

**Ghosts in the Head: Mourning, Memory and Derridean 'Trace' in
John Banville's *The Sea***

Joanne Watkiss

With the publication of his novel *Birchwood* in 1973, John Banville established himself as an eminent writer of modern Gothic fiction. Described as 'one of the most startling of the century's varied achievements in Irish writing', (1) Banville's novels have been pivotal to the emergence of a late twentieth-century Irish Gothic fiction in particular. His most recent novel, *The Sea* (winner of the Booker prize 2005) expands on many of the themes from his earlier work, and most especially, his 1993 novel *Ghosts*. *Ghosts* centres around Freddie Montgomery; a man recently released from jail for murder, charting his move to a remote island where he is haunted by the past events of his life:

Banquo was a dampener on the king's carousings, and Hamlet's father made what I cannot but think were excessive calls on filial piety. Yet, for myself, I know I would be grateful for any intercourse with the dead, no matter how baleful their stares or unavoidable their pale, pointing fingers. I feel I might be able, not to exonerate, but to explain myself, perhaps, to account for my neglectfulness, my failures, the things left unsaid, all those sins against the dead. (2)

There are no actual spectral sightings in *Ghosts* (just as there are none in *The Sea*) yet ghosts are central in both novels. Banville's postmodern Gothic is concerned with the idea of the ghost rather than the ghost itself; the importance of the ghost does not lie in its revelation, but the way it is understood (or not understood, as the case maybe). His focus is on hauntings where the ghost does not appear; the haunting of ourselves by ourselves. In *The Sea*, this concept of self-haunting is connected to the process of mourning.

The Sea is a torrent of pasts blended with the uncertain, ever-shifting present of Max Morden: a recently bereaved art-historian who relocates to a seaside village, Ballyless, where he once spent a childhood holiday. Having lost his wife Anna to cancer, he is left with his unsympathetic daughter Claire to pick up the pieces. It is after Anna's death that Max is drawn to Ballyless, where he met the Grace family as a child. The Graces' consist of Connie and Carlo, parents of Chloe and Myles: a set of twins who become good friends with Max. The novel follows his return to a variety of childhood and adult pasts, involving people and moments that have influenced his life. For Max, bereavement generates an episode of reflection which compels him to visit different places and people. Yet it is unclear exactly what or who Max is mourning, his youth, his wife, disappointments of his life, or perhaps his childhood friends, Chloe and Myles Grace, whose untimely death (as children, they walk into the sea and are lost forever) returns to him in perpetual collision with a tentative present. Max's mourning is initiated by Anna's death but soon transforms into a more generalised grief, forcing him to return to moments of loss in the past. The death of his wife has resurrected departed figures in a fluid interchange of assorted pasts. As a 'work of mourning' (3), Max writes 'a Book of the Dead' (4) in an effort to comprehend these events.

In a confrontation of mourning, Max is overcome with the desire to travel back into spaces of the past. *The Sea* is structured by the journey (or rather anti-journey) of remembrance that Max undertakes. There is no beginning or end to his travels, with the novel focusing primarily on his mental journey rather than his physical one, combining the two in a meditation on mourning. In this way, mental and physical representations of space intersect in an interrogation of spatial zones. Max, for example, begins the mourning process by revisiting the Cedars Hotel (where he met the Grace twins as a child) in an attempt to stimulate memories created there. However, as his recollections become more vivid, Max no longer needs to travel to such places; his memories have taken over his reality and can provide him with the relevant evocation of space.

The Sea shifts between different spaces erratically in a fluid narrative represented like tides of the sea (in the manner of a ghost). Because of this, an evaluation of Max's grief through spatial analysis is suggested. The mourning that drives Max to places of the past is caused by an obsession with memory. He is seeking out spaces that act as archives of his past: solid structures that contain firm memories for him to return to. As Jacques Derrida states in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, an archive is:

not only the history and the memory of singular events, of exemplary proper names, languages and filiations, but the deposition in an arkheion (which can be an ark or a temple), the consignment in a place of relative exteriority, whether it has to do with writings, documents, or ritualised marks on the body proper. (5)

The demarcation of space can act as a complex archiving mechanism, holding together histories and memories in a specific area. Derrida defines such a space as 'a house, a domicile, and an address.' (6) Max's saturation in the mourning process has compelled him to re-visit sites of the past, linking mourning inextricably to significant places in memory. Place instigates mourning and mourning instigates place. His memories are thus enriched by his journey through different spaces.

Alongside a complex form of reminiscent haunting, this concept of spatial mourning is pivotal in *The Sea*. Mourning prompts memories that are returned to by locating oneself spatially and mentally in moments that have passed. The return of events and figures of the past (even though they return psychologically and not physically) induces a kind of memorial haunting. In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Julia Kristeva equates mourning with a kind of 'disenchantment that I experience here and now, cruel as it may be, appears, under scrutiny, to awaken echoes of old traumas, to which I realize I have never been able to resign myself.' (7) The grief experienced by the loss of his wife provokes past mournings to re-surface. Attempting to withdraw from his attachments to lost loved ones provokes a 'struggle that can be so intense that a turning away from reality ensues.' (8) For Max, reality becomes memorial in his undivided attention to the past. Kristeva remarks that in melancholia 'everything has gone by, they seem to say, but I am faithful to those bygone days, I am nailed down to them, no revolution is possible, there is no future.' (9) As a bereaved man in his sixties, the past is the most important tense for Max. The mourning present is intolerable and any possible future looks bleak. After an argument with his daughter, Claire, he curls up in a bed that was 'low and narrow, hardly more than a cot' (10) as if attempting to regress into the comfort of childhood. He allows his mind to be haunted by past ghosts conjured by space and memory. Place instigates haunting as the spectre is 'of some familial domesticity: haunting implies

places, a habitation, and always a haunted house.’ (11) Spaces of the past can evoke haunting memories that are as powerful as ghosts themselves due to the ghost’s ability to ‘invade all of space.’ (12) The sporadic narrative shifts the focus spatially and historically, permitting a return of the dead in a memorial haunting of past memories.

I use the term ‘haunting’ here as both noun and verb (as both an entity and an event) in the Derridean sense discussed in his 1994 book, *Specters of Marx*. In it, Derrida examines haunting by returning to spectres present in the writings of Shakespeare and Karl Marx. He discusses Marx’s notion of haunting: ‘Marx thought, to be sure, on his side, from the other side, that the dividing line between the ghost and actuality ought to be crossed...this dividing line as real limit and conceptual distinction.’ (13) This ‘line’ he suggests, is one that exists within the framework of Western metaphysics: a construction, a depiction of how things can be represented and interpreted. It is a comfort to designate the dead and the living as polar opposites to one another. As Hélène Cixous argues, ‘It is the between that is tainted with strangeness’ (14) as this space defines any potential overlapping realms. Its peculiarity is also found in the difficulty of articulating a meaning: as if neither our culture nor our psychology can allow for the middle space; there are no words available to describe it. ‘What is intolerable is that the Ghost erases the limit which exists between two states, neither alive nor dead.’ (15) In reference to Derrida’s work on ‘Différance’, Catherine Belsey proposes that ‘meaning is always the effect of the trace, paradoxically of the other in the selfsame.’ (16) In such an analysis, meaning depends upon a difference that is not accommodated for in binary oppositions. Articulating the ghost depends upon reference to an opposition, but in this case, this does not exist. The ghost is the middle point between opposite terms and so cannot be placed alongside any term that will provide any meaning. For example, ‘the difference between the specter and the spirit’ is ‘a différance’. (17) Hence, there is no specific discourse to rely on in order to articulate spectrality, and the space between two polarities is the only place the ghost belongs. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida describes the ‘work of mourning’ as an exorcism but also a conjuration. In light of this concept, I will now examine the actions of Max: a man whose mourning ‘work’ involves conjuring his dead through spaces of the past.

Derrida states that ‘to haunt does not mean to be present’ (18) suggesting – as in *The Sea* - how ghosts do not need to materialise to haunt. As mentioned above, place instigates mourning and vice versa, suggesting that existence and being are determined by an occupation of space. Max mourns by inhabiting different spaces because the departed used to occupy them. After death, the spaces the dead occupy are those we provide for them (in our memories, in our minds). In this novel, haunting is much more complex than the appearance of a ghost that haunts. Instead there is a kind of mental haunting (an archive) inside Max’s mind, ‘we carry the dead with us only until we die too.’ (19) Max permits his ghosts of the past to enter his head in an occupation of the space of the mind. It is implied that after Max’s death, he too will become a haunting memory present in someone else’s mind. As Derrida argues, this was also the case for Karl Marx, who ‘had ghosts in his head’ that ‘harassed, besieged and obsessed’ him. (20) Marx’s ghosts, like Max’s, haunt him from both inside and outside: ‘in him, but of course in order to repulse it, outside of him. In him outside of him: this is the place outside of place of ghosts wherever they feign to take up their abode’. Max is haunted by the spaces of the past that supply and enhance the memorial ghosts which have always been present inside his mind. Derrida states, ‘the living body is the space in which thoughts or

ideal, autonomized entities are gathered, is it not itself the “body of ghosts”?’ (21) The mind’s ability to remember (or archive) permits the production of a catalogue of spectres: concealed until mourning encourages their resurfacing. This interior and exterior haunting has caused Max to produce ‘a vulgate of the dead’ (22), acting as a memorial to those he has known and lost. Through writing, Max attempts to revive the dead physically, ‘Why have you not come back to haunt me? It is the least I would have expected of you.’ (23) Constructing a ‘Book of the Dead’ helps Max to visualise those he mourns, providing them with a type of ‘presence’ other than the memories inside his mind. As T.J. Lustig explains in *Henry James and the Ghostly*, ‘In a very general way all writing evokes, revives or resurrects what is not present’ (24), this is true not only in the resurrection of archives, but in the creation of them too. All writing produces a particular type of archive that is composed from other sources of documentation. In this way, written works are also haunted spaces: as they all refer back to other archives or literary works.

Because Max is haunted internally by memory and externally by space, *The Sea* is a novel that both haunts and is haunted in a manifestation of double spectrality. Max’s haunted recollections haunt the text, generating a dislocated narrative sequence (a shifting between different spaces erratically) that operates in the manner of a ghost. This double nature of haunting is further established by the two traumatic incidences in Max’s mind: the death of Anna and the Grace twins. ‘They were twins. I had never encountered twins before, in the flesh, and was fascinated and at the same time slightly repelled.’ (25) Max’s conflicting response is that of Freud’s ‘Uncanny’: a simultaneous attraction and repulsion to that which is familiar, yet unfamiliar and thus frightening. His response also calls to mind René Girard’s assertion that ‘twins inspire a particular terror’ in that they ‘often display a single social personality’ (26) and yet are individual subjects. The spectral representation of the twins in Max’s memory further enhances the uncanniness evident in this novel of doubles. The ‘doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self’ situates twins as ‘a thing of terror’ (27) and an object of curiosity. The Grace twins however, are unusual in addition to being twins. Myles cannot speak and has webbed feet, and Chloe is cruel and heartless (she, for example, is amused by watching grasshoppers boil ‘in their own fat’ (28)). Because Myles cannot speak, Max imagines Mr and Mrs Grace were ‘a little afraid of him. That is no wonder either. It must have been like living with an all too visible, all too tangible poltergeist.’ (29) Max’s description of Myles as a mischievous spirit is soon followed by a depiction of Chloe’s hair and appearance:

She wore it in a pageboy style, with a fringe at the front overhanging her handsome, high-domed, oddly convex forehead – like, it suddenly strikes me, remarkably like the forehead of that ghostly figure seen in profile hovering at the edge of Bonnard’s Table in Front of the Window. (30)

Only when reflecting on his past does it occur to Max that Chloe has the forehead of the ghostlike image in a Bonnard painting. It is through memory that Max can recollect her, but this comes at a price. Max can only remember the dead as spectral: Myles must be a poltergeist and Chloe a ghost, as they exist only in his thoughts. Memory, it emerges, is a practice of spectrality. Max considers Myles a poltergeist through another instance of recollection: a supernatural creature that moves objects around without sound. Max is categorising the dead twins as spectral, asserting their deceased-ness, in a classification of the dead inside his mind. Because he is so deeply immersed in mourning, Max is seeking out sites to restore lost

memories in order to accumulate a mental archive of the twins' lives. The containment of such psychological information allows Max to cling onto their existence in a conjuring of the dead.

Julia Kristeva suggests that 'melancholy persons settle the lost Thing or object within themselves, identifying with the loss's beneficial features on the one hand, with its maleficent ones on the other. This presents us with the first state of the self's doubling.' (31) After Anna's death, Max positions Anna within himself - 'we carry the dead with us' (32) – in an attempt to hold onto her memory. Like Chloe and Myles who were 'one mind and two bodies' (33), Max clings onto the memory of Anna in an attempt to preserve her memory inside of him. In his case, his double is the ghost of Anna who now only exists in the space of his mind; a place where death may be transcended, that is, 'until we die too.' (34) Such intimacy between the dead and the living has an intense effect on Max. Soon after Anna's death, he becomes more alert to the sensations of his own body: a testament to his being alive. 'It is as if I were being tested for vital signs; for signs of feeling; for signs of life.' (35) He goes on to note how,

I have developed too a queasy fascination with the processes of my body, the gradual ones, the way for instance my hair and my fingernails insistently keep growing, no matter what state I am in, what anguish I may be undergoing. It seems so inconsiderate, so heedless of circumstance, this relentless generation of matter that is already dead. (36)

His allegiance towards Anna's memory begins to affect his self-perception. Although his body is alive, he chooses to allow his mind to be persistently haunted by memory: resulting in the deduction that he too is dead. A glance in the mirror reveals he has 'definitely something of the look of a hanged man...not yet hanged perhaps but definitely on Death Row.' (37) The melancholia Max experiences after Anna's death is driven by a guilt originating from his own survival. Freud's essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' suggests that melancholia is 'a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity' containing 'self-reproaches' and 'delusional expectation of punishment.' (38) Max's impression of being a condemned man on Death Row is his punishment for surviving whilst Anna (and others in his life) has died. Max's mourning has become so extreme that he considers suicide in a sinister replication of the twins walking into the sea, further enhancing the double nature of this novel. Max seeks penance by moving to the site of trauma and death at Ballyless. His drunken meditation of re-enacting the Graces' deaths is 'not a disguised act of war but a merging with sadness and, beyond it, with that impossible love, never reached, always elsewhere, such as the promises of nothingness, of death.' (39) The oblivion offered by the sea's expanse provides an opportunity for forgetfulness and nothingness: an escape away from the melancholia of mourning. In the *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida proposes that 'to love in love or friendship would always mean: I can kill you, you can kill me, we can kill ourselves. Therefore, in all cases, we already are dead for one another.' (40) This bears a direct relation to Max's experience of love: for Max to love Anna, he must be prepared to end his own life for her. The resolution he achieves at the end of the book is accomplished by the realisation that his mourning is so intense that he would die for her. Losing his footing foils his attempt at suicide, knocking him unconscious by striking his 'temple on a stone.' (41) This is however, irrelevant, as he has proven to himself he would be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice.

As I have already suggested, place instigates the recollection of memories for Max to gather and archive in his mind. As Derrida states 'the structure of the archive is spectral. It is spectral a priori: neither present nor absent "in the flesh," neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met, no more than those of Hamlet's father, thanks to the possibility of the visor.' (42) What Max is looking for at the Cedars Hotel is not simply something to be found, but rather a trigger to awaken the forgotten past in his memory. 'The room was much as I remembered it, or looked as if it was as I remembered, for memories are always eager to match themselves seamlessly to the things and places of a revisited past.' (43) He acknowledges his desperation to rekindle moments of the past, becoming more and more frustrated as the reality in front of him is not what he remembered. The hotel becomes a disappointment to Max when he realises:

Everything was slightly out of scale, all angles slightly out of true. The staircase was steeper, the landing pokier, the lavatory window looked not on to the road, as I thought it should, but back across the fields. I experienced a sense almost of panic as the real, the crassly complacent real, took hold of the things I thought I remembered and shook them into its own shape. (44)

Max's disillusionment with the Cedars is represented in a bitter resentment towards the living for removing residues of the dead. He angrily acknowledges how the space of the hotel holds no sentimental value for him or his past. He may have thought the hotel would be an archive of memories, but it coldly proves itself to be a space that has changed over the years. The hotel is not the only space that has changed however, Max has not considered how he too has changed since he stayed there as a child. One possible explanation for the angles to seem 'out of scale' or for the small size of the landing would be that Max has grown into a man since his stay at the Cedars. Like Alice in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Max's experience of disproportion leaves him feeling anxious, as the Cedars Hotel is structured by the supplemental recollections that he holds in his mind (this will be expanded upon later). He is not yet aware that he does not need to find evidence of the Graces' existence, as all the evidence he needs is present in his psyche ('we carry the dead with us'). Even though all traces of the Graces' have been removed, the space of their dwelling is enough to activate archived memories. The traces may have gone, but the structure of the house and surrounding area is still in place.

Max stays at the Cedars for another reason - to escape the house he shared with his wife. It seems to the mourning Max that their family home takes on a hostile stance towards the living:

I had not yet had the heart to put it on the market, but I could not have stayed there a moment longer. After Anna's death it went hollow, became a vast echo-chamber. There was something hostile in the air too. (45)

The space of the house takes on a distinct enmity when one of its inhabitants dies, as if death produces traces of presence that no longer exist. There can be no recollection of a form of presence (Anna) without an admission of spectrality. Anna's absence produces an angry atmosphere in the house that Max unconsciously directs towards himself: he is angry at his own survival. Max is then wary to take on the house of the Cedars for fear of a present absence where the Graces' should be. 'I was nervous of this

moment, the moment when I would have to take on the house, to put it on, as it were, like something I had worn in another, prelapsarian life.’ (46) Max’s description of the hotel as clothing hints at how living spaces may not be as solid as we assume them to be. They are spaces that people live and die in: all that remains is a haunting supplement to memory:

There was an impression of general, tight-lipped awkwardness, of all these homely things – jars on the shelves, saucepans on the stove, that breadboard with its jagged knife – averting their gaze from our all at once unfamiliar, afflicted presence in their midst. (47)

The contents of their home have become a supplement; an addition to what has been lost. The saucepans and jars were used by Anna in a particular space, and so have become an alternative mechanism to induce haunting within their house.

Important events of the past happen in spaces, so in order to recall the memory, it is necessary to recall the space it occurred in. Max recalls an excursion to a picture-house by trying to remember where his and Chloe’s first kiss took place:

Chloe and I were sitting in the middle of a bench near the front, so close to the screen that it seemed to tilt out over us at the top and even the most benign of the black-and-white phantoms flickering across it loomed with a manic intensity. (48)

The memory of a picture-house is spectral because it exists in the past, but also because ‘cinema is the art of phantoms; it is neither image nor perception.’ (49) The picture-house is an old one: ‘a barn-like structure set on a bit of scrubby waste-land.’ (50) The film quality in such a picture-house would doubtless be rather poor, making the outlines of the images blurred and indistinct, akin to a ghost. Cinematic spectrality consists of the reproduction of images that is secondary to actual events. The filming of the film has already been done, the events have already occurred. In this sense, the cinema projects events not dissimilar to how they are recalled in memory. ‘Above us the screen retained a throbbing grey penumbral glow that lasted a long moment before fading, and of which something seemed to remain even when it was gone, the ghost of a ghost.’ (51) The double nature of the novel returns in Max’s recalling of a memory that appears like a memory itself. His description of the place where they went to see films as a ‘picture-house’ refers back to my earlier discussion on spaces. Unlike the term ‘cinema’, ‘picture-house’ reminds Max that he is again, inhabiting a variety of house. In any form of house, the structure has contained what has happened within it. In this sense, a house, hotel or picture-house is an archive of events, a place quite simply, ‘where things commence.’ (52) As Mark Wigley explains, all spaces can be determined by ‘a line that produces an inside opposed to an outside, a line that acts as a mechanism of domestication.’ (53) Control within a house’s structure is the structure itself as ‘to constrain the unruly play of representations is to house them, to domesticate them.’ (54) Records relating to a house are contained in local councils and governments to ensure a house is ‘housed’ through a variety of different archives. Similarly, deaths that occur in houses are recorded in detail and archived extensively. Deaths that occur in the sea however (as in the case of Chloe and Myles), are much more difficult to record.

The realm of the sea is a persistent image in the novel, initially as a site for play between Max and the Grace twins. The location of a picnic on the beach faces out ‘desperately toward the horizon as if in mute search for a sign of rescue.’ (55) It is suggested that by walking into the sea, Chloe and Myles took an opportunity offered by the water, ‘their backs turned to the world’ (56), to escape a reprimand from their governess. The twins were (albeit willingly) swallowed up by the sea’s expanse. The sea, as Jonathan Raban writes, is ‘swollen with historical significance’ (57) as a battleground for international disputes (‘the little waves before me at the water’s edge speak with an animate voice, whispering eagerly of some ancient catastrophe’ (58)). ‘The sea is a realm of danger and death’ (59) that has taken many lives and produced an impressive expanse of history beneath its surface. ‘The sea interests for its depth, for the quality of its bottom as a holding-ground.’ (60) The sea may contain a deep history and have claimed an extensive amount of lives, but it does not reveal its secrets. It extends endlessly, unlimited in its incalculable expanse. In *Ghosts*, the protagonist describes how ‘I like the sea; I am afraid of it, but all the same I like it, its strangeness, its indifferent thereness; in all that space I can forget for a while who and what I am.’ (61) Its expanse suggests a forgetfulness about its history that extends to an uncannily impenetrable depth. Its endlessness also produces a placelessness: there is no locating the sea. Because it cannot be located, it would be an impossibility to archive the events and history contained within it. The sea is a respected zone: memories or lives contained within it are not interfered with. The bodies of Chloe and Myles Grace cannot be retrieved from the sea and archived in the usual death register. As a space, the sea is not definite; it is not contained within a particular zone. It cannot be ‘housed’, like other spaces depicted in the novel. It is undomesticated, sublime, uncanny. It is essentially, a non-place or anti-space, which can be seen but is never fully present. The sea is also permanent: it remains in a defiance of infinite time. As a place of movement and voyage, the sea is an in-between space that has no discernable barriers. The ‘sea and the land interpenetrate’ (62) in a mergence of two states: rather like the status of the ghost, both alive and dead.

The sea forms part of a renewal process, as footprints or impressions on the shore are removed daily by its tides. The traces of the Grace family for example, have been removed from the beach, just like they have been removed from the Cedars Hotel:

It had retained hardly anything of the past, of the part of the past that I knew here. I had hoped for something definite of the Graces, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, a faded photo, say, forgotten in a drawer, a lock of hair, or even a hair-pin, lodged between the floorboards, but there was nothing, nothing like that. No remembered atmosphere, either, to speak of. I suppose so many of the living passing through – it is a lodging house, after all – have worn away all traces of the dead. (63)

Just like the sea has removed the traces of Chloe and Myles Grace from its shores after they walked into it, the Cedars too has lost the memory of the Grace family. The living, who have passed through the Hotel, have removed marks of the dead: evidence that Max is seeking to support his own existence (and archive in his writing). Discussing the archive, Derrida states that archivization is to ‘protect marks from being erased’ (64), just as Max’s archiving attempts to do. To record is to remember traces of specific moments that time and progress attempt to erase. Such impressions of the past are analogous to the

Derridean sense of trace: considered as a rupture of Western Metaphysics. (65) By examining binary oppositions that act as the foundation to our culture, deconstruction exposes traces of incongruity: ‘the trace, paradoxically of the other in the selfsame.’ (66) There are, for example, traces of presence within absence, in the case of the ghost. Every element in a system bears traces of other elements. As Belsey explains, ‘These traces are nothing other than the absence of the other “element”...No element is anywhere present (nor simply absent), there are only traces.’ (67) Within the haunted spaces of mourning, traces of the past are exposed into the present, and the deceased into the lives of the living. This is only possible through memory and archivization, as traces of the dead ultimately become absences if unrecorded. This is why Max is overcome by absences in most of the spaces he encounters: he regrets there has been no documental recording of those he mourns; as our feet touch ‘the ground, the foot, the leg, the ash and earth below serve together as a sort of machine, a momentary printing press that will leave the archive even as it disappears forever.’ (68) The fleeting occurrence of the instant allows such moments to be lost unless archived. The archive is after all, ‘a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met.’ (69) In the promotion of archivization, Derrida attempts to expose traces that are lost all too easily. Perhaps this is why traces are removed the instant they are created: as a necessity to enable the binary oppositions our western culture depends upon. The living must erode traces of the dead, as their existence (dasein) dismantles the life/death opposition. Traces of the dead in living spaces reveal the possible existence of a presence outside of a constructed notion of being. The sea is a natural mechanism of removing traces in its sweeping away of the Grace twins’ bodies.

In an attempt to prevent himself from forgetting traces of the dead, Max’s mind becomes a mourning space that accommodates the memories contained in the spaces we have looked at so far. The spaces of the Cedars, the picture-house, the family home and the sea have invaded Max’s mind in an internalisation of spatially stimulated memories. In *Memoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida suggests ‘a possible mourning which would interiorize within us the image, idol, or ideal of the other who is dead and lives only in us.’ (70) Max is living within his own archives, archivizing the spaces of his life, and experiencing them, re-living them. In writing an archive, Max’s internal space is becoming one. The structure of this novel can be understood as the flowing and ebbing of a gradual tidal progression into a memorial spectral realm. As a permanent feature of the book, the sea suggests how through mourning, Max is increasingly becoming a haunted space. As Eric Prenowitz states in his note to *Archive Fever*, ‘an event [Max’s journey] is always archiving; [Max’s writings] an event is an archiving act even if there may not be a “proper” archive and even if the archive of an event, as its interpretation, must always remain open.’ (71) As we read Max’s writings, his travels are archiving themselves continuously: his archive also remains permanently open and unfinished, until of course he will ‘die too’.

In Max’s case, bereavement can result in a kind of supplemental haunting with all the symptoms of a ghostly encounter that operate through memory. The term ‘supplement’ is a Derridean one applied to that which ‘is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness’ just like the word or ‘the sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.’ (72) As mentioned earlier, memory can supplement spaces of the past by recalling what occurred there. For Max, his memories are spectral due to the mourning process he is experiencing. The supplement takes the place of a presence, initiating a present absence: in this case, Max’s haunting

memories supplement the reality he perceives. The places he visits (and avoids) are incomplete without the addition of memory to understand their significance. The opposite of this is also true: Max needs reality to decipher his memories. Either way, the reality we perceive is haunted by memories that mourning draws attention to. This is the importance of the mourning process: to recognize how haunting (in memorial form in this case) supplements a partial version of reality. In other words, the dead return to disturb the equilibrium of the living. As mentioned earlier in my discussion of trace, binary oppositions require stability to maintain their structure. The trace of the deceased in the realm of the living (the dead supplementing the living) is dangerous and ‘seductive; it leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, guides it towards its loss or fall and therefore it is a sort of lapse or scandal.’ (73) Like the trace, the supplement is a rupture, a fracturing of traditional systems to expose discontinuity within them.

The concept of the supplementing trace is constituted by difference. As the haunting presence in the novel, the accuracy of memory is questioned. An encounter with a woman named Avril in Duignan’s Lane disappoints Max when he learns that the Duignan’s have moved away from the area, and that the past now exists only in memory:

All at once my gloom gathered itself into a surge of sour resentment against her, as if she had for some fell reason of her own set herself up here, in this unconvincing disguise – that hennaed hair, those old lady’s bootees – intentionally to usurp a corner of my mythic past. (74)

Max’s mythic past appears to be comprised of constructions produced like paintings by ‘applying a dab of colour here, scumbling a detail there’, referring to memories of people or places as his ‘handiwork.’ (75) These creations are destructive to the actual past, as ‘the result of all this close work is that my focus on them is blurred rather than sharpened.’ (76) Such a statement leaves the reader in doubt as to the accuracy of Max’s recollections. ‘I keep going up close to them, the two Graces, now mother, now daughter, applying a dab of colour here, scumbling a detail there.’ (77) However, we may interpret Max’s inability to accurately recollect in light of Derrida’s remark that ‘failure of memory is not a failure; we can also interpret its apparent negativity, its very finitude, what affects its experience of discontinuity and distance, as a power, as the very opening of difference.’ (78) Difference is articulated through inaccuracies, as disarticulation is the very essence of the ghost: ‘the specter is also, among other things, what one imagines.’ (79) The process of writing or ‘archivization, produces as much as it records the event’ (80) as ultimately, memory is inaccurate. Derrida’s examination of Freud’s archive reveals that ‘we will always wonder what he [Freud] may have burned’ (81), as archivization relies upon what has and hasn’t been recorded. Memory and imagination are wrought together so tightly in Banville’s novel that even Max cannot tell one from the other: ‘if it is Memory herself who is at work here and not some other, more fanciful muse.’ (82) The reminiscence of Mrs Grace’s washing line containing a ‘black swimsuit, hanging by its shoulder straps’, becomes ‘limp and scandalously empty’ (83); a trace of Mrs Grace’s life in Max’s memory. It is ‘on the frontiers of life and death [that] occasionally I have the arrogant feeling of being witness to the meaninglessness of Being, of revealing the absurdity of bonds and beings.’ (84) The haunting nature of mourning provokes traces to be revealed, resulting in a questioning of metaphysics.

Due to the supplemental traces of memory contained within his mind, Max learns that the departed can return. This overturns the western metaphysical belief of what Geoffrey Bennington refers to as ‘constructing things on an unquestioned value: presence.’ (85) Instead, Max’s mourning induces an interaction between memory and haunting. It suggests that presence is not a set concept providing the foundation for western thought. In Max’s recollections for example, he begins to see himself not in the preferred category of the living: as a ‘presence’, but as an ‘absence’:

I had a sudden image of myself as a sort of large dark simian something slumped there at the table, or not a something but a nothing, rather, a hole in the room, a palpable absence, a darkness visible. It was very strange. I saw the scene as if from outside myself [...] and I this big dark indistinct shape, like the shape that no one at the séance sees until the daguerreotype is developed. I think I am becoming my own ghost. (86)

This division of Max’s self begins with the unease at his existence (mentioned earlier in ‘the look of a hanged man’), and develops into perceiving himself as a ghost. His remembered response to the twins’ death is moving ‘among the rooms as if I were myself a thing of air, a drifting spirit, Ariel set free and at a loss.’ (87) Max’s existence after mourning is problematic for him, as he can no longer rely upon the discourse of presence to distinguish himself from the dead. *The Sea* reveals how complex the mourning subject can be. ‘I am’ becomes ‘I am haunted: I am haunted by myself’ (88) as to live is to house (archive) memorial hauntings within the space of the mind.

In this sense, mourning can be instructive: it can teach that there is no such notion as absolute presence, in the living or the dead. Each binary is present and absent in different instances. In Max’s case, he also learns that remnants of the dead remain in memory and space: preventing them from achieving absolute absence. Due to this, mourning encourages a consideration of the self in such terms: How present am I? How absent am I? Like Max’s contemplation of the twins ‘having one mind and two bodies’ (89), grief forces a doubling of the self as the bereaved struggle to come to terms with present absences that surround them. In *Memoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida poses the question: ‘what if there were a memory of the present and that far from fitting the present to itself, it divided the instant?’ (90) The whole concept of the instant is divided for Max, between different spaces, time, but also forms of existence. In the instant of re-visiting the Cedars, Max recalls how

standing with Mrs Grace in that sunlit living room, or sitting with Chloe in the dark of the picture-house, I was there and not there, myself and revenant, immured in the moment and yet hovering somehow on the point of departure. (91)

After his double loss, Max feels that he is ‘learning to live amongst the living again.’ (92) Derrida states how ‘the time of the “learning to live”’ amounts to learning to ‘live with ghosts. In any case from the other at the edge of life.’ (93) Learning to be alive is taught by others, by memories and experiences the dead have left behind. Max is learning to live in the presence of ghostly memories, but also with the knowledge of a trace that deconstructs the systems of thought around him.

As the narrative comes to an end, Max 'recalls another moment' in Ballyless when 'the whole sea surged, it was not a wave, but a smooth rolling swell that seemed to come up from the deeps, as if something vast down there had stirred itself, and I was lifted briefly and carried a little way toward the shore and then was set down on my feet as before, as if nothing had happened.' (94) This memory enters Max's mind at exactly the right time. Faced with the death of his wife, he reminds himself of the sea: an escape into oblivion and a return to a past trauma in the search of atonement. After this recollection, a 'happy lightness' appears before Max, 'as if I had stepped suddenly out of the dark into a splash of pale, salt-washed sunlight'. The past has 'told me what to do, and where I must go.' (95) Escaping his daughter, the house he shared with his wife, and numerous sympathetic friends and relatives, Max retreats into his own memorial archive. Division between time and space provides an opening void for the creation of a ghost: or quite simply, a man in mourning.

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