

南台人文社會學報 2012 年 5 月

第七期 頁 117-141

## 尋找「鬼」跡：論亨利詹姆斯「愉悅角」中的鬼魅空間

陳素連\*

### 摘要

這是亨利詹姆斯擅長的把戲，將一個尋常不過的場所轉化成幽靈空間。他在 1908 年出版的「愉悅角」便是個很好的例子。幽靈化的空間為打破理性思考的模式另闢蹊徑，這也是此篇論文重要的論述之一。本篇論文分成五部份，第一部份闡述本篇論文的理論基礎，雅克達希達的「幽靈纏繞理論」。第二部份則是說明亨利詹姆斯在「愉悅角」中建構的幽靈空間，一個尋常不過的老宅如何轉化成「幻化」的世界，最後甚至於液化讓布來登如至身水中，在此空間任何衝突的情緒或無以名狀的恐懼錯綜複雜，交錯成矛盾難解的網，猶如存在於真實與虛幻之間的第三空間。第三部份說明有關書中主角史賓塞布來登在夜晚流連老宅，尋找著「鬼/軌」跡時的遭遇。某一晚他碰到了身份不明的訪客，懷著複雜的心情，他惱怒、哀鳴、抗拒，最終暈了過去，具有毀滅與啟發力量的「幽靈」存在本質因此令主體的完整性崩壞。第四部份則是「幽靈性」的探討，亨利詹姆斯靈異故事中，「鬼魅」是否存在不是重點，重點是「幽靈性」這個意符很難被定義加上它本身具有破壞性，也因此讓文本的呈現變得曖昧與晦澀，主角與讀者的問題依舊懸而未決。第五部份總結以上討論，再一次強調隨著幽靈的「返回」，那帶著毀滅又充滿預示的力量，造就了異質化的空間，也成為探討現代人不安定感、恐懼、懷疑等各種心態的能量。

**關鍵詞：**幽靈纏繞理論、幽靈空間、幽靈性、主體性

---

\*陳素連，南台科技大學應用英語系助理教授

電子信箱：suelien@mail.stut.edu.tw

收稿日期：2012 年 03 月 29 日，修改日期：2012 年 05 月 22 日，接受日期：2012 年 05 月 31 日

*STUST Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, May 2012*

*No. 7 pp. 117-141*

## ***Seeking to be Haunted: the Spectral Space in Henry James’ “The Jolly Corner”***

*Sue-Lien Chen \**

### ***Abstract***

*Based on Jacque Derrida’s theory of Hauntology, this paper is aimed to scrutinize the significance of a spectral space which is created in Henry James’ ghostly story “The Jolly Corner” (1908). As a concept of deconstruction, Hauntology is appropriated to deal with the issues of the specter and spectrality, which dominate “The Jolly Corner” in a very Jamesian manner. Namely, Henry James’s idiosyncratic method of manipulating Gothic mechanism is also referred to. There are five sections in this paper. In the first section, the theoretical framework is introduced; that is, Jacque Derrida’s conception of Hauntology from his work Specters of Marx serves as the foundation of my argument. In the second section, the spectral space as a specified site is discussed. With the presence of the spectral figure, the ordinary domain becomes twisted and turns out to be dynamic and watery, engulfing the protagonist Spencer Brydon into a hallucinatory and lamenting whirl. In the third section the collapse of the rational thinking because of the appearance of the spectral figure is depicted. Responding to Brydon’s assumption that he has an alter ego, the split self appears to him in a hideous form. In a distorted and isolated realm, the presence, simultaneously, threatens to crash wholeness of the supposed subjectivity. In the fourth section, spectrality becomes the focus. As a deferred signifier, spectrality enhances the vulnerability of the conventional concept of subjectivity and cannot be arrested under a certain signified. And therefore, as the protagonist wakes up from the spectral space, he is left in a state of uncertainty about his problematic life. In the fifth section, the alienated world and representation of spectrality in Henry James’s ghostly tales are emphasized again.*

***Keywords: Hauntology, spectral space, spectrality, subjectivity***

---

\*Sue-Lien Chen, Assistant Professor, Applied Department of English, STUST,  
Mail: suelien@mail.stust.edu.tw

Manuscript received : Mar 29, 2012 , Modified : May 22, 2012 , Accepted : May 31, 2012

## Introduction

Henry James tends to impress his reader with various types of spectral spaces, for example, the beautiful mansion Bly in one of his most popular ghost stories *The Turn of the Screw*, the deserted but inviting country house in "The Ghostly Rental," the mysterious room locked by a curse in "Owen Wingrave," the study owned by an earnest writer whose spirit is still felt in "The Real Thing," and the old house teeming with family memories in New York City in "The Jolly Corner." They are not notorious haunted places where macabre incidents happen to those who are curious about them; yet once the wraith is felt/seen or is said to be wandering in the places, the impact of the stories is immediately strengthened, transferring readers into the uncanny realm. What is more, James's ghosts cannot be explained away or exorcised for the ethic purpose like some of the conventional Gothic writers', such as Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. Henceforth, heated debates on whether the phantom exists or not have spread among the critics. To be brief, Henry James has his own idiosyncratic method of treating ghosts, and thus develops his own special spectral spaces.

In fact, the specialty of Henry James's ghost stories or his Gothicism lies in the creepiness of the daily life. Just as Leon Edel (1963) reveals, "In his mature, the novelist expressed this more characteristically—the ghostly tale called for 'the strange and the sinister embroidered on the very type of the normal and the easy'" (Edel, 1963, p. vi). This is the charm of Henry James' specters and their stories: a reciprocal relationship between the haunting and the haunted in people's everyday life. Henry James leads his reader to a sphere where apparition can be regarded as part of living instead of a peculiar wonderment. By so doing, James seems to motivate his reader to challenge the existing episteme predominated by reasoning that excludes and condemns the apparitional

shadows. When James's Gothic wand wields, reality is not just material. Other than that, when the reader is ushered into the spectral sphere created by James, the hard reality built by orderly logics and scientific visions seems to crash, leaving a fissure for people to peep into something unutterable; namely, in the spectral space, the phantom beckons human beings to explore something that exists but is denied while cannot be dodged. The rising up of a spectral space can be scrutinized with the help of Jacque Derrida's theory of "Hautology."

According to Jacque Derrida (1994), "If there is a something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general and so forth. (Derrida, 1994, p. 39). In some sense, spectrality is sinister and destructive to the established epistemology. However, this tragic tinge conveys promising harbinger—destruction and rebirth. Derived from "Hauntology,"<sup>1</sup> spectrality really annoys or even irritates the academy.<sup>2</sup> What is "Hauntology?" In Derrida's own (1994) words, "repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time, since the singularity of any first time makes of it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it *hauntology*" (Derrida, 1994, p. 10). Referring to the presence of the specter, Derrida (1994) alludes to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "*Hamlet* already began with expected return of the dead King. After the end of history, the spirit comes by *coming back* revenant, it figures *both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and

---

<sup>1</sup> The pronunciation of "Hauntology" is similar to "ontology." Therefore, Jacque Derrida deliberately coined this term to replace "ontology."

<sup>2</sup> In his book *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international*, Derrida points out, "There has never been a scholar who really, and as scholar, deals with ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts—nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality" (11).

again" (Derrida, 1994, p.0). A Taiwanese scholar Jinshun Lai (2005) explains what this term stands for: ". . . the ghost's ontology which cannot be ontologized in the linear and progressive process between life and death or between the actual and the virtual. The logic of hauntology signifies the eternal return of singularity, the infinite present-absent specter. Hauntology as iterability leads to alteration through returning" (p.27). Challenging the episteme of ontology of human beings, Derrida uses "hauntology" to reconstruct the knowledge of time and being, pointing out the absurdity of linear perspective of time and history. Accordingly, terror does not occur because of the emergence of the apparition but because of the precariousness of our beliefs. Colin Davis (2005), a scholar in Royal Holloway, recapitulates the concept, saying, "**Derrida's** spectre is a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate. It does not belong to the order of knowledge" (Davis, 2005). Then what does "hauntology" target? "**Hauntology** is part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relation to the dead, examine the elusive identities of the living, and explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought" (Davis, 2005). Hauntology guides people to observe the uncanny realm through an aperture where the present and the past meet, and where the past creeps into the present or even into the future in the form of a specter. Why does the specter of the past return and what does it want? Derrida, with the example of Hamlet's father, suggests that the returning wraith probably presages the necessity of revenge, justice, and resetting the order.<sup>3</sup> The specter appears to embody what Hamlet says, " 'The time out of joint': time is disarticulated, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run and run down *tranque et detraque*, deranged, bout out

---

<sup>3</sup> In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida explains that Hamlet curses his destiny of "having to punish, avenge, exercise justice and right in the form of reprisals" (20).

of order and mad. Time is off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadjusted” (Derrida, 1994, p. 18). He “thereby opened one of those breaches” (Derrida, 1994, p. 18), and the ‘breaches’ make the borderlines of the real world and the imaginary one collapse, and then precipitate anachronism. The disorderliness becomes the scourge of people’s trepidation, forcing the living to imagine the ultimate possibility of existence. Hauntology pushes the reader veer off the symbiotic debates on the veracity of ghosts, but to justify the presence of specters which might embody personal fears or institutional defects or both simultaneously.

To demonstrate Henry James intent and Derrida’s scheme of Hauntology, “The Jolly Corner” serves as good example. Here Henry James has created a realm between the existing and the other world, which can be regarded as the third realm, or the third reality. The protagonist of “The Jolly Corner” Spencer Brydon, experiencing near death when the alienated world becomes watery, almost devastating him, comes to realize the contradictory parts of life, the incompatibility of reality and desires, which is a tragic ending of a hopeless middle-aged man.

### **A Twisted World**

In James’s ghostly tales, the reality of the ghost is controversial, but the spectral space is certainly uniquely his own because it alienates an ordinary domain, transforming it into an enclosed sphere that is perceptible to certain people. His specters act like Derrida’s example of Hamlet’s father, who entices the prince, making the time out of joint (Derrida, 1994, p. 3). For example, Darrel Mansell(1985) used to illustrate the heavenly place in the governess’s eye, Bly, in *The Turn of the Screw* (1901), as “a picture with no third dimension, a window become blank or a mirror, . . . –flat like that two-dimensional place Flatland so as to allow its imprisoned figures no view, no communication, no reference beyond the planet of their own restricted existence” (Mansell, 1985, p.

63). This two dimensional space exists in its own way, and the dwellers (the governess, the children, and the old maid) seem to be sealed into this framed picture, becoming hypnotized or even numbed and disabled either in thinking or acting. Similar to this flat world in *The Turn of the Screw*, the old, empty house inherited by Spencer Brydon in "The Jolly Corner" could be compared to a mirror-like sphere, especially after he recognized "the face, *that* face, Spencer Brydon's" (James, 1963, p. 427). The reflection of himself indicated that Brydon was being ambushed in a speculum-like area, the two dimensional one. The image of mirror implied that Brydon's self-knowledge seemed to turn back to "the mirror stage" when he had to fumble about to establish his subjectivity, his understanding of self. Besides the obscurity of location and self-knowledge, this deserted place by Brydon was surrounded by the aura of the graveyard: "He closed the door and, while he re-pocketed his key, looking up and down, they took in comparatively harsh actuality of the Avenue, which reminded him of the assault of the out light of the Desert on the traveler emerging from an Egyptian tomb. . . . since his parents and his favorite sister, to say nothing of other kin, in numbers, had run their course and met their end there. That represented, within the walls, ineffaceable life" (James, 1963, p. 405-6). The foreshadowing was obvious: the Egyptian tomb portended the approaching threat of death and menacing spirits. The otherworldly implication conveyed the hallucinatory essence of the spectral space. The memories of the past and the mysterious atmosphere both beckon Brydon to venture into this realm and conjure "the ineffaceable life" used to be breathing here.

In fact, the suspicion of his present life in the U.S after a long "exile" in Europe initiated his habitual roaming alone in the house at night. In the opening of the story, having decided to settle himself down in New York City, Brydon kept telling himself, "It would have taken a century, [he repeatedly said to

himself, and said also to Alice Staverton, it would have taken a longer absence and a more averted mind than those even which he had been guilty, to pile up the differences, the newnesses, the queernesses, above all the bignesses, for the better or the worse, that at present assaulted his vision wherever he looked” (James, 1963, p. 397). The incompatibility to the hometown pushed him to seek for solutions from the memories in the past—his lived past and even to be haunted by the demised kin.

Having some obscure expectation in mind, Brydon kept his midnight wandering going until the night the house really trapped him, pushing him to the state of stupefaction or even death. “He had come into sight of the door in which the brief chain of communication ended and which he now surveyed from the nearer threshold, the one not directly facing it. Placed at some distance to the left of this point, it would have admitted him to the last room of the four, the room without other approach or egress, had it not, to his intimate conviction, been closed since his former visitation, the matter probably of a quarter of an hour before. He stared with all his eyes at the wonder of the fact, arrested again where he stood and again holding his breath while he sounded its sense. Surely it had been subsequently closed—that is it had been on his previous passage indubitably open!” (James, 1963, p. 418-9) Until then, he found out he had been confined in an unfamiliar world with no escape. Like the dwellers in Bly, Brydon had no communication, no reference, and even no ability to contact the outside world. What he could do was struggle with the menacing presence, endeavoring to figure out what led him to this alienated world and why the jolly corner turned out to be a terrible one.

As the collision between Brydon and the mysterious presence or the spectral visitor gave Brydon suppressing impact, the enclosed sphere finally turned into a fluid, watery world: “The house, withal, seemed immense, the scale of space again inordinate; the open rooms, to no one of which his eyes

deflected, gloomed in their shuttered state like mouths of caverns; only the high skylight that formed the crown of the deep well created for him a medium in which he could advance, but which might have been, for queerness of colour, some watery under-world. He tried to think of something noble, as that his property was really grand, a splendid possession; but this nobleness took the form too of the clear delight with which he was finally to sacrifice it. They might come in now, the builders, the destroyers—they might come as soon as they would. At the end of two flights he had dropped to another zone, and from the middle of the third, with only one more left, he recognized the influence of the lower windows, of half-drawn blinds, of the occasional gleam of street-lamps, of the glazed spaces of the vestibule. This was the bottom of the sea, which showed an illumination of its own and which he even saw paved—when at a given moment he drew up to sink a long look over the banisters—with the marble square of his childhood”(James, 1963, p. 424-5). The past with the “morbid obsession” of the “mere vain egoism” (James, 1963, p. 406) overwhelmed him, drawing him to “sink” into amniotic fluid inside the womb—his desire to be unborn or “rest forever” (James, 1963, p. 421). In this watery-world, the real world melted into wavering imagery—the sublime, the intoxication, the ecstasy and even the trepidation all imbued this hallucinatory space. And as for Brydon, the self-knowledge, after returning to the mirror stage, at this moment, even worse, had been deteriorated into the embryo phase. To Brydon, not only has time been out of joint but also the demarcation line between the real and the imaginary has been blurred. According to M. R. Dougherty, “Through the tension between the two opposites, Wolfreys argues, a spectral other can be seen: in the liminal space between the opposites arises a third, and previously unseen, reality” (Dougherty, 2006, p. 271). In the beginning of the pursuit, Brydon, confident and eager, expected to explore the

possible success that he had forsaken; nonetheless, he thoroughly gaped at the “ineffaceable life” that resembles and affects him. The black and white marble slabs of his childhood distinguished to his eyes, which brought about the only possibility for him to get rid of this nightmare—to go back to the primitive state or to resort to the memories of childhood, something he had lost forever.

### **Revenge from the Past and Crashing Subjectivity**

The appearance of the spectral figure turned the old house into a twisted world, but it seemed to be evoked by Spencer Brydon, who showed unwillingness to fit into the present society. In other words, he somewhat indulged himself into the un-lived past which might ease his tension and compensate what he had lost. He told to his close friend Alice Staverton, “Everyone asks me what I ‘think’ of everything, and I make answer as I can—begging or dodging the question, putting them off with any nonsense. It wouldn’t matter to any of them really, . . . my ‘thoughts’ would still be almost altogether about something that concerns only myself” (James, 1963, p. 396). And then “It was a few days after this that, during an hour passed with her again, he had expressed his impatience of the too flattering curiosity—among the people he met—about his appreciation of New York” (James, 1963,p.406). Without Alice Staverton, what Brydon could rely on in New York was his memories about the life in the jolly corner, used to be deserted by him. At night, Brydon “roamed, slowly, warily, but all *restlessly*, he himself did” in the house (James, 1963, p. 412 my italics). “Restlessness” marked Brydon, seeking for redemption or compensation, but, “restlessness” indeed induced despair and shut him up in the old house. As a self-centered person, Spencer Brydon was very sensible to his own emotions—guilt, dismay, queerness, pang, which were tormenting this battered expatriate. To pacify the restlessness in heart, Brydon

expected to find solutions in this jolly but "holy" corner--a kind of urge out of a mentally suffering and aesthetically consuming person.<sup>4</sup> The vulnerable and barren mentality needs to be imbued with something higher or nobler because he confessed "He was leading, at any time these thirty years, a selfish frivolous scandalous life" (James, 1963, p. 408). He sought for something sublime by appealing to the nocturnal activity (James, 1963, p. 421). Hence like a stalker, "he watched with his glimmering light; moving slowly, holding it high, playing it far, rejoicing above all, as much as he might, in open vistas, reaches of communication between rooms and by passages; the long straight chance or show, as he would have called it, for the revelation he pretended to invite. It was a practice he found he could perfectly 'work' without exciting remark; no one was in the least wiser for it; . . . (James, 1963, p. 410). Shalyn Clagget (2005) comments on Brydon's wandering in the house, saying, "Brydon's infatuation with this idealization leads him to stalk the specter of his supposedly successful self. 'Catching' his own image becomes an obsessive pursuit, revealing Brydon's desire for a literal encounter—perhaps even a union with—his idealized selfobject" (p.195). He only believed in himself and tried to synthesize all the conflicting emotions in his present life.<sup>5</sup> He kept saying to himself,

---

<sup>4</sup> According to Krook-Gilead(1962), James, like Brydon, tends to feel that

The knowledge that he had not 'lived' all he could, the fear that he had perhaps sacrificed too much for the sacred end of art, the deeper fear that there might have been a sharp taint of egotism in the sacrificial business itself, appears in these years to have grown more and more oppressive, and the pain of 'too late' almost unendurable. The fears could, of course, have been exorcised and the sacrifice of 'life' at least partly compensated for by the miracle of a public recognition such as he confessed himself—in the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, for instance—occasionally to have dreamed of. But this miracle did not happen; and the sense of personal failure, reinforced by the objective proof of professional failure in the fate of New York Edition, may be supposed to have had a great deal to do with the nervous disorder to which he succumbed at the beginning of 1910, which for two wretched years virtually incapacitated him for serious work. (351)

<sup>5</sup> In Brydon's mind, "it was mere vain egoism, and it was moreover, if she liked a morbid obsession. He found all things come back to the question of what he personally might have been, how he might have led his life and 'turn out', if he had not so, at the outset, given it up. And confessing for the first time to the intensity within him of this absurd speculation—which but

“What would it have made of me, what would it have made of me? . . . I see what it has made of dozens of others, those I meet, and it positively aches within me, to the point of exasperation, that it would have made something of me as well” (James, 1963, p.406). Pang, ache, and even regret plus arrogance grasped his heart firmly, to some extent, helping bulging his alter ego.

He was seeking for “me”—his own identity, but that self was so petrifying and sinister that he denied accepting what he was encountering. “He had been ‘sold’, he inwardly moaned, stalking such game as this: the presence before him was a presence, the horror within him a horror, but the waste of his nights had been only grotesque and the success of his adventure an irony. Such identity fitted his at *no* point, made its alternative monstrous. A thousand times yes, as it came upon him nearer now—the face was the face of a stranger. It came upon him nearer now, quite as one of those expanding fantastic images projected by the magic lantern of childhood; for the stranger, whoever he might be, evil, odious, blatant, vulgar, had advanced as for aggression, and he knew himself give ground” (James, 1963, p. 427). A spectral self returned in a vengeful attitude, stupefying the observer. Brydon thus was experiencing the pain of splitting: “The hands, as he looked, began to move, to open; then, as if deciding in a flash, dropped from the face and left it uncovered and presented. Horror, with the sight, had leaped into Brydon’s throat, gasping there in a sound he couldn’t utter; for the bared identity was too hideous as *his*, and his glare was the passion of his protest. The face, *that* face, Spencer Brydon’s? (James, 1963, p. 427) The alter self, “as the full-blown flower was in the small tight bud,” (James, 1963, p. 407) finally embodied in a spectral figure, diabolically enough to shed light on the vulnerability of wholeness as people perceived for the subjectivity. As is envisaged, Brydon’s precarious self-knowledge was toppling.

---

proved also, no doubt, the habit of too selfishly thinking—he affirmed the impotence there of any other source of interest, any other native appeal” (James, 1963; 406).

As Claude Forray (1997) indicates, "within the frame of the mirror, Spencer Brydon carries his own smaller mirror, more exactly a small candle with he plays around in the dusky spaces of the old house in the hope of catching the miraculous image of the unknown personality." However, this unknown personality, acting as revenge from the past, caught him with horror and "revulsion"—"the revulsion, for our friend, had become, before he knew it, immense—this drop, in the act of apprehension, to the sense of his adversary's inscrutable manoeuvre" (James, 1963, p. 426). At the end of the quest, Brydon was still torn between the assortment of emotions after the long absence from the hometown and the belated expectation to become successful as "the inventor of the skyscraper" (James, 1963, p. 401). Since he could not integrate himself with the hideous alter ego, the only thing he could do was reconcile with it.<sup>6</sup> He said to himself, "If you won't then—good: I spare you and I give up. You affect me as by the appeal positively for pity: you convince me that for reasons rigid and sublime—what do I?—we both of us should have suffered. I respect them then, and, though moved and privileged as, I believe, it has never been given to man, I retire, I renounce—never, on my honor to try again. So rest for ever—let *me!*" (James, 1963, p. 421) Really, the confrontation seemed to jeopardize him, making him suffer and moan and even forcing him to give up his life. The un-lived past returned vengefully, claiming justice from Brydon.

As the alter self appeared in a malignant manner, the joy of adventuring in the dark and the curiosity of reaching something beyond imagination, in fact, all of a sudden, brought forth "prodigious thrill" (James, 1963, p. 416). Thrill and pang attacked Brydon because the power of prying into the secret of the other world belonged to the monstrous category. Seemingly, Brydon was executing a

---

<sup>6</sup> After Brydon was rescued and awakened by Alice Staverton, he discussed what he had seen with Alice. Alice told him, "I could have liked him. And to me, he was no horror. I had accepted him" (James, 1963, p. 433). Alice tried to comfort Brydon, convincing him that "he isn't you" (James, 1963, p. 433).

forbidden ability and knowledge. In fact, before experiencing splitting, Brydon was undergoing metamorphosis from a human to a monstrous creature. “With habit and repetition he gained to an extraordinary degree the power to penetrate the dusk of distances and the darkness of corners, to resolve back into their innocence the treacheries of uncertain light, the evil-looking forms taken in the gloom by mere shadows, by accidents of the air, by shifting effects of perspective; putting down his dim luminary he could still wander on without it, pass into other rooms and, only knowing it was there behind him in case of need, see his way about, visually project for his purpose a comparative clearness. It made him feel, this acquired faculty, like some monstrous stealthy cat; he wondered if he would have glared at these moments with large shining yellow eyes, . . .” (James, 1963, p. 413). Clagget (2005) unveiled “What he Brydon thought he wanted—self-knowledge—becomes, at this moment, what he most dreads. If Brydon were to see, to have “assurance” that the apparition is him, he would have to accept the fact that he would be, quite literally and unmistakably, in two places at once. Such knowledge would expose as fictional his own belief that he exists in the world as a unified subject—that is, he would be divested of his “alienating identity,” and he would cease to be a coherent subject. The consequence for Brydon would be—as it is for Narcissus—death” (p. 195). In other words, the split subjectivity demystified the established and idealized self, contradicting his understanding of the wholeness of the subjectivity. The reality he was glimpsing at unraveled to him he was literally dead—he was no more the one he had perceived or expected; the two were neither identical nor integral.

Indeed, the horror occurred because the apparitional other lacked “two fingers” (James, 1963, p. 427), which implied the monstrous appearance of the other self. But what was more horrifying was that the split personality toppled Brydon’s knowledge of the complete subjectivity. This incident of confronting

the spectral presence, instead of solving his trouble, revealed more problems to him. In some sense, Brydon deploras the American life he would have lived if he had not left New York for so long, a kind of materially successful life.<sup>7</sup> Henceforth, he deliberately familiarized himself with the uncanny aura by wandering in the dusk of the empty house, like a sorcerer, appropriating the old house into a necromantic niche where he might peep into the secret of "the unlived past." At the end, he found ". . . the penumbra, dense and dark, was the virtual screen of a figure which stood in it as still as some image erect in a niche or as some black-vizored sentinel guarding a treasure. Brydon was to know afterwards, was to recall and make out, the particular thing he had believed during the rest of his descent. He saw, in its great grey glimmering margin, the central vagueness diminish, and he felt it to be taking the very form toward which, for so many days, the passion of his curiosity had yearned. It gloomed, it loomed, it was something, it was somebody, the prodigy of a personal presence. . . . Rigid and conscious, spectral yet human, a man of his own substance and stature waited there to measure himself with his power to dismay" (James, 1963, p. 426). Obvious, instead of satisfying himself with the adventure in the distorted world, he endangered himself into a situation of specular disillusion. Despair, disappointment and even depression intermixed after he realized he could not incorporate what had been and what he would be in the future. When the specter of the past had been conjured, it did not epitomize a promising future, but foreshadowed his further destruction. Therefore, according to P. Kirschner (2007), "[T]he pursuer becomes the pursued, taking comfort in hearing his own footsteps descending four flights of stairs until, at street level, he confronts the apparition, . . . but this downplays the apparition's subsequent advance, threatening to engulf Brydon with 'a life larger than his

---

<sup>7</sup> Brydon said to Alice Staverton, "I see, you'd have liked me, have preferred me, a billionaire" (James, 1963, p. 407).

own, a rage of personality' (p.477) and making him swoon" (Kirschner, 2007, p. 110). This is the process from physical restlessness to mental restlessness as well as the process from a human to a monster, and a scenario of a person's suffering from the irreconcilable selves. Brydon truly encountered what rationality and the original episteme could not explain away.

Like Derrida, who "knew very well there was a ghost waiting there, and from the opening, from the raising of the curtain," (1994, p. 4) Brydon expected "some agent" returned from the past, especially the un-lived past to tell him what might have happened to him, if he had not lived a scandalous life in Europe for so long. Nevertheless, his other self returned in an intimidating and overwhelming manner, asking for the wholeness of his subjectivity as cost. Surely he was knocked down by his eager pursuit for illusionary fulfillment and forced to fulfill "the justice" the un-lived past demanded. To depict the concept of "conjunction," Derrida maintains that "to conjure means also to exorcise: to attempt both to destroy and to disavow a malignant, demonized, diabolized force, most often an evil-doing spirit, a specter, a kind of ghost who comes back or who still risks coming back *post mortem*. Exorcism conjures away the evil in ways that are also irrational, using magical, mysterious, even mystifying practices" (Derrida, 1994, p. 48). Accordingly, when the spectral presence occurs or is supposed to occur, the orderly world begins to fall down and irrationality begins to take over the existing world based on the idealized and simulacrum-like supposition of wholeness. Splitting, anarchy, and malignance are destined to happen since the rational world does not allow the intermittent return or intrusion of the phantom.

### **Spectrality as a Deferring Signifier**

According to Derrida, spectrality implies the collapsing of actuality and blurs the borderline of the binary system. Spectrality rejects to be restrained and

tends to be destructive. In fact, spectrality in "The Jolly Corner" allows the text to become ambiguous and dynamic. As Shalyn Claggett (2005) suggests, "critics who attempt to identify the ghost implicitly posit themselves in the position of 'hunters', attempting to make the specter emerge from ambiguity and confess its meaning. James indicated, however, that undoing this ambiguity is a dangerous endeavor insofar as it portends death. For Brydon, this death is actual. For the interpreter of the text, this death is the end of the text's signification" (p. 198). Only the silhouette of the ghost can be grasped; if someone strides to pinpoint the capricious existence, he is executing a tactic that Derrida has condemned.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the debates on James's spectrality among the critics are quite heated. For example, P. Kirschner (2007) expounds that "the apparition in 'The Jolly Corner' derives not from the ubiquitous immigrant but from another restored absentee's sense of being thought to have wasted his life abroad 'in a surrender to sensations' " (1909, p.456) (110). Kirschner, here, depicts the spectrality in the protocol of American society then. Similarly, Stephanie Hawkins(2004) unravels: "in Henry James's fiction more broadly we see him exploring the energies of this ghostly 'residuum' as one means of representing American identity as persistently fractured and incomplete" (Hawkins, 2004, p. 277). She continues to explain, "For James, American citizenship is haunted by anxieties about competing genetic histories, anxieties that were imperfectly managed by representations of imperceptible, but nonetheless potent, racial differences. And the social implications of an internal unknown other—a remnant, perhaps, of some earlier stage of

---

<sup>8</sup> In fact, to respond to the American political scholar Francis Fukuyama's work *The End of History and the Last Man*, which claims that the conflicts between different ideologies would come to an end the progress of history would be completed as democracy and capitalism serve as the definite and absolute law of human society, Jacques Derrida wrote *Specters of Marx: the state of debt, the work of mourning and the new international*. Here, Derrida proclaims that the specters of Marx still haunt Europe and the revenant of the specter portends the disillusion of the completeness of history. The deconstruction of Fukuyama's conception of history is the major goal of Derrida's Hauntology.

development, something lesser, incomplete, inchoate, atavistic, savage—were undeniably profound” (283). Probably this is the reason for him (Brydon/James) to stay away from his native land—the uncultivated but materially prosperous and aggressive society—for thirty-three years. To probe into the depth of horror, Hawkins(2004) continues her observation: “The psychological horror in *The Sense of the Past* and ‘The Jolly Corner,’ I suggest, emerges from physiological horror of encountering an earlier genetic forebear concealed within the self. Nowhere is this preoccupation with the body and all that it might conceal and reveal more potent than in . . . obtaining ‘true self-consciousness’ in a world where one can only know oneself ‘through the revelation of the other world’ (102)” (Hawkins, 2004, p. 276). In fact, as I have elaborated, the essence of the horror represented in this story consists of many complicated emotions and significations, which drives a dissatisfied and eccentric person like Brydon to the edge of rationality. The haunting thus becomes the haunted, and sees through nothing but his tragic and pathetic mentality—his likes and dislikes of the successful self and his loss of making his goal as somebody. The guilt of escaping from his duties to inherit the family tradition and the failure of achieving something by making good use of his life come along with the derailed self, vice versa, chase this specter hunter—turning his enjoyment to a lasting nightmare.

On the other hand, the critic Shalyn Claggett (2005) compares Brydon’s adventure to a Narcissus’ experience: “Infatuated with his own *imago*, Narcissus realizes that he cannot attain what he most desires—a union with himself—because he is not an unified subject (p.128-29). Like Narcissus, Brydon encounters an image of himself in a potentially disastrous way” (p. 189). Yet, the best interpreter of Brydon’s psychology is still his faithful friend, Alice Staverton. She, having seen the “huge and monstrous” (James, 1963, p. 407) specter in her dream, told Brydon, “I knew it for a sign” (James, 1963, p. 432).

“. . . it is a sign in the chain of continuing signification, forever deferring its meaning” (Clagget, 2005, p. 199). To Brydon, actually, the presence represented an assortment of feelings which could not be clarified even at the end of the story: “It marked none the less a prodigious thrill, a thrill that represented sudden dismay, no doubt, but also represented, and with the self same throb, the strangest, the most joyous, possibly the next minute almost the proudest, duplication of consciousness” (James, 1963, p. 416). Besides, the confrontation brought about “the misery and the pang” and also became “amazing,” “exquisite,” and “rare” (James, 1963, p. 420). Spectality, eventually, demonstrated the resistance to be caught down as well as the destructive power to devastate the mundane world.

Another critic, P. Lewis (2005) has a similar observation: “Henry James leaves the real source of his many apparitions a mystery: he refuses to tell us where the ghosts ‘really’ come from and leaves us in doubt as to whether they are products of the unconscious desires of those who experience them. He emphasizes not their reality or unreality but their social character and their unpredictability” (p.33). What is the social character of a specter? According to the editor of James’s ghostly tales, Edel (1963), to read James’ ghostly tales, we may realize “how in the comfortable daylight of our lives we walk with ghost, our own and those of others—and can encounter the demoniacal at the corner of a street” (p.viii). That is, “Henry James’ ghostly tales, in a word, achieve their mystification by introducing the uncanny in bland settings. The terrors of life, he suggests, reside in the everyday event, and he invites us not to explain away ghosts but to reckon with them as that part of life which remains stranger and queer an inexplicable, in which the irrational intrudes upon the rational, and logic yields to the illogical” (Edel, 1963, p. vi). Since the logic based on reason is unable to explain away James’ or James’ characters’ fears and restlessness, in

this case, James's characters appeal to the uncanny. For Brydon, nonetheless, the glance at the world in between worsens his predicament and under the consolation of Alice Staverton, only reconciliation enables him to move forward.<sup>9</sup> "In the last of his ghostly tales Henry James does not overcome the ghost of his past. He accepts it because Alice Staverton accepts it and accepts him. "In other words, he learns to accept himself as he might have been, but above all as he is" (Edel, 1963, p. 395). Namely, to accept "hauntology" rather than "ontology," Brydon can make a move in a world that mutual haunting is happening.

In fact, we cannot but be wondering if this adventure is taking place in Brydon's dream just like Alice Staverton mentions that she saw "him" in her dream (James, 1963, p. 409). Considerately, she retorts Brydon's question, "You dream about me at that rate"; she insists "him" is not "you" (James, 1963: 409). At the end, she said, "I *could* have liked him. And to me, he was no horror. I had accepted him" (James, 1963, p. 433). This is an adventure as well as an epiphany.<sup>10</sup> The reality of the specter does not matter; neither does the signification of the haunting and being haunted.<sup>11</sup> This is a journey of

---

<sup>9</sup> According to Edel (1963), "the hero of "The Jolly Corner" ends up being reconciled with his world after having been terrified by a glimpse of his own past" (393).

<sup>10</sup> In Clagget's words (2005), "representative of this sort of reading is Ernest Tuveson's comment that the story is 'one of James's most optimistic, hopeful pictures of the human situation—an exception to the dark mood of most of his later work' (271). In a more recent reading Daniel Fogel similarly remarks that 'we can . . . affirm that there is a real moral victory at the end of the tale' (198). Critics who view the final scene in a positive light typically read Alice's reentry into the story as a catalyst for Brydon's transcendence. By accepting both Brydon and the spectral other, Brydon is able to make 'the first positive move of his life towards human love' (Byers 97)" (190).

<sup>11</sup> Pericles Lewis (2005) indicates, "In the most comprehensive study to date of James's ghost stories, Henry James and the Occult, Martha Banta argues that James's stories of the supernatural can all be resolved into questions of psychological abnormalities:

"Supernaturalism," as used by James pertains to that which is human (no divine presence is implied); it manifests qualities that are generally hidden (occult) to the empirical eye and that are above and beyond (super-, supra-, preter-, and trans-) so-called normal powers. (Where these human powers came from originally and that larger powers endow them are matters for consideration James managed to avoid). (53)

envisioning an alternative reality *on route* to meet the complex and riddle of life. In Lewis words (2005), "In Henry James's ghost stories, the unseen has its peculiar force in the visible world. James's greatness as a teller of ghost stories depends on the fact that the 'unseen' here involves the unconscious sexual, material, and social desires of his characters but cannot be reduced to any one of these"(p.33). The life itself, embraced by different layers of bounds, tends to give strokes to human beings—it will revenge, asking for justice if it is not fully lived. That is, no matter if there is an alter ego, the specter in various disguises keeps returning to remind the haunted of the ridiculousness of human's world.

### Conclusion

The spectral space, confined in "The Jolly Corner," has become a site of different speculations and discussions; spectrality as well as "Hauntology," helps open one more possibility of probing into the depth of humanity and vulnerability of the established order based on rationality. James' editor, Leon Edel (1963) comments on James's Gothic style, saying, ". . . James explained to Howells that the story was to be that of a central character haunted by the fear that he is haunting others. This represented an extension by James of the concept of the ghostly tale—he had moved from the "merely apparitional" to the individual with his inner ghosts and now finally to the exercising of a haunting spell by the individual. Toward the end of his life, when other artists find their resources waning and the fount of their creative energy drying up, Henry James stood upon the threshold of such new experiments and discoveries (Edel, 1963, p. 391). Indeed, the ambiguity in "The Jolly Corner," not only marks Henry James' own Gothicism, but also reveals his revolutionary intent. As H. McDonald (1992) suggests, "The project is to create a 'new', American form of tragedy that draws on the resource of the past (in particular, European

culture) to constitute the American future. As such, Jamesian tragedy has social, cultural, and ideological function: to resist the disintegrating forces of modernism that eventuated in World War I by performing a literary deed that helps to reconstitute the social, cultural, and political ‘institutions’ of the United States” (McDonald, 1992, p. 410). In fact, on the contrary, James’s ghostly stories not only place him in the field of modernism, which emphasizes the disintegrating forces, but even help create his status as a postmodern writer who feels skeptical of any established institution. In other words, because of the ambiguity and subtlety embedded in James’s Gothic stories—the spectrality, he has a great influence on the contemporary writers. P. Lewis (2005) claims, “In fact, Henry James’s modernity seems closely connected to his interest in the supernatural, which is one source for such central and typically modern concerns of his as the double consciousness or divided self, the process of conversion, and the celebration of ambiguity, themes that in turn inspire a range of modernist writers, including Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound” (p.33). As a matter of fact, spectrality in “The Jolly Corner” incarnates the split identity, the restless soul, the unnamable desires, perversity and so on. Whatever is unutterable can be represented in a spectral form. Furthermore, from the gaze of the visitor from the underworld, we human beings see the reflection of a monstrous self, a therianthrope figure.

In “The Jolly Corner,” both the identity of the so-called alter ego—the mid-night visitor—and the imminent collision of the human and the supernatural have left a plenty of problems to readers and critics. The jolly corner is not so joyful as it is named. As I have expounded, Brydon’s reckless move to seek to be haunted enhances his repulsion of the unlived past and his regrets of the unaccomplished life in Europe. Torn between staying true to his eccentric self and seeking for the opportunity to become “a millionaire,” Brydon almost becomes a prey to the menacing visitor from the underworld.

The revenant of the past would never stop if Brydon could not pacify himself mentally and fulfill his social character as has been expected in the American society. The reality between the real and the other world is still opaque and vagarious, though through the split self Brydon can comprehend something beyond imagination. With "revulsion" and "pang"<sup>12</sup> Brydon tries hard to see through a "cold silvery nimbus that seemed to play a little as he looked—to shift and expand and contract" (James, 1963, p. 425). The nimbus is the only clear object he has seen as the dawn approaches when he has been stunned by the adversary ego. Like the nimbus, the old house, once turned into a spectral space, also appears vacillating. It is something beyond the binary system, a third reality that resists to be defined but cannot be denied. So does the spectrality. When comprehending the imminent peril triggered by the creepy alter ego, Brydon knew "he had the whole house to deal with, . . .; only he now knew that uncertainty alone could start him" (James, 1963, p. 424). And after he woke up on Alice Staverton's lap, he called it "horror", having difficulties in identifying the spectrality. Uncertainty, as we can see, starts and wraps up the story. The haunting has not been exorcised yet.

---

<sup>12</sup> This "pang" grasps him when he confesses to Alice that he has led "a selfish frivolous scandalous life" in Europe (James, 1963, p. 408). Seemingly, he can not feel satisfied with either his life in Europe or in US. The sense of failure has predominated his mentality since he went back to New York.

## References

- Claggett, S. (2005). Narcissism and the Conditions of Self-Knowledge in James's "The Jolly Corner." *The Henry James Review*, 26, 189-200.
- Clark, M. (2007). "Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds": Scare Quote in "The Jolly Corner." *The Henry James Review*, 28, 223-231.
- Davis, C. (2005). Hauntology, Specters and Phantoms. *French Studies*, 59(3), 373-79. Retrieved from <http://fs.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/59/3/373>.
- Derrida, J. (1994). *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international* (P. Kamuf, Trans.). London: Routledge.
- Dougherty, M. R. (2006). Wolfreys, Julian. Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, and the Uncanny and Literature. *Studies in the Novel*, 38(2), 271. Retrieved from Questia database: <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5015994933>
- Edel, L. (1963). Introduction to the Universal Library. In L., Edel. (Ed.), *Ghostly Tales of Henry James*, p v-viii. New York, NY: The Universal Library Grosset & Dunlap.
- Forray, C. (1997). Foreignness and the alter ego in Henry James's "The Jolly Corner." *Journal of the Short Story in English*, autumn 29, Retrieved from <http://jsse.revues.org/index132.html>
- Hawkins, S. (2004). Stalking the Biracial Hidden Self in Henry James's "The Sense of the Past" and "The Jolly Corner." *The Henry James Review*, 25, 276-84.
- James, H (1963). The Jolly Corner. In Edel, L. (Ed.), *Ghostly Tales of Henry James*, p. 396-433. New York, NY: The Universal Library Grosset & Dunlap.
- Kirschner, P. (2007). Conrad, James and the "other Self." *The Conradian: The*

- Journal of the Joseph Conrad Society* (U.K.), 32(2), 110. Retrieved from Questia database: <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5044896032>
- Krook-Gilead, D. (1962). *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP.
- Lai, C. H. (2005). Transgressive Flows: Theorizing Hauntology of Anti-Globalization. *Concentric: Literary and Cultural* 31(1), 123-46.
- Lewis, P. (2005). "The Reality of the Unseen": Shared fictions and Religious Experience in the Ghost Stories of Henry James. *The Arizona Quarterly*, 61(2), 33+. Retrieved from Questia database: <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5037774011>
- Mansell, D. (1985). The Ghost of Language in The Turn of the Screw. *Modern Language Quarterly*, March 46(1), 48-63.
- McDonald, H. (1992). Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and the Tragic Henry James. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 34(3), 403-449.
- Woolf, V. (1921). *A Haunted House*. Retrieved from [http://www.world-english.org/woolf\\_haunted\\_house.htm](http://www.world-english.org/woolf_haunted_house.htm)