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TRANSNATIONAL ADAPTATION

‘The Dead,’ ‘Fools,’ *The Dead*, and *Fools*

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This chapter begins in the realist mode, that is, by starting with a family tree. In 1914, James Joyce published his short story collection, *Dubliners*; this would be followed in 1922 by *Ulysses*, which would continue the project of depicting the Irish capital city while inverting the naturalist and epiphanic protocols of its predecessor in favor of a faux-epic modernism. *Dubliners* would be followed again in 1983 with the publication of Njabulo Ndebele’s *Fools and Other Stories*, a collection retooling Joyce’s early naturalism to depict township life in apartheid South Africa; and again in 1987 by John Huston’s filmic adaptation of ‘The Dead,’ the last and best-known story in Joyce’s collection. ‘Fools,’ Ndebele’s title story, would be adapted in turn by Ramadan Suleman in 1997, the first film shot and produced in post-apartheid South Africa.

This outline reveals three different kinds of adaptation; first, adaptation in terms of *formal development*, as in the stylistic shift from the Dublin of *Dubliners* to the Dublin of *Ulysses*; second, adaptation in terms of *context*, as Ndebele puts Joycean naturalism to work in depicting the extreme racial domination of apartheid South Africa; and, finally, adaptation in terms of *medium*, in Huston and Suleman’s respective filmic translations of Joyce and Ndebele. It is primarily the second two kinds of adaptation that concern the discussion here – recontextualization and remediation – but the problem of formal development will be a structuring principle. If the question here is what changes in the recontextualization of Joyce as adapted by Ndebele, and in the remediation of Joyce and Ndebele as adapted by Huston and Suleman, one part of that question must be about the apparent suitability of Joyce’s earlier naturalism for these kinds of adaptation, as opposed to that of his later modernism, which had been thoroughly canonized by the 1980s.¹

This question of how ‘The Dead’ has traveled, and why, is posed not to add to the teetering pile of Joyce scholarship, but to arrive at an understanding of how meaning is made and developed in postcolonial cultural production. This analysis, in attending to the sociology of literary adaptation in the postcolony, and in determining how institutional and market forces shape the formal development, recontextualization, and remediation of aesthetic objects, will divulge not only what a given text means, nor even the history of what it has meant, but the structures that determine its meaning. Such a line of inquiry attempts both to respond to Simone Murray’s 2008 call to ‘materialize’ adaptation theory, and to demonstrate in a postcolonial key the analytic dividends of such a materialization. In tracking a sequence of adaptation, then,

from Joyce in 1914, to Ndebele in 1983, to Huston in 1987, to Suleman in 1997, the questions are as follows: what accounts for this process of selection for adaptation? What survives in the adaptation, and what undergoes resignification? And what do these selections, survivals, and resignifications indicate about the culture and society of the postcolony?

If Joyce is the first term in this sequence that runs Joyce, Ndebele, Huston, Suleman, it is not a neutral term. The study of literary influence is one of weak empiricism at best, and typically has little explanatory force, but it would nonetheless be a mistake to ignore how Joyce's 'The Dead' gets to be a text for Ndebele and Huston to take up. By the 1980s, whole generations of scholarship had been devoted to arguing over what Joyce's work meant, what its worth was, and where it belonged. These arguments appear to be ongoing, but getting a sense of where things stood when Ndebele and Huston were undertaking their respective adaptations will help to indicate what it is they thought they were adapting when they were adapting 'The Dead.' The apparent suitability of *Dubliners* as a model for literary or filmic adaptation is as much a consequence of the sociology of literary publishing and literary criticism that produced *Dubliners* as a canonical text as it is a matter of, say, late colonial affinities between Joyce's context and Ndebele's, or a shared modernist sensibility between Joyce and Huston. In other words, these affinities and sensibilities are only made apprehensible to Ndebele and Huston, and thus to their audiences, by that history of publishing and criticism. This discussion begins, then, with a brief account of Joyce's story and the process of its literary consecration, before moving into how his late colonial short fiction gets adapted in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Composed between 1904 and 1907, and published in 1914, *Dubliners* is a collection of twelve short stories concerned with depicting the largely dismal and parochial lives of Dublin's petite bourgeoisie. 'The Dead' is the last of these stories, and the one that most nearly approaches middle-class respectability. Its focal character, Gabriel Conroy, is a teacher and book reviewer, and the son of a member of the Dublin Port and Docks Board. Gabriel and his wife Gretta attend a party hosted by Gabriel's downwardly mobile aunts in Dublin to celebrate the feast of the epiphany; here, Gabriel is accused by a nationalist colleague of being a 'West Briton' (190), that is, a collaborator in British hegemony over colonial Ireland, and Gretta is reminded by a west Irish ballad, *The Lass of Aughrim*, of a doomed adolescent love affair that preceded her marriage to Gabriel. Later, at their respectable Dublin hotel, Gretta is compelled to relate this history to Gabriel, who is disturbed and moved by this new knowledge of his spouse and of his diminished role in her life; drifting into sleep while watching the snow fall outside his window, he resolves, obscurely, 'to set out on his journey westward' (225).

Outside of Ireland, *Dubliners* was overshadowed by the reputation of Joyce's later works until the 1940s, after which it began to acquire some greater critical prestige, but only in terms of being a predecessor to those later works. Joseph Kelly suggests that from 1944 onwards, 'the critical community has treated Joyce's earlier book as ... the embryonic stage of his later high modernist texts' (14). The critical community to which Kelly here refers is chiefly American – though its evaluations would quickly enough become commonplace elsewhere.²

There are two features of this consensus about *Dubliners* – which would persist until the 1990s³ – that concern us here. First, it is an American consensus, which understands *Dubliners* outside of its national context; the process of Joyce's canonization, first via Pound and T. S. Eliot in Britain, and then via Morris Ernst, who defended *Ulysses* in its American obscenity trials, was a process by which Joyce's work was divested of its Irishness so as to make it universal. Second, it is a modernist consensus, in which any naturalism or realism in *Dubliners* is reread as an inchoate modernism, and any specific reference to Dublin's paralysis is made into an allegory for the general human condition. The manufacture of an aesthetic that privileged, on the one hand, universal truths, and, on the other, the depths of human subjectivity, was the

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work of the postwar American academy, directly and indirectly supported by the CIA, eager both to establish an American canon free of reliance on older British and European models, and to suppress the growing interest in social realism, coming from the Soviet Union and the decolonizing nations, and associated rightly or wrongly with revolutionary communism.⁴ This being the case, what does it mean when a Black South African in exile from apartheid in an American creative writing program in 1983 rewrites Joyce's putatively modernist, putatively universal *Dubliners* to depict a Gauteng township in the 1960s?

Njabulo Ndebele's *Fools and Other Stories* was written in 1983, in partial fulfillment of his PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Denver. It would go on to be published that year in South Africa by Johannesburg's Ravan Press, winning the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 1984, and was republished in the United Kingdom in 1985 by Longman, and in the United States in 1986 by Readers International. Ndebele is explicit in the preface to his dissertation about drawing on Joyce's *Dubliners* as an organizing principle – noting that he had 'adopted the four-part structure of Joyce's work' (8). Subsequent reviews would underscore this relationship with *Dubliners*, including a *USA Today* review excerpted on the back cover of the Readers International edition.

'Fools' is the last entry in the collection and by far the longest, running to about 130 pages, closer to a novella than a short story. The narrative chiefly concerns the school teacher Zamani, its middle-aged and disgraced narrator, and Zani, a student recently returned from Swaziland to the Charterston township, south-east of Johannesburg, and hoping to radicalize the place of his birth. Zamani rescues Zani from a bar fight early in the story and is obliged to get Zani safely home, which precipitates at the level of narration a flashback to Zamani's sexually assaulting Mimi, Zani's sister, while she was a student of Zamani's, and at the level of plot a confrontation with Zani's family. The two men's lives become further entangled in the days leading up to Dingaan's Day, or the Day of the Covenant – a public holiday commemorating the 1883 Battle of Blood River, site of a decisive Voortrekker victory over the Zulus, and an important date in the ethnonationalist Afrikaner ideology.⁵ Zani attempts to organize a protest without success and narrowly avoids being assaulted by a passing Boer, who vents his frustration by flogging a stoic Zamani. The story concludes with Zamani somewhat reintegrated into the township community by this scapegoating, and setting off on the long walk home.

It seems clear that Ndebele does more than adopt Joyce's four-part structure (that is, childhood, adolescence, maturity, and public life (*Letters* 134)), and in fact rewrites Joyce's concluding story, 'The Dead,' in his own concluding story, 'Fools.' Listing the similarities between 'Fools' and 'The Dead' is instructive: both stories are centered around a day of historical and symbolic freight; both feature as their protagonist a colonial subject collaborating with an oppressive regime; both protagonists vacillate between attempting to engage with and escape from their community; both protagonists entertain ambivalent at best, antagonistic at worst relationships with women; both protagonists are in marriages haunted by early disappointment; both protagonists compete with younger men for their wives' attention; both protagonists have their political inertia underscored by those actively opposed to the present regime; by an ambivalent apotheosis, both protagonists come to some uncertain reconciliation with or surrender to their subject positions and communities. It is perhaps less important to make a plausible case for 'Fools' as a rewriting of 'The Dead' than it is to indicate that 'The Dead' is Joyce's 'public life' story, just as 'Fools' is Ndebele's 'public life' story, and that we can productively understand these two texts as responding to the same problem on either side of the twentieth century – namely, public life in the colony.

The suggestion here is that where Ndebele might think he's using a globalized modernist form to contain local realist content, in fact he's using *Dubliners*'s form to do exactly what it

was made for before it was turned into a 'universal' text, in an instance of perhaps-inadvertent fidelity.⁶ There's a problem here, however, because if Ndebele's aesthetic commitments do not conform explicitly to the ideology of America's cultural Cold War, which Greg Barnhisel describes as 'pro-Western, pro-freedom, and pro-bourgeois' (382), neither do they correspond precisely to the committed literature of South Africa's Black Consciousness Movement. So, what work does this adaptation – whether of the modernist Joyce, or the 'authentic' Joyce – accomplish? As far as Ndebele is concerned, what it does is *delve*:

delve, as far as possible, into the essence behind the conventional masks of oppression; to reveal a complexity there, a multisidedness designed to open up the horizons of consciousness; to suggest that even for those struggling for freedom, it is to frustrate that struggle to attempt to subject living to easy formulae.

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Ndebele thinks that liberation from apartheid would be a good thing, but that liberation is frustrated by articulating it dogmatically, through easy formulae. So far, so Joyce, whose own impatience with the clichés of Irish nationalism is fairly well documented. More interesting, however, is when Ndebele reflects on the short story as a form for doing this delving with:

The short story, in its most concentrated form, will flourish only where there is a broad range of shared social assumptions on a variety of issues. ... But where such social and artistic assumptions are lacking, particularly in societies torn by strife and massive social upheavals, or in culturally deprived societies such as South Africa, the novel, in its totalizing expansiveness, provides the necessary syntheses. Short stories on the other hand, by concentrating on isolated details, may serve not to illuminate, but to reinforce the sense of social frustration and disharmony stemming from an intuitively felt inability to control the disparate and conflicting elements of life.

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Paradoxically it is the ambition of this collection to locally revise stale liberation rhetoric, with the understanding that the collection of short fiction may only 'reinforce the sense of social frustration,' absent the integrated community that liberation is working towards.

This is a declaration doubly constrained by its contexts of enunciation, as a critical preface to Ndebele's creative dissertation at the University of Denver's creative writing program, and as a preface to a work that might be at risk of censorship in apartheid South Africa, which had established with the Publications Act of 1974 a censorship board that made typically conservative though often wildly unpredictable decisions about what was and was not fit to print. That is, this is a theory of literature and culture conditioned by its being articulated in the context of an American creative writing program and by its hopes of escaping the attentions of South Africa's censors. The former has been, since the Second World War, the institution par excellence for the dissemination of the notions of literary autonomy, irony, and distance, and the latter was a bureaucracy that had banned works by Nadine Gordimer, Bloke Modisane, and Es'kia Mphahlele, but passed works by J. M. Coetzee, Andre Brink, and Etienne Leroux on the basis of the latter's apparent 'literariness,' in spite of all of these authors being manifestly critical of the apartheid state⁷ (McDonald 40). Just as Ndebele's conditions of literary reception as a reader of Joyce were in large part institutionally determined, so too were his conditions of literary and literary-theoretical production as a writer shaped by his institutional context.

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If Ndebele's theory of literary reception is a mediated form of Cold War modernism, it nonetheless emerges towards the tail end of that conflict, in which declining profits from global manufacturing have begun to trigger a series of economic crises that would sharpen tensions between the bourgeois and the growing precariat, and between center and periphery. One consequence of this historical shift was the increasing difficulty of sustaining the ideology of aesthetic autonomy, especially in the global south. Both Ndebele and Huston are working with a text that was consecrated in a cultural and economic period that had definitively elapsed by the 1980s. That is, there is a distance between not just Joyce and his adaptors, but also the historical epoch in which Joyce was consecrated and the period in which Ndebele and Huston are operating.⁸ For that transformation to be made visible, however, we need to see what the society Ndebele depicts in 'Fools' looks like.

Two short scenes should serve to provide this sketch. First, on the morning of December 16, as Zamani pauses in his search for Zani to regard one of the township's landmarks:

In the distance, still rather hazy under a thin veil of mist, was one of the ancient landmarks of the township: two yew trees at the apex of a high hill. They were known as the 'eternal twins' and had been there for as long as anybody in township history could remember. . . . And the question was always asked: what did they see? And the answer was invariable: they saw division. . . . Yet how obvious the analysis ascribed to them. Zani was right. The obviousness of analysis! A mind given completely to a preoccupation with an unyieldingly powerful, unabating negation, is soon debased by the repeated sameness of its findings. And in the absence of any other engaging mental challenges, its perception of viable alternatives becomes hopelessly constricted.

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By setting this novella in 1966, after the Sharpeville massacre and banning of the African National Congress, but before the establishment of the Black Consciousness Movement, Ndebele means us to understand the school teacher Zamani's political quietism as complicit in, or at least acquiescent to, the erection of the deeply segregated apartheid architecture, most notably in its development of the Bantu school system, which mandated a racist and deliberately limited curriculum for Black African students. Zani is a little more peculiar, in that we might expect his politics to be an inchoate form of what would become the politics of the Black Consciousness Movement, which prioritized Black liberation and Black power, as against the 'non-racialism' of the banned ANC. What we get instead is an inchoate version of Ndebele's politics circa 1980, which are critical precisely of the Black Consciousness Movement and 'the "obviousness" of [its] analysis.' Ndebele's writings of the 1980s decried what he understood to be the 'spectacular' nature of protest literature, which in his reading did little more than represent the obvious: 'the more the brutality of the system is dramatized, the better; the more exploitation is revealed and starkly dramatized, the better' (*Rediscovery*, 149). By contrast, the function of 'the new literature' would be to develop the 'subjective capacity of the people to be committed, but only on the basis of as complete a knowledge of themselves and the objective situation as possible' (156). For Ndebele, this is best achieved by careful representation of the everyday life of the revolutionary class, away from the brutality of the system. This spectacle is what Ndebele is representing in his image of the 'eternal twins,' with the stock depiction of the segregated Black, Colored, and Indian communities, followed by Zamani's, and Ndebele's, rejection of the obviousness of that depiction and the analysis that it produces. At the level of narrative discourse, this is a story that is self-conscious about the imperative to depict the

segregation that structures public space and public life in apartheid South Africa, and about what fulfilling that 'obvious' imperative risks overlooking.

Later, after Zani's protest fails and he flees the scene, Zamani consents to be flogged by the passing Boer, and then limps off in search of Zani:

From the top of the hill I could see, there in the distance about three miles away, the town where the whites live. On the left of me was a huge field of corn that ran along the road to town. On the right was an empty space. I could not see Zani there, nor did I see him walking along the side of the road. I concluded he must have gone into the cornfield.

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Once Zamani finds Zani, the young man begins to monologue:

'I'm not sure what I have found. I'm not sure what I have found in you,' he said. 'When I first saw you at Springs Station that Wednesday morning, I knew you immediately. I hated you, as I had been hating you all these years, for the shattered dreams of my sister, and the shame you brought on us. But I struggled to contain my hate, for I had taught myself to give everyone a chance. I wanted to see if there was anything of value in you. But I'm not sure what I've found. ... For example, you did not help me. Everybody. They preferred to sleep in their safety. But I ran too. And that wind that blew against my face as I ran sounded like the very sound of shame. The sound of victims laughing at victims. Feeding on their victimness, until it becomes an obscene virtue. Is there ever an excuse for ignorance? And when victims spit upon victims, should they not be called fools? Fools of darkness? Should they not be trampled upon?'

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Touched but nonplussed by Zani's consternation, Zamani leaves him there, but encounters Ntozakhe and Mimi – Zani's girlfriend and Zani's sister, respectively – on the road back. Zamani offers to lead them to Zani, but he is dismissed, and the women walk on in search of their brother and lover, while Zamani stumbles home.

It is in this conclusion that Ndebele begins to provisionally articulate what is gained in deferring the fulfillment of that referential, spectacular imperative. After a cursory description of the segregated setting in which the narrative unfolds, Zamani, the novella's narrator, is here consigned to the role of mute witness to Zani's digressive monologue. Where the omniscient narrator at the end of Joyce's story reports on Gabriel Conroy's psychological and spiritual state, and the reader is positioned to take that report as complete and sincere, Ndebele has his narrator-protagonist report on the speech of yet another protagonist, whose analysis is clearly incomplete. Zani flees the scene before seeing Zamani assaulted by the Boer, and Zamani doesn't enlighten him now. Likewise, where Joyce's narrator asserts a resolution, Ndebele's Zamani simply reports the incompleteness of Zani's irresolution, an incompleteness signaled by the interrogative mood in which Zani's chain of reasoning is conducted. 'Should they not be called fools?' sounds like a rhetorical question, but within this litany of questions, asked by a young man sulking in a corn field, it becomes sincere. Against Joyce's cross-section of the paralysis of colonial Dublin, from which he hopes to rescue both Gabriel Conroy and his depressed readers with Conroy's decision to 'set out on his journey westward' (225), Ndebele seems to want to rescue ambiguity and incompleteness from a colonial context that manufactures discursive certainty in both state propaganda and the protest literature that responds to it. The

effect of placing these texts in sequence, and not merely in juxtaposition to one another, is that a dialectical process reveals itself; Joyce observes the real and material paralysis of the colonial situation in Ireland and produces the symbolic solution of Gabriel Conroy's westward journey, which cannot but be read as a kind of political commitment; Ndebele observes the real and discursive consequences of this commitment in the colonial situation in apartheid South Africa and produces the symbolic solution of Zani and Zamani's irresolution and uncertainty, which for Ndebele is an attempt at clawing back human subjectivity under conditions that would erode or overlook them. The point is not that Joyce's gesture towards commitment is naive or that Ndebele's gesture towards subjectivity is bourgeois, but that these are entries in an ongoing conversation made visible by this sequential perspective.

This does not mean, however, that we are barred as critical readers from registering and evaluating our dissatisfaction with either Joyce or Ndebele. J. M. Coetzee's review of *Fools* observes that 'the endings of the two longer stories, "The Uncle" and "Fools", do not develop out of the logic of the action, but have the air of having been willfully imposed.' He continues, 'it is as though the end ... has assumed the aspect of that which cannot be imagined, that which can be represented only in fantasy, whether dire or wishful' (38). Coetzee, it should be said, is writing in 1986, a context in which the apartheid regime had declared a state of emergency in the wake of a campaign of guerilla bombing by the ANC's military wing and increased tensions between several revolutionary factions, including the ANC. That is, Coetzee is writing in a context of increased sectarian tension, increased state suppression and surveillance, and frequent explosive violence. In this context, the resolution that Ndebele manufactures by having Zamani submit to being whipped by a white man, and through this act of vicarious expiation reintegrate somewhat into his community, seems particularly difficult to take seriously. Indeed, this difficulty persists even into the putatively post-apartheid present.

The solution to this difficulty is to be found, as Kay Gabriel writes in another context, in 'attend[ing] to these dissatisfactions as techniques internal to [a text's] structure rather than as failures of its political imagination' (183). In this reading, 'Fools' exceeds some of Ndebele's stated intentions for it. Ndebele's critical writings on the 'rediscovery of the ordinary' have suggested a turning away from spectacle and towards the everyday as an act of recovery. In spite of this, the effect that the ending of his novella produces, in which a spectacular act of expiation is meant to reintegrate Zamani into 'the ordinary' and into communal township life, does not succeed in critiquing the spectacular. On the contrary, it demonstrates by its dissatisfying conclusion the absence of those material conditions that would allow such a reintegration to 'develop out of the logic of the action.' This would be an act of literary production that, in Nicholas Brown's terms, 'begins from the full assumption of all the debilitating effects of the semiperipheral situation' and, as a result, cannot 'help but project a social horizon no longer organized around this relationship' (185). In addition to advancing the dialectic begun in Joyce's 'The Dead,' Ndebele's 'Fools' adapts Joyce to critique its own contexts of production. Whatever Joyce and Ndebele's shared coloniality, the fact that there are narrative possibilities open to Joyce's turn-of-the-century Dubliners that are closed to Ndebele's postwar Charterstonians is felt as a lack in the narrative's conclusion, a dissatisfaction that is then properly leveled not at Ndebele's novella, but at those conditions that make its conclusion difficult to accept. What's more, the center-periphery relationship not only makes Ndebele's conclusion unlikely in the South African context, but is also the material basis on which such a possibility is founded in the global north. This will become especially clear in following this history of postcolonial adaptation to John Huston's far more metropolitan versions of Joyce in his 1987 *The Dead*.

The cultural Cold War is in part responsible for Ndebele's finding a waystation in an American MFA program while in exile from apartheid South Africa in the early 1980s. An earlier form of

that same cultural landscape is what motivated John Huston's relocation to Ireland in the 1950s, ostensibly in response to the haphazard and paranoid persecution of suspected communists, particularly in Hollywood, under the House Committee on Un-American Activities. As a result of this relocation, Huston became an instrumental figure in the Irish reevaluation of Joyce. In 1962, Huston assisted the Dublin artist John Ryan in purchasing the Martello tower in Sandycove – briefly Joyce's residence and the setting of the first episode in *Ulysses* – for the establishment of the James Joyce Tower and Museum. Huston and Ryan's investment began the process of merging literary Ireland's evaluation of Joyce, which had hitherto been based on his naturalist *Dubliners*, with the international and particularly American evaluation of Joyce, which was largely based on his modernist epic, *Ulysses*. As a tourist attraction, at least, Bloomsday, an annual city walk that follows the itinerary of that latter novel, began to grow in participants from the 1960s onward, into the large commercial event it is today. Huston's reading of Joyce is thus not simply a passive reflection of the literary institutions that brought Joyce into his orbit, but in fact extends and adapts those institutions. It is in this context that his 1987 adaptation of Joyce's early short story should be understood.

The Dead was Huston's last film, shot with a script written by his son, Tony Huston, and co-starring his daughter, Anjelica Huston, as Gretta Conroy. The director was in failing health at the time, and would die shortly before *The Dead*'s release. Huston's illness was in part responsible for the fact that the film was shot almost entirely in Valencia, California, save for a handful of external shots of the Morkan's house on Usher's Island, where the dinner party is hosted, and of the Dublin surrounds. The film's closing sequence, which reproduces the short story's epiphanic vision of the snow being 'general all over Ireland' (*Dubliners*, 225), is ostensibly composed of footage of the Irish countryside and west coast, though these were mostly shot in Dublin's outskirts by the film's Irish unit. It is surprising, then, that a film that seems inextricably bound to Huston's personal life, given his family's involvement and his own approaching death, and doggedly American in its production, would nonetheless be criticized for being too political, rather than too personal, and too Irish, rather than too American. Luke Gibbons summarizes this account of Huston's film as 'too Irish, implicating a story of deep personal grief in submerged narratives of political loss of the kind that Joyce ... clearly rejected in his own life' (134). Gibbons is largely concerned with dismissing this critique on the basis of fidelity, working to demonstrate that the ostensibly interpersonal dramas in Joyce's short story map convincingly onto allegories of Ireland's colonial history. For example, when Gretta Conroy overhears *The Lass of Aughrim* while preparing to leave the party, she is reminded of her adolescent sweetheart, Michael Furey, dead and buried in the west of Ireland. At the same time, Joyce evokes the 1691 Battle of Aughrim, site of a decisive and painful defeat of Irish Jacobites by the forces of William of Orange, and consolidation of the colonial social order that Gabriel Conroy now aids and abets, as a colonial teacher and contributor to the unionist *Daily Express*. In this reading, Huston's expansions of the historical and political resonances of interpersonal disputes are faithful to the spirit, if not the letter, of Joyce's text.

This critique of Huston as 'too Irish' can be understood without recourse to this notion of fidelity, however, and can shed greater light on Ndebele's unfaithful adaptation at the same time. First, as seems clear, to find fault with the importation of Irish political history into Joyce's story is to rearticulate a literary consensus about Joyce as an apolitical modernist with universal concerns, which consensus by the 1980s was beginning to be troubled, by both the earlier convergence of Irish and transnational interpretations of Joyce and the emerging field of postcolonial literary criticism. Second, Huston's medium seems necessarily to be more explicit in its depiction than does Joyce's. Joyce's Gabriel Conroy can drift off to sleep in the Gresham Hotel at the story's conclusion and imagine in the broadest possible terms the general snow

over Ireland, ‘falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves’ (225). By contrast, Huston is obliged to depict particular settings, the camera roving over Dublin Bay and the Clondalkin Round Tower as Gabriel (portrayed by Donal McCann) narrates the story’s closing paragraph, thus explicitly tethering the expanding scale of Gabriel’s attention and sympathy to Ireland’s geography and so to Ireland’s history of foreign domination. Third, *The Dead* is an American film, its finances mostly raised through Vestron Pictures – subsequently sold to LIVE Entertainment, subsequently sold in turn to Lionsgate – and its distribution concentrated on the American film audience. As a result, what often looks like too much Irishness is simply the film having to explain itself to an audience unfamiliar with the milieu under representation. Where Joyce can have Molly Ivors call Gabriel a ‘West Briton’ for writing for the *Express* and expect that insult be understood by both Gabriel and Joyce’s audience, Huston requires Gabriel to ask Molly what she means, so that she can reply, ‘those who look to Britain for our salvation.’ This filmic insertion is a departure both from the text and from historical accuracy, but makes the political stakes of the dinner party’s interpersonal squabbles more legible to an historically and geographically removed audience.

Rather than doing too much to bridge this historical and geographical remove, as the ‘too Irish’ critique would suggest, Huston’s film is remarkable for how little it bears the trace of this distance. Huston does some work to explain the late colonial Irish context to a 1980s American audience, and sharpens in the process some of the political markers of that context; in Joyce’s story, Molly Ivors leaves the party early to go home, where in Huston’s film she leaves to attend, somewhat anachronistically, a trade union meeting run by the republican James Connolly. What’s striking is that there is no particular anticipation of Irish independence or of the Troubles, which by the 1980s had become a spectacular and protracted period of conflict. These absences are faithful to Joyce’s story, which became historical only as an accident of a protracted publication process, but in producing a period piece that ignores its own periodization, Huston seems to have created not so much an historical film as a costume drama. Ndebele’s setting of his 1983 story in 1966 introduces the intervening years as a contextual frame for his narrative; even if Zamani’s reintegration into the community weren’t somehow dissatisfying, there are long years of struggle and oppression ahead for him and Zani both, tempering any resolutions or epiphanies with the fact of the historical record. This tempering is absent from Huston, whose film does not seem to imagine a future, except in its intimations of death; its futures are private, at best communal, but rarely political.

This is not to accuse Huston of political quietism, but to remark on the peculiarity of the orientation of his vision. Joyce and Ndebele understand themselves to be at the beginning of something new, in terms of both political emancipation and aesthetic innovation. By contrast, Huston’s performance of Joyce is retrospective in both its content and its composition, the majority of its action unfolding indoors on a California soundstage, Dublin creeping in only at the very beginning and very end of the film, and in the form of its monuments – the Round Tower, the Wellington monument in Phoenix Park, O’Connell Bridge, and the O’Connell monument. This monumental imaginary seems to be the Joycean and Hustonian version of Ndebele’s spectacularity, with the external and public symbols of Irish subjugation on the one hand, and the real infrastructure of apartheid on the other. The differential attitude towards this spectacle reflects the shifting coordinates of literary naturalism. In Ndebele it can and must be possible to escape the obviousness of the analysis that these material conditions initially invite, with this escape figured as explicitly political. For Huston, on the other hand, the appearance of these ruins and monuments during the scenic montage that plays under Gabriel’s closing monologue suggests the subsumption of this monumental imaginary within his window-gazing

epiphany. The effect is to turn Conroy's ambivalent political commitment at the end of Joyce's story into a personal tour of the Irish countryside and its history, its nostalgic gaze fixed firmly and exclusively on the past.

This bracketing off of the future, which indeed thematizes Huston's own relationship to the consecration of Joyce in the transformation of Joyce's old living quarters into a museum, is nowhere more clearly in evidence than during the sequence in which Julia Morkan, Gabriel's elderly aunt, makes an affectingly feeble attempt at singing 'Arrayed for the Bridal.' As her performance continues, the camera pans slowly over the empty rooms in the rest of the Morkan house, and its quaint collection of Victorian bric-a-brac and tchotchkes, the ephemera of a life at its end and already falling into anachronism. To observe this conservative and curatorial perspective in the film, on both Joyce and Ireland's colonial history, is not to accuse it of anything like inauthenticity; Huston and his children lived in Ireland for decades, and most of the cast is composed of Abbey Theatre players. Rather it is to suggest that just as Ndebele's adaptation of Joyce cannot but be historical and cannot but disappoint with its ending as a result of the material conditions of its production and circulation, so too is Huston's position in the global north at once the enabling condition for, and material constraint upon, his ahistorical historical drama. Huston ends his film, and ends it satisfyingly, with a possibly reformed West Briton contemplating the snow falling 'all over Ireland.' Depicting such contemplation without bearing any trace of the film's historical moment, in which the question of what does and does not constitute the 'all' of that Ireland is a matter of life and death, is the formal consequence of the global metropole being *The Dead's* context of production and its effective audience.

Huston's decision, in a period of postcolonial turbulence in Ireland, to return to a more sedate because more thoroughly colonially dominated epoch of Irish history, finds its completion and complement in Ramadan Suleman's 1997 *Fools*. Given that Suleman was directing the first feature film shot in the newly democratic Republic of South Africa, in a period of relative economic growth and considerable political optimism, it is curious that he should elect to take advantage of the funding coming into the country with the lifting of apartheid-era embargos to set *Fools* at the height of apartheid, and to undertake a fairly unflinching critique of misogyny, collaboration, and corruption in the South African township, in spite of the prevailing optimism of the immediately post-apartheid period. Suleman sharpens this critique by moving Ndebele's story from 1966 to 1989, months before Nelson Mandela's release, rather than two years after his arrest as in Ndebele's novella. As a result, the Zamani of the film (depicted by Patrick Shai) is closer generationally to the Zani of the novella, and his political quietism doubly indefensible to the film's Zani (depicted by Hlomla Dandala). Where Huston evades the complexity and difficulty of the Irish postcolony in favor of the simplicity, or at least distance, of the colonial period, Suleman sidesteps the optimism and triumphalism of the immediate post-apartheid epoch by interrogating precisely the class and the activists who were vindicated by apartheid's nominal conclusion.

This interrogation is principally staged through its examination of Black masculinity and the performance of gender under apartheid, effecting what Litheko Modisane has called a side-stepping of the expected 'celebration of the democratic moment of 1994,' in favor of 'intervening, through a retrospective gesture, into the public engagements on gender relations' (125). Suleman performs a neat inversion of what Graham Pechey identifies in Ndebele's writings as a prophetic 'post-apartheid discourse' (3). In its examination of South Africa's ongoing crisis of gender-based violence, and in understanding such violence as structured by the violence of apartheid, both spectacular and banal, Suleman at once intervenes in contemporary debates about this crisis in South Africa and articulates the film's principle message: 'the impact of apartheid won't be going away tomorrow' (Suleman). Where Ndebele constructs a post-apartheid

discourse during apartheid, Suleman insists upon the ongoingness of apartheid's effects in the wake of South Africa's transition to majority rule.

Suleman's primary vehicle for conveying this insistence is also his primary departure from a largely realist film idiom: the character of Forgive-Me, who is introduced in the film's establishing shot clambering down a hill on the outskirts of Charterston, crying out what will become his refrain in the film, 'Forgive them, God, for they know not what they do.' In Ndebele's novella, Forgive-Me is mentioned once in an anecdote by Ntozakhe about a man from her childhood township guilty of some crime – assumed to be rape – who was known for 'getting up very early in the morning, and going up and down our street three times, all the while shouting: "Forgive me! Forgive me! Forgive me!"' (253). In Suleman's film, the polarity of this guilt is either reversed or else expanded, with Forgive-Me's backstory rewritten to make him a traumatized veteran of the 'German war,' rather than a contrite rapist. Forgive-Me appears in Zamani's hallucinations and drunken visions, and attempts to assist Zani in his initial protest action against the Day of the Vow.

In contrast to this flirtation with surrealism, Suleman shoots the one surreal sequence in Ndebele's novella, which narrates as if in a dream Zamani's sexual assault of Mimi, in a restrained, straightforward, and almost documentary style (Magogodi, 246; O'Brien, 277; Dovey, 70). This is remarkable in a film that elsewhere indulges in overhead angles, mirror shots, and unconventional camera positions without obvious motivation. Suleman's camera is similarly conservative in its framing of an early scene in the film, in which we encounter Zamani failing to maintain an erection during an assignation with a sex worker outside of the Moulin Rouge Hotel in Johannesburg. Zamani's embarrassment, and the sex worker's laughter, are cut short by a police raid; Zamani flees the scene, managing to avoid suspicion by his ostensible school-teacherly respectability, and boards a train to Springs, where he will arrive in the morning, hung over, and meet Zani for the first time. The effect of this sequence is to explicitly articulate Zamani's sexuality to the enforcers of the apartheid regime, and thus by both content and the idiom of the camera to articulate Zamani's sexual assault on Mimi to that same regime. At one and the same time, Suleman's version of Forgive-Me inserts into the film a transnational history of imperialism and warfare that exceeds the limits of the apartheid regime. In so doing, Suleman places his film within an historical context while suggesting that that context precedes the construction of the apartheid state and presumably survives its formal abolition.

This orientation in Suleman reaches its culminating moment in the film's conclusion. Once again, Suleman's adaptation of Ndebele performs a sort of inversion of Huston's adaptation of Joyce. Where Ndebele's Zamani is the novella's narrator, and so the lens through which the world is interpreted, Suleman's Zamani is simply a character, and while he is deeply expressive in Shai's interpretation, he is less voluble than almost any of his fellow players. Where Joyce's conclusion to 'The Dead' is narrated by a disembodied third-person narrator, and that monologue is attributed to Gabriel in voiceover in Huston, Ndebele's first-person narrator Zamani is appraised anew by the third-person perspective of Suleman's camera. Zamani ceases to be a focalizing consciousness and becomes an object of representation and critique. As if as a result of this evacuation of Zamani's interiority, Suleman reverses the novella's concluding sequence by having the young Zani, accompanied by Mimi and Ntozakhe, go out in search of Zamani, who has hidden himself in the veldt. This reversal appears initially to be staging a rapprochement between the embattled generations that Zani and Zamani represent, in addition to indicating Zamani's expiation has, on some level, earned him Mimi's forgiveness; however, Zamani stumbles away, and disappears into the hillside where the film began, to either join or replace Forgive-Me as an excluded figure for unmanageable guilt.

The legibility of these movements, which undercut the prevalent political optimism of South Africa in the immediate post-apartheid dispensation, is wholly contingent on audience. This is a particular problem for South African film production: where funding for film projects tends to come from abroad; where local audiences are difficult to reach due to limited cinema infrastructure outside of middle-class districts, which primarily pay to see mainstream Hollywood films; where, as a result, foreign audiences on the festival circuit need to be courted. This was the pattern for *Fools*, which saw a brief run in the South African auteur cinema circuit, along with some sponsored screenings in the townships, but was mostly screened overseas, winning prizes in Italy, Burkina Faso, and Zimbabwe, and additionally being screened in Canada and the United States. In spite of this ostensible consecration, the film is not much discussed, for quite materially explicable reasons. Writing in 2017, Lindiwe Dovey observes that the film ‘exists more in a form of secondary “print” culture than in its original, audiovisual form. For those who want to watch the film, one’s best bet is to purchase a DVD from its main producer and distributor, JBA Production (based in France).’ She adds, ‘the original distributor of the film in South Africa – the Film Resource Unit – is now defunct, making the film difficult to access in its local context’ (108).

The upshot of this history of circulation is that it reveals a tension between the audience or audiences that Suleman suggests in the formal construction of his film and its effective audience. Suleman has been explicit elsewhere about addressing his cinema to the South African proletariat (Suleman, ‘Interview with Barlet’). This suggestion is underscored by the film’s translation of Ndebele’s English into Zulu, English, and Afrikaans, switched between and intermingled depending on context – which is both mimetic of township vernacular expression and particularly accessible to the South African proletariat. It is also such an audience for whom the critique of reconciliation and of local patriarchal violence against women appears to be addressed; certainly, according to Modisane, foreign audiences, interpreting this film in the inescapable context of South Africa’s transition to democracy, tended to efface ‘the film’s privileging of black masculinity, gender, and gender relations as societal problems,’ opting instead to ‘subsume *Fools* under the national agenda of which it is critical’ (146). Thus, where Huston’s *The Dead* is critiqued for being ‘too Irish,’ in a misreading of that film’s disavowal of its own historicity, Suleman’s *Fools* is placed by international audiences in an historical context and a political scale that it is trying to critique, even as the film uses that historical context as the occasion for its own dissemination.

Suleman’s dilemma, then, is the question of how to articulate a local context, with a local audience in mind, when the infrastructure of cultural production necessarily routes that articulation through colonial and neocolonial inheritances. This was Joyce’s dilemma, who had to publish *Dubliners* in London to be read by Dubliners, and Ndebele’s dilemma, who had to write *Fools* in Denver, and try to avoid apartheid’s censors, to be read by South Africans. This was not Huston’s dilemma, which largely illustrates the point. The ways in which these writers have responded to this situation are never solutions, since capital adapts itself ceaselessly to innovation, but this itinerary of adaptation offers a historical perspective on how colonial and postcolonial writers have had to adapt their formal registrations of this capitalist world system, and how the infrastructures through which those registrations have circulated have changed. It also reveals the perhaps-obvious point that adaptation as remediation ought to be understood not only in a transformation of a text’s immanent form, its meaning, but also of its effective audience, its significance. Thus, to remediate is always also to recontextualize.

These recontextualizations, however, are not made under self-selected circumstances, but rather under circumstances already existing. Thus, Suleman cannot determine where his film will be distributed and shown beyond formally stipulating the horizon of interpretation in

which he's placing himself. This stipulation comes early, in the aforementioned scene outside of the Moulin Rouge in Johannesburg. Zamani's impotence, an invention of Suleman's, cannot but be understood as an allusion to Ousman Sembene's 1975 *Xala*, one of the most influential films by African cinema's most influential filmmaker – and similarly one concerned with impotence, gender, and community in a neocolonial context. In addition to disclosing Suleman's own pan-African apprenticeship under the Mauritanian director Med Hondo and the Malian director Souleymane Cissé, this allusion points to a discursive field and even an infrastructure wholly outside of the itinerary from Dublin 1904 to Denver 1983 to California 1987 to Johannesburg 1997. That is, Suleman synthesizes the incompatible wish for a proletarian African audience for *Fools* and the imperialist world system that produces and circulates it, by shifting its discursive frame to that of a pan-African intelligentsia, the center-periphery model symbolically abolished. Such an abolition is, of course, wishful, no less so than Joyce's wish for a perspective that could encompass all of Ireland, or of Ndebele's for a subjectivity that could redeem the spectacular violence of apartheid South Africa. Until such wishes achieve their material fulfillment, however, this sequence of adaptations serves as an archive of how colonial and postcolonial cultural production has registered its ongoing unfreedom.

Notes

- 1 The selection of Joyce's naturalist short story by Ndebele and Huston as a model merits attention; literary naturalism is somewhat infamous for its deterministic handling of environmental constraints on individual agency. The adaptation of a naturalist text, with an implicitly deterministic ideology, in the context of the height of apartheid, as in Ndebele, and the height of the Troubles, as in Huston, generates some tension – these were historical moments of profound oppression, but also of profound struggle. The tradition for this association of naturalism with determinism is long, if not linear. For major interventions, see Émile Zola's *The Experimental Novel* (1893); György Lukács's 'Narrate or Describe?' (1936) and 'Realism in the Balance' (1938); Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946) 518, 505; and Raymond Williams's 'Social Environment and Theatrical Environment: The Case of English Naturalism' (1977).
- 2 Joyce's collection took seven years to get published, largely on account of fears of legal action for libel or obscenity – Joyce's concern with Dublin's lower classes and naturalist sensibility leading him to a frankness in discussing sex, squalor, and political squabbling that publishers worried would be out of step with bourgeois Ireland's Edwardian sensibilities. By the time *Dubliners* was released in 1914, it was somewhat overshadowed by the simultaneous serialization of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in Ezra Pound's *The Egoist*; and again more thoroughly overshadowed by the 1922 publication of *Ulysses* and its subsequent history of censorship, banning, and unbanning on either side of the Atlantic. Joyce's canonical fortunes undertake a sort of split itinerary here. With the eventual unbanning of *Ulysses* in the United States following the 1933 ruling of *United States v. One Book Called Ulysses*, Joyce would go on to receive considerable public, critical, and scholarly attention in that country, as the author of *Ulysses*. By contrast, as Joe Cleary demonstrates in his *Outrageous Fortune*, 'it was the early naturalistic Joyce of *Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist*, and not *Ulysses*, that exerted by far the most decisive influence of Irish writing in the post-independence period' (97); an influence no doubt partially conditioned by the fact that *Ulysses* would only become publicly available in Ireland after 1960. This opening-up was not without its commercial incentives; John McCourt records a 1951 letter to the *Irish Times* by R. Shelton Scholefield complaining about the lack of Joyce infrastructure in Dublin, and of 'the ridiculous position in which we stand *vis-à-vis* the world by our persistent ignoring of this great Dublin-born artist. After all we *are* in the tourist market, and these misguided foreigners think quite a lot of Joyce' (McCourt, 51).
- 3 The 1990s was a period of considerable historical revision within Joyce scholarship, largely informed by postcolonial and subaltern studies; major texts in that cohort include Enda Duffy's *The Subaltern Ulysses* (1994), Emer Nolan's *James Joyce and Nationalism* (1995), Vincent Cheng's *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (1995), and Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes's *Semicolonial Joyce* (2000).
- 4 Scholarship on the cultural Cold War is by this point fairly extensive; Frances Stone Saunders's *Who Paid the Piper?* (1999), Mark McGurl's *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*

- (2009), Greg Barnhisel's *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (2015), Eric Bennett's *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing During the Cold War* (2015), and Sarah Brouillette's *UNESCO and the Fate of the Literary* (2019) are the most significant interventions.
- 5 The 16th of December is now celebrated in South Africa as the Day of Reconciliation.
- 6 At bare minimum, we can say that this rewriting of Joyce, taking place during the first flowering of postcolonial studies – between the 1978 publication of *Orientalism* and the 1988 publication of 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' – is the literary precursor to the theoretical development that would eventually identify the shared coloniality of Joyce and Ndebele's respective contexts.
- 7 These conditionings, though both basically aestheticist, are not identical; indeed, his banning and proscription in South Africa is what drove Es'kia Mphahlele into an exile that would eventually lead him to taking his own PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Denver, some years before Ndebele.
- 8 A third strand, in addition to the MFA context, and the context of apartheid censorship, which space prevents me from elaborating here, is Ndebele's intervention in a South African literary debate about the status and function of fiction. This conversation was begun in Lewis Nkosi's 1965 'Fiction by Black South Africans,' which saw that fiction as failing to assimilate the lessons of the world literary canon in its attempts to represent South Africa's social situation. Nkosi was responded to by Es'kia Mphahlele in his 1973 'The Tyranny of Place,' which argued for the irreducible specificity of the South African situation, hence the inapplicability of world-literary techniques; and for his stated project, not merely to describe the South African situation but to constitute the proletarian literary diet. Ndebele does not so much synthesize these positions as find a compromise between them, adapting and entering into the world literary canon in his attention to the specificity of township life in apartheid South Africa.

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