stake in Joyce and Banville is finally how to live in a world preceded by others. If Banville takes as his inspiration the wonder of “who we are, and what we are, and how we are in the world, and what it is to be in the world”⁹⁸, then this image of the world puts us not at the centre of it, but in relation to asynchronous alterities. For both writers, to live on is intimately linked to the ability to write after, in that language turns on the issue of how to speak for, by speaking *in the place of* that which has no place to begin with. To argue for Joyce’s influence on Banville is not to argue for a simple derivativeness that structures futile questions about loss and gain; is it to seek ghostly afterimages in both texts which reactivate open textual gaps that give reading and criticism their chances. In short, to give an image of the world in writing is to give the future textual significance – to be given over to the time of the spectre. To end with one more suggestive comment from Banville on Joyce, he describes the latter in a 2012 article as a “lost leader”, one who *could have* brought the nineteenth-century novel to its apogee but failed to do so. Despite Banville’s much-noted dissatisfaction with Joycean experimentation, it would not be a critical stretch to consider Banville as an inheritor who reads Joyce as he *might have been* read.

NOTES

- ¹ Banville, *Snow*, 24.
- ² Friberg, 200.
- ³ Powell, 202.
- ⁴ Banville, “Survivors of Joyce”, 74.
- ⁵ Banville, “James Joyce’s Dublin”, 88.
- ⁶ Kenny, *John Banville*, 88.
- ⁷ D’hoker, 73.
- ⁸ Murphy, “Poetics of ‘Pure Invention’”, 111
- ⁹ Kenny, “Well Said Well Seen”, 59.
- ¹⁰ Hand, “John Banville”, 20.
- ¹¹ McNamee, 14.
- ¹² Springer, 4.
- ¹³ Wrethed, 190.
- ¹⁴ Banville, *Ghosts*, 83.
- ¹⁵ Banville, *Eclipse*, 55.
- ¹⁶ Kenny, *John Banville*, 21.
- ¹⁷ Boxall, 44.
- ¹⁸ Smyth, 177.
- ¹⁹ Haughton and Radley, 861.
- ²⁰ Norris, 108.
- ²¹ Brown, 164.
- ²² Wondrich, 204.
- ²³ McMinn, 5.
- ²⁴ Hand, *John Banville*, 5.
- ²⁵ Kearney, 9.
- ²⁶ Derrida, *Specters*, 5.
- ²⁷ Schultz, 281.
- ²⁸ Schultz, 285.
- ²⁹ Schultz, 282.
- ³⁰ Schultz, 288.
- ³¹ Schultz, 291.
- ³² Renggli, 55.
- ³³ Slote, 72.
- ³⁴ Derrida, *Specters*, 3.

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- ³⁵ Van Boheemen, 177.
³⁶ Derrida, *Specters*, 48.
³⁷ Derrida, *Specters*, 45.
³⁸ Peach, 48.
³⁹ Peach, 63.
⁴⁰ Hand, *John Banville*, 39.
⁴¹ Fisher, 18.
⁴² Fisher, 19.
⁴³ Fisher, 21.
⁴⁴ Houghton and Radley, 866.
⁴⁵ Derrida, *Specters*, 181.
⁴⁶ Bachelard, 233.
⁴⁷ Joyce, 218.
⁴⁸ Eide, “Gender”, 79-80.
⁴⁹ Castle, 103.
⁵⁰ Joyce, 203.
⁵¹ Joyce, 204.
⁵² Ricoeur, 108-9.
⁵³ Joyce, 175.
⁵⁴ Joyce, 204.
⁵⁵ Joyce, 205.
⁵⁶ Joyce, 177.
⁵⁷ Joyce, 177.
⁵⁸ Joyce, 180.
⁵⁹ Derrida, *Specters*, 121.
⁶⁰ Joyce, 211.
⁶¹ Joyce, 218.
⁶² Joyce, 218.
⁶³ Joyce, 219.
⁶⁴ Joyce, 221.
⁶⁵ Derrida, “Given Time”, 265.
⁶⁶ Joyce, 224.
⁶⁷ Kershner, 173.
⁶⁸ Joyce, 224.
⁶⁹ Joyce, 225.
⁷⁰ Benstock, 165.
⁷¹ Winston, 124.
⁷² Nolan, 35.
⁷³ Cheng, 146.
⁷⁴ Joyce, 224.
⁷⁵ Murphy, “James Joyce’s *Dubliners*”, 180.
⁷⁶ Eide, *Ethical Joyce*, 4.
⁷⁷ Friberg, 206.
⁷⁸ Piñeiro, 59.
⁷⁹ Imhof, 17.
⁸⁰ Banville, *Snow*, 213.
⁸¹ Banville, *Snow*, 226.
⁸² Imhof, 16.
⁸³ Banville, *Snow*, 27.
⁸⁴ Banville, *Snow*, 86.

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- ⁸⁵ Banville, *Snow*, 190.
⁸⁶ Banville, *Snow*, 112.
⁸⁷ Banville, *Snow*, 254.
⁸⁸ Banville, *Snow*, 42.
⁸⁹ Fisher, 21.
⁹⁰ Banville, *Snow*, 190.
⁹¹ Banville, *Snow*, 232.
⁹² Banville, *Snow*, 197.
⁹³ Derrida, *Specters*, 26.
⁹⁴ Banville, *Snow*, 273.
⁹⁵ Banville, *Snow*, 87.
⁹⁶ Powell, 211.
⁹⁷ Brown, 171.
⁹⁸ Haughton and Radley, 865.

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