

Ghosts and Shades and Place: Empathetic Hauntology in *Gravity*, *Lars and the Real Girl*, and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

*Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed.*

—from *Spring and Fall*, by G.M. Hopkins.

THE LAND OF GHOSTS AND SHADES

In this chapter we examine the ways the dead walk among us in drama, how they are purgatorial burdens, emotionalized landscapes that are often deeply loved but that we must face and work through to achieve purgatorial or therapeutic freedom.

Our exploration will also distinguish ghosts from shades, comparing these two very different dramatic manifestations of the dead. Ghosts are very common devices in drama: they are essentially characters with desires and memories of their own who haunt a place or person and occasionally take corporeal form. Sometimes they also have the ability to do things: to move pencils, distract characters, or even kill people. Ghosts can also make requests of a main character that can lead to their destruction or salvation: think of Hamlet's father's ghost who tells him to kill his uncle.¹ Usually we see the faces of ghosts.

Shades, however, have a very different force and presence: they are not seen in the present but instead hold the power to make the living see the world in a certain way. In that way they are often spatial presences, especially when we enter the point of view of a character who is herself possessed by a shade: via that sideways step we see the world through

that shade. This is why it is a bit of linguistic luck that the slang word for sunglasses is shades: though we easily forget we are wearing them, shades can change perception and emotional life, obscuring some facts, emotions, people, colors and corners while highlighting others, all the while without themselves being directly seen. As a result, a shade can have a power just as dangerous or as liberatory as any ghost.

We now look at three very different films which are, however, all built upon similar Dantean moments: all three feature the presence of a loved one who has died, an empathy-evoking hauntological shade.

Gravity

The science fiction film *Gravity* (2013) features both a ghost and a shade. The ghost comes forth briefly in the affable form of the dead astronaut Kowalski, while the shade, present throughout most of the film, is the main protagonist's dead daughter, who has died before the story starts and who is herself never directly present or even seen in any photograph or memory.

The film revolves around Dr. Ryan Stone, a scientist on a space mission to repair the Hubble telescope. Ryan clearly does not fit comfortably into the team: she has trouble getting along with others. Soon we learn why she is so sharp and self-isolating: she is still in grief from the recent death of her little girl. It turns out that Ryan received the news of her daughter's death while driving her car at night: afterwards, feeling lost and bereft, she took many aimless nighttime drives.

Once again we meet a character trapped in a specific Dantean moment in her past, a moment of huge consequences that she cannot overcome and that took place in a specific environment—she was driving alone in her car at night—that has in a sense taken over her perception of everything (Fig. 6.1).

As Ryan tries to fix the satellite, the story's inciting incident literally hits: because of a missile strike on another satellite, they are suddenly assaulted by a fierce storm of metal shards and everyone but Dr. Ryan and the astronaut Kowalski are killed. He saves her and they sail out into the dark to rendezvous with the International Space Station. They find it abandoned, then both barely escape when it is almost destroyed by another storm of debris.

Unfortunately, thanks to some technical complications, only one of them can survive and so before Ryan can stop him Kowalski selflessly



Fig. 6.1 Dr. Ryan lost in her grieving memory, *Gravity* (2015)

cuts himself loose to save her and floats away into the darkness of space. Left alone in the small capsule, Ryan struggles to direct it to re-enter earth's atmosphere but fails. She gives up and turns off the capsule's life support, then sits in silence waiting for death.

And now a tapping comes from outside the capsule: it is, miraculously, Kowalski. He comes inside, having somehow saved himself, and now gives her the hard talking-to she needs to save them both. But once she gets the capsule working, she realizes this manifestation of Kowalski was not real. After a fiery re-entry into the atmosphere, she crash-lands on earth, swims from the capsule, and in a scene of rebirth she finally stands up on the shore in the sunlight.

In this case we have a story with both a ghost and a shade. Kowalski in his ghost form is easy to understand and appreciate: he is a character with objectives and opinions. You can often argue with a ghost and, ever since the film *The Sixth Sense* (1999), ghosts themselves often have their own character arcs. These figures, which are sometimes manifestations of guilt or love or desire, almost always carry some real role in the plot but they differ in obvious ways from shades.

A shade does not take physical shape: instead it occupies your body and mind, as in the case of Ryan's dead daughter. In *Gravity*, for example, here in the present Ryan is still stuck in the car she was driving when her phone rang and she suddenly heard of her daughter's death. For Ryan, the shade of her dead daughter has turned the space vehicle into

the car so that Ryan is in a sense still driving through the dark, beset on all sides by sudden killing blows that sweep others away, leaving her alone in deathly silence and the emptiest of nights.

One clue that there is a shade in a story is that the audience will know someone important to a main character has died but will see nothing or very little of the face of the dead. Denied our own access to their physical form, we see and experience only their effects on the protagonist. Compare *Gravity* with *The Official Story*, discussed in Chap. 3. In the pivotal scene of the playhouse, it is the vivid *absence* of the adopted daughter's real parents that rushes into the room, the house and the mind of our main protagonist when her adopted daughter relives her original, hidden and off-screen trauma. We see nothing of little Gaby's dead parents, nothing directly of their invaded, shattered house: instead we feel their presence, their inhabiting of the playhouse, their inhabiting of the lives and minds of Alicia and Gaby.

Shades can control an entire narrative space: in *Gravity* the dead daughter occupies not only Ryan's mind, mood and suicidal drift, but outer space itself. To finally escape the shade's world, Ryan must leave the blackness of night and fall through fire to water, to crawl back onto land and into air and sun and life.

In a sense outer space has become a kind of transference object for Ryan: just as the dollhouse hosts the shades of the dead parents in *The Official Story*, so black space hosts the shade of the dead daughter in *Gravity*. In a way *Gravity's* grief-laced space is a kind of dark inversion of the shade-laced sky in the film *Up*: in that film the shade of the main character's joyful, adventurous dead wife has colored the sky with a sense of joy, relief and escape. Both *Gravity* and *Up* offer a therapeutic Dantean space, a space that serves as a lathe on which the protagonist, by external or internal effort or both, can resolve conflict and grief and be born again in a new space. Like a character completing a purgatorial task in Dante's *Purgatory*, Dr. Ryan works through her grief: escaping space is escaping that car of doom and death, a difficult, cathartic graduation out of a traumatic memory and into health.

PURGATORIAL VS. THERAPEUTIC ARCS AND CHARACTERS

Let's now put Ryan's escape from her isolation, loss and guilt into some context. We have claimed that after Dante, Western stories generally represent arcs and spaces of three kinds: hellish, purgatorial and heavenly.

With *Gravity* we have moved from Hell and Hell-bent arcs to Purgatory and purgatorial arcs.

There are many examples of purgatorial arcs: the thriller film *Jaws* (1975), for example, has this classic structure. A girl is killed by a shark in a small seaside town. Afraid of losing his job, the town's sheriff gives into the pressures of shopkeepers in town who are scared that the news will keep tourists from coming to their beach: he agrees to say that the girl might have been killed by a passing boat. As a result, unsuspecting people flood the beach and then the shark kills a small boy. Now the sheriff has a death on his conscience. To erase this crime the sheriff must overcome his inner conflict, his fear of the water, and then risk his life to go out and kill his external antagonist, the shark. It is not an easy task.

We have already talked in Chap. 3 about Buzz Lightyear in *Toy Story*, but here it is worth noting that while Buzz has a therapy arc in the film, Woody actually has a purgatorial arc. He is responsible for pushing Buzz out the second-floor window out of jealousy and envy. To undo his unjust action Woody must leave the house and go find Buzz, then save him, rebuild his shattered sense of self and then bring Buzz back home. This kind of balancing of action, doing some hard purgatorial task to undo a mistake or a crime, is very common in stories.

Often both therapeutic and purgatorial arcs are mixed together. Consider, for example, the story of Detective “Rust” Cole, the protagonist of the first season of HBO's *True Detective* (2014). Across the first season Rust must experience a therapy arc to overcome the death of his daughter in a car crash, but at the same time he is also responsible for destroying his partner and friend's marriage and for killing a number of suspects in the course of his work. By the end of the series—which goes into Dantean space in increasing stretches as the tension of the season rises—our protagonist has passed through a wide range of tortures and wracking pain in his efforts to find the serial killer. In the series' final cathartic and highly empathetic moments Rust finally passes through a personal transformation, crying about his dead daughter and regaining a sense of hope as he stares up at the night sky with his forgiving partner. While throughout the season it has been hard to distinguish the character's therapeutic struggles from his purgatorial suffering, the viewer's strong empathetic reaction and release in this scene comes from sensing that both arcs are finally complete.

Gravity also illustrates a therapy arc that at times seems purgatorial, as though Ryan somehow feels responsible for the death of her daughter or

for the team of astronauts that have been killed. We might offer the following simple distinction between the two arcs and then give an explanation for how they are linked.

A purgatorial arc features a character making some big mistake, recognizing it and then pursuing a known goal in order to pay for or erase that mistake: this describes the sheriff from *Jaws*, Colonel Nicholson from *The Bridge over the River Kwai* and Woody from *Toy Story*. By contrast, a therapy arc features a character unaware in some way of the forces that control and impel his character and who, through struggles, becomes aware of his emotional problem and then either faces it or fails to overcome it. This describes both Rust and Dr. Ryan. (It also describes Lars of *Lars and the Real Girl* and the female protagonist of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, the protagonists of our next two examples.)

Often the two arcs are mixed: many therapy stories are full of painful purgatorial actions because both are marked by a difficult unworking and forgetting of traumatic memories. In Dante's *Purgatorio* the sinners who work through their symbolic actions and come to fully grasp their sinful actions then wash in the River Lethe, the river of forgetting, and with this bath they finally wash away their guilty memories: then and only then are they able to walk out of Purgatory. This three-step struggle—of grasping some painful event in the past, then working to change the character tendencies that relate to that traumatic event, and then at last forgetting the painful event (through a washing-away or a burial) also undergirds a successful therapy. Both *True Detective* and *Gravity* take advantage of this parallel to create violent spectacles that only later, on reflection, are revealed to be part of a long, painful trail towards self-insight. These characters' violent spaces serve to emotionally release traumatic memories, apparently necessary steps in the uprooting of a shade. But of course a drama needn't conflate the two arcs: the character of Lars in our next example show a non-purgatorial example of a therapy arc, where space remains quiet and gentle throughout.

We can briefly compare *Gravity's* big-budget, spectacular Dantean space with a low-budget non-spectacular film, *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007), which also features a successful therapy arc in which the main protagonist manages to bury the past and move forwards into a new life. However, while *Gravity* stayed largely within the shaded space of Ryan's grieving perspective, this next story instead stands outside its shaded Dantean character, Lars, and stays entirely within dramatic space.

ON THE RICH AND STRANGE SEA CHANGE OF THE DEAD:
THE WIDE GAMUT OF HAUNTINGS

*“Full fathom five thy father lies.
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.”*

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 1, Scene 2

Lars and the Real Girl

Lars and the Real Girl (2007) is a low-budget drama set in a small town. When we first meet the film’s main protagonist Lars, he is a social isolate, a neurotic who cannot touch people. Lars lives with his brother Gus and is scarred by a series of Dantean moments in his past: his mother died when he was born and his father abused him when Gus left home. So far Lars has held these scarring moments in abeyance, but that changes one evening when his brother Gus announces that Gus’s wife is about to have a child. Disturbed by this, Lars has something like a psychotic break that, as Gus and his wife slowly realize, is powered by Lars’ reawakened guilt about his mother’s death, his fears of being abandoned again by Gus and replaced by this baby, as well as Lars’ newly-triggered desire to have, like his brother, a partner of his own. This last desire is a particular problem since Lars is so phobic about people that he wears white gloves to keep from touching anyone.

Lars’ solution is simple: he purchases a life-sized sex doll that he orders on the internet, names it Bianca, and then starts a romantic but non-sexual relationship with the doll, squiring her about town and bringing her to dinner parties. While the viewer stays at a dramatic distance from Lars’ perceptions, we do see that the sex doll has in a sense become inhabited with the shade of Lars’ dead mother, becoming both a realized physical ghost and, as his conversations show, also a shade that lives only in his mind. For most of the film Lars then psychotically explores his deepening non-physical relationship with the doll, caring for her by bringing her to doctor checkups (Fig. 6.2), helping her to bed and so forth.



Fig. 6.2 A Dantean character in a dramatic space, *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007)

And now Lars' healing begins. After he meets a local woman and starts a friendship, he slowly becomes convinced that Bianca is sick and then that she is dying. He puts her in a wheelchair and starts taking loving care of her, and eventually becomes convinced that she is dying of a terminal disease. In a highly-empathetic last act, the entire town comes to sympathetically recognize that Lars is actually working through some very deep issues: they begin to facilitate his fantasy in many caring ways, and with their help when Bianca 'dies' Lars can finally bury her, freeing himself of the shade of his dead mother and then finally beginning a real relationship with a local woman whom he can touch.

This film is a drama and stays within dramatic space. The locations are unobtrusive settings of low spectacle, like those of *Little Miss Sunshine* and *Young Adult*, staged in ordinary, lower-middle-class places that do not intrude in on the drama being played out among the characters. And like those other two films, the camera and sound design observe all the usual boundaries of realism: we never enter into the protagonist's own distorted perceptions of his world. But in this film we rarely lose sight of Bianca: her silent, comically-awkward presence always reminds us that part of Lars is somewhere else, somewhere we cannot go, and that he is trying to free himself from a terrible and abusive childhood. And so, although we stay outside his perceptions, this becomes a very empathetic film that exhibits both

compassionate and communal empathy: at first we come to understand what he has been through and how it has affected him, and then we see his childlike solution, that the doll is not a sex doll but really a doll of transference, of re-enacting his missing relationship with his mom and modeling the marriage of his brother. With this insight we gain compassionate empathy for Lars. Then as we see him taking such care of the ‘dying’ sex doll, we respond to him personally with communal empathy, increasing our empathetic investment in him. And then when the entire town begins helping him through his transition and through his need to bury ‘Bianca,’ we also feel a great sense of communal empathy for everyone.

Again, as we saw in the film *Young Adult*, this is a Dantean character acting out in a dramatic space: given no access to Lars’ inner experience and staying in realistic and unspectacular settings, we can only imagine his inner storms from his behavior. However, our next examples show how as we increasingly enter into a character’s subjectivity the story’s space can grow increasingly Dantean: as a story enters this pressured, torqued emotional perspective, its realistic boundaries begin to break down, bending under the weight of the character’s guilt and hope and grief-wracked memories.

Hiroshima Mon Amour

In *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Duras and the director Alain Resnais do something very remarkable: they turn the world of Hiroshima and its erased radioactive past into a dance of space. This tour-de-force of transference features two lovers with similar Dantean moments in their pasts, both possessed by shades of beloveds horribly killed in the war. But it also manages to treat each character differently, granting Dantean space to the French woman and dramatic space to the Japanese man in the same film, and often even in the same spaces. Though we gain only oblique glimpses of their dead beloveds, never seeing the face of her dead lover and never seeing anything of his dead family, we nevertheless feel the controlling power of these shades in every frame.

The story barely has a plot in the ordinary sense. A French actress, who is only identified as “she” but who is our main protagonist, is in Hiroshima in the late 1950s to be part of a film about the city’s atomic bombing in 1945. As the film opens she is in the midst of a one-night affair with a Japanese architect, only identified as “he,” who is native to Hiroshima.

But soon the film reveals two entirely other levels because both the lovers carry specific traumas from the war. Hers took place fourteen years earlier in her native Nevers, a town in France, when she was just 17. She fell in love with a German soldier who was part of the occupying force in the town. The two became lovers and the world changed for her—it was suddenly full of joy and hope. But when her lover was killed as the war ended she was punished as a collaborator, having her hair shorn off and being locked in a cellar while mad with grief. Finally, her parents essentially abandoned her, putting her on a bicycle at night and telling her to bike to Paris. She rode off and, it seems, has never looked back. In all the flashbacks that she narrates in the present in her confessions to the Japanese man, we never see the face of the German.

We learn less of the Japanese man's personal experience: he tells her he was away fighting when his family was killed by the bomb in 1945, but we never see his family and never enter his own memories. However, we do gain a grounded if impersonal sense of the utter horrors they must have gone through after that fateful day of the American bombing through seeing the French actress's research—her walks in the city's museum—and through the film's use of harrowing documentary footage of the bombing and its effects on the survivors.

Though both she and he are casual at first in mentioning details about their past, it gradually grows clear that both war-experiences, which took place 14 years earlier at roughly the same time, were Dantean moments. And after they begin exchanging vague, oddly rhetorical confidences while in each other's arms, each finds in their increasingly intimate revelations that the dead are growing stronger. For her he becomes a mirror of her genuine suffering, a chance to glimpse how empty and shaded her life has been since the war, while he himself gains a sense of how lost he is.

Pulling each other into their pasts, they slide rather hopelessly towards full confessions to each other, and by the middle of the film she is speaking honestly about her horrors for the first time in her life and to a man she has known for only a few days. At first the dead German is not supplanted by the living Japanese lover, who though he strives to connect with her is largely locked into the role of confessor. But then in a long confessional scene² she starts pouring out her terrible memories. The challenge of this is that she is still enamored and committed to her dead beloved, even as he is now both powerfully evoked and beginning to fade: as a result she feels she is betraying and losing her dead German

beloved by speaking of him for the first time. And now, in the grip of memory she actually conflates the two men, beginning to address the Japanese man as if he were her dead German, producing an eerie performance that shifts from affected to neurotic to authentic as it elides and slides between the present Hiroshima and the past of Nevers in 1944.

Meanwhile the Japanese man finds that his own memories of the bombing are evoked by her story. Like her, his memories cannot be effaced by the rebuilt city's present, by its modernist sunlit streets and clean-swept plazas: instead that dead city of ashes affects everything he sees and senses, including her white body. As they confess these emotions they are drawn closer to each other and yet also repelled by their own allegiances to their dead loves, and this begins a dance of attraction and flight that crosses the city's bars and streets all night long.

The film's most memorable sequence is by itself such an apparently simple and undramatic scene in which nothing is resolved or argued over. Coming in the third act, it is the minutes of her walking down Hiroshima's neon-lit streets at night as he follows her (Fig. 6.3).³ Dollies of Hiroshima's streets are jump-cut into dollies of streets in her native Nevers. And gradually the viewer understands why this apparently prosaic scene is so haunting. As she walks she is being followed by her own specter: that is, she sees in this living man the shade of her dead German lover, and in this city the ghost of her own lost Nevers. He meanwhile seems to sense that she alone can understand what he has lost, how he too is split between that banished shameful past and this sterile present. In a very real sense while we stay in the film's neorealist present, seeing an ordinary street while gaining no cinematic access to their own churning emotions and memories, we also realize that they are both in the other's psychomachia, each wanting to be lovers but each thrust into the role of a past grief-soaked love: while we watch him follow her through a night in 1957 Hiroshima, we know that she is walking down the streets of a long-ago Nevers with the dead German man. Meanwhile the German's shade has a clear stand-in in the Japanese man, who himself is walking through a night vibrating with the ghost of the destroyed Hiroshima where his family was killed along with hundreds of thousands of others.

And so three different spaces are joined—1944 Nevers, 1945 Hiroshima and present-day 1957 Hiroshima, creating what we might call a neorealist haunting of the defeated dead. A Dantean space is created



Fig. 6.3 A space that is Dantean for her and dramatic for him, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

using the strict palette and techniques of neorealism of actual locations and the tropes of realism and traditional documentary, all glued together by personal and historical memory. This is character haunting but wedded to the history of a world at war. As these two adulterers drift through the seemingly-illusory streets of a rebuilt present that now carries little mark of what terrors happened here, they carry on their shoulders the story of an entire generation still shell-shocked and damaged by war.

The only redemption in the film, and it is honest and true, comes in a small dramatic repetition. It begins in the bar in the middle of the film: after she confesses her truth, her pain and her fear of losing this memory to him, he asks her if she has ever told this story to anyone. When she says no, that this is the first time, he grasps her wrists in joy. Though shocked at his ecstatic reaction, she also smiles brightly, though the reason for her smile is not very clear: has she fallen back into her actor's role? In the film's final moment he again seizes her wrists, and she again

reacts with a bewildered joy and surprise, but now it seems genuine, as if he has snatched her back from some dangerous ledge.

The repeated tableau seems to mean that despite the erasure of memory, of lovers by bullets, of families and cities by nuclear weapons, of love by time, death still does not have complete dominion in the world. In fact real true joy comes from authentic actual intimate human contact and the sharing of grief and the consoling of injuries, even if only in a casual affair had by two people who are too scathed by memories to have real anchored relationships in their present living life.

One way to experience this film is to feel its lush romanticism. This too seems to owe something to Dante, though in a way we've not yet discussed. There is something of her condemned situation that resembles the condemned-soul architecture of Dante's Francesca and her own linked and wandering lover. Like Francesca, our protagonist has chosen to go against the social and political norms in loving the wrong man. And like Francesca, we can see both sides of her curse. And like Francesca, she seems sometimes frightened that the Japanese lover might yank her down out of the air and back into life, yet at other moments she seems to blow about the land with him, unable to leave her German-Japanese Paolo.

At least, this is one interpretation of the protagonist's motives. But we see a productive ambiguity over the motives of a main character: Duras has provided a rich and obscure layering of motive here. The main character grows increasingly fascinating because even as she painfully spills out her tragic backstory, her motives and feelings for the Japanese man grow not more clear but rather more opaque and hard to grasp. We can't tell how much of her motivations are about her desire to be released from the German lover's ghost, how much is a hatred for the Japanese lover for doing this, how much she wishes she were with the Japanese man, how much she wants to be punished as the French punished her for sleeping with the enemy, how much she has internalized that social view of her. Finally, looking for motive, we wonder, are these two simply overcome by survivor guilt?

Repeatedly she expresses the following lines of self-abasement: "Who are you? You destroy me. I was hungry. Hungry for infidelity, for adultery, for lies, hungry to die. I always have been." Has she internalized the punishments of the angry French who shaved away her hair? Is she longing to be punished for loving? For surviving? Is she simply longing for death? Her motives remain opaque to us: all of these impulses might

be jostling within her. Without knowing this, we cannot quite be sure of what her character arc is really about, or of what her final bright smile means. Does it signify that she is now released from her shade. Is she committing to a relationship with this man? Is she simply trying to end things on a higher note, or is she just showing a certain French *jouissance*? We think of the adage of showing and not telling, or of the biblical point that “you will know them more by what they do than by what they say,” but here these characters do so little and muse so much that their psychology is largely closed off to us. As a result of our prismatic glimpse of her chaotic emotions, Hiroshima seems by turns a longed-for, inviting space, an abrasive space, a judgmental space, a tryst space and a space of self-abasement.

In part this happens because of her growing ambiguity, which so vividly dramatizes the human problem of self-knowledge and self-deception: she shows how even when we are earnest and not engaged in presenting ourselves well or in outright lying, we are still not the best reporters on our own desires. Our own actions often surprise us, revealing ourselves to ourselves as well as to others. Despite her marked penchant for brooding, she is obscure to herself, indecisive in the truest meaning of ambivalent in having very strong desires to do quite opposite things.

Duras’ scenario notes describe the protagonist as wrestling with the fact that she survived the death of her love, but it is not entirely clear if this is guilt: though unclear in the script, it seems more clearly to be grief in the performance. But yet we ask ourselves questions as we watch her: we wonder why she has never told this story—the core event of her life that she wrestles with every waking moment—to her husband, the man she is happy with and has had children with and is apparently happy to return to. We answer this question for ourselves: perhaps this is because he would not understand, having never been through anything similar, while the Japanese man has lost his family in the bombing of Hiroshima. And having been in the Japanese army in the war, he won’t judge her for having been involved with a German soldier. Is she thinking simply that she has found a tragic twin in him: is that the source of their antipathy and bond?

And so she confesses it all to the Japanese man, further forgetting it even as she tells it, hating him for asking her to tell him yet needing to tell. Losing her old love and finding a new one, she is helpless before both. She becomes the protagonist of a kind of anti-therapy movie

where, like Ugolino, she fights to keep certain painful tragic-romantic memories alive, fights to remain within her own psychic torture out of love for the lost beloved. Like Francesca, she cannot give up her pain because it is too anchored in her love. And like Ugolino she cannot strive for her own therapy and healing: when it threatens to arrive at the end of the film, she is terrified and lost.

Simultaneously Resnais and Duras are using another divide to obscure motive and character, another device to create meaningful ambiguity, to give us a sense of glimpsing some multiplicity of meaning. These two do not act out scenes in the ordinary way of dramatic films: instead they are staged in odd frozen tableaux, among dissonant montages and documentary footage. Most striking of all, they continually lapse into a polished, precise and often artificially-declarative delivery with each other in which they take turns speaking without any of the usual impulse to interrupt or speak over each other, becoming respectful in an almost incantatory style. With a few exceptions, their arguments are abstract and formally presented, as in the long opening argument of the film about whether she truly did see Hiroshima. In an early example of identity politics it is a fight over conceptual schemes and emotive truth. She thinks she understands something of what happens but he denies this, saying she never can understand or even see the real Hiroshima. Her reactions to his accusations comes only in long blocks, so that rather than composing a scene their speech feels more like a Platonic dialogue or like court testimony recorded separately from two witnesses. And so the status of the entire first sequence is unclear, are we hearing thoughts or testimony or confessions or dialogue? All of this becomes even more abstract as we realize these lovers who have so much to say never address each other with any names, nicknames or endearments. At times we wonder, can these two characters even hear each other?

This ambivalence is heightened by a non-realistic form of blocking: in general they stand very still as they speak, always carefully blocked in their actions and gestures so that personal particulars of spontaneous movement are erased. This lack of spontaneity in people who are well-trained actors is heard even in their laughter which feels forced and uncomfortable.⁴ And while they discuss intimate memories, outside of her painful memories of Nevers there are no particulars—we know nearly nothing else specific about either of them. They often parrot facts about the war and other non personal issues: at one point, while she has her face in his caressing hands, she begins to sound like an almanac as she

talks about the Loire river. Their performance slides between a smiling nonchalance and a brooding inner contemplation of their memories. So much seems intended to slide past each other and not land, conveying a world of banalities and indifference where people cannot communicate emotionally.

In contrast, we see small authentic details and moments of performance only as she recounts her traumatic memories. Usually these memories are seen playing out in visual flashback with no sourced sound—the sound stays with her voice and contains the backgrounds of the setting where she recounts them, giving a defamiliarizing distance.⁵ And yet the empathetic romantic bonds between these two are continually broken in the film, only slowly and somewhat bitterly reforming again as she repeatedly but almost unwillingly seeks out some contact. And this is complicated further by apparent breaks in the dramatic frame that seem to pull them apart even when they are together.⁶ These moments with their specific details and strongly relayed emotional memories pop the actors out from the film's cold backgrounds with visceral force. While the Japanese lover's focus on her and his need for her is sometimes total and absorbed, it is quickly followed by his odd and cruel comment to her that "in years ahead when I have forgotten you and had many other adventures like this out of habit, I will remember you as a symbol of forgetting." And this poetic declaration does seem to land on her with a cruel force he doesn't himself recognize or see. While we are unsure if he knows he has even said it out loud, the comment seems to launch her away from him and so to trigger his long drawn-out pursuit of her through the neon-lit cityscape.

All of these tactics combine to produce a unique marriage of a highly charged romantic empathetic bond between two highly alienated characters. Compare the nature of the drama here to the more conventional ones of, say, the dynamic central to films that have a surface similarity like *Before Sunrise* (1995) or *Wings of Desire* (1987), which both feature a couple moving through a city in search of each other while having intellectual and poetic conversations about the state of the world and the nature of romance. As these two characters shift so fast, what is this shift, exactly? Are they shifting psychologically in reaction to each other? Or is this a dramatic aside, a technique taken from Eugene O'Neil's play *Strange Interlude*, in which he speaks his inner thoughts out loud but we are to understand she cannot hear them?⁷ Or are we still inside realism and these two are actually struggling hard to invent and to give advice to

each other? Has a simple affair turned inadvertently into this paired tragedy, and now they are struggling through it to understand their own suffering, to come to grips with the nature of love after war, working hard to come to insights for themselves and for each other as a form of consolation, and perhaps of healing? Or are they simply trying to be cruel to each other, pushing each other away when they feel rejected or out of an underlying anger at the foreigner, the newcomer to their own carefully-fenced inner terrain of vulnerability: are we seeing a familiar trope of romance dramas, the dance of repulsion and attraction? Is she angry with him for his abstract talk? When she leaves him now is she punishing him? As she then wanders through the streets, staying just yards ahead of him, is she abandoning him? In the eerie scene in the Casablanca bar is she trying to make him jealous as a punishment for his inadvertent casual cruelty? Or are they both just solitary obsessives, lost in their grief, whose paths keep crossing in a small, empty city?⁸

It may be impossible to decide what we are seeing: we might plausibly attribute all of these motives to *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. But whatever these jarring shifts are about, their overall aesthetic effect is clear: these two are not dramatic characters and we are not in a dramatic space like that of *Before Sunrise*. From the start all of this refusal of ordinary dramatic conventions transforms our characters into symbols, or anyway gives them another dimension: through these many carefully deployed distancing effects, the two become statue-like analogues of meanings, unwitting stand-ins for ideas and forces and great choral masses of war-dead that lie beyond their own characters' understanding.

In the final scene they actually name each other by their city's names. In the face of all this we accept that their motives are obscured not only because of akrasia or because this is often the human condition—especially for people who have undergone extreme suffering and loss—but also because these two are trapped in overwhelming culturally-wide Dantean memories that are themselves crafted by the remorseless war. And so now as these two walk both together and alone through Hiroshima, walking through the memories of their own past tragedies and haunted by their own loved dead and dead loves, they also cast a million shadows each, the shadows of the millions of dead and the shadows of all those still living who have lost everything that matters.

And now we might comment on the sheer number of distancing devices in the film. This strange, experimental formalism paradoxically pushes us away from the typical Hollywood beat-by-beat experience

of the fictional characters' lives. Instead these devices link the characters' ever-present individual suffering to that of their dead shades. And because these shades are described in abstract terms while their situation refers to actual massive historical pain, we find our own empathetic reactions are now linked to a history of suffering that yet reinforces the romantic, emotional pain of the fictional characters. Knowing the leftist commitments and aesthetic experimentalism of both Duras and Resnais, we might say that this film is a rather unique example of how to marry Dantean characters to the very different sensibility of Bertolt Brecht. Though we cannot discuss him in this book, Brecht is perhaps the only other figure in Western narrative history besides Dante who changed the tradition by marrying a new moral sensibility to a large-scale productive re-invention of narrative technique. Perhaps only a Brechtian Dantean space could so romantically combine alienation and exposed pain, distance and empathy, erased individuality and emotional immediacy, catharsis and lingering horror.

This complex mixture is felt acutely in the film's final scene when the space becomes its most placeless, as if they are no longer in Hiroshima or 1945 Nevers but in some white box of modernity. As she finally returns at dawn to her hotel room with him still in tow, a new alienation takes over. She has arrived, indecisive and bleak, in a room whose anonymity reflects her own sense of being lost and bereft of roots and place and certainties, ending up with him in this placeless place so lacking in any detail.

This final room is a non-place of the kind Augé defined (Augé 1992, p. 122). A non-place is one of transience that carries few or no markers of personal history and thus carry a sense of anonymity and even of indifference. We will see a similar use of non-place spread through New Wave cinema to describe utter alienation and dejection: two years later we find it in so much of Olmi's *Il Posto* (1961) and in Antonioni's *The Eclipse* (1962) where Monica Vitti is anxious and torn in another alienating hotel room. And now in this depersonalized, ahistorical emptiness, a place whose ordinariness perhaps emblemize the boredom, rote days and emotional facades that each is returning to in their family lives, now in this place a final emotional reversal takes place. Now he grabs her arms and she smiles and looks at him in some kind of hope. Once again we are unsure what we are seeing, yet it is emotionally compelling and highly empathetic.

We should make some distinctions now between this film and *Gravity*, a discussion that looks ahead to our next chapter's Dantean documentaries. First, the female protagonists of both *Gravity* and of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* are both in some sense resisting their own healing: each of them is still very much in love with the memory of the dead beloved that keeps them frozen in a certain state of grief, and this love conspires to both keep them miserable as it also keeps them from entirely realizing or grasping their own unhappiness. In such stories healing would mean to allow their memory of the dead loved ones to lose some sense of its vividness and closeness, and they are simply not ready for that. But then unlike Ugolino, who is now in a permanent Hell and will never be ready to face his actions, by the end of their stories both of these two women have been able to gain some distance on and control of their grief.

Another point is worth making. Dr. Ryan's Dantean moment came to characterize her sense of space, but we do not feel at the end of *Gravity* that space *itself* has gained any tragic airs. We realize we have been in a subjective tragedy and that space is not itself characterized by the death of Ryan's young daughter—actual outer space itself, we know, has an objective reality uninflected by this fictitious narrative. By contrast, the Dantean spaces of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* are quite different in this sense: they extend out from the film, connecting causally with and deepening our emotional sense of the actual Nevers and Hiroshima. The fictitious protagonist of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* characterizes Nevers because her story of being shorn of her hair and locked up is drawn from the stories of many young women all across France after the war. Her punishment and madness represent real historical forces and events. And Hiroshima is even more deeply emotionalized, because the film links his story (and to a lesser extent hers also) to the powerful forensic evidence of Hiroshima's trauma, revealed in the documentary footage, then visually contrasts it to the present-day *erasure* of that trauma in the rebuilt city. Documentary serves as a bridge between their empathetic space and history, linking their fictitious romance with the real events of the bombing. While *Gravity* was one woman's story and one woman's Space, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (like *The Third Man* and *The Official Story*) uses Dantean space to bring empathy to actual historical places and events, creating a political hauntology, an actual collective mass shade composed of the war dead.

With this bridge, Dantean space brings alive the real lived history of two actual war-torn places in a very intersubjective and emotionalized way. Like the example of Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, the nature of two cities in wartime are dramatized through the vehicle of a protagonist's traumatic experiences. Just as Aeneas's character and story represents both the fall of Troy and the birth of Rome, this French "she" and Japanese "he" now similarly represent the past and future of whole cities and nations. But unlike the *Aeneid*, here the places become enlivened, their history made empathetic and experienced, through a new aesthetic. Thanks to their own somewhat depersonalized and erased personal stories and abstracted performance styles which lack many of the specifics of realism, their Dantean moments mingle to characterize Hiroshima's destroyers, its victims, and its uneasy anxious present. But their increasingly-emotional affair also points towards a specific future for the cities and places in the story: by enacting a romance in 1958 about a woman who loves a German and a Japanese man (two soldiers who fought long ago for the defeated, scorned countries), their mutual empathic healing and union helps to mark the end of the war's great divisions. In a way this film's break from conventions does not only announce a new cinema but rather a new coming world, a new form of being, and perhaps a new geography. For all of these reasons this film is the first cinematic expression of the new globalism that would come to define the EU project. It also begins a new Aeneas-like tradition of using contested cities to represent both a personal inner crisis and yet express the hopes for a new start to our politics, a theme we will explore more fully when we discuss the film *Amelie* in our last chapters. But for now consider *Wings of Desire*, *Alice in the Cities* and so many other cinematic and narrative efforts that are laced with the birth and hopes of the European Union. In all these films we find ourselves in a borderless land of the soul where international bonds and character changes can happen that offer a way out, an escape from the dreadful national histories of the protagonists. It's hard to find any comparable project or effort in literature, song or any other branch of European culture: nowhere but in cinema do we really see artists struggling to create a new and specifically *international* identity like this. The lack of that broad project is sorely missed in today's Europe, but perhaps these examples of radical aesthetic invention can point the way towards a new culture and a new synthesis of identities.

Stepping back now from this tour of shades, we see how the shade is a device of Dantean hauntology. Following Derrida (1993) and Fisher

(2009, 2014), we use the term hauntology to identify an ontology of absence, of something that is not present and is in fact in some sense missed: in such narratives not only are we “haunted by futures that failed to happen” (Fisher 2009) but the ontological elements that make up a shaded narrative’s world (for example in a film’s case the locations, production design and other craft elements) are working differently to connote a loss and lack rather than a presence. A shade is in this sense an empathetic frame of hauntology that takes us inside the sensibility of a character trapped in an overwhelming sense of loss.

The Official Story, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *Gravity* simply make no sense without us realizing there is a shade at work, and yet that shade has also hidden itself to announce its absence, to highlight how the fabric of existence has been carved, wounded and rent. Just as Ugolino’s icy twosome and toothsome revenge are a projection of his missing, murdered, eaten children, so in all these examples a forceful overwhelming memory of loss animates all that is present, though our examples announce their wounds in different ways and for very different dramatic and social purposes.⁹

Few of us has met a ghost in life but anyone who has suffered a moment of grief, who has seen their world darken and echo with loss, has met a shade.

The world is dappled: as Petronius said, there are shipwrecks all around us if we can only train ourselves to see.

NOTES

1. See Baxter (2013).
2. Beginning at minute 45.
3. The walk itself begins as they are passed by a duo of guitar players quietly strumming the snatch of a melody. This source music fades but is soon replaced by a funereal piano in score that then ties together the jump cuts between two dolorous dollies, both moving at the pace of a funeral train, that marry the lonely uninhabited night-time Hiroshima they are walking through to her remembered daytime Nevers of 1944. As she wrestles with the emotional turmoil raised by the Japanese Man behind her, the familiar dissonant score enters again, and we are now with her emotions in score, voiceover and long lonely visuals of them walking. And always her voice intones her quiet confessions in a formal, abstract and poetic register which is nothing like ordinary speech. Mallarmé once said that the job of poetry was “to clean up our word-clogged reality by creating silences around things” (quoted in Sontag 1983, p. 196). This part of the film does create

silence around things, or really silence is laced through whole cities and holocausts, but it then alternates its many quiet meditative shots with long stretches of words and subdued traumatic memories.

4. Throughout this film we see the Nouvelle Vague's commitment to breaking the bonds of naturalism.
5. But there are flashes of realism and performative empathy as well: for example, at one point (48:00) she talks about loving the taste of blood after tasting the blood of her dying German lover, and this is intercut with a jump-cut memory (itself invented as a technique in this film) of her in her cellar scraping her nails bloody on the stones of her cellar room and sucking on them. Though once again this breakage is observed rather coolly and distantly by the film, she is lost in this memory of how the bodily boundary between her dead lover and her was breached in a sensuous way: we see this when now in the present in the Japanese bar, her hand accidentally touches the beer glass with a tiny sound, an ordinary sound that shocks her as it drags her back into the present.
6. This ambivalence is created through directing the actors. Again and again the actors seem to stop communicating with each other and announce their own thoughts, as he does at 1:05:00, saying things that would be cruel if actually said to a new lover after she had made such an intimate confession. Then their performance becomes careful and deliberative in intonation and thoughtful in affect, closer to that of the film's early voice-overs, so that we cannot be sure if they are hearing each other or simply lost in their own deeply depressed thoughts and memories.

And then there is the constant radical shift from the intensely personal and bonded subjective emotions to a coldly-clinical objective eye. For example, only a minute or two after she was under some strange spell that allowed him to take the place of her dead lover literally before her eyes, and even as she finally throws herself into his arms after her confession (1:04:40), she says "It's so good to be with someone sometimes!" The impersonal nature of this declaration, so detached from him in particular by its double-barrelled generalizations of "someone" and "sometimes", does not land on him in any negative way. In fact, it is oddly underlined by his own smiling acceptance of her suddenly dissipated attention. Once again, his reaction pushes us right out from the expected personal bond of intimacy we expect from most romantic dramatizations: clearly something else is being sought in this film.

7. For a good discussion of this technique, its uses and antecedents, see *Eugene O'Neill: A Playwright's Theatre* by Egil Törnqvist, pp. 159–161.
8. Or is this all wrong? Are we simply experiencing a kind of metalepsis? Is the voice here simply shifting from the characters to that of the writer herself? After all, from the start the writer's voice has never been far away.
9. Dedicated to Anne and Bill Iannone, Aida and Walter Gross, Rose, Lisa and Jason Scarpellino, and Valerie Vail, Layla, Aaron and Lewis Cole.

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