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## “Christmas Yet To Come”: Hospitality, Futurity, the *Carol*, and “The Dead”

*Art's Utopia, the counterfactual yet-to-come, is draped in black. It goes on being a recollection of the possible with a critical edge against the real; it is a kind of imaginary restitution of that catastrophe which is world history; it is freedom which did not come to pass under the spell of necessity and which may well not come to pass ever at all.*

—Theodor Adorno<sup>1</sup>

*We look and peer into the innards of the human animal, and, after all, confess that we see nothing there. Only our supermen know how to write the history of the future.*

—James Joyce<sup>2</sup>

WHEN CHARLES DICKENS'S *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* and James Joyce's "The Dead" are mentioned together, it tends to be on regional theater websites or on lists of "great holiday tales" rather than in any more sustained context of affiliation. This essay posits a deeper kinship between these beloved stories: they are both, I suggest, serious meditations on the ethics of hospitality. Unlike the *Carol*, Joyce's story dwells on hospitality as a legal and political category as well, but it does so largely by inviting the *Carol*'s face-to-face ethics of hospitality into the political space of occupied Dublin. That colonial setting hosts an encounter among three forms of hospitality: the social codes of invitation and limited welcome; the ethics of limitless welcome to the absolute stranger; and the call within cosmopolitan political philosophy for a universal right of hospitality. "The Dead" thinks about how these hospitalities inform, delimit, and critique one another and asks whether they can still be thought in a political context of forcible occupation. Reprising the *Carol*'s interest in futurity, it considers, too, what is at

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ABSTRACT This essay reads Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and James Joyce's "The Dead" in light of their shared concerns with hospitality. By portraying Scrooge's ethical regeneration as both guest and host, the *Carol* renews the openness of a future in which one can still intervene for the good in others' lives. Partly through its echoes of Dickens's story, "The Dead" critically engages the ethics of limitless welcome in the context of colonial occupation; that engagement produces an ethical relation to a future political form the story both demands and awaits but declines to portray. / REPRESENTATIONS 98. Spring 2007 © 2007 The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 93-117. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo/asp>. DOI:10.1525/rep.2007.98.93.

stake in representing—or in refusing to represent—the future political form of a present colony. By the lights of such a reading, the *Carol* and “The Dead” are in fact antidotes to the holiday chestnut, a genre of foregone conclusions and sealed interiors. But we will not want to sever them entirely from the season with which they are so strongly identified. Insofar as it waits for a radical discontinuity in history—for a chance to welcome what has never yet been welcomed—the expectant temporality of Christmas remains central to these stories’ critical energies.

One reason for the *Carol*’s rich legacy—its seemingly limitless capacity to be republished, adapted, updated, parodied, and even negated—is its signal openness, its performance of a kind of radical hospitality as text to future guests. It announces its concern with the future, with ghosts, and with thresholds in its full title, *A Christmas Carol in Prose, Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*, and in the preface’s expansion on the title. Dickens writes:

I HAVE endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their house pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it. [Signed] Their faithful Friend and Servant, C. D.<sup>3</sup>

The strange fantasy of the preface is of a haunting that does not haunt—of a ghost who is more guest than *gast*. Dickens hopes to exert an influence that is exorcism-proof, one that will not put the hosts “out of humour with themselves”; this is to be a foreign thing that will only consolidate the domicile it enters, not set that home against itself. Yet it *will* walk through our walls. The preface asks its readers—and, by extension, its future adaptors, performers, and parodists—what kind of welcome they will offer the *Carol*, framing the act of reading as an act of hospitality. But this request for permission to enter and haunt is also posted at the threshold of the *Carol*, a tale obsessed with thresholds, be they doors or doornails or doorknockers or doorsteps, invitations or arrivals or entrances or visitations. If the *Carol* is a friendly ghost, it also claims to be friendly to guests, setting itself up as a textual house whose walls, no less than its doors, were made for walking through. This hospitality, I would add, is not incidental to the text but one of the gestures it most hopes to extend.<sup>4</sup>

I don’t mean simply that the *Carol* teems with warm interiors, well-stocked feast-tables, and inventories of bounty; in themselves, these offer no challenge to the reciprocal logic of relations among kin and social peers. If we take seriously the problem of hospitality that I have claimed is legible at the text’s various thresholds, we find Dickens’s tale has more to offer than celebrations of conventional, decorous welcome. Here I turn to Jacques Derrida, for whom hospitality is a “problem” not only because it is difficult to define or enact but also because there are two regimes of hospitality,

regimes we might describe as mutually constitutive in their opposition. In Derrida's formulation, "They both imply and exclude each other, simultaneously."<sup>5</sup> One is conditional, the other unconditional; one (the "laws" of hospitality, "hospitality by right") is a matter of codified obligations, the other (the "Law" of hospitality, "just hospitality") overwhelms those codes and duties; the first is extended to a guest, stranger, or foreigner possessed of a social status, the second to a figure who lacks that status: the figure of the absolute other.

If absolute hospitality—the kind extended, for instance, by Lot to his angelic guests, or by the Phaiakians to the unnamed Odysseus, or by Theseus to the outlaw Oedipus—if such absolute hospitality intrinsically breaks with hospitality by right or pact, it nonetheless requires that right or pact as the thing in contrast to which it is hyperbolic, as the condition in relation to which it is unconditional. And the requirement that absolute hospitality break with the *laws* of hospitality might be a second-order law of hospitality: a place where the pact recovers itself through its seeming negation. Conversely, as Derrida puts it, "conditional laws would cease to be laws of hospitality if they were not guided, given inspiration, given aspiration, even, by the law of unconditional hospitality." Thus he accounts the two regimes of hospitality as "indissociable," as "so close" in their separateness that they are able to "pervert or corrupt" one another.<sup>6</sup>

Yet their proximity should not obscure the key difference between these two regimes: namely, that absolute hospitality forgoes or even abjures the logic of reciprocity, exchange, and rights on which conditional hospitality is premised. And because the uninvited guest is admitted through a break in the logic of reciprocity, he or she may transfigure the host. Derrida's point, which the *Carol* anticipates, does nothing less than reverse the polarity of invitation: *the master* enters his own home "from the inside *as if* he came from the outside. He enters his home thanks to the visitor, by grace of the visitor."<sup>7</sup> This reversal describes something more than the way a houseguest reacquaints us with our belongings by occasioning our power to bestow them; it gets at the guest's power to hold not only the home but the host's *subjectivity* hostage. This hostage taking, moreover, is never undone; the host's subjectivity is partly based in the capacity to welcome the absolute other, to give place to the uninvited guest. And if we think of the rest of the Lot story, we are reminded that radical hospitality can invite ends other than a renewed appreciation of our household linens. Unlike the pleasant haunting of Dickens's preface, a visitation that says to the host, "Don't put yourself out for me," radical hospitality carries with it the possibility that the host may become homeless, or truly haunted, or utterly transformed. If I do not know who my guest may turn out to be, I no more know who I may turn out to be.

Dickens's story describes a host's transformation by a succession of uninvited guests, and yet Scrooge seems the least likely character to welcome either a stranger or an unknown future. He is, after all, the man who ascends to his rooms after seeing Marley's face on the doorknocker and, having checked everywhere for intruders, "closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom" in order to feel "secured against surprise" (56). But if some achieve hospitality on their own, others have it thrust upon 'em. This would be the chief difference between a *visit* and a *visitation*: you can opt not to receive visitors, but you cannot decline a visitation. "You *will be* haunted," Marley's Ghost tells him in a simple future tense that overwrites the merely future-conditional haunting Dickens imagines in his preface (63; emphasis added). When Scrooge attempts to decline the visitations, the Ghost responds, "Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one" (63). The simple future tense, the clarity about where Scrooge's present path will lead, the exact hour of the visitation—all of these speak to a predetermined future. Yet even here the foreclosure of the immediate future takes place in the name of opening an alternative path in the longer-term future, as the word "hope" signals to us: "Without their visits, you cannot *hope* to shun the path I tread." Having been forcibly haunted, the Ghost implies, Scrooge might hope differently, might hope to be different, a stranger to his present self. This movement from foreclosure to reopening, from coercion to volition, from doom to hope is the *Carol's* core rhythm, what we might imagine as its systole and diastole. We are *made* to receive visitations in the hope that we will later *elect* to receive the absolute other as visitor. We *will be* haunted in the hopes that we *may be* haunted.

I have been describing Scrooge as a reluctant host who becomes a willing one by witnessing both the hospitality of others and the consequences of failures of hospitality, often his own failures. But here we do well to remember that the *Carol* begins and all but ends with Scrooge as *guest*: first, refusing his nephew's invitation to dine with him and then accepting that invitation after all, asking "Will you let me in, Fred?" (132). Although he technically plays host to the Spirits, he is more like the guest of honor at their visitations, the person for whose benefit they conjure vision after vision. As if to insist on Scrooge's status and education as guest, the Ghost of Christmas Present actually invites Scrooge—"Come in! Come in! and know me better, man!" (87)—into the latter's own room, which has been transformed into a cornucopia. It's a scene in which Scrooge, to use Derrida's language, enters his own home thanks to the visitor and is emancipated by virtue of being, paradoxically, his guest's hostage. Guest and host are fully entangled in the *Carol*, Scrooge's strange and growing hospitality to the

Ghosts being a thing compounded of acts of guesthood, the Spirits' visitations comprising in their turn invitation, provision, safe conduct. We could even hazard that one of the *Carol's* projects is to perform a hauntological reading of the guest-host dyad, a reading that enormously destabilizes the putative power of the host over the guest.<sup>8</sup>

In speaking of guest and host as enmeshed, however, we risk implying that they are interchangeable and that, by extension, the other and the same are equivalent: that the other is just another myself. The notion of a radical hospitality, as we have seen, is founded on the opposite premise: that the other is irreducibly other and that my hospitality to that other cannot, by its very nature, be a matter of perfect equivalence, reciprocity, or interchangeability. As Emmanuel Levinas puts it, "The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery."<sup>9</sup> Far from equating host and guest, same and other, *A Christmas Carol* testifies to the difference of the other even as it insists that "mankind was my business" (62), in other words, that social life—what Marley's Ghost calls "the requirement that the spirit within us should walk abroad among our fellows, and travel far and wide" (60–61)—is none other than the encounter with radical alterity. And, as Richard Cohen notes about the work of Levinas, this encounter with radical otherness is what sociality has in common with death. The strange are like the dead to us: off the map of kinship, sharing the same ontological status as alien, unmarked, unprovided for.<sup>10</sup> Scrooge, who is privileged to witness one possible aftermath of his own life while still living, receives at the hands of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come an object lesson in the strangeness of the dead and the deadness of the stranger: the "unhappy" (117) dead man finally identified as the future remains of his present self is unattended in death, unaccompanied to the grave, unmourned, unnamed except by his tombstone, a feast for rats and worms rather than a reveler at life's feast. These are the attributes not just of someone who has ceased to be a subject but of someone who was never a subject to begin with; if he is a *thing* in death he was only ever a *thing* in life, an object, a corpse; he was never *recognized*. Thus Scrooge's scouring the future in vain for some glimpse of a still-living self signifies multiply. The narrator tells us "The Ghost conducted him through several streets familiar to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but *nowhere was he to be seen*" (120; emphasis added). Scrooge's absence from his familiar streets in the future helps transmit to the reader the open secret of his death, but it also tropes his invisibility, and the Spirit's, as disembodied visitors to a world with which they are barred from

interacting. And most chillingly, Scrooge's being nowhere visible in the future speaks the truth of his *present* status as a devil, a scourge, "Old Scratch," the Cratchit family Ogre, the butt of jokes and object of curses—that is, as a resident alien among human subjects. Despite being haunted and conducted by ghosts, he finds, in what may be the quintessential Dickensian recognition, *that he himself is the ghost*.

Yet the other half of that recognition—think, for instance, of Esther Summerson's realizing that *she* is the dreaded specter of the Ghost's Walk in *Bleak House*—is that others have, in fact, attempted to see us in our invisibility, extending the very sort of welcome we have become spectral by failing to offer. This is the sort of invitation made to Scrooge by his nephew, who professes, "I want nothing of you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?" (49) and, indirectly, by Bob Cratchit who toasts his employer un-facetiously as Founder of the Feast. The work of these invitations, however, is not to activate an economic desire for strict reciprocity in Scrooge. (This is one reason the *Carol* is not about "redemption"—from *redimere*, "to buy back.") Although his Christmas morning discovery that "the Time before him was his own, to make amends in" (127) suggests that his debts are repayable, the excesses of Stave Five—the hyperbole, the giddy exclamations, the claim that "Scrooge was better than his word," that "he did it all, and infinitely more" (133)—suggest otherwise. Yes, these surpluses are set within the matrix of exchange: his purchase of the outsized turkey; his lavish recompense of the boy who procures it; his charity subscription, which includes "a great many back-payments" (131); the raise he gives Cratchit. But even as these surpluses are propped on the trellis of exchange, they overgrow it: radical hospitality can overbear the logic of reciprocity even if it cannot be totally detached from it.

Here the *Carol* constellates *futurity* with *death* and *social relations* as having in common an encounter with radical otherness and with radical temporality. Scrooge's discovery that the alternative paths and selves of the possible future cast ghostly shadows in the present—and that "the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled"—is knit up with his emergent power to receive others in their strangeness (127). Like the other, and like death, the future is absolutely unknowable. But the relationship between the other and the future goes beyond a static likeness in the *Carol*, beyond even the sense that the future will be the unforeseeable backdrop to the limitless surprises borne by the other. The alterities of the future, of the other, and of death are fully intertwined in Dickens's tale insofar as they are restored to Scrooge together, his reception of the other in the shadow of death being what opens him to alternative futures—futures that diverge from the one his life has seemed to prepare. As if from the vantage of these newly unoccluded futures, he begins to view the present in a retrospective conditional mood:

this Christmas might have been another in a series of holidays on which he did not visit Fred, or it might turn out to have been the first on which he did.

This opening toward the other that is an opening of the future happens, in part, through the play of faces and gazes. Although Scrooge hates to meet the gaze of Marley's Ghost and of the first two Spirits, the shrouded and invisible eyes of the last Spirit "thrill him with a vague uncertain horror" (110). That Spirit's concealment is repeated later in Stave Four, in the shrouded face of that "something covered up" (118)—the corpse whose face Scrooge cannot bear to look on.

The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge's part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side. . . .

Still the Ghost pointed with an unmoved finger to the head.

"I understand you," Scrooge returned, "and I would do it, if I could. But I have not the power, Spirit. I have not the power." (118–19)

Rather than regard Scrooge as frightened into good behavior by this close encounter with his own corpse, I would suggest that this moment—and above all Scrooge's moving admission that "I would do it, if I could. But I have not the power, Spirit. I have not the power"—is the very moment of ethical regeneration, and that it proceeds not from a failure of nerve peculiar to Scrooge but instead from his recognition that he is, as a subject, "in relation with what does not come from [him]self" (the phrase is Levinas's).<sup>11</sup> One name for this thing utterly exterior to the self is death; a second name is the future, whose exteriority lies partly in its containing our death; and a third name is the other, who exceeds the *idea* of the other *in* us. To strip away the veil would have been to assert that the will and the self have no limits; it would have violated the strangeness and openness of the future, whose fundamental trait is that it will contain a moment we cannot witness, the moment after our death. And stripping away the veil would, a little less obviously, have meant a failure to acknowledge the precariousness of the *other's* life. This last we can see more clearly in the positive case: by leaving the veil in place, Scrooge specifically does *not* enter a prayer that the dead man be anyone but himself. To the contrary, he acknowledges that the other's death is not less unbearable than his own, that the other's life is no less precarious, and that an unmourned corpse, whether his or another's, is a thing, a "something covered up," that was never, tragically, a subject visible to others in its precariousness. Leaving the veil in place says the following: Let me not pretend to domesticate my death; Let the future remain both unforeclosed and undisclosed, its face hidden; Let me recognize others, for all that they may be untranslatably alien, and for all that I



may owe them a responsibility without limit, as “fellow-passengers to the grave” (49).

The massive and conspicuous foreclosures of Dickens’s tale generate an equally massive sense of relief, of ethical potential, and of elevated responsibility when those foreclosures are revealed to have been *only* representations—that is, when the future is reopened with Scrooge’s realizing “the Time before him was his own, to make amends in” (127).<sup>12</sup> A moment in the afterlife of *A Christmas Carol* illustrates this even more vividly than does the text itself. In December 1983, *The Day After*, a made-for-TV movie about nuclear war and its aftermath, first aired. Once the film had ended, Ted Koppel opened a discussion of it by asking viewers to look out their windows. “It’s all still there,” he said. “Your neighborhood is still there; so is Kansas City and Lawrence . . . What we’ve all just seen is a sort of nuclear version of Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*.”<sup>13</sup> Koppel’s remark makes clear without stating it outright that both narratives take us virtually downstream of an ethical decision and, having shown us its consequence, return us upstream of the same decision. This round trip exhorts us to depart from the seemingly pre-cut channel of our lives, insisting that the decision, its high stakes restored to us, still remains to be made. This persistence of the decision gets contrasted explicitly within the *Carol* to the disjunction between seeing and being able to intervene, a disjunction we could say pervades the society of the spectacle and the space of reading alike. Just after Marley’s Ghost has left him, Scrooge looks out his window and sees a universe of phantoms, moaning in their chains. The narrator tells us

Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever. (65)

Damnation for this old ghost is wanting to receive the uninvited guest but having lost the power. It is epistemology without ethics—knowledge without the capacity to look the other in the face and to have one’s gaze returned. It is the literature of omniscience and clairvoyance and disembodiment, unmoored to any moment of reembodiment and decision. Although the *Carol* shows us many visions in which neither Scrooge nor the Spirits nor we can participate, it does so in order to revive the high ethical stakes of the decisions that do remain to us. Its insistence that “it’s all still there” aims not to console or narcotize us but rather to reawaken us to the ramifications of our *timeliness*—of our *not* being too late. The *Carol*, then, is ethically performative

in addition to being narratively constative; as such, its effects overflow any propositional content it could be said to harbor. The “it” that is “all still there” has a local referent for each of its readers; this is a deixis of ethical responsibility. That we are able to read at all means that it is not too late. But *only to read* that it is not too late is to reject the *Carol*’s embassy, which urges nothing less than our interference. If *A Christmas Carol* successfully bids us “interfere, for good, in human matters,” it does so by dint of having interfered with us. Judith Butler could be addressing Scrooge when she describes the course of a morally binding appeal: “It comes to me from elsewhere, unbidden, unexpected, and unplanned. In fact, it tends to *ruin* my plans, and if my plans are ruined, that may well be the sign that something is morally binding upon me.”<sup>14</sup> The *Carol* stages the ruination of Scrooge’s plans by ethical appeals that come to him from elsewhere; it also attempts, in the course of this staging, to ruin the plans of its reader.

Joyce’s “The Dead,” written in 1907, also belongs to the genre of plan-ruining literature, and it takes important cues from *A Christmas Carol*. Its most obvious resemblance is the note of Fezziwiggery in the lengthy holiday party scene, with its enumerations of arriving guests, its long inventories of food and drink, its dance scenes and well-lit interiors, and its apparent conviviality. Writing to his brother about the story, Joyce observed that the earlier *Dubliners* stories had omitted a few crucial elements of Dublin society, ones he hoped to feature in “The Dead.” He wrote, “I have not reproduced its ingenuous insularity and its hospitality. The latter ‘virtue’ so far as I can see does not exist elsewhere in Europe.”<sup>15</sup> The theme of hospitality, unnamed if pervasive in the *Carol*, gets taken up explicitly in “The Dead” as the topic of protagonist Gabriel Conroy’s after-dinner toast to his three kinswomen and hostesses, whom he salutes as the Three Graces of the Dublin musical world and as incarnating “qualities of humanity, of hospitality, of kindly humor which belonged to an older day.” Where Scrooge sought to make amends in “the Time before him,” “The Dead” itself is the amends Joyce made for his earlier failure to praise his birth-city in his fiction.

But if “The Dead” makes restitution, it is of a deeply ambivalent sort. Because we are privy to Gabriel’s thoughts before his toast, we know he worries that his references to Robert Browning will be “above the heads of his listeners.”<sup>16</sup> We learn that, in his mind, “their grade of culture differed from his” (179) and that he thinks his aunts are “only two ignorant old women” (192). He fears his speech will fail grotesquely and brand him a snob. Although he celebrates what he calls “the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality” (203), he does not exemplify or practice it, understanding it only as a rhetorical hook in a speech the story exposes as self-aggrandizing. Meanwhile the party itself, ostensibly a perfect specimen of

“courteous Irish hospitality,” reveals its different circles of inclusion, its pariahs, parasites, and bores. And Gabriel’s admission during his speech that Irish hospitality “is rather a failing than anything to be boasted of” (203) asks, in a manner that anticipates E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, how invitation, welcome, and hospitality might signify in the context of colonialism.<sup>17</sup> If “The Dead” is Joyce’s celebration of Irish hospitality and a gift of contrition to the city he had excoriated in the rest of *Dubliners*, it seems a very Greek gift.

However, while “The Dead” exhibits a suspicion of hospitality in its populous social spaces and in Gabriel Conroy’s toast, a series of face-to-face encounters between Gabriel and three other individuals—Lily the caretaker’s daughter, Molly Ivors, and finally his own wife Gretta—reopens the possibility of a radical welcome.<sup>18</sup> These three encounters are the story’s most obvious structural nod to *A Christmas Carol*, but they are also the site of one of “The Dead”’s most emphatic revisions of Dickens’s tale. Whereas Scrooge, after Christmas morning, “had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards” (134), “The Dead” never imbibes those Spirits to begin with: Gabriel’s visitations involve strictly corporeal visitors, as if to insist that the surprises borne by the other are strange enough not to require the embellishment of the paranormal. In the first of these encounters, Gabriel attempts to flatter his aunts’ housemaid by saying that since she’s finished with her schooling “I suppose we’ll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?” But instead of tamely confirming Gabriel’s sense of his munificence, Lily responds to his condescension by saying “with great bitterness: —The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you,” a retort that causes Gabriel to blush and look away “discomposed” and later to force a coin on her: part tip, part bribe, tricked out as a Christmas gift (178).<sup>19</sup> The second encounter occurs during a round of Lancers for which Gabriel is partnered with Miss Ivors, an Irish nationalist and a colleague of his at the University. During the dance, which suggestively involves a step called “going visiting” (190), Miss Ivors twits Gabriel for writing reviews for an antinationalist paper, for his lack of interest in the Irish language, and for his continental pretensions. Later, after he has mentally rewritten part of his speech as a retaliatory jab at her, he learns that she must leave too early to hear the speech, and when he offers to escort her home she pointedly refuses, ruining his plans to reassert his male prerogatives.

But the central ruination of plans in “The Dead” is triggered by Gabriel’s third encounter, with his wife Gretta. As the party disbands, he sees a graceful, mysterious woman at the top of the stairs listening to the last song of the evening, then realizes it is his wife. As she listens to the distant music he muses that she looks like a symbol of something—he wonders of

what—and he thinks if he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude and call the picture *Distant Music*.<sup>20</sup> The tableau awakens memories of their courtship and arouses Gabriel’s lust for Gretta; as they make their way through Dublin’s snow-covered streets to their hotel, he plans their night of love. But when they reach the hotel, he finds her distant, thinks, “To take her as she was would be brutal” (217), and decides to wait for some sign that she shares his ardor. When at last he asks her what she is thinking about, he learns that the song she had listened to at the top of the stairs was once sung to her by Michael Furey, a lover in her youth who caught his death visiting her in the rain on the eve of her leaving Galway for convent school. “I think he died for me,” she tells Gabriel (220).

At this point, “The Dead” appears to cue up a climactic scene of ghostly visitation in the manner of the *Carol*. Receiving the news that Michael Furey died for Gretta, Gabriel is seized by a “vague terror...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). But Gabriel’s terror of a menacing “being” never coalesces into a singular apparition; he overcomes it in order to hear Gretta tell her story, and when the “impalpable” returns it does so in the less hostile, less external form of Gabriel’s concluding visions, in which the living enter into a snowbound solidarity with the dead whom they will eventually join. This final passage, famous for its panoramic lyricism, tends to be the fulcrum of critical discussions of “The Dead” and the decision-space for readings of the story’s ethics and politics. But before discussing this finale, I want to stay with the preceding scene—not least because it stages the question of what it means to *stay with* someone—in which Gabriel listens to Gretta’s story. This scene, I maintain, rather than the one that follows it, is the heart of the story’s meditation on the ethical dimensions of hospitality. Such a suggestion may seem perverse, given that Gabriel extends welcome here not to a stranger but to his own wife, and only by extension to the memory she bears of a long-dead stranger. If staying with this scene seems strange, it is because hospitality narratives across a range of cultures emphasize welcoming the absolute, nameless stranger—the god, angel, ghost, mendicant, or refugee—rather than the familiar-become-strange. Against this grain, “The Dead” suggests that extreme alterity can take the form of an intimate whose disclosures vandalize the portrait of our intimacy; it suggests, by extension, that radical hospitality can be asked of us not only by the absolute stranger but also by the intimate who comes bearing absolutely strange news.

In attending to this scene of attention, we should first note that Gabriel’s only utterances are essentially phatic, reestablishing the fact and possibility of communication rather than transmitting any more specific content. In contrast to his dinner-table oratory, his remarks here are wholly ancillary to

another's discourse: "—Well; and then? asked Gabriel"; "—And did you not tell him to go back? said Gabriel"; "—And did he go home? asked Gabriel" (221). The work of such questions is not to say "Don't leave me in suspense here!" or to ask, "Why did you do that stupid thing?" but to affirm to the speaker that the listener continues to listen. Insofar as they assist the oncoming of something that is transformatively alien—Gretta's story, which makes the present differ from itself in the light of a transfiguring revelation about the past—they may be the speeches in which Gabriel most resembles his angelic namesake, who announced the future births of John the Baptist and Christ, although the annunciation here is not messianic in any transcendental sense. Even more noteworthy than these gentle verbal prompts, however, are the caresses Gabriel gives Gretta through the scene. Whereas his earlier smoothing of her hair was part of his seductive plan, that plan has by now been ruined, and his caresses, detached from any erotic telos, have a moving neutrality:

Gabriel, feeling now how vain it would be to try to lead her wither he had purposed, caressed one of her hands. . . . he shook himself free of [his vague terror] with an effort of reason and continued to caress her hand. He did not question her again for he felt that she would tell him of herself. Her hand was warm and moist: it did not respond to his touch but he continued to caress it just as he had caressed her first letter to him that spring morning. (220)

The narrator repeats the word "caress" as if the word were equivalent to the touch, a half-rhythmic gesture of proximity, attentiveness, and reassurance. This kind of caress is the phatic gesture at its simplest and most intimate: it reminds its recipient that she is accompanied, that she enjoys an ongoing recognition, that her listener is very near and persists in a readiness to listen. These gestures of *staying with* pay just the sort of attention Scrooge was, before the Spirits, unable to pay to others; and insofar as Gabriel's caressing Gretta's unresponsive hand suggests a vigil—a staying with the dead—it is the sort of attention denied the unaccompanied corpse in Stave Four of the *Carol*.

At once devotional and disinterested, the form of accompaniment Gabriel offers should be understood as a waiting without expectation, an orientation toward the other not as a repository to be plundered but as always oncoming—as incapable of being foreknown and thus deserving of our limitless listening. This ethical orientation is crucially a temporal one as well: it understands the future as arriving through the other without fully delivering the other to our possession or apprehension.

Put another way, Gabriel's readiness to attend does not mitigate his radical unreadiness for what Gretta has to say. This seeming paradox, in which a man *is prepared* to welcome news he could never *have prepared* to welcome,

frames a hospitality that departs massively from the kind celebrated in Gabriel's speech. That other hospitality he described as a "tradition," as something "cultivated"; it functions according to codes of good behavior, conventions of reciprocity, protocols for welcoming. Such hospitality depends on preparation: from the invitations and the laying of the table to the last goodnights, the events unfold according to scripts everyone knows ahead of time. To this hospitality by *invitation*, the scene in the hotel juxtaposes a hospitality by *visitation* that should again put us in mind of the *Carol*.<sup>21</sup> Absolute hospitality would consist in being receptive to the state of utter unreadiness in which the stranger will catch me, into which the stranger will plunge me. In Derrida's formulation, the host who offers such hospitality thus lives the seeming paradox of being "ready to not be ready," of "wait[ing] without waiting, awaiting absolute surprise, the unexpected visitor, awaited without a horizon of expectation."<sup>22</sup> It is just this necessary impossibility Gabriel briefly experiences—it will not do to say he "inhabits" it, as the host is in some sense made homeless by such a visitation—in his radiant scene of listening, caressing, awaiting, staying with. This scene of hospitality by visitation does not trump the earlier scenes of hospitality by invitation; rather, "The Dead" performs the inseparability, the mutual haunting, of these two hospitalities. It suggests that traditional hospitality of the kind Gabriel celebrates in his speech must admit at least the possibility of "absolute surprise" if it is to be more than an apparatus for accumulating and discharging social debts.

There is another reason to consider the welcome Gabriel extends to Gretta radical: for its echo and revision of absolute hospitality's traditional gendering. As I mentioned earlier, one might balk at the suggestion that a scene between a husband and wife could exemplify radical hospitality. One reason would be that intimates cannot welcome one another as strangers; another is that core Western narratives about absolute hospitality are so emphatically and violently gendered as to make a man's extension of such hospitality to a woman—and to his wife, no less—appear nonsensical. Two of the central Judeo-Christian narratives of absolute hospitality—Lot in Genesis 19 and the Levite guest in Judges 19—describe a male host who protects a male guest or guests from sexual attack by offering his female kin to the men who would attack the guest.<sup>23</sup> In both cases the virgin daughters offered by the host are refused, but in Judges 19 the guest's concubine, also offered to the attackers, is repeatedly raped. When she returns to her Levite master, he kills and dismembers her, sending twelve parcels of her remains throughout Israel. Absolute hospitality in such narratives can be as costly to those near the host—and to any woman, kin or concubine, under the host's roof—as it is beneficial for the guest. Arrayed around a scene in which a husband welcomes the absolutely strange news borne by his wife,

“The Dead” takes as its guest the very figure—the host’s female kinswoman—who so often stood as sacrificial victim in patriarchal hospitality narratives. Yet this revision recalls rather than denies the gendered tradition of absolute hospitality, a tradition whose residue can be read in the “brutal” way Gabriel is tempted “to take” Gretta sexually (217), and in the latter’s strange echo of Lot’s wife: having remembered a past love, Gretta is a mute, sleeping body at the story’s end, as if frozen in her backward glance. Thus even in expanding absolute hospitality to accommodate a male host’s female intimate as guest, the story insists on both the history and the possibility of a victimization entailed in visitation—that is, on the persistent danger that the face-to-face scene of ethical encounter may cost some third person, as it does the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19, everything.

So even as it shows us the necessity of absolute hospitality, Joyce’s story illustrates its limits, its evanescence, and its near impossibility. Gabriel pointedly does *not* stay with his wife until the end, for in becoming other, she has ceased to be, for the present, his intimate kinswoman. As she sobs face downward on the hotel bed, he holds her hand “a moment longer, irresolutely, and then, shy of intruding on her grief, let[s] it fall gently and walk[s] quietly to the window” (221–22). After Gretta has cried herself to sleep, Gabriel looks on her with “a strange friendly pity,” “as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife” (222). This marks a change from both the jealousy he feels when she introduces the story of Michael Furey and the attentiveness into which he subsequently settles. Gabriel’s caress, recall, is first interrupted and then deepened by her revelation, “I think he died for me” and the “vague terror” it produces in him. This terror has less to do with the future than with a present Gretta’s utterance has made suddenly multiple and alternative, a present that no longer corresponds to itself. The present of his plans—“that hour when he had hoped to triumph”—has split off from one in which he is subjected to the gathering force of the dead boy’s vengeance: “some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him” (220). A third present, too, gets opened by his wife’s ambiguous phrase “he died for me,” which implies both that Furey’s love for her caused him to sicken and die and that his death was the price of Gretta’s having become herself, Gabriel’s wife, as if to say “he died that I might become me.” Michael Furey in Gabriel’s mind then ceases to be the vengeful ghost who envies Gabriel’s good fortune, but becomes instead an opening into the foreclosed path that might have led Gretta to an altogether different present as Mrs. Furey. It is this ghostly present that becomes real to Gabriel when he becomes “shy of intruding.” No longer the humiliated husband, he is now the embarrassed funeral guest witnessing the widow’s grief. In a displaced echo of the biblical stories, Gabriel’s willingness to entertain Gretta’s narrative has led

him to give away his kinswoman by inhabiting a different present, “as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife.”

Gabriel’s move away from the face-to-face—away from the primary scene of ethical encounter—seems bound up with a will to obliterate the present altogether. To be sure, the realization of Gretta as stranger forms a diptych with the earlier “Distant Music” tableau of her listening at the top of the stairs, where her familiarity—he first perceived her as “a woman,” only later realizing “it was his wife” (209)—was also suspended. Yet the eros of the earlier tableau is missing in the later one: Gabriel, who normally will not admit to himself that his wife is no longer beautiful, first reflects that her face has lost the youthful beauty for which Michael Furey risked his health, then assimilates her to his elderly aunts and to a proleptic vision of his Aunt Julia’s death. The imagined scene of future bereavement (drawn blinds, black garments, a community of survivors remembering the deceased and attempting to console one another) seems gentler than Dickens’s vision of the unmourned corpse, but there is a violence in the way Gabriel interposes the death of the other between the present and his own death. Still, the other as human shield does not hold: he no sooner stretches on the bed next to his wife than he thinks, “One by one they were all becoming shades” (223).

This might sound like a summons to responsibility for an other in whose mortality one’s own is knit, and might thus echo that regenerative scene in which Scrooge professes himself powerless to expose the face of the dead man. But if this moment in “The Dead” recalls that scene of inter-implication in Dickens, it does so to mark the extent to which Gabriel and Scrooge here part ways. This parting is further underscored by the graveyard visions both stories depict in late scenes. Scrooge’s final stop with the third Spirit is an untended grave whose stone bears his own name. It would be easy to mistake his plea there to “sponge away the writing on this stone” (126) as a plea to be delivered from his own death. But the earlier scene with the covered remains—“plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for” (118)—showed us a Scrooge who could receive the impossible presence of his own corpse as an invitation not to live forever but to live for the other, to die only after he has exercised some of that “vast means of usefulness” for which the soul must “find its mortal life too short” (62). Gabriel, by contrast, appears willing to go straight to his grave as if it were a bed; in lying down next to Gretta he has been as good as laid out, acquainted with the fact that he is a shade in the making. In the wake of this realization, he first envies the dead Furey (“Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dimly with age” [223]) and then envisions the fortunate boy’s spirit as persisting in some afterworld into which the solid cosmos of the living constantly ebbs.



Through “generous tears” inspired by the thought of Furey’s love-death, Gabriel imagines he sees the young man. The veil between worlds thins in a manner that recalls Scrooge at the window, as “the air filled with phantoms” who can see the world but no longer act upon it. Here is Gabriel: “Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling” (223).

The splintering of the present into alternative possibilities and its relocation in the persistence of Furey’s passion derealizes the social and the personal together. The spatializing language (“shades,” “forms,” “region,” “dwell,” “hosts”) suggests the *descensus averni* of epic tradition, but this visitor seeks neither oblation nor information, nothing that would ease things in the daylight world; he seems to want to remain among the dead. Here Joyce’s story makes its most conspicuous departure from its Dickensian intertext. The *Carol* suggests that the way back to life lies through empathy with the *suffering* of the dead. Through his window, Scrooge sees the old ghost moaning at his inability to assist the living: “The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever” (65). Gabriel, for his part, seems to sentimentalize, even to yearn for, the *peace* of the dead—their condition of having ceased to produce or intervene in the world of the living. In Dickens, that world is the warm firm center, the going concern from which the dead lament that they are barred as ethical actors; in Joyce, the world of the living becomes, in its ongoing dissolution, a mere tributary to the afterworld.

As if sponged on a stone, the final paragraph of “The Dead” describes the loss of distinctions—the blurring of localities by a universalizing snowfall, the merging of “all” the living and the dead—in language that is nonetheless distinctly *written*. The passage’s many lexical and syntactic repetitions, its unmissable alliterative pulse, its extravagant chiasmus (“falling softly . . . softly falling . . . falling faintly . . . faintly falling”) seem to pose the question of conspicuously fine writing’s relation to the story’s themes. How does such language—lyrical, yes, but so much besides—speak, or fail or refuse to speak, to matters of colonial subjection and its cultural geographies? To questions of gender and power? Of ethics, hospitality, alterity?

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen

and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. (223–24)

For many of the story's commentators, this incantatory language describes Gabriel's moment of self-transcendence while also bestowing a kind of self-transcendence, through lyricism, on the reader.<sup>24</sup> Such a reading seems to side with Gabriel, who wants to tell Miss Ivors that "literature was above politics" (188); in its airborne vantage, the narratorial gaze extravagantly literalizes this "above," lifting off the politically fissured terrain on which Gabriel has repeatedly foundered during the story. Other readers find this lyrical transcendence of the political to be the story's most objectionable gesture, the moment in which it whites out its historical and geopolitical specificity and thus its critical traction.<sup>25</sup> In that white-out, a series of weirdly militarized features can still be seen: the "vast hosts" of the dead, the "mutinous" Shannon waves, the "spears" of the churchyard gate, and the grave of "Furey." The image of "Ireland" is conjured, too, through the snow that covers it. Whether we deplore or celebrate the passage's lyrical turn from worldly struggle, we must place these images in some relation to the prospect of their disappearance in the universal snowfall.

I argued earlier that the scene of Gabriel's vigilant listening to Gretta—the scene in which the caress followed the ruination of his erotic plans—is the story's central depiction of absolute hospitality. In seeking to understand what is at work in the final paragraphs of "The Dead," we can begin with the question of why the narrative turns away from that scene of face-to-face encounter toward the lone meditations of Gabriel at the window and in bed. I want to suggest that far from selling out ethics in favor of solipsistic escapism, the story breaks from the face-to-face in order to ask what absolute hospitality both risks and forgoes politically in its potentially limitless attention to a singular other. "The Dead" poses this question by following a scene of absolute hospitality with a concluding prospect of the peace of multitudes. This peace is both infinitely extensive, stretching from locality to nation to universe, and everlasting; in it, those warlike hosts and spears and furies and mutinies are alike muffled in snow. It is an afterwordly take, I suggest, on the perpetual peace of a possible cosmopolitan order. This is not the cultural cosmopolitanism of goloshes, French bicycle tours, and other continental affectations for which Gabriel gets twitted at the party, but the desideratum of a philosophical tradition linking global peace to laws and political institutions that would inhere beyond the level of the nation-state and be based on universal notions of human rights, duties, and

proclivities. As Immanuel Kant and others have imagined it, this perpetual peace would install a universal right of hospitality, a legal guarantee that the peaceable will not be treated with hostility on foreign soil. In confronting a version of this perpetual peace—an eerily posthumous and depopulated one—Gabriel has arrived at a threshold. Behind him is a scene of welcome to absolutely strange news, and to his newly estranged spouse; before him lies the *prospect*—both the vista and the future-conditional possibility—of the nation, the question of its relation to the “general” and to the “universe,” along with the temptation to abandon this question for the peace of the dead. He is at the threshold between the Law of absolute hospitality and the laws of universal hospitality—at that place where each regime of hospitality, each conception of peace, constitutes the limit, critique, and complement of the other. It is worth emphasizing that the cosmopolitan order here is present chiefly through its cancellation: instead of envisaging an Ireland that has emerged from colonial rule—from the violation of universal hospitality by the colonizer—to enter into peaceful accords with other states, Gabriel succumbs to what might be thought of as cosmopolitanism’s other: the peace of the cemetery.<sup>26</sup> Such a surrender, such a solidarity with the denizens of the underworld, the story suggests, works in fact to produce violence in the upper world. If that world fades easily into the region of shades, their dwelling in “vast hosts” implies not that the dead are hostile but that the peace of the dead as political precept—the conviction that there is no perpetual peace until death—underwrites the maintenance of armies among the living, consequently producing armies of shades. Insofar as it is the chief canceled presence and conspicuous absence of the last paragraphs, the barred prospect of an earthly perpetual peace turns out to be the ghost that most vexes the end of “The Dead.”

But even the haunting seems equivocal. The passage’s oscillations in scale, taking us in two paragraphs from a man’s tears to “Ireland” (colony? region? nation?), from a series of specific locales to “the universe,” may enact a kind of universalizing gesture, but it also bespeaks an uncertainty about what the unit of a universal peace would be. The earlier scene with Gabriel and Gretta adds to these reservations by showing us precisely what a politics of universal hospitality excludes: the face-to-face encounter in which absolute hospitality is offered to a stranger, or rather to a strange intimate, in all her singularity instead of secured for her as a matter of law. By insisting on the radical alterity of the future, this scene readies us to reject the subsequent array of deterministic attractions—cosmopolitanism, the peace of the dead, perhaps even the snow vision’s hypnotic lyricism—as a flight from ethics. Yet we have also seen how absolute hospitality, in paying the other the limitless attention politics cannot pay, may license the

abuse, even the annihilation, of a third party, as in the story of the Levite guest; the ethics of absolute hospitality that might make cosmopolitanism habitable is, in its turn, shown to be indissociable from terrible and historical violences. The final pages of “The Dead” seem to call for a rapprochement between absolute and universal hospitality in which ethical Law and political laws act reciprocally as correctives without being subsumed by one another. But the story cannot heed its own call: instead, it arrives at a pass where the rapprochement of ethics and politics is, at least for the present, both necessary and impossible. Such an impasse does not reconcile Law and laws, clearly, but neither does it refuse their respective appeals. If “The Dead” declines to embrace either absolute hospitality or the prospect of an earthly perpetual peace among nations, it may be the better to stay with both appeals in their present irreconcilability—to afford, at the impasse, a special case of the caress.

This impasse, for all the language of fading, dissolution, and generality that attends it in the final lines of “The Dead,” remains in certain ways specific to the condition of the colony. At its crux are questions like these: How can absolute hospitality be thought when colonialism has resignified hospitality *tout court*, underscoring the historical proximity of visitation and occupation, guest and invader? How do colonized subjects whose experiences and models of hospitality have been so disfigured by history imagine an international order in which a universal right of hospitality is a central tenet?<sup>27</sup> What perpetual peace besides that of the dead can be imagined by the people of an occupied non-nation—people who have lived in a condition of perpetual hostility and have good reason to suspect, as Joyce famously did, the form and legacy of the nation-state that is supposed to end that hostility?<sup>28</sup> Rather than try to represent the political form of a future Ireland, Joyce’s story immerses its readers in the ethical and political reasons for maintaining that form’s unrepresentability, its unknowability, and draws a veil. “The Dead” models an ethical relation to the political future of Ireland as oncoming, as something to await without expectation. This attitude of radical political patience is not an incitement to revolution, to be sure, but neither is it the same thing as apolitical quietism. It holds out the possibility of an absolutely strange political form of the sort one has *not* already welcomed, a form far stranger than the nation-state; it therefore refuses to rule out a discontinuity more extreme than the sort of revolution from which mere nations emerge.

Here Joyce’s story draws near the *Carol* for the last time. Having half-echoed, in Gabriel’s “becoming shades” moment, Scrooge’s encounter with the shrouded body, “The Dead” ends by transposing that scene into a political key: it allows the political future of the colony to remain shrouded

despite having named the absolute necessity of that future's arrival. Thus it is neither to the grave of the self nor to the grave of the other that Dickens's "Ghost of an Idea" accompanies Joyce—to neither of *those* impossible futurities—but to the brink of the political form to come. Because both stories imagine the future as limit, they share the temporality of *not yet*; but the *not yet* of each, the Christmas-yet-to-come of each, is importantly distinct. The *Carol* evokes a time at which we will no longer be able to intervene in order to realize an alternative present and future saturated with a sense of urgency and responsibility. It instructs us that Christmas has *not yet* lapsed—that "it's not too late" to interfere for good. "The Dead" is set not in the shadow of an imminent Christmas but in its wake, some time between New Year's Day and the Feast of Epiphany. Against the *Carol*'s, and Scrooge's, impatience to interfere, it urges and enacts a kind of messianic patience; its *not yet* says "it is still too early" to represent the political form to come. The *Carol* invites us to act before the inevitable happens; "The Dead" asks us to be vigilant in case the unforeseeable should arrive. In this sense, at least, Joyce's is the more vertiginously open of the two tales, depicting the ruination of Gabriel's plans without showing us the aftermath of that ruination, without even the concessions the *Carol* makes to the diegetic future in its reassurances that, for example, "Tiny Tim . . . did NOT die" (133). The openness of "The Dead" makes it colder, too, by holding out the possibility that no future political form will arrive. Yet where else but in the cold would one look to receive what one has not already welcomed?

## Notes

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This essay is dedicated to Peter Buitenheim, who loves—and lives—the spirit of the *Carol* best of all.

A version of the paper was read at the Dickens Project Weekend Conference on "Dickens: Life and Afterlife" held at the University of California, Santa Cruz, August 4–6, 2005. I wish to thank Hilary Schor for inviting me to speak on that occasion and for the ongoing invitation of her friendship; Catherine Gallagher, Ned Schantz, Ellen Scheible, and Gary Wilder for discussing the essay with me at various stages; and Tom Murray, with whom I first read Dickens back in 1983, for coming to listen.

1. T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, 1997), 196.
2. James Joyce, "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages," in *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (Ithaca, 1959), 173.
3. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol in Prose, Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*, in *The Christmas Books*, vol. 1, *A Christmas Carol/The Chimes*, ed. Michael Slater

(Harmondsworth, 1971), 41. Subsequent references to the *Carol* are to this edition, with page numbers given in the body of the essay.

4. In characterizing Dickens's tale as open or radically hospitable, I am swimming against a prevailing current in *Carol* scholarship during the last sixty-five years. The sense that *A Christmas Carol* is a foreclosed or ideologically self-replicating text merely disguised as an open one has been shared by critics of a range of theoretical persuasions. Thirty years ago, Elliot Gilbert enlisted Edmund Wilson's 1940 *Atlantic Monthly* article "The Two Scrooges" in describing what Gilbert called "the Scrooge problem": namely, that Scrooge's conversion is too sudden, too complete, and too durable to be psychologically convincing—that the reformed Scrooge is like a jack waiting bunched up in the box of his humbug, ready to burst forth at the slightest pressure on the latch. Gilbert tried to solve this realism problem by simply replacing it with a different foregone conclusion: what he called "metaphysical innocence," an immutable, oceanic oneness with the world, a grace of earliness that can always be recovered once one realizes that chronology is an illusion one can master and move through at will. J. Hillis Miller's wonderful 1993 essay on "The Genres of *A Christmas Carol*" catalogs the rhetorical excesses and generic miscegenations of Dickens's tale but concedes that it "reinforces an essentially conservative ideology" in wanting to reform capitalism incrementally through charity. And Audre Jaffe's 1995 essay "Visuality and Ideology" reads the *Carol* as nothing less than an enculturation in the society of the spectacle, a text that "profoundly manipul[es] the reader's visual sense in what is, in effect, the mass marketing of an ideology about sympathy." For Jaffe, both the *Carol*'s annual return and its massive adaptability are features of its self-promotional energies, its capacity to regenerate desire for the "images and scenes" it coercively schools its readers to mistake for presence—in Jaffe's words, "images and scenes to be absent from which is, effectively, not to exist." In each of these readings—Gilbert, Miller, Jaffe—the real function of Dickens's conversion narrative is to stabilize, reconsecrate, and even reproduce some version of the status quo. Such readings take Dickens's own language of a pleasant haunting to its domesticated extreme: this is a haunting that only scares us safe, administering a seasonal *frisson* that leaves us all the gladder to be with our kin, warm behind locked doors and impermeable walls, our eyes filled with scenes of unendangered plenitude. See Elliot L. Gilbert, "The Ceremony of Innocence: Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*," *PMLA* 90 (Winter 1975): 124; J. Hillis Miller, "The Genres of *A Christmas Carol*," in *Dickensian* 89 (Winter 1993): 204; and Audre Jaffe, "Spectacular Sympathy: Visuality and Ideology in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*," in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkeley, 1995), 330, 337.
5. Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, 2000), 81.
6. *Ibid.*, 79.
7. *Ibid.*, 125.
8. The term "hauntological" features in Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London, 1994), 51 and elsewhere. A hauntological reading would be attentive to how concepts produce an impression of their ontological stability by rejecting the terms on which in fact they rely—by disavowing an impasse, opposite,

or limit that is indispensable to their constitution. Derrida's portmanteau word seems actually to have been coined, in its negative form ("dehauntological") by Christine Brooke-Rose in her experimental novel *Amalgamemnon* (Manchester, 1984), 138.

9. Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other [and Additional Essays]*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, 1987), 75.
10. Such a connection between strangers and death enters the *Carol* obliquely, when Scrooge blames the Second Spirit for the Sunday Observance Bill, and the Spirit retorts, of the Bill's advocates, "There are those upon this earth of yours who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived" (92).
11. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 70.
12. In her reading of the *Carol*'s "spectacular sympathy," Audre Jaffe observes that "spectacle depends on a distinction between vision and participation, a distance that produces desire in the spectator." She adds that the *Carol* imagines literature "as spectacle, [defining both] as compelling identification while precluding participation." Jaffe, "Spectacular Sympathy," 330, 331. To be sure, the tale offers a succession of scenes in which we, along with Scrooge and the Spirits, are barred from participating, barred in proportion as we are privileged to walk and see through spatial and temporal walls. But I want to contest Jaffe's claim that this bar on participation *only* naturalizes the society of the spectacle, conferring the illusion of presence *only* in the moment of consumption, and staging participation in culture as nothing other than participation in an endless series of representations. The *Carol*'s insistence on that bar to participation, I suggest, superheats our desire for the lifting of that bar.
13. Paul Davis, *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (New Haven, 1990), 123.
14. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, 2004), 130.
15. James Joyce, *Selected Joyce Letters*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York, 1966), 110.
16. James Joyce, *Dubliners*, ed. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (New York, 1996), 179. Subsequent references to "The Dead" are to this edition, with page numbers given in the body of the essay.
17. On E. M. Forster's study of the "incongruity of [invitation and] civility within a colonial context," see Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago, 1992), 132ff. The "not yet" with which the Indian landscape responds to the question of cross-cultural friendship at the end of *A Passage to India* echoes "The Dead"'s refusal to represent Ireland's future political form. Both texts, that is, end with a turn toward landscape, imagining it simultaneously as the site of a possible future peace and as able to articulate human communities' unreadiness for such a peace. But where *A Passage* clears a space for friendship in the wake of Indian nationhood, "The Dead" is less optimistic that colonialism's disfigurement of the face-to-face encounter can be squared by the arrival of the nation-state.
18. That "The Dead" is organized around these three encounters has long been noticed by readers of the story. At least two recent discussions precede mine in tying these encounters to the question of hospitality. Jean-Michel Rabaté links them to the three goddesses among whom Paris (mentioned in Gabriel's toast) must choose. That Gabriel "fails" in all three encounters testifies, for Rabaté, to

his self-division as a “liberal intellectual who is caught up between the values of the past he cannot completely make his . . . and the growing militancy in a period of impending troubles he cannot cope with.” One symptom of this self-division, Rabaté adds, is the story’s fissuring of hospitality, which “needs an alien, a *xenos*, as a butt to satirize and criticize in order to rejoice in its fake universality.” See Jean-Michel Rabaté, *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism* (Cambridge, 2001), 157. Karen Lawrence also refers to Gabriel’s three encounters but argues that they interrupt Gabriel’s conditional model of hospitality not only to expose “a too-facile humanism” (as in Rabaté’s account) but also to introduce the prospect of an unconditional hospitality. See Karen R. Lawrence, “Close Encounters,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 41 (Fall 2003/Winter 2004): 138. My discussion is indebted to Lawrence’s reading of the Gabriel/Gretta scene in the hotel as an irruption of absolute hospitality.

19. Margot Norris’s chapter on “The Dead” in *Suspicious Readings of Joyce’s Dubliners* (Philadelphia, 2003) identifies Lily’s response to Gabriel as the first in a series of what she calls, borrowing a phrase from the story, “back answers”: critical interruptions in the story’s restaging of an autonomous aesthetic sustained by bourgeois society. These “back answers”—most of them brief outbursts of candor, accusation, or protest by female characters—form key nodes in a “disruptive feminist countertext” (216) that challenges both the story’s patriarchal aesthetic and its identifying Irish nationalism, to the exclusion of feminism, as *the* legitimate site of the political. My discussion of how hospitality is critically re-gendered in the Gabriel/Gretta scene should be understood as another node in this countertext—as a “back answer” that is enacted without being uttered.
20. The title “Distant Music” is usually taken to be the extent of the story’s Dickensian inheritance: it echoes chapter 60 of *David Copperfield*, where, “with the unerring instinct of her noble heart,” Agnes touches the chords of David’s memories of Dora “so softly and harmoniously, that not one jarred within me; I could listen to the sorrowful, distant music, and desire to shrink from nothing it awoke.” Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. George H. Ford (Boston, 1958), 640.
21. It should call to mind, too, Derrida’s distinction between hospitality by right and absolute hospitality. Preparation, so essential to hospitality by right, is precisely what the host forgoes in welcoming the uninvited guest; as Derrida puts it, “the awaited hôte (thus invited, anticipated, there where everything is there to receive him) is not a hôte, not an other as hôte. . . . If I welcome only what I welcome, what I am ready to welcome, and that I recognize in advance because I expect the coming of the hôte as invited, there is no hospitality.” Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality,” trans. Gil Anidjar, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (London, 2002), 361–62.
22. Ibid.
23. Derrida discusses both narratives at the end of “Step of Hospitality,” asking of them: “Are we heirs to this tradition of hospitality? Up to what point? Where should we place the invariant, if it is one, across this logic and these narratives?” Jacques Derrida, “Step of Hospitality,” in *Of Hospitality*, 155.
24. See, for example, David Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World* (Chicago, 1939); Alan Tate and Caroline Gordon, *The House of Fiction* (New York, 1950); William York Tindall, *A Reader’s Guide to James Joyce* (New York, 1959); Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York, 1984).



25. See, for example, Charles Peake, *James Joyce: The Citizen and the Artist* (Stanford, 1977); Vincent P. Pecora, "'The Dead' and the Generosity of the Word," *PMLA* 101 (1986): 223–45; and Seamus Deane, "Dead Ends: Joyce's Finest Moments," in *Semicolonial Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (Cambridge, 2000).
26. Counterposing the perpetual peace of the dead to that of a cosmopolitan order among the living is a move native to cosmopolitan discourse itself. The Abbé de St. Pierre's *Projet de traité pour rendre la paix perpétuelle entre les souverains chrétiens* (1713–17), is the first text to apply an expression ("la paix perpétuelle") commonly associated with the cemetery to the project of an international legal order. Immanuel Kant's "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795), one of the foundational Enlightenment texts on cosmopolitan legal order, begins with this famous gloss on its title: "A Dutch innkeeper once put this satirical inscription on his signboard, along with the picture of a graveyard. We shall not trouble to ask whether it applies to men in general, or particularly to heads of state (who can never have enough of war), or only to the philosophers who blissfully dream of perpetual peace." See Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge, 1991), 93. Jacques Derrida discusses this passage (and Levinas's allusion to it) in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, 1999), 100.
27. Jacques Derrida observes the following in the dialogue "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility": "So unconditional hospitality implies that you don't ask the other, the newcomer, the guest, to give anything back, or even to identify himself or herself. Even if the other deprives you of your mastery of your home, you have to accept this. It is terrible to accept this, but that is the condition of unconditional hospitality: that you give up the mastery of your space, your home, your nation. It is unbearable. . . . For unconditional hospitality to take place you have to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone." In *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London, 1999), 70–71. How does one embrace the "unbearable" condition of unconditional hospitality when the political latitudes, legal freedoms, and material resources at one's disposal as host are massively determined by a previous and violent visitation—by an uninvited guest who indeed deprived you of mastery of your home? That mastery would seem a precondition of one's capacity to run the risk of being dispossessed; in this version of the impasse mapped by "The Dead," one's having met the condition of unconditional hospitality in the scene of colonization would prevent one's ever meeting that condition again, even supposing one were inclined to do so. Such an impasse is homologous with what Derrida elsewhere calls the "absolute victimisation which deprives the victim of life, or the right to speak, or that freedom, that force and that power which *authorises*, which permits the accession to the position of 'I forgive.' There, the unforgivable would consist of depriving the victim of this right to speech, of speech itself, of the possibility of all manifestation, of all testimony. The victim would then be a victim, in addition, of seeing himself stripped of the minimal, elementary *possibility* of *virtually* considering forgiving the unforgivable." In the face of this second-order victimization, Derrida can only "dream of" a "forgiveness without power: *unconditional but without sovereignty*."

Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London, 2001), 58–59; original emphasis.

28. Joyce's 1907 lecture "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages," written in Trieste concurrently with "The Dead," radiates ambivalence about both the Irish nationalist movement and the nation-state as political form. Having fulminated against British imperialism, its Irish nationalist critics, and race- and language-based models of nationality, the lecture ends by simultaneously urging on and belittling the revolutionary decision: "It is well past time for Ireland to have done once and for all with failure. If she is truly capable of reviving, let her awake, or let her cover up her head and lie down decently in her grave forever. . . . If she wants to put on the play that we have waited for so long, this time let it be whole, and complete, and definitive. But our advice to the Irish producers is the same as that our fathers gave them not so long ago—hurry up! I am sure that I, at least, will never see that curtain go up, because I will have already gone home on the last train." Joyce, *Critical Writings*, 174. Joyce's self-portrait of the émigré as a disenchanted suburban theatergoer deflates the passage's anti-colonial urgency. Yet his proleptic abandonment of the revolutionary theater stops short of specularizing the political; in fact, it refuses spectacle by leaving the curtain unopened, the veil drawn on the political future in a manner that resonates with the charged patience of "The Dead."