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THE HAUNTED DON'S HOUSE:
ARCHITECTURAL LIMINALITY, SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSERVATISM
AND BURGEONING MODERNISM IN MONTAGUE RHODES JAMES'S
"EPISODE OF CATHEDRAL HISTORY"

by

DANIEL J. TOWNSEND

Under the Direction of Dr. Leanne Richardson

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the use of architecture in the ghost story "An Episode of Cathedral History" by Montague Rhodes James. The focus entails an examination of the architectural theories of John Ruskin, which impacted James's personal views on education, female empowerment, and Modernism. These views are reflected in "An Episode of Cathedral History" as story elements that bear symbolic values that James hides under the auspices of entertainment for the purpose of creating a commentary and warning about the chaos of the emerging Modern world.

INDEX WORDS: ghosts, Montague Rhodes James, suffrage, Modernism, Ruskin, architecture

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

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2014

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving wife, Elizabeth, and my parents, Ronald and Mary Jo, my family and my friends, who are too many to name (save The Usual Turtledoves), for always believing in my abilities even when I did not. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to coffee and insomnia. They have both played an integral role in its production.

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I would like to acknowledge all of the professors and colleagues who have assisted me in my academic career thus far, but most especially Dr. Leanne Richardson, Dr. Paul Schmidt, and Dr. Murray Brown who all made learning fun.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1 CONTEXTUALIZATION: RUSKIN, WOMEN, AND ACADEMIA	9
1.1 Contextualization: Ruskin.....	9
1.2 Contextualization: Women’s Suffrage	13
1.3 Contextualization: Scholarly Works	18
2 ANALYSIS: “AN EPISODE OF CATHEDRAL HISTORY”	21
3 JAMES AND MODERNISM.....	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	48

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Victorian era in Britain marks a period of immense social change. Montague Rhodes (M. R.) James (1862-1936), an antiquarian who became known for his ghost stories, creates a commentary on this change through his fiction. James's ghost stories harbor socially conservative ideologies and certain systemically progressive modernist tendencies that haunt the structures of his tales. James's fiction becomes a harbinger of modernity shackled to the edifice of traditional patriarchy. This edifice becomes literalized in his fiction, manifesting itself in his obsession with ecclesiastical architecture.

James's participation in privatized education helps account for his adherence to the patriarchal hierarchies of the Victorian era. At the age of eleven James was placed in a preparatory school, Temple Grove, at the insistence of his father who wanted James to follow in his career path as a rector, as well as, adhere to more dogmatic Christian principles in the wake of growing religious doubt (Cox 10). James would continue from Temple Grove to attend Eton, and then King's College, Cambridge.¹ After his undergraduate studies James became a prominent figure in Cambridge becoming a Fellow (1887-1889), Dean of King's College (1889-1892), Tutor of King's College (1900-1905), and finally Provost of King's College and Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University (1905-1918). James left Cambridge after his Provostship to become Provost at Eton (1918-1936). (Cox xv)

James became immensely popular at Cambridge, in a large part, because he organized social gatherings and participated in multiple school groups both in a leisure and professional

¹ James's father, Herbert James (1822-1909), attended each of these schools in the same order as his son, though with differing prestige given his interests in Divinity and Theology.

capacity. These gatherings started as elitist events comprised of James's close friends and contemporaries, but they eventually expanded to include professors, tutors, underclassmen, and Oppidians, and Collegers alike.² These groups eventually evolved into informal gatherings, where James highly encouraged younger and new undergraduates of King's College to attend and relax. Even during his tenure as Provost Of King's, James actively maintained social relations with undergraduates (Cox 164). Richard Pfaff, one of James's biographers, attributes James's exposure to William Johnson Corey's novel tutoring philosophy, being a tutor and a friend, as one of the prime influences on James's association with youthful academics (21). Accessibility and friendliness greatly endeared James to undergraduates and contemporaries at Cambridge.

James's time at Cambridge was also marked by internal conflict over elitism and agnosticism. Exclusivity was common among Collegers, who were attending on academic scholarships, but James's class brought the initial tensions to a breaking point. James and his contemporaries were incorporated into an informal association known as the Best Set, referring to Kingsmen³ who had gone to Eton prior to King's College.⁴ Tensions peaked in Spring of 1889 when several Best Set undergraduates assaulted a Canadian freshman by dunking him repeatedly in a lake over an ongoing dissention about the newly vacated post of Dean and Vice Provost for

² Oppidians were fee-paying students who lodged off-campus. Collegers resided on campus in dormitories and were the typical recipients of scholarships and grants that paid for their educational costs. Herbert James started at Eton as an Oppidian. (Cox 2)

³ Kingsman refers to an undergraduate or successful graduate of King's College.

⁴ Eton and King's had been traditionally linked schools for more than 400 years prior to James's matriculation. Non-Etonians began to matriculate to King's in 1850, threatening the prior homogeneity of the Kingsmen demographic and prestige (Cox 52).

King's college.⁵ James, although initially sympathetic with the Best Set, ultimately resolved the conflict by gathering the undergraduates and reconciling them during a sermon (Cox 90). This act led to James's appointment as Dean in December 1889. Growing agnosticism was also a concern during James's tenure at Cambridge as more scholars began to adopt scientific rather than theological positions of epistemology. Michael Cox remarks on the importance of these divisions while discussing a letter written to James by his predecessor as Provost of King's, Augustus Austen Leigh imploring James to stay on as Tutor⁶: "[The letter] clearly shows the split between the Churchmen and the agnostics –a transmutation of the old division [at Cambridge] between the Exclusives and the Excluded –that was, to some extent, responsible for confirming Monty's inclination to leave Cambridge at the end of the First World War, by which time the 'ungodly' element was well and truly ascendant" (Cox 118). Cambridge was not immune to the changing thoughts and processes regarding Christian faith during the latter part of the nineteenth-century, and James ascendance through the hierarchy of King's College reflects a desire to mitigate the influence of agnosticism while maintaining a conciliatory presence. James, thus, became a key arbiter of tradition and balance at Cambridge, particularly during the last twenty years of his professional employment there when his political power dramatically

⁵ The conflict arose when E. H. Douty was rumored to be receiving an initial Fellowship and then the Deanship passing over older, more-qualified candidates. Douty was a member of the Best Set, even though he never attended Eton. Robert Ross, the Canadian freshman, wrote a scathing article about the nepotistic nature of Douty's appointment prompting the reprisal from the Best Set (Cox 89).

⁶ James disliked several of the clerical duties associated with being Tutor: " 'There will be many protestations and declamations, but the prospect of an indefinite period of arranging examination, taking lodgings, arranging rooms, deciding about payments, which with other like duties are seven-eighths of the work, is one which I cannot face with equanimity" (qtd. in Cox 117).

increases. James's leadership positions, and his actions in attending to crises, provide models for understanding the way he addresses ecclesiastical architecture and gender roles in his stories.

James's interest in the writings of John Ruskin ecclesiastical architecture fuel both his obsession with ecclesiastical architecture and his discomfort with expanding women's rights at the end of the nineteenth century. James represents his fears of about societal and cultural destruction –primarily expanding women's sphere and “restoring” ecclesiastical architecture in his fiction. These fears resonate with contemporary audiences through key ambiguities that address the nineteenth-century issues of social degeneration, gender equality, and general uncertainty that ideally situate James to become a transitional voice for integrating into the modern era preceding World War I. James accomplishes this voice through a re-appropriation of architecture in literature that creates the potential for apt social commentaries.

Architecture and literature complement each other in significant ways. The use of architecture in literature builds a space for discussing the changes in society, and according to David Spurr, a way of defining modernity and resolving the crisis of meaning proliferating in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (ix). The tandem nature of these two forms is also evident in their efforts to effectively communicate culture and desire. Spurr utilizes two ancient examples in order to connect architecture and literature. The first example comes from Homer's *Odyssey*. Spurr cites the role of architecture throughout the epic to again establish the communal aspect of architecture,⁷ but also to establish and confirm identity (6-9). In the case of identity, Spurr uses the example of Odysseus's bed as the final point of identification that Odysseus's

⁷ Odysseus tells the majority of his story in the house of Alkinoos prior to his return to Ithaca, and Alkinoos's house represents the community that Odysseus has been denied since his departure from Troy. (*Odyssey* 8-13)

wife demands before accepting her husband following his twenty-year absence (7).⁸ Spurr's inclusion of *The Odyssey* extends the idea into the private home by building a sense of community and security through the metaphor of Odysseus's bed and the fellowship he experiences as he recounts the tale of his adventures prior to his return home. The second is the story of Babel, where the biblical tower is used as an expression of community and communal desire, which demonstrates the potential for united progress via a common goal of enlightenment/achievement (Spurr 9-10). Both of these stories establish architecture as the primary form of community and expression before the written word. Architecture actively fulfills the expressive role of literature until the advent of the printing press and the potential for the widespread dissemination, via print, of ideas.

Spurr's point is salient, particularly in regard to ecclesiastical architecture. Most cities during the Middle Ages featured a cathedral or some other large religious edifice as the main attraction and town center (Spurr 100). Thus, churches became the primary form of expression given their capacity for public exposure and contextualization. Babel becomes the ideal example of this idea, merging religious rhetoric, community, language, and architecture.⁹ These examples inextricably link the parallels of the communicative and revelatory capacity held by architecture and literature. Thus, architecture becomes the historical foundation for communication and literature becomes the fluid interpretative structure erected atop it. The two can be used together to generate productive ideas, one as the enduring historical remnant for comparison and the other

⁸ Odysseus's bed has been literally built into the house, and one of its four legs is actually a living tree, which makes Penelope's claim of moving it impossible assuming the tree, and marriage, is still intact. (*Odyssey* 23. 200-230) Spurr uses the "nuptial bed" as a symbolically charged metaphor to inform not only Odysseus's identity, but also to incorporate the temporal and spatial association with survival, futurity, permanence and civilization.(9)

⁹ See Genesis 11. 1-9

as the critical expression of history to inform the present. In Spurr's view, correlating architecture and literature becomes the primary force for creating meaning, particularly when architecture holds a universally symbolic meaning for a specific community (4-6).

In this capacity for creating meaning, the preservation of the architectural remnant becomes paramount. Without the architectural baseline for communication, literature loses expressive capabilities and some of its critical value, which impacts its ability to generate meaning. The link to the past is important since it dictates the origin (to a certain degree) of culture and thought. Spurr elaborates:

Apart from its concrete presence, Gothic architecture also served as a spectacular monument to the religious past, that is, to a sense of spiritual transcendence now cut off from religious experience and consigned to a purely aesthetic realm. As a constant and present reminder of that rupture and a charge newly assigned to art, the medieval cathedrals of Europe could not escape the allegorical if enigmatic meanings that would be assigned to them by writers of the nineteenth century.

(100)

Without the establishment of a core set of ideas, progress through commentary and argument becomes stymied in subjective antagonism. By having an accepted point of expression, in this case architecture, competing interpretations can be made accelerating and supporting newly created ideas. For example, ecclesiastical architecture becomes a singular point of expression while simultaneously symbolizing a core belief structure. Thus using a cathedral or church as a foundation creates a common point for interpretation, which can vary and create new meaning through the different criticisms of the single architectural and ecclesiastical space. This example can be modified using any type of architecture so long as there is a shared symbolic value

attached to it. This notion becomes especially important during the Industrial Revolution, when massive population shifts to urban areas radically alter civic composition to accommodate the demand for laborers due to the crippling of agrarian culture. In this period of cultural upheaval the relative permanence of ecclesiastical architecture becomes the touchstone for the past, which contextualizes the results of change. Preserving architectural structures helps new ideas develop as the interpretive potential of the architectural resonates with different viewers and antagonizes thought to generate an acceptable shared interpretation, or meaning. Communication of this new, shared meaning, or even potential meaning, depends on the written word for the mass dissemination required for social acceptance. Thus new thoughts and ideas emerge through literature, especially through commentary on architecture.

In this case, M. R. James uses buildings and interior church structures to approach the shifting dynamics of British society following the end of the Victorian period. James's use of architecture demonstrates a concern for preservation, both physically and socially, which extends from his academic work to his fiction. For example, in one of James's ghost stories, "An Episode of Cathedral History," ecclesiastical architecture becomes a stronghold against an internal supernatural force. The containment, though, is disrupted when the physical architectural space of the altar and choir experiences renovation. James sees this renovation as inherently destructive, and thus he introduces a threat of physical violence, and frequently death (through supernatural means), to warn against the obliteration of history and desecration of the sacred spaces and institutions, which act as the analogs for social traditions and potential reform. This aggressively preservationist attitude reveals James's concern for architectural and societal conservation and conservatism. It also highlights a resistance on James's part toward advancing technologies and ideas. James confronts his modernity through the modification of the

architectural remnant, which illustrates his fears and prejudices. James's participation in this active commentary stems not only from his desire to make sense of the evolving nature of Victorian England, but also in his abiding adherence to a staunch architectural preservationist, John Ruskin.

1 CONTEXTUALIZATION: RUSKIN, WOMEN, AND ACADEMIA

Three main influences emerge in James's ghost stories: John Ruskin, female empowerment as embodied by the British suffrage movement, and James's academic work. James intentionally combines these influences with his obsession for architecture to create a political commentary on the danger of social changes, particularly female empowerment, and the need for historical preservation at the turn of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. This chapter is devoted to examining these influences, while the second chapter will discuss their implementation in James's ghost stories.

1.1 Contextualization: Ruskin

John Ruskin's (1819-1900) preservation and architectural theories are best seen in his seminal work, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849). In this study Ruskin outlines a set of principles for critiquing and understanding architecture. However, within this treatise are pieces of social commentary in the shadows of the architectural criticism. These commentaries influence James's social attitudes in addition to bolstering his obsession with architecture. Gothic architecture, especially, intrigues James. Gothic architecture is also the primary subject of Ruskin's theories.

It is no coincidence then that Ruskin's influence on M. R. James was immense. James' tutor and lifelong friend, Henry Elford Luxmoore (1841-1926), first advocated Ruskin's views while James attended Eton (1876-1882). Luxmoore saw Ruskin as a "spiritual master," and it is this fervor that enchanted James who was already an avid enthusiast for ecclesiastical architecture (Cox 24). This exposure to Ruskin would inform James's academic and fiction work for the rest of his life. Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* is perhaps the most influential of these works as it attempts to defend the parameters of acceptable architectural work in the

wake of Gothic revival spearheaded by A. W. N. Pugin (circa 1836), but Ruskin's "The Nature of the Gothic" (1853) and "Sesame and Lilies" (1865) also provide insight into James's life, political leanings, and fiction, as well as rebut Pugin's theories.

Ruskin relates an idealism and fervor in the *Seven Lamps* that would be very attractive to James, with such sentiments as: "Architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them contributes to his mental health, power, and pleasure," (15), and "Therefore, when we build, let us think that we build for ever" (176). The former idea encourages James's already burgeoning love of architecture while the latter idea of the permanency of architecture imbues James with a sense of purpose. These influences culminate through James's shift toward antiquarian studies in lieu of pursuing divinity school like his father, and also in the way James spend his leisure time, vacationing to the European mainland to explore cathedrals (Pfaff 111).

One of the more influential aspects of Ruskin on James's work and mentality is his call for preservation in the Lamp of Memory section of *Seven Lamps*. This influence may be seen in James's scholarly work of cataloging various ecclesiastical structures and antique collections. James's socio-cultural insistence on the preservation of art and architecture becomes a bit clearer when we examine Ruskin's views on the preservation of ruins and architecture in general: "What we have ourselves built, we are at liberty to throw down; but what other men gave their strength, and wealth, and life to accomplish, their right over does not pass away with their death; still less is the right to the use of what they have left vested in us only. It belongs to all their successors" (186). Considering these statements on a more universal scale, it becomes plausible that James's concern with the maintenance of a perceived status quo at Cambridge derives from this idea of respecting and preserving historical permanency. The structure has merely shifted

for James from the physical buildings to the socio-political hierarchies of King's College, which he seeks to maintain as a tribute to his own Eton and King's College experience. This is why James utilizes his influence to ensure that Greek remains the primary ancient language of study instead of Latin (Pfaff 125).¹⁰ James struggles to preserve Cambridge the way he experienced it, though his efforts become less effective after the beginning of World War One. This sentiment of preserving or revisiting the past, in architecture and society, echoes another nineteenth-century British architectural theorist, A. W. N. Pugin.

Pugin's *Contrasts* argue for a re-implementation of fifteenth-century Gothic architecture and fifteenth-century socio-political practices. This Gothic revival, the mimicking of Gothic architectural style for the purpose of re-establishing medieval sentiments associated with landed gentry, serfdom, and religious dominance, builds from Pugin's religious fervor and relative disgust at the "decay of faith" that he sees in departures from Catholicism and in urban migration (13). This attribution of faith to Gothic architecture as a means of guidance is not uncommon: Ruskin also provides space for the religious, particularly in architecture's adherence to nature and natural forms. One of the main points of disagreement though emerges in the ideas surrounding the duplication of architectural styles. This emerges in Pugin's "Preface to the Second Edition" of *Contrasts*: "[the] revivals of ancient architecture, although erected in, are not

¹⁰ In a rare display of influence, James undermined the Council of the university to replace Greek with Latin as the main language of study. James, utilizing his influence as the former Dean of King's College, rallied more than fifteen hundred undergraduates and associates to oppose the vote to shift to Latin. The only other time James utilizes influence on a scale this large is when he uses his position on a special select committee to oppose women attending Cambridge altogether, though the committee creates the compromise of allowing women to study, but not obtain degrees. That compromise was defeated by Cambridge's voting members. Subsequently women were not able to obtain degrees at Cambridge until the 1940's (Pfaff 124-27).

buildings of the nineteenth century,— their merit must be referred back to the period from whence they were copied“ (v). This idea runs directly counter to Ruskin’s position: “ Another spirit may be given by another time, and it is then a new building; but the spirit of the dead workman cannot be summoned up, and commanded to direct other hands, and other thoughts. And as for direct and simple copying, it is palpably impossible” (184). In this regard, Pugin believes that the past can be recreated through the duplication of architectural styles. Ruskin states that this is impossible given the temporal and existential difference between any and all eras of civilization. Pugin’s adherence to the past demonstrates dissatisfaction with the ideological shifts in the early nineteenth century, while Ruskin promotes the past as a valuable resource that should be maintained, but not emulated.

It becomes clear how James limits his views on change when looking closely at Ruskin’s “Nature of the Gothic” from *The Stones of Venice* (1853). One of the defining tenets of Gothic architecture for Ruskin is change: “The vital principle is not the love of Knowledge, but the love of Change,” (47). This capacity for change is what endears Gothic architecture to Ruskin. It is this sentiment that creates the capacity for hope and the necessity of mutability that heralds the potential for progress in the face of stagnation, and also the lesson that James appears to forget from Ruskin’s *Seven Lamps of Architecture*: “[T]here are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men, Poetry and Architecture; and the latter in some sort includes the former, and is mightier in its reality” (169). This notion promotes the supremacy of architecture to act as an impetus for the re-examination of any number of pursuits, which James never truly embraces. It also echoes the notion of fragility held in the edifices of humanity:

There is no law, no principle, based on past practice, which may not be
overthrown in a moment by the arising of a new condition, or the invention of a

new material; and the most rational, if not the only, mode of averting the danger of an utter dissolution of all that is systematic and consistent in our practice, or of ancient authority in our judgment, is to cease for a little while, our endeavors to deal with the multiplying host of particular abuses, restraints, or requirements.

(Seven Lamps, 10-11)

Ruskin presents the vulnerability of virtually any structure, even his own, but he mitigates the impact by advising reflection to create a baseline that accommodates a balance of the new and the old. It is this idea of a balanced progress that James adheres to when he creates the peace between outsiders and Etonians¹¹ and dismisses when he uses his influence to deny women access to degrees at Cambridge. Denying degrees for women marks his prejudice against the growing suffrage movement, which by the end of the nineteenth century had become even more insistent on immediate enfranchisement and inclusion. Female enfranchisement threatens James's sacrosanct vision of Cambridge, and warrants further examination.

1.2 Contextualization: Women's Suffrage

Women's suffrage becomes one of the major hurdles that James's identifies in the pre-Modern landscape at the end of the nineteenth-century that threatens Cambridge. James earns himself a reputation as a misogynist early on as Michael Cox intimates: "As a young man, Monty had occasionally affected the misogynist. At Eton in April 1886, for instance, at a dinner . . . he had taken in a lady 'who had been to every corner of the globe and reveled in every kind of athletic pursuit except dancing. I [James] contrived I hope to appear thoroughly contemptible to her'" (164). James never lists an explicit reason for his dislike of women, and some of his experiences with women, like the one above, are simply confounding, but by examining James's various interactions with women, and taking into account other influences surrounding Victorian

¹¹ See p. 3 above.

gender spheres and proscriptions from Ruskin, some sense may be made of James's negative attitudes concerning women.

There are numerous accounts of James having respectful and enduring relationships with women of all ages, but there are certain episodes that highlight his prejudice, and thus mark him as a misogynist. Richard Pfaff attempts to redeem James's prejudice: "Though [M. R. James] came to have something of a reputation as a misogynist, this is far from an accurate label. The fact is that he was often fond of, and apparently charming to, women if they were wives, fiancées, sisters of friends, or otherwise 'safe'" (62). Even Michael Cox rushes to defend James's reputation: "No 'woman hater', then, but one of nature's bachelors, jealous of his independence and a connoisseur of the pleasures generated by the predominately male society in which he moved" (165). James's associations with 'safe' women and "predominately male society" do not obviate his general prejudice, but it does offer some insight into his sexist associations with other women. From personal letters, biographer Michael Cox captures an instance of James's discomfort surrounding women by citing an incident during a vacation period at King's College during May 1882 where James voices "displeasure at watching ladies traipsing around" the campus from his dormitory (65). Even later on in James's career, before he is elected Provost Of King's there are concerns where ". . .one [unnamed] prominent Cambridge lady [spoke] with vexation of Monty – ' [that he] doesn't like women; will close the Lodge¹² to them'" (Cox 158). Explaining this prejudice prompts a brief examination of the suffrage movement, and it necessitates a discussion of the acceptable gendered spheres during the late Victorian period.

Suffragists actively sought enfranchisement since explicit gender-restrictive laws were passed in the early nineteenth century. This movement for equality began to mobilize in earnest

¹² The Lodge refers to the Provost's living quarters and spaces for entertainment.

in the late 1880's and continued to build momentum up until the First World War when suffrage efforts were voluntarily suspended until the resolution of the conflict. During this time, women were effective at gaining some advantage for enfranchisement by actively pursuing educational achievement and involvement, particularly following the 1870 Education Act, which allowed women to vote for local school boards (Smith 6). The link to education, traditionally associated with the women's sphere, created a foothold for expansion into the patriarchal hegemony of the university. Women were empowered to teach primary schools, typically attended by poorer students, but they were not allowed to teach more affluent youths whose early education was often privatized, like James's when he attended Temple Grove (Cox 11-19). This limitation on teaching also expanded into the ranks of higher education creating a contentious overlap of gender spheres as women vied for access to higher educational environments and enfranchisements. The dual nature (or double standard) of education that tangentially connects the Victorian gendered spheres creates a promising battlefield for suffrage expansion. It is in this capacity that James comes into conflict with the suffrage movement.

James's issue with women evolved from their transgression into the sphere of higher education, and by extension, political enfranchisement. Richard Pfaff comments on this situation:

Women were clearly at, and even of, the University . . . but not in it. Their sharpest grievance was that, though they could sit the Tripos examinations and even be ranked in them, they were not allowed to take degrees, which meant also that they could not become M.A.s and share in the governance of the university (127).

James wielded his influence as a former Dean and King's favorite in manifold forms to limit the access of women to academia, which earned him a negative reputation among women actively

seeking a foothold. In 1896, this prejudice culminates in James's adamant refusal to permit women to obtain degrees from Cambridge by exercising his influence over committees and voting members. This rare, almost uncharacteristic, act for James attempted to bar women from studying at Cambridge altogether (Pfaff, 127). James can also be seen actively discrediting female scholarship in his scholarly work. However, this ire towards women in academia doesn't emerge entirely from any general hostility or antipathy, but from the mind of James's great model of authority, Ruskin.

In Ruskin's essay, "Lilies," a discussion of female education calls for a greater scope in educating and empowering women. While this essay appears to establish a point equivalent education for both men and women, Ruskin hedges the impact with the following caveat:

I believe, then, with this exception, that a girl's education should be nearly, in its course and material of study, the same as a boy's; but quite differently directed. A woman, in any rank of life, ought to know whatever her husband is likely to know, but to know it in a different way. His command of it should be foundational and progressive; hers, general and accomplished for daily and helpful use. (92)

Thus Ruskin reintegrates the traditional gendered spheres, a sentiment that James parrots in conjunction with other Ruskin-esque sentiments as mentioned above. This in no way alleviates James's complicity in sexism, but it does demonstrate the magnitude of command that Ruskin's work exerts over James. By combining this prejudice with those associated with the academy, namely the necessity of perfection in scholarly pursuits, it becomes less surprising that James takes such an extreme position. The growing militancy of the suffrage movement likely only serves to confirm James's trepidation at allowing women to take degrees.

By 1905, the suffrage movement began to grow increasingly violent in the wake of several reversals on proposed policy changes. This militancy began with the interruption of political meetings, evolved into the destruction of public property, and reached its zenith with physical assaults, the targeted destruction of private property, arson, and even bombings (Smith, 36). While these acts were perpetrated by only a small group of radical suffragists, some would likely begin to associate such destructive behavior with the larger group. One of the foundational tactics of the suffragists was to assert a moral superiority over men, and these “unwomanly” tactics damaged that ideal especially for traditionalists like James.¹³ These points of extremism likely reinforced not only James’s misgivings about women in academia, but also his depiction of them in his fiction as bizarre and even evil. These depictions merge James’s contemporary concerns with his ecclesiastical obsessions, which is also evident in his scholarly works.

¹³ Other instances like the Mud March in 1907, and the assaults Black Friday in 1910, generated some mitigating sympathy for the suffrage movement (Smith, 17-36). However, it is unlikely that these instances would have received sympathetic attention as the transgressions of the extreme suffragists were likely to overshadow the reciprocate violence of the authorities.

1.3 Contextualization: Scholarly Works

James's ghost stories typically feature an academic that stumbles onto some type of supernatural force through the course of his work or research. These academic settings form an unmistakable air of autobiography in James's fiction necessitating an examination of James's academic works. This examination will look briefly at the breadth of James's work and attempt to form some rationale for James's academic career since James never voiced any intention or goal for his work, but merely pursued the topics and projects he enjoyed.

James's academic work most notably concerns apocryphal books of the Bible. One of the more interesting episodes in James's undergraduate academic career involves an annotated version of the apocryphal book of Baruch, which he attempted to send and dedicate directly to Queen Victoria in the Spring of 1878.¹⁴ James also catalogued numerous art and antique collections for multiple universities. This work complements James's appreciation of ecclesiastical architecture, and eventually this focus is realized in the commissioned work, *Abbeys*. This work catalogues the majority of abbeys extant in Britain. James was a prolific scholar during his tenure at Cambridge. He even maintained an impressive scholarly output as Provost despite the time constraints of the office.¹⁵ Richard Pfaff comments extensively on James's academic career:

¹⁴ This attempt proved to be quite a fiasco. The Queen's personal secretary intercepted the document and confronted James for his lack of propriety. James was verbally reprimanded, but in later examinations of the episode, James asserts that he was 'slightly disarranged in the intellect' from too much mental fatigue. (Cox 32)

¹⁵ Pfaff also comments that by 1894, the sum of James's publications would have sufficed many scholars for a lifetime. It is then even more impressive that James received his Doctor of Letters distinction from King's College, Cambridge at the age of thirty-two, a distinction that was typically awarded as a capstone near the end of a scholars career. James was to continue his scholarly contributions until his death in 1936. (127)

In his [James] own case his scholarship was so immense and so wide-ranging, covering as it did medieval manuscripts by the thousand, apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphical writings by the dozen, and so much of the intellectual, legendary, and artistic history of the medieval west, that it would be impossibly tedious even to begin to list these most fundamental sources (ix).

Considering the immense breadth of James's work it seems unlikely that he would even have the time to write ghost stories for entertainment purposes, which suggests that James's motivation to write ghost stories stems from some other desire. It comes as no surprise then that James's academic environment and practices should figure so prominently in his fiction.

James's ghost stories typically feature ancient texts or other religious artifacts, but the aim of James's scholarly work appears to be an understanding of the medieval mindset: "Though his contribution to the study of Christian origins was extensive, it is clear that the primary focus of MRJ's interest in the subject was in its bearing on the intellectual equipment of the Middle Ages" (Pfaff 104). Pfaff claims that James sought to explore apocryphal apocalypses as a way of informing the artifacts that he studied and catalogued. This desire to know the artifacts he studied endeared the subjects to James, and also provided him with ample exposure to content for his ghost stories. James was responsible for greatly increasing the depth and number of Cambridge's Fitzwilliams Library's medieval texts and artifacts through various purchases and lobbied acquisitions (Pfaff 170), but he also took an active role in preserving parts of medieval churches.

James was also considered one of the foremost experts in medieval glass. He was responsible for the preservation of several stained glass plates at King's Chapel (Pfaff 96). James was able to utilize his position and expertise to take an active role in preservation, perhaps

further fulfilling his obligation to Ruskin. This did not always work in his favor, as is evidenced with an incident at Malvern, where James consulted on window glass and met stiff renovationist opposition. James's brother, Sidney, was headmaster at Malvern, which garnered James some latitude, but the deciding party, a Mrs. McClure, staunchly opposed James's recommendations for cleaning and preservation in favor of a more comprehensive restoration. Such a renovation would have entailed replacing a few panes with new glass, which likely further indisposed James to condemn women in positions of influence (Cox 117).

James utilizes almost all of his professional experience in his fiction. His insistence on incorporating his profession so thoroughly in his ghost stories prompts multiple questions and potential interpretations, which begin to highlight his trepidation in regards to changes in academia. This conservative attitude, in addition to his devotion to Ruskin creates interesting critical avenues in his ghost stories that reveal a trending discomfort with greater societal shifts.

2 ANALYSIS: “AN EPISODE OF CATHEDRAL HISTORY”

James's ghost stories reveal the James's influence and predispositions and provide an ideal medium to examining his socio-political ideologies. "An Episode of Cathedral History" serves as a prime example for this type of analysis. The story itself deals with a series of unexplained, or perhaps supernatural, phenomenon that take place in the extant town of Southminster, Essex in 1840. To facilitate his narrative, James creates a cathedral, which he calls Southminster Cathedral, and has it undergo renovation as it falls prey to the Gothic revival. However, certain ambiguities and inconsistencies within the tale give rise to myriad possibilities regarding interpretation. Ambiguities within the story have a direct effect on the reader, and in the case of the “Episode” these ambiguous encounters include time, narration, place, and even identity. Pervasive ambiguities are necessary to create tension for readers of the ghost story who anticipate revelations of ambiguity to capitalize on the horrific and unsettling affect of the narrative. Such ambiguities are also imbued with interpretive potential since they enable any number of social, political, existential, or economic issues to be superimposed upon them. Thus, the horrific and the unsettling become infinitely adaptable and dependent upon individual readers and their unique fears and anxieties, which echo larger group concerns. James, though, makes stylistic choices and modifies the traditional ghost story, so that he can use the ambiguities of architectural space to promote a confrontation between reality and fiction, and thereby address his embedded anxieties about a changing modern world.

James's “An Episode of Cathedral History” begins with the discovery of the notes of a Mr. Lake by an unnamed narrator, presumably James. Mr. Lake's notes relate the story of a supernatural event that takes place at Southminster Cathedral some forty years prior as related by the current verger of Southminster Cathedral, Worby. Worby's tale recounts the presence of a

phantasmagoric entity, which terrorizes Southminster after the old choir and pulpit are renovated during the Gothic revival to reveal a hidden sarcophagus. Many townsfolk and clergymen succumb to heat and disease following this discovery, and there several other inexplicable events transpire to suggest supernatural agency. The story culminates with the opening of the discovered sarcophagus, and the escape of the abominable and mysterious monstrosity contained within it. Throughout the story readers are subjected to ambiguities that either increase the horror of the tale, or remain ambiguous to promote a persisting unease.

Readers first encounter the ambiguity of time. James leads off with the phrase, “There was once a learned man . . .”(*Haunted Doll's*, 37). This phrase establishes no historical measure, so the reader is left with no scale of historical time. What the phrase does establish is a parallel to the age-old idiom: Once upon a time. Once upon a time lacks a specific timeframe, but its association with various fairytales and legends does prepare the reader for entry into the magical, or the inexplicable. James does not let this fanciful fairytale setting last for too long. The question of ‘When’ is established a bit later when the narrator discusses the Gothic Revival in 1840. However, this does not give the reader information on the contemporaneous period of time Mr. Lake, the learned man described by the opening’s narrator, logs. His time period remains unknown until the very end of the story when James reveals that Lake’s notes are dated 1890, fifty years after the event described in the body of the tale. The shifting timescapes, which grow increasingly closer to the present, act as a destabilizing point for the reader. The ambiguous “there once was” from the opening increasingly creeps closer to the reader’s time. The timescapes advance from the ancient fairy tale past to a recent historical time until it becomes evident that these events in the “Episode” did not happen quite so long ago. This is especially true for James’s first audiences in the late nineteenth century where the more recent timescapes

would likely encompass the lifetimes their parents and grandparents, but these timescapes also establish temporal permeability in the architectural space of Southminster Cathedral. The cathedral becomes an expanse of time so that readers are unable to unravel the past from the present making the cathedral a point for both. Blending both of these temporal points creates a space for James to modify the supernatural creating a vulnerability for readers who are unable to distinguish the supernatural past from the chaotic present. This telescoping sense of time, from potentially ancient to present, also complements the shifts in narration.

There are three narrators in the “Episode.” The first is the narrator is unnamed, the second is the learned man, Mr. Lake, and the third is the verger, Worby. This creates a frame narrative, a trope common to early Gothic literature. Thus the reader encounters three stories simultaneously. The first story is the discovery of Mr. Lake’s notes by the unnamed narrator of the opening. This gradually evolves into the story of Mr. Lake’s own experience of Southminster Cathedral, and, lastly, Worby’s first person account of his childhood experience with the supernatural force. However, Mr. Lake abridges Worby’s tale, and the unnamed narrator further emends Mr. Lake’s notes. Thus each external narrator truncates each of the accounts, so the reader is left with a highly edited, sparsely referenced rendition of the story. The reader is slowly propelled through each narrator through shifting first person perspectives and thoughts. The unnamed narrator explains this quite explicitly: “I will not undertake to tell it wholly in his own words, or in his own order. Lake committed the substance of it to paper immediately after hearing it . . . I shall probably find it expedient to condense Lake’s record to some extent” (*Haunted Doll’s* 39). Ultimately, it is an account of an account of a story, and as the ‘ghost story’ takes shape the reader begins to lose the first unnamed narrator in the account of Lake’s notes on the story. This overlap marks the transition between the unnamed narrator and Mr. Lake

since the reader cannot discern what Lake has written versus what the unnamed narrator has emended. To further complicate this narration structure, James repeats this narrative overlap, as Worby becomes the sole narrator of the 'ghost tale,' which is marked by his pastoral accent. However, Lake has edited Worby's version of the tale so it becomes unclear which parts of the tale are Worby's and which parts are Lake's modifications. This narration structure effectively distances the actual ghost story from the reader and even the author. Andrew Smith comments further on James's narrative distancing: "James's complex narrative structure has often been regarded as a means of distancing horror. However, changes in this structure . . . implicate the reader in a voyeurism that is meant to unsettle the idea that 'horror' can be contained by the urbane narratorial voice" (170). Smith's interpretation demonstrates James's complete control over the tale through the ambiguities of narration and James's ability to promote a sense of security and simultaneously undermine that security effectively incorporating the supernatural into reality. This reveals an intriguing, and open, literary space that James can mold to mimic reality, house terrifying phantasms, and embed social anxieties.

To accomplish this realistic setting for the presentation of the supernatural, James relies on the ambiguity of place. This ambiguity emerges in the fact that there is no Southminster Cathedral. James freely admits in interviews that the cathedral mentioned in the "Episode" story is a conflation of three separate cathedrals, notably the cathedrals at Canterbury, Hereford, and Salisbury ("Some Remarks" 255). This fact may seem inconsequential, but given James's abiding infatuation with Ruskin and the preservation of ecclesiastical architecture this fact bears further scrutiny. This ambiguity of place, Southminster Cathedral, is situated in reality. The city of Southminster actually exists; it's located approximately fifty miles southeast of Cambridge. This blend of a real location with a fictitious edifice lends credibility to James's story. It also

creates a safe space for James to entertain the notion of destroying architecture and society, but not the total destruction that Ruskin advocates: “But, it is said, there may come a necessity for restoration! Granted. Look the necessity full in the face, and understand it on its own terms. It is a necessity for destruction. Accept it as such, pull the building down, throw its stones into neglected corners, make ballast of them, or mortar, if you will; but do it honestly, and do not set up a Lie in their place” (*Seven Lamps* 185). James instead uses the more blasphemous idea of renovation, or the erection of a lie, in order to highlight the risks and dangers of violating Ruskin’s ideals. James, thus, purposefully alters the setting to introduce a purely fictional cathedral that can be subjected to the degradation of renovation rather than blasphemy against an extant edifice. This duplicative nature is evident in other stories, such as “The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral.” In “Episode,” though, James promotes the inherent risk of altering the architectural revenant by introducing an adversarial supernatural entity.

The nature of this supernatural nemesis in the “Episode” is something of a mystery, which brings about the ambiguity of identity. James initially plays with the reader's expectations while the would-be protagonists, Mr. Lake and Worby, are exploring the cathedral at night. Worby disappears from view for a few seconds while walking down the nave of the darkened Southminster Cathedral with a lantern, and Mr. Lake becomes suspicious of Worby when he reappears: “‘I suppose it is Worby, and not a substitute,’ thought Lake to himself, as he walked up the nave. There was, in fact, nothing untoward” (*Haunted Doll’s* 39). Lake’s supposition that Worby is a fraud creates a doubling, however short-lived, effect of identity. This doubling potential exploits the idea of the ‘ghost’ by insinuating another type of inexplicable creature, perhaps reminiscent of Robert Louis Stevenson’s Mr. Hyde. The fact that Lake conceives the possibility of a doppelganger creates uncertainty for the reader. The readers are anticipating

some sort of supernatural entity, but they are not aware of what it is by this point in the story preceding Worby's retelling of the supernatural event.

This sense of doubling, or uncertainty of identity, manifests in another way in the "Episode." Mr. Lake and Worby continually associate themselves with characters from Dickens unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.¹⁶ James was an admirer of Dickens, but his choice here to conflate his two characters with Dickens's raises some interesting notions concerning identity. Mr. Lake sees himself as Mr. Dratchley, and after his acquaintance with Worby, the two become associated with the characters of Jasper and Durdles respectively. This capacity for the characters in James's work to vicariously perceive themselves as other fictive characters causes readers to consider their own position vicariously observing Lake and Worby. Readers have already vicariously entered into the experience position of Lake through Mr. Lake's notes on the trip to Southminster, as they will later do with Worby once he begins narrating the story of the supernatural event. This tactic creates a sympathetic connection between reader and character, which intensifies the reader's ability to relate to the characters. Intensifying the vicarious experience for readers lends credence to the experience regardless of its inexplicable or foreign nature. Thus, the readers reach a point of emulating the unnamed narrator in reading Lake's notes, Lake by examining Worby's account, and Worby through his limited first person experiences. Mimicking the characters' actions further incorporates readers into James's world where architectural and social preservation become necessary for survival,

¹⁶ James was quite infatuated with the incomplete nature of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. James and a few of his colleagues even formed a club, called The Edwin Drood Syndicate, where they would propose potential endings for the novel. James himself argued that Mr. Dratchley was actually Edwin Drood, and that the murder attempt was unsuccessful (Pfaff 226).

and when the sanctity of these ideas is violated calamity ensues. The architecture of Southminster Cathedral becomes the metaphor for the social hierarchy James seeks to maintain at Cambridge, as well as a metonym for the greater goal of architectural preservation. Readers may be vaguely aware of their complicity in this environment, but the presence of the supernatural mutes any full realization. James reassures the reader through the narrative distance, but this ambiguity of identity persists as readers become enmeshed in the narrative levels approaching the unreal supernatural event.

Critics of James comment on the characteristics of the supernatural in his stories, but they disagree about the type of supernatural creature that appears in “Episode.” The critics oddly do not debate the differences in their interpretations of the supernatural entity. For instance, Bill Read hypothesizes a pair of satyrs as the supernatural force in the story (46), basing his claim on textual evidence citing a specific bible verse, Isaiah 34.14. S. T. Joshi identifies a lamia as the culprit, which he bases on a Latin inscription from the very end of the story (143). Jack Sullivan posits a vampire, likely derived from the nightmare of the old widow who first ‘sees’ the monster (69). Despite these differences, none of these critics consider the alternative findings; they simply present their own identification of the monster. While all of these interpretations seem plausible, James’s intent is the opposite of definite identification. James wants to maintain the lack of identity so that readers conceive of the monster on their own terms; however, James also enjoyed having a bit of fun with his audience.¹⁷ This bit of levity prompts an examination into the mystery of the creature, and it reveals James’s embedded anxieties.

¹⁷ James was an inveterate prankster. He forged numerous manuscripts during his early years at Cambridge, and presented them as convincing authentic manuscripts to his teachers (Pfaff 35). Upon the instructor’s acceptance of the document, James would reveal the ruse. James apparently enjoyed challenging

The key to understanding James's idea of the creature in "Episode" is in the bible verse that Read identifies, Isaiah 34.14. James mentions this verse explicitly during Worby's account of the events: "I happened to be playing about in the Close, and there was two of the Canons met and said 'Good Morning' one to another. 'Sleep well last night?' says [Mr. Henslow] . . . 'Can't say I did,' says Mr. Lyall, 'rather too much of Isaiah 34.14 for me'" (*Haunted Doll's* 45). Worby, of course goes to look up the verse in his own Bible, and reads: "the wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl shall also rest there, and find for herself a place of rest" (*Bible, King James's Version*, Isaiah 34.14). At the very end of the story, James mentions a metal cross that used to adorn the sarcophagus, which has been affixed to the northern wall of the cathedral:

Mr. Lake felt no difficulty about communicating his notes –taken in 1890 –to me. He accompanied them with a sketch of the tomb and a copy of the short inscription on the metal cross which was affixed at the expense of Dr. Lyall to the centre of the northern side. It was from the Vulgate of Isaiah xxxiv., and consisted merely of three words –IBI CUBAVIT LAMIA. (*Haunted Doll's* 54)

Read accepts Worby's reading of Isaiah, but Dr. Lyall, who first mentions the Isaiah passage, is using the Vulgate, a Latin version of the Bible. Worby is using the King James Version. There are similarities between the two,¹⁸ but the specifics differ. The translated Latin¹⁹ reads: "And

scholars, and given his initial audience of academics, it is not surprising that he would integrate elaborate puzzles into his fiction.

¹⁸ The King James Version of the Bible was translated from the Vulgate, albeit with certain flourishes.

¹⁹ The Vulgate Latin of Isaiah 34.14 is as follows: *et occurrent daemonia onocentauris et pilosus clamabit alter ad alterum ibi cubavit lamia et invenit sibi requiem* (Vulgate.org)

demons and monsters shall meet, and the hairy ones shall cry out one to another, there hath the lamia lain down, and found rest for herself” (*Vulgate of St. Jerome* Isaiah 34.14). The verb phrases in each passage are roughly the same, but the creatures mentioned vary. The point of this scavenger hunt²⁰, for James, is not only to chide the audience, and particularly academics²¹, for missing the discrepancy, but also to suggest the feminine root of the destructive supernatural. James’s trick ultimately reinforces the ambiguity of the “hairy ones” and accomplishes James’s other motive, personalizing the horrific experience. Each critic interjects a different interpretation that satisfies his analysis and complements his experience for the “Episode.” The ambiguity of the creature remains intact and ultimately resists identification, thereby adhering to James’s initial design to create an ambiguous horror.

James further obscures the nature of this entity by highlighting certain sensory perceptions of the creature while keeping it visually hidden. The first is heat, and the resulting in miasma that accompanies it. The second is the auditory "crying" of the creature. The phantasm then embodies a physical manifestation when it tears certain items. The first item is a dress worn by the wife of a scholar exploring the discoveries of Southminster following the destruction of the pulpit and the choir. The second item is a piece of sheet music that the young Worby and his friend push into a small crack on the side of the sarcophagus. In both instances, the remnants of the music and the dress are discovered in the sarcophagus after it is opened near the end of the story. Eventually the reader is given a visual referent, but this is cloaked, literally, in shadow

²⁰ James’s ghost story, “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas” utilizes an explicit scavenger hunt in interpreting images in a church window for the purpose of finding gold. The protagonist also misses a small clue, like the reader of “Episode,” and experiences some discomfort for such negligence.

²¹ James’s initial audiences for his ghost stories were his contemporaries and students at Cambridge, but I doubt his humor would be diminished in view of the current academic articles concerning his ghost stories.

and the only semi-recognizable feature is a pair of dull red glowing eyes. During the span of these exposures, the miasma grows increasingly fatal, nightmares transpire, and other irreverent hijinks ensue, but none of these phenomena is initially associated with the creature. Instead the superstitions of the inhabitants of Southminster create an explanation for the inexplicable mayhem: “Gradually there formulated itself a suspicion—which grew into a conviction—that the alterations in the Cathedral had something to say in the matter” (*Haunted Doll's* 44). This reasoning on the part of the villagers promotes James’s preservationist agenda, and creates the beginning of a cautionary tale for readers about the risks of architectural desecration and destruction.

James utilizes the ambiguous monster in order to play more effectively on his audience’s fears and explore his own insecurities with the approaching modern world, particularly female empowerment. Penny Fielding comments “we can see James’s isolated male heroes; as they try to preserve their singular, masculine pursuits, become overtaken by precisely those complexities of gender and sexuality that they originally feared” (751). Without physical or mythological definition, the creature becomes adaptable to the readers on an individual level as they insert their own fears or rationales onto the ambiguous monster. By including both lamia and satyr, James makes the gender uncertain, but his lamia reference opens the creature to the possibility that the creature is feminine. James believes that the feminine is destructive to established patriarchal spaces, like those of academia or the Church.

This personal social commentary, for James, emerges further through the presence of Ruskin in James’s ghost stories. In “Episode,” Ruskin emerges fairly early, as Worby remarks that shadows in the cathedral make it seem more magnificent than when the interior is lighted. This description closely resembles Ruskin’s attitudes concerning the sublime effect of

architecture, as discussed in the Lamp of Power from Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*: "So that, after size and weight, the Power of architecture may be said to depend on the quantity (whether measured in space or intensesness) of its shadow" (52). Ruskin's architectural criticisms from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and "The Nature of the Gothic," as discussed above, provide stability in the story by offering a rubric for assessment, or rather rules for acceptable use. These criticisms are interwoven into the narratives that James creates and are the genesis of many of the plot turns and twists. Revisiting "Episode" further unveils Ruskin's presence in the story, and demonstrates the consequences that result from violating Ruskin's architectural tenets. This involves the pulpit of the Southminster Cathedral, which has odd dimensions. It is in fact noticeably too big because it is hiding a stone sarcophagus beneath it. This act of using architecture for means other than the intended use runs counter to Ruskin's ideals. Ruskin establishes a need for honesty in architecture in the *Seven Lamps*. While talking about the enjoyment derived from imagination, Ruskin uses an example where clouds are seen as "warm" and "mountainous" and the sky is seen as a "blue vault," "[b]ut we know the contrary, in both instances; we know the cloud to be a damp fog, or a drift of snowflakes; and the sky to be a lightless abyss. There is, therefore, no dishonesty" (*Seven Lamps* 38). Thus the misperceptions of clouds and the sky are not damaging because there is knowledge of the reality. It is the obfuscation of knowledge that Ruskin condemns, particularly in architecture, and which implicates the use of the pulpit in "Episode." The pulpit, in this case, is meant for preaching, not hiding sarcophagi and imprisoning phantasms. This deception becomes the signal that something is wrong in the story; however, the discovery of the sarcophagus is due to the new Dean's Gothic revivalist leanings and his penchant for restoration via the Gothic Revival, as mentioned above. This creates a double bind against Ruskin's uses and strictures for

architecture. The more egregious of the two being the renovation since it tries to represent itself as something laudable, when it in fact lacks the esprit de corps of traditional Gothic architecture and is merely a hollow imitation devoid of any of the creativity and mastery of earlier masons that Ruskin champions (*Seven Lamps* 27). The presumed supernatural entity becomes a manifestation of the blasphemous architectural use wielding the chaotic punitive force that punishes all for the transgressions of a few, a fury that leaves an indelible mark on the community, and the reader. As Michael Mason elaborates: “[W]hat occurs is a kind of wild justice visiting any offence with death, or at least the fear of it. The predicament of the victim is naturally the one with which the reader identifies” (256). The investigation of the pulpit demonstrates the ideologically emphatic adherence to Ruskin evident in James’s fiction, but Ruskin’s architectural ideas aren’t the only ones that James incorporates.

Evolving from Ruskin’s proscription of women as equal participants in academia from his essay “Lilies”, James’s use of women in his fiction reflects a very conservative and biblical structure for addressing fears involving women violating James’s sacred sphere of Cambridge. It is not surprising then that a majority of the women who inhabit James’s ghost stories exhibit a reactive relationship to the supernatural entity. In the “Episode of Cathedral History,” an old widow is the herald of the creature through a dream, and the ambiguity surrounding the creature. Also in the “Episode,” the wife of an antiquary documenting Southminster, who, thus, participates in the creation of academic knowledge, irreverently sits on the sarcophagus prompting an immediate reaction from the supernatural. Her presence seems to instigate supernatural action, in sharp contrast to the young Worby and his friend who have to continually

‘poke’ the creature in order to elicit a reaction (*Haunted Doll’s* 50). In James’s rendering, women typically observe or provoke the supernatural action.²²

The feminine in James’s stories has frequently been associated with nature, promoting the sense of chaos and unpredictability that typically defines James’s supernatural. Some critics like Terry Thompson examine this relationship. Thompson posits a relationship between the natural world and the architectural environments that inhabit James’s stories. The natural and wild become a substitute for the feminine, while the precision and ordered environments of the architectural and landscaped come to represent the masculine (Thompson 67). James sees the supernatural as inherently feminine, and a gendered supernatural charges other feminine associations with meaning. In the primary example of the “Episode,” certain details begin to become quite conspicuous. The pulpit and choir, prior to renovation, were made from wood. These wooden architectural elements become a nexus point for the feminine and the masculine to

²² This reactive pattern repeats in James’s other stories. This is most clearly seen in James’s early story, “The Ash Tree.” In this story, a witch named Ms. Mothersole is hung for trimming an ash tree by moonlight. This trimming appears to coincide with the maintenance of a brood of gigantic gray spiders that live within the titular ash tree. After Mothersole’s demise the spiders retrieve her corpse and enact their revenge on the descendants of the prosecuting sheriff. In this particular instance, Mothersole acts as the gatekeeper for the spiders, establishing a supernatural link between her and the creatures. This is seen again in “The Whitminster Residence” where the apparent male villain achieves empowerment through a female witch in a retelling of the biblical legend of the Witch of Endor (See 1 Samuel 28. 3-25) . This revelation of the transition of power occurs through a small girl who can see the past in a small silver mirror. The maid at Whitminster is also the only person who knows the whereabouts of a key needed to unlock an old bureau, which is surrounded by some insidious force. This is not to say that all women in James’ stories fall into this nefarious category, but James’s implication of women via their relationships with supernatural phenomena unmask the ambiguous monster to reveal an ardent concern in regards to women gaining sociopolitical equality.

coexist, or overlap; the wild wood tamed by the architectural appropriation, which provides containment for the supernatural force within the sarcophagus. The miasma begins directly after the choir is demolished, which correlates to the weakening of the barrier created by the masculine/feminine nexus, which permits the feminine supernatural to escape, and/or manipulate the environment of Southminster through the breach in the side of the sarcophagus. Seeing the feminized supernatural as the retributive agent for Ruskin's definition of architectural blasphemy suggests that James's appropriation of women in his fiction portends societal calamity if they are allowed to hold equivalent positions to their male counterparts in reality.

The tangibility of James's 'ghosts' is similarly significant in that tangibility and tactility mark the literal point of contact between the real and the unreal. The tactility forces the unreal, the supernatural, into the real by removing the possibility of illusory perception typically associated with traditional ghosts. This makes the ambiguity of the creature even more horrifying since it can interact in a corporeal, and typically violent manner, a nightmare made real. China Mieville's distinction between the "Weird" and the ghostly suggests that James's ghosts have moved beyond Victorian moralism and into Edwardian uncertainty, "as Victorian ghosts grew more ostentatiously moralistic, they decorporealized," (119). But at the brink of modernist chaos, when social upheaval puts all moralizing into question, Mieville identifies the emergence of the "Weird:" the overt tactility, or "tentacularity," of strange/inhuman phenomena that are typically associated with later writers like Lovecraft. James sits at the transition point between the ghostly and "Weird" and James's incorporation of new types of horror as well as old-fashioned 'ghosts' marks him as an important touchstone. Joshi notes that, "[t]he Jamesian ghost embodies all those traits of primitive human beings that are most frightening to the civilized and the rational: not merely ignorance, but aggressively violent ignorance," (135). It is

this extreme primitivism that highlights the core of the crisis of meaning as the rational and civilized attempt to explain the barbarism running rampant in the military conflicts and society leading up to the First World War.

3 JAMES AND MODERNISM

James wrote in a time of massive uncertainty. The shifting socio-politics of England following the death of Queen Victoria, the implementation of colleges for women, and the proliferating imperial interests in Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century situate James in a pre-modern landscape increasingly devoid of faith, concerned with degeneration, and accepting the decay of Victorian ideals. For James's fiction this period is marked by the second Boer War (1899-1902), which enflamed nationalist sympathies; the women's suffrage movement, which destabilized social norms; and technological advancements, all of which helped proliferate the crisis of meaning that accompanied the advent of modernism.

Describing the "radical shift in aesthetic and cultural sensibilities in the art and literature of the post World War One period," Christopher Keep defines Modernism as marking "a distinctive break with Victorian bourgeois morality; rejecting nineteenth-century optimism, they presented a profoundly pessimistic picture of a culture in disarray. This despair often results in an apparent apathy and moral relativism" (Keep). James's earlier stories precede World War One, so they inhabit a pre-modern period that is building up to the "radical shift" of modernism. James thus functions as a transitional author, between the Victorian and the Modern, and he demonstrates his discomfort with social changes by re-appropriating ecclesiastical architectural space in his ghost stories to expose readers to the horrors of despair and uncertainty that will eventually swallow after the First World War (1914-1917). In his re-imagined architectural space, James violates traditional conventions for ghost stories, as well as the architectural directives laid out by John Ruskin to address the uncertainty and ambiguity that emerge as Victorian gender spheres and belief structures disintegrate.

Commenting on the significance of artists breaking with conventions, Gerald Graff notes that, “Throughout the nineteenth-century, when neo-classical and Christian standards retained a lingering influence over culture, artistic defiance of received traditions and conventions in the name of the autonomy of the imagination possessed a significance, which can scarcely be duplicated by similar gestures today” (144). While James’s modifications to ghosts and Ruskin might not be “bold transgressions” (Graff 144), they do complement the experimental and rapidly shifting social complexities and uncertainties preceding Modernism, which makes James’s fiction appealing in its subtle treatment of social change and its reliance on the old Victorian establishment of society to limit the chaotic nature of the modern while still engaging with modernist attitudes.

David Spurr’s description of the shifts accompanying twentieth-century modernity describes James’s stories well; the crisis of Modernist meaning

manifests itself in a number of ways: in the aesthetics of ruin and fragmentation, in the retreat toward interiority as a space of subjective and private meaning, in new kinds of attention given to the human body, in the development of new forms and materials, and in the conception of the past in terms of stock or reserve. (ix)

James’s fiction participates in proto-modern preparation through numerous subtle mechanisms in form, characterization, and critique. James uses somewhat stable and conventional mechanisms to create a safe space for examining pre-modern uncertainty. As Martin Tropp elucidates: “Horror stories are not nightmares transcribed, but fears recast into safe communicable forms – a concrete yet separate reality” (4). This separation creates exposure to the horrific and a grudging, if not passive, acceptance of the inexplicable in an increasingly modern world. One of the ways that James accomplishes this separation is through narrative distance; however, this

distancing must be anchored in a commonality before productive meaning can be achieved. Thus Tropp's "concrete reality" emerges in this interstitial space between the real and imagined and the past and present as it does for both James and Spurr, in architecture.

Architecture becomes the vehicle for making meaning by becoming a nodal point, or an anchor, in James's stories. As Jack Sullivan elaborates, "[t]he power of James lies in his ability to set up a barrier between the empirical and the supernatural and then gradually knock it down—to move subtly from the real to the unreal and sometimes back again" (78). The building metaphor becomes especially appropriate as the architectural space becomes the liminal, the border between the real and the unreal, and the ideal place to create new meaning. In addition, architecture also provides stability since it represents an unalterable past that can be readily accessed in the present making it ideal for modernist considerations. It is the active role of readers in architectural space that allows new meaning to be created as they use the architectural space as a lens to address their own struggles with Modernity. James endorses reader participation in modernist considerations: "For some degree of actuality is the charm of the best ghost stories; not a very insistent actuality, but one strong enough to allow the reader to identify with the patient, while . . . the reader of an antique story should fall into the position of a mere spectator" ("Ghosts and Marvels" 248). Architecture's stability promotes a sense a familiarity and actuality that makes James's stories accessible and interactive for readers.

For critics like Spurr, and by extension James and Ruskin, architecture also becomes a historical remnant, or cultural artifact/fragment that acts as the real half of a real/unreal binary for modifying cultural understanding and/or meaning: "Architecture, as the art of building, gives concrete form to the external world according to the structures of imagination; whereas literature, as the art of written language, gives symbolic form to the same world" (Spurr 3). Thus,

interdependence emerges between architecture and literature where literature becomes the interpretative lens for making sense of the imaginative, or the unreal half of the real/unreal binary. James uses architectural space to explore social fears; however, his personal prejudices also emerge as he enters the relative safety of the controlled experience. This resonates with modernism in that “while ostensibly the means to an innocent escape, it aroused in its Victorian audience fears that lurked beneath the surface, fears connected with the upheaval of a culture discarding a way of life that had been unchanged for centuries . . . making a modern world” (Tropp 3). Tropp’s notion underscores the relative instability that a modern world requires, and it is unsurprising that authors, like James, sought out a means of addressing it. The horror, or ghost, story becomes an ideal platform for staging a conflict to promote destabilization, particularly when the architectural space in the story is religiously charged, as I will discuss later. James typically utilizes an ecclesiastical, or at least ancient, architectural space within the ghost story to facilitate the real/unreal interaction, but the supernatural entity that James includes in his architecture becomes more than simply the object of terror. Just as the architectural serves a multi-functional purpose in James’s fiction, as reality anchor, historical remnant, and interpretive aperture, the supernatural entity serves multiple aesthetic and ideological functions.

The supernatural, as expected, function to create terror, but it also represents a point of multiplicity: “Ghosts are paradoxical since they are both fundamental to the human, fundamentally human, and a denial of the disturbance to the human, the very being of inhuman, . . . Ghosts have history . . . in a sense, are history” (Bennet 160). While this statement deals specifically with ghosts, the same argument could be made, in modified form, involving anything that possesses anthropomorphic properties in a supernatural context like James’s ‘ghosts’. It is this historical quality that makes James’s ‘ghosts’ so much more effective in destabilizing

modernity. James's tactile creatures, like ghosts, come to represent history whether it is S. T. Joshi's interpretation of ghosts representing brutal barbarism reminiscent of degeneration theory [135] or Sullivan's interpretation of the sacred as a further violation of religious conventions [81]. The tactility of James's ghosts designates a relative proximity to human and the real, which creates a far more terrifying premise: that these embodied ghosts are, in fact, facets of humanity. The real, tactile and human characteristics of these 'ghosts' also prime them to receive socio-political significance; since these creatures are perceived as a piece of humanity they are able to participate in aspects of human civilization and socialization. Coupled with this degradation of humanity's position, the desecration of the supposedly safe space completely unhinges the Victorian mindset.

The supernatural creatures parallel the historical capacity of the architectural space; however, the supernatural takes on a contemporary expression of history, whereas architecture typically marks the historical past. The conflict between the two opposing historical representations, the old architectural space and the threatening, socially symbolic supernatural creature, increases the potential for instability as the two interact but do not resolve any of the tensions. In fact, James's creatures typically escape, which weakens the secure nature of the architectural space. Spurr posits that:

[W]e obtain a threefold vision of the demonic spaces of modernity: historically, they range from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries; institutionally, they implicate the Church, bourgeois capital, and the state; architecturally, they are figured in the monastery, the factory mill, and the Castle as bureaucratic office space. (85)

Spurr is speaking specifically about the Marquis de Sade, Charles Dickens, and Kafka, respectively, but what he establishes is the correlative capacity of the liminal architectural points that facilitate the real/unreal interaction and the inherent sickness within them. Graff pays particular attention to the risks of conflating art and religion during the late Victorian period, and of investing art (in this case architecture) with religious symbolism, because the art is ultimately marginalized since religion has already suffered destabilization through the diminishing faith of the late nineteenth-century (124). In the case of Southminster Cathedral this means that the architectural space has already been infected and destabilized undermining its stability as a nodal point for the creation of new meaning. By poisoning art within a religious context, James also violates Ruskin's architectural tenants. Ruskin infuses religion into architecture via natural forms: "The cylindrical pillar is always beautiful, for God has so moulded the stem of every tree that it is pleasant to the eyes. The pointed arch is beautiful; it is the termination of every leaf that shakes in the summer wind" (*Seven Lamps* 101). As the architectural forms take on religious significance they succumb to the contemporaneous dubiousness associated with Christian ideals and traditions. Southminster Cathedral becomes representative of a bygone relic that the Modern world has no real use for, completely stripping it of the influence and power that it once held.

James profanes the cathedral further in the "Episode" by inserting a demonic entity beneath the pulpit; however, this desecration also explains James's decision to create a purely fictive architectural space: by doing so he can obliterate the sanctity and safety of the architectural space and allow the unreal to breach liminal containment. The breakdown of the architecture as a barrier, through physical renovation and/or modernist debasement, obscures the real and unreal further destabilizing the base of knowledge that the architectural space represents, namely the structured past. The placement of the demonic entity merely amplifies the

destabilization of the ecclesiastical space. Sullivan explains that, “when things appear to be falling apart, supernatural horror stories provide their authors and readers a masochistic, but relatively safe means of fantasizing the worst” (3). James fears the cataclysmic potential for his ‘safe’ spaces in academia, particularly Cambridge and ecclesiastical architecture, and so he manifests the destructive modernity that threatens these spaces in his stories as ‘ghosts’.

To protect himself, and by extension readers, James must mitigate the apocalyptic architectural nexus that develops as the boundaries of the real and the unreal lose cohesion unleashing the chaotic supernatural force. James achieves this mitigation through narrative distance. In the “Episode of Cathedral History,” as discussed above, he utilizes three separate timescapes within the narrative structure to address an ambiguous supernatural entity responsible for the destruction of the liminal architectural barrier and the destabilization of the social order of Southminster. The separation of setting and time creates a less jarring effect on the reader. The reader understands that the retelling of a retelling of “Episode” is situated in terms of ink and paper, and not the much more visceral experience of Worby or Worby’s father who experience the supernatural in all of its horror and mystery. The temporal and physical distance maintains a safe space for exposure to the horrific and the uncertain. James uses this distance to confront the devaluation of historical architecture and the crumbling gender spheres of Victorian society, but the reader uses it to confront the uncertainty of the supernatural entity, which becomes tied to the social expectations and anxieties of their time that also exhibit uncertainty. For James, the idea of female empowerment threatens the relative stability of Cambridge in terms of prestige and in further violating Ruskin’s sexist position on female education, namely that it should be complementary to a woman’s husband’s education but not equal (“Sesame and Lilies” 92). The projection of anxiety becomes subjective for readers, so it changes depending on the individual

reading. This makes James's 'ghosts' very adaptable to a population looking for some type of structure or resolution. The 'ghost' receives the blame for destroying lives, and there is a brief sense of closure even though the safety and sanctity of the space is not re-established. The cathedral simply becomes vacant and the nodal point that architecture held dissolves merging the real and the unreal.

The reader, though, is spared from the full impact of the merger of the real and unreal because of the curated value of the account. James's narrative distance recoils back to the unnamed narrator reading Mr. Lake's notes far away from Southminster. As Jack Sullivan intimates, "the endless process of collecting and arranging gives the character [James's antiquary] an illusory sense of order and stability" (75). It is this illusory characteristic of order that further insulates readers from the chaos of modernism, and it makes James's stories even more appealing during the end of the Victorian period when social uncertainty started to peak. While James does not resolve the crisis of meaning that accompanies modernism, he creates a space, however small, for the idea of change, which plants the seeds for the uncertainty and instability that will explode after the First World War. Thus the ambiguous 'ghost' becomes an approachable scapegoat for making sense of the death, loss, and change experienced on the part of the fictive community, readers, and the author. Themes of distancing are pervasive throughout James's work, and sometimes they also accompany peripheral references to emerging technologies.

Some of James's stories discuss technological advancement as it promotes the instability of modernity. James describes a need to separate contemporaneous technology from the setting of a ghost story: "The detective story cannot be too much up to date: the motor, the telephone, the aeroplane, the newest slang, are all in place there. For the ghost story a slight haze of

distance is desirable” (“Ghosts and Marvels” 248). James’s fiction appropriates archaic forms of contemporaneous technologies in response to the “haze of distance.” For example, James’s “The Mezzotint,” published in 1904, discusses the peculiar phenomenon of a picture of a house that changes, relating the spiriting away of a child by a vengeful revenant.²³ This story, in addition to distancing the reader through the vicarious experience of the antiquary observing this moving picture phenomenon, becomes a commentary on the recent advent of film technology. As in the story, the phenomenon of the changing picture is noteworthy, but in order to fully understand the context of the pictorial narrative the narrator needs to complete additional research into the architectural identity of the framed picture of a house. Furthermore, the observable changes in the picture shift over the span of several days. This disjunction with the relative time of watching a contemporary film may be a commentary on the ever-increasing speed of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century society, as seen by Jean Michel Rabate. Rabate identifies three scientific developments, which further preempt the shift to modernity of that turn of the century: electricity, light, and speed (73). Film becomes an especially apt example since it incorporates at least two, if not all three, of these variables, and while James’s does not explicitly state a connection between “The Mezzotint” and film technology, the similarities do raise questions and concerns that modify James’s impact on the modern.

This utilization of the filmic in James is also present in another story, “The Residence at Whitminster,” where a young girl is given a small crystal mirror, which reflects the events of the past relevant to the supernatural occurrence in the story. A later story in James’s oeuvre, “The

²³ A mezzotint is a type of printmaking that utilizes hand etching onto a metal plate; as opposed to using photographic plates to create very realistic looking images. This process is similar to engraving. A popular example of a mezzotint is M. C. Escher’s “Eye.”

Residence at Whitminster,” may reflect a growing public affinity for the filmic. The “Residence’s” supernatural reel is not as staggered temporally as “The Mezzotint’s” which diminishes the “haze of distance” James requires of technology in his stories. The filmic is also explicit in James’s “Casting the Runes” where the villainous Mr. Karswell exhibits a frightening magic lantern show for a group of young children (*Count Magnus* 160-1), but this story incorporates a greater “haze of distance” as it was included in James’s first collection of ghost stories. These technologies act as predecessors to the advent of film technology. They also signal a rise in the desire for mechanical reproduction, violating the natural Ruskinian ideals that James embraced and furthering the allure of scientific and mechanical processes that are so damaging to James’s quest for preservation: “For it is no the material, but the absence of human labor, which makes a thing worthless; a piece of terra cotta . . . which has been wrought by human hand, is worth all the stone in Carrera, cut by machinery” (*Seven Lamps* 57). Ruskin’s disdain for machinery is pervasive, and James’s allusions to modern modes of production in his stories serve to highlight modern instability by clashing with the disapproving past.

In these stories the filmic and vicarious distancing also highlights another important aspect necessary for appropriating distance for readers that has been broached briefly above, multiplicity. The multiplicity of function removes stable meaning from objects and places, and the more functions that an item exhibits the greater the potential for radical interpretation. James did not merely destabilize the architectural and the individual; he extended instability to include the commonplace. To do so, in stories like “The Ash Tree,” James attacks Ruskinian ideals to manifest the modern mentality, and thus complete the effect of destabilization. Within this story James violates Ruskin’s affinity for nature by transmogrifying the titular ash tree into the den and supernatural locus of loathsome spiders: “So then while Nature is at all times pleasant to us, . . .

that image of her which the architect carries away, . . . demands from us, . . . an intellectual exertion of a similar kind in order to understand it and feel it” (*Seven Lamps* 114). The ash tree loses its natural pleasantness and becomes associated with vengeful death and witchcraft. The tree supersedes its original use simultaneously being a tree, a breeding ground, a grave, a symbol of vengeance, and the supernatural home of witches and arachnids alike. The multiplicity of use obfuscates the traditional norms of the object tree and, by extension, drags into question the potential values of any number of mundane or ordinary things. . As Julia Briggs notes: “Fear of the supernatural is essentially circular, for what we fear most is the sensation of being afraid, which endows the most familiar objects with frightful possibilities” (128). Corrupting the mundane complements the downturn in religious faith and the uncertainty that was enveloping the globe preceding the First World War, and it totalizes the destabilization that adapting to modernity requires.

James ultimately fulfills a supportive role that helps to bridge the fading Victorian ideal as it dissolves into the chaos of modernity. This enables readers to adapt to the horrors that emerged during and after World War I. James's style might appear both traditional and archaic, but it is important to note that most of the radical changes to form and society occurred during and after the war. James merely acts as one ferryman among many in helping to transport and prepare them for the tragedy, intense self-reflection, and social change that accompanied the war. Beyond this James's later stories provide a valuable touchstone to the abandoned past of feudalism and conservatism. His stories create a contextual lens for a world before rampant globalization; one that still intensely values the past for its creativity and its quality. Architecture can still function as the liminal nexus for making meaning, but it will likely never hold the value that it held for the likes of Ruskin and James. As the physical landscapes have changed in the

face of global capitalism and conflict, so have James's fiction and scholarly work lost a measure of their initial weight becoming ever more valuable as a resource to the past, and ever more obscure as the knowledge of the world shifts and expands.

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