

**PhD Thesis –A Jungian and Historical  
Reading of M R James’s Ghost  
Stories**

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These are stories that venture to the limits of the human capacity for terror and revulsion, as it were, armed only with an umbrella and a very dry wit...<sup>1</sup>

Arise, vampires, spectres, ghosts, harpies, terror of the night.  
Arise, soldiers who blasphemed as they died, arise the unfortunate, the humiliated, arise the dead from hunger whose death cry was a curse. See, the living are here, the fat living prey!  
Arise, swoop down on them in a whirlwind and eat the flesh from their bones! Arise! Arise! Arise!...<sup>2</sup>

The classics are those books that one is always rereading, that come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture through which they have passed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Chabon, *Maps and Legends, Reading and Writing along The Borderlands* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008); Colin Davis, Sartre's Living Dead, In: *Haunted Subjects* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Italo Calvino, *Why Read the Classics?* (Strand, London: Penguin, 1991), p.4.

## **Chapter One: Introduction: Methodological and theoretical approach to the thesis**

This thesis profiles a writer long ignored by the field of literary criticism, M. R. James. It focuses on his fiction, a small body of work comprising 31 ghost stories and a fairy tale written for children. The thesis offers the first sustained Jungian reading of James's work, using Jung's theory of individuation, particularly, to identify a psychic split in James the man. The thesis argues for the need to read the man alongside the stories, and vice versa, so offers an original approach combining a historical reading and a Jungian one to explore the way that James's stories reflect his struggle with the individuation process, focussing on the key issues of sexuality and James's life-long ambivalence about being ordained, as well as placing the evolution of his stories in their cultural and literary context, as James's work over the course of his career bridged the Victorian and the Gothic Modernist.

This initial chapter provides an overview of my Jungian approach to James's short stories and their latent psychological interest, arguing that a Jungian reading opens up new interpretations of James's life and work which no other approach can.

The second chapter provides an overview of my Jungian approach to James's short stories and their latent psychological interest, arguing that a Jungian reading opens up new interpretations of James's life and work which no other approach can. The third chapter, 'James and The Unseen: The divided reading in his ghost stories' focuses on the question of why James avoided being ordained into the church, when it was obvious that his Christian faith was extremely important to him. Exploring this ambivalence through a Jungian lens, the chapter argues that it generated an interrupted individuation process in James's psyche which helps us to interpret the numerous ghost stories which focus on ambivalence in relation to religion and what

we might call 'the unseen' generally. The next chapter, 'M. R. James and the Darwinian Gothic', reads the monsters or revenants in James's fiction as Darwinian devolved specimens whose relevance to contemporary debates about moral and physical degeneration become clear when they are read through the theories espoused by Charles Darwin, Max Nordau, Cesare Lombroso and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck.

In chapter 5, 'Gender and Sexuality – the Cloistered World of M. R. James' I develop a psycho-biographical reading of James's own cloistered sexual psyche, and the world in which he lived, and apply this to the narration and plot-lines of the stories to challenge the critical consensus that James avoided the inclusion of sex. I show that sexual guilt is common in the stories, and develop a Jungian reading of the resulting interrupted individuation process in a number of the characters. The next chapter, 'The Bridge from the Victorian to the Modern -The Evolution of James's Fiction', explores the evolution of James's fiction from Victorian to Edwardian, and in particular the ways in which he could be considered a gothic-modernist. In the conclusion, I finish my analysis by demonstrating again that a Jungian and historical reading of James's life and work sheds light on many under-explored and under-valued aspects of his work.

#### Where my work fits into ongoing critical debates on M. R. James

In approaching the territory of Jamesian studies for my Master's thesis in late 2006, I began to appreciate that there had never been a full-length study of M. R. James's ghost stories. I then began to realise that there was also a very limited amount of Jamesian criticism: there were three biographies, by Dr Richard William

Pfaff, Michael Cox and Gurney Lubbock respectively; James's own autobiography *Eton and King's*; and Gwendolen McBryde's published letters.<sup>4</sup>

The secondary sources that were available were notable for the complete absence of theorists engaging with Jungian studies of the ghost story and any focus on James and Jung. The sources that dealt with the ghost story were mostly chapter-length investigations included in books critics such as Julia Briggs and Jack Sullivan. These investigations included James as part of full-length studies of the English ghost story. In *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, Briggs placed James in the setting of the antiquarian ghost story with its emphasis on historical and materialistic criticism, while in *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* Sullivan concentrated on the form's psychological critical underpinnings, mostly from a Freudian standpoint.<sup>5</sup>

Sullivan's work, however, was useful, as his comparison of James's characters' ennui as suffered by the protagonists described in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* exposed the ghostly vacuum that their lives entailed, and was pivotal in my understanding of the interruption in their individuation process that often exposes their psyches to the invasion by the Jungian Shadow.<sup>6</sup> This also further links in to the idea of the alienation portrayed in many modernist works, recently explored by Andrew Smith in his work on James and modernism.<sup>7</sup> Smith's work on James as a quasi-modernist links to with my work on James and his experiments with this literary form, and especially the idea of moral ambiguity in his stories. Two of the stories, specifically "The Mezzotint" and "The Haunted Dolls' House", inform later stories with

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<sup>4</sup> Richard William Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James* (London: Scholar Press, 1980); Michael Cox, *M.R. James An Informal Portrait* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986); S.G. Lubbock, *A Memoir of Montague Rhodes James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939); M. R. James, *Eton and Kings* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1926); Gwendolen McBryde, *M.R. James: Letters to a Friend* (London: Edward Arnold, 1956).

<sup>5</sup> Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977); Jack Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Eliot, *The Waste Land*.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840-1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

their ennui and alienation, as a reaction to modernism. This reaction is symbolic of the anxiety suffered by many people coming back from the carnage of the First World War, and their ensuing inability to empathise with others' pain. This condition is explored especially well in the idea of the fractured self, as espoused in Dennis Brown's *The Modernist Self in Twentieth-Century English Literature A Study in Self-Fragmentation*.<sup>8</sup> This is a large study that finds links with modernism's representations of disconnection and psychological breakdown in many portrayals of shell-shocked victims, such as Septimus Smith in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Christopher Tietjens in Ford Maddox Ford's *Parade's End*, to name a few.<sup>9</sup> James's work can also be identified as portraying many of the tropes of gothic modernism, utilising the forms of the zombie, and invisible protagonists to channel the shock and ennui experienced by his protagonists living through the increasing progress of the modern world.

In later works, Darryl Jones has offered a new introduction to yet another issue of James's collected ghost stories, concentrating on a broad summary of existing Jamesian criticism.<sup>10</sup> Luke Thurston has contributed a study of semantic ambiguity in the stories, with his *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: the Haunting Interval*.<sup>11</sup> His book concentrates on Lacanian symbolism, particularly in "The Mezzotint", which dovetails with my reading of Darwinian regression symbolised in the attributes of the revenant that kidnaps the baby (as I outline below in my chapter on James and Darwin). On the internet, one can find both more academic and popular work, such as the 'Ghosts and Scholars' site run by the

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, *The Ghost Story*; Dennis Brown, *The Modernist Self in Twentieth-Century English Literature A Study in Self-Fragmentation* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000); Ford Maddox Ford, *Parade's End* (London: Penguin, 1928).

<sup>10</sup> M. R. James *Collected Ghost Stories*, ed. Darryl Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*; Luke Thurston, *Literary Ghosts from The Victorians to Modernism: The Haunting Interval* (London: Routledge, 2012).

Jamesian scholar Rosemary Pardoe, which features an in-depth look at all of James's stories, his scholarly work, and descriptions of the films based on these stories.<sup>12</sup> However, the site reiterates much of the same biographical Jamesian themes and is useful as a guide to starting to explore the canon of resources available on James.

### Where my work fits into ongoing critical debates on C. G. Jung

My work expands on existing historical work, particularly in relation to Darwinian theory, Kristevan abjection and the vacuum inherent in modernist writing that results in the interruption of the Jungian individuation process, and also bringing a Jungian reading to bear on James's ghost stories for the first time. In reading the material available, I noted that there had never been an attempt to read James's ghost stories from a Jungian perspective. The nearest attempt was a few short paragraphs by Christopher Booker in his study on mythic storylines *The Seven Basic Plots*.<sup>13</sup> Booker's idea of the nyktomorphic monster, that shares some of the forms of animae and bestial qualities, chimes with my research into the Darwinian gothic in that James's array of ghosts have physical attributes that reflect the regressed quality of earlier stages of man in Darwin's family tree of species. These revenants have fins (the helper in "Count Magnus"), tentacles (the monster down the well in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas") and claws (the beast in "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook"), to name just three of James's stories that feature the regressed revenants, which I outline in my chapter on Darwin and James later in this thesis.<sup>14</sup>

This dearth of Jungian examinations of M. R. James's stories was an obvious gap in the canon, as it soon became apparent that reading James from a Jungian

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<sup>12</sup>Ghosts and Scholars. Montague Rhodes James. M.R. James. ed, Rosemary Pardoe. 20.04.2015. <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk>.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots* (London: Continuum, 2007), p.451.

<sup>14</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories* pp.54, 82, 1.

perspective demonstrates that James's characters suffered from a particularly Jungian malaise: an un-individuated personality. According to Jung, this occurs when a personality does not unify its ego and shadow successfully in the first stages of personality development that usually takes place in early childhood, but is also continuously renewed throughout a lifetime.<sup>15</sup> Jung argues that if what he calls the shadow side of the human personality is not successfully integrated into the personality as a whole, the result can be the domination of the individual by the shadow side, or the development of a either split personality or a psychological projection of the shadow side.

The primary source of Jungian literary psychoanalytic criticism is Jung's own critical literary engagement with works such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*.<sup>16</sup> Jung struggled with *Ulysses*, noting in his essay on the book that he had tried to stay awake, "falling asleep twice on the way" by page 135 on his first reading.<sup>17</sup> Beyond this, there is limited availability of secondary resources on Jungian literary psychoanalytic criticism; primary works on literary criticism by Jung are thin on the ground, but notable secondary criticism exists, such as James S. Baumlin, Tita French Baumlin and George H. Jensen's collection of Jungian criticism, *Post-Jungian Criticism Theory and Practice*. Andrew Samuels' foreword to the book indicated the problems in Jungian criticism, in that many theorists tended to over-emphasise the framework of the archetype to every narrative, especially in applying Jungian theory to literature and film. I concur with Samuels here, as I outline below in this chapter: not every strong woman in each story can be viewed as an anima, or

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<sup>15</sup>C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, Connecticut, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), p.563.

<sup>16</sup>James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Everyman 1999).

<sup>17</sup> C. G. Jung, "Ulysses: A Monologue", *Europaische Revue*, viii (1932), 2/9.

every man a hero. As Samuels notes, there needs to be a nuanced application of Jungian theory to avoid it becoming formulaic and reductive.<sup>18</sup>

Lucy Huskinson's work on Jung and Nietzsche was also useful in developing my understanding of the Jungian individuation process. Huskinson argues that it can be different for each character in a text and can lead to a regression in the growth of a self, which can bring forth the shadow. Further along this progression, a rejected animus or anima can lead to an encounter with an ego that is searching for its reunification with the self.<sup>19</sup>

In the area of Jungian criticism, Christopher Hauke's book, *Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities* was an especially useful framework with which to engage, in that it interrogated the growth of Jungian theory from the archetypal beginnings to post-Jungian theory.<sup>20</sup> Hauke explores the work of other theorists such as Kristeva, whose ideas on the abject chimed with my work on the Jungian Shadow, especially how the regression in the interrupted individuation process in James's characters can bring forth the Jungian Shadow.<sup>21</sup> These secondary sources were especially useful in establishing a Jungian framework of ideas with which to enlarge and develop my own theories.

Hauke's book also enlarged on the Jungian theory of the archetype, which he terms 'a structuring tendenc[y] in the human psyche'.<sup>22</sup> Archetypal theory, according to Jung and Hauke, helps man over generations structure his society through rituals, seasons and cultural dates, such as religious ceremonies and marriages, birth dates, death rituals and the telling of myths.<sup>23</sup> Whilst Jung was developing his theory of the

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<sup>18</sup>James S. Baumlín, Tita French Baumlín and George H. Jensen (eds), *Post-Jungian Criticism Theory and Practice* (Albany, New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), p.viii.

<sup>19</sup> Lucy Huskinson, *Nietzsche and Jung The Whole Self in the Union of Opposites* (Hove, East Sussex: Routledge, 2012), p.44.

<sup>20</sup>Christopher Hauke, *Jung and the Postmodern Interpretation of Realities* (London: Routledge, 2000)

<sup>21</sup>Hauke, p.284.

<sup>22</sup>Hauke, *Jung*, p.199.

<sup>23</sup>Hauke, *Jung*, p.199.

Archetype, during and immediately after the First World War, there came an outpouring of historical, anthropological and psychological literary works of a mythical orientation. These were from writers as diverse as T.S Eliot, who wrote his mythic poem *The Waste Land* in 1921, Leo Frobenius's *Paideuma* in 1921, James Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1922, Oswald Spengler's *Decline of The West* in 1923 and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* in 1924.<sup>24</sup>

All of these works emphasise mythic patterns, as do James's stories with their quests for treasure and focus on the hero's efforts to acquire this treasure, as well as a secondary protagonist arriving to aid the hero. The appearance of the secondary protagonist, often a valet or an older man who rescues the hero, is Jung's wise old man archetype. As I outline below, for example as in "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad" (the Colonel rescuing Parkins in his hotel room) or Brown the valet rescuing and aiding Mr Somerton in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas".<sup>25</sup>

I utilised this melding of archetypal and mythic theory found in these books, to illustrate the theory of individuation in the process of the hero in James's stories, particularly as the quest or adventure process adds to their psychic growth. This growth or regression is prevalent in James's stories, particularly in the end of each story, after the tribulations of the encounter with the shadow or revenant have been overcome. This can be seen in the case of Stephen the young boy whose growth in the face of a murderous uncle marked him as a hero in "Lost Hearts", or Mr Garrett in "The Tractate Middoth" who marries at the end of his encounter with the revenant.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Eliot, *The Waste Land*; Leo Frobenius, *Paideuma* (Munich: Nabu Press Ltd, 2014); Joyce, *Ulysses*; Oswald Spengler, *Decline Of The West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932); Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* (London: Vintage, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.65, 82.

<sup>26</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.11, 114.

This emphasis on the archetypal pattern of the hero found its literary home in the latter stages of the Second World War in 1944. In this year, Joseph Campbell started work on Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, and later in 1949 published his magnum opus, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.<sup>27</sup> Again, as in James's stories, the emphasis is on the deeds of the hero, and the repetition over the centuries of his story. In the chapter, "The Hero and the God", Campbell set out this regularly trodden path:

[t]he standard path of the mythological adventure of the Hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder...<sup>28</sup>

As Campbell illustrates, the archetypal and mythic patterns of separation, initiation and return to their life after the quest are all part of the process of growth or Jungian individuation. In 1969, Michael Atkinson utilised Jungian theory to expose the archetypal narrative underlying Robert Bly's *Iron John* and later *Sleepers Joining Hands*, which he linked to the void found by particularly American men.<sup>29</sup> Here Bly uses the prism of second-wave feminism, which in his opinion takes women's focus away from the home. His "ideal" American woman is perfect icon of "mother", culminating in a re-imagined cultural "need" for the Great Mother after the Second World War.<sup>30</sup>

In opposition to the focus on women that Bly utilises, in light of mythic patterns espoused by Jung, in James's stories (as I outline in Chapter 5 my gender chapter), his portrayal of women is surprisingly modern. He preferred to utilise two types of women: a succession of one-dimensional serving women and older, wiser, more

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<sup>27</sup>James Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake* (Oxford: OUP, 2012); Joseph Campbell, *Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Princeton: New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973).

<sup>28</sup> Campbell, *Hero*, p.30.

<sup>29</sup>Michael Atkinson, Robert Bly's 'Sleepers Joining Hands: Shadow And Self', in *Jungian Literary Criticism*, ed by Richard. P Sugg (London: Harper, 1991), p.83.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (London: Rider, 2001), p.17.

academic or socially-adept woman, such as Mary Oldys in “The Residence at Whitminster”, who acts as a sort of amateur detective.<sup>31</sup> Mary is not a mythical mother in the Bly manner, but a woman who has her own autonomy; readers even get to see the story through her eyes. Bly’s essay is a celebration of feminine archetypes, particularly the female goddesses found in the early poems and books of primarily matriarchal societies such as those of the Iroquois Indians and the early Britons.<sup>32</sup> Utilising Jungian and archetypal theory, Bly outlines the matrilineal system that resulted in these often-opposing theoretical structures.

My own work takes the mythic ideas of theorists such Campbell, Bly and Booker, with their ideas of the hero and other figures, and the Jungian process of individuation, from the work of Jung, and by extension the ideas of academics such as Jensen, Huskinson, Samuels et al. My work at this point is the first to apply these theories to James’s ghost stories.

### A New Direction in Jamesian Studies

My own study of this critical form has given a new impetus to analysis of James’s ghost stories. Apart from the mythic patterns and archetypes that many of the critics have engaged with (as outlined above) my focus has also included Jung’s individuation process, in the characters and in James himself, as revealed in the stories.

Jungian theory is a macrocosmic system, in that it purports to represent the whole of humankind’s outer consciousness. The individual is only part, a cog (so to speak) in the wider human collective that makes up the macro consciousness of man, in opposition to the Freudian psychoanalytic system, which delves deep into

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<sup>31</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.207.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (London: Rider, 2001), p.31.

the individual (rather than the group) psyche. This mythic structure can be found particularly strongly in M. R. James's ghost stories, and it is only through this original Jungian reading of his stories that these deeply-buried tropes of character psyche can be revealed. In applying Jung's archetypal ideas to M. R. James's ghost stories, the stories have to be read through the lens of his universal archetypes, and the individuation process and growth of his characters. This reveals that his characters have their roots in the archetypal heroic patterns, and the narrative structure follows Joseph Campbell's pattern of the quest myth.<sup>33</sup>

The application of Jungian and archetypal literary theory to James's ghost stories demonstrates that he reworked the quest myth into the underlying structure of virtually every one. Not only is this myth in the underlying structure of the stories but each story also features what Jung termed archetypes or literary blueprints that Jung suggests authors graft their storytelling onto. Jungian theory focuses on the collective unconscious of mankind as the source for the archetypal patterns. However, mythic criticism of the kind that Joseph Campbell, and Northrop Frye engaged with is more involved with the mythic stories of ancient cultures forming the blueprints that later literary traditions were grafted onto, whether it is the universal search for treasure, bildungsroman or a journey of self-discovery.<sup>34</sup> Read in this way, they have echoes of Biblical parables or fairy-tales. There is a hero and a villain in each of James's stories; often the revenant (or ghost) is cast as the villain, and often the protagonist (as reluctant hero) needs to be rescued. In *The Uses of Enchantment* Bruno Bettelheim argues that the universal archetypes are present in, and therefore can reveal, the underlying mythic status of many types of stories. He suggests that:

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<sup>33</sup>Campbell, *Hero*, p.6.

<sup>34</sup>Campbell, p.2; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy Of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton New Jersey, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[r]epressed or otherwise unconscious material underlies myths and fairy tales, and how these relate to dreams and daydreams. Jungian psychoanalysts stress that these figures and events of these stories conform to and hence represent archetypal psychological phenomena and symbolically suggest the need for gaining a higher state of selfhood – an inner renewal which is achieved as personal and racial unconscious forces become available to the person.<sup>35</sup>

The journey many of James's heroes undertake, and their search for treasure, can also be viewed as the individuation process in action. It is this journey into selfhood and the uniting of the personality that is represented in the Jamesian heroes' emergence into the world, often away from an academic life of constraint into a quest that reunites them with the hidden areas of their personality represented as their treasure, usually antiquarian objects or documents. The stories therefore are approached through not only a lens of historical analysis but also a Jungian archetypal and structuralist focus, concentrating on the characters and the narrational allusions and structure of James's ghost stories.

#### Why use both historical and Jungian approaches

The thesis melds a historical and Jungian literary analysis of M. R. James's ghost stories. These two (often differing) literary theories work very well together in this particular melding, as by its very nature, Jungian literary theory is a structuralist approach because of its emphasis on the mythical landscapes and structures in the narrative, and the individual character's growth (or regression) through their journey of the Jungian individuation process.

The application of a historical theoretical framework was also very useful to pick apart the particular themes that informed the work of a writer like James, who was very much a product of his Victorian/Edwardian time. It allowed the examination of the position of women and effeminate characters in his stories and the treatment

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<sup>35</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1973), p.34.

of “the Other”, or characters that did not stay in the narrow prescribed roles that society of the time expected them to occupy.

Through his schooling and professional life, James was very familiar with biblical and classical motifs and included them in the very narration and structure of his oeuvre. Therefore, the Jungian approach is an exceptionally useful approach, allowing the uncovering of rich symbolic seams and hidden inner landscapes in the stories. An historical approach alone, whilst also valid, would not have been as rich and illustrative of James’s intentions towards the structure and methodology of his story-crafting. Although the structuralist and the historical are very different approaches when used to read literature, my use of archetypal Jungian criticism and the process of individuation and the historical theories of Kristeva, Darwin and Dennis Brown’s theory of the fractured self allows me to bring together the historical and the structuralist in a complementary combination.

#### Is the focus of the PhD on James the writer or James the person?

There were many questions about James as an author and an historical figure that were extant when I came to undertake this PhD; interesting and unsolvable conundrums, such as why he never undertook ordination into the church, and why, although he had many female friends in his social circle, he never found a lifelong companion or wife. The unsolvable nature of these questions contributes to the mystery of James the writer and of the way in which he wrote his ghost stories, as if the stories were mere afterthoughts to his actual work as an academic. When James the writer and individual is examined in light of his fictional oeuvre then we often get what I term the “doppler effect”. This effect is similar to that seen when as on a pond, if an object (be it a leaf or an insect) lands on its surface then it creates a circular

effect with waves concentrically repeating in a circle which are virtually inseparable from each other. When Jungian literary criticism is twinned with historical analysis, and used to critically pick apart the structure, narration and underlying mythic systems of James's stories, then this effect occurs.

The cultural concerns of the wider societal mores reflect James's own life, in that; the embedded themes of the constant pursual by the revenants of his effeminate antiquarians can be read as a product of the shadow archetype punishing them for an inability to merge with their anima. This divided portrayal of the demonic and religious in his stories was a result of his unindividuated personality, and these themes suddenly become clear in the stories with this theoretical interrogation, as this thesis will examine.

The PhD thesis focuses primarily on the stories, but also pays attention to James the writer, and the shade of James the person hovering around the periphery of the whole body of work, appropriately enough for a writer of ghost stories. To detach the focus from James the writer and also the person would have been almost impossible, as well as limiting, as the links between the character's unindividuated personalities and their creators interrupted individuation were symbiotically engendered, each influencing the other, as will become clear.

There is one earlier critic who had taken the approach of a Jungian and historical approach to a variety of authors, where the author and their oeuvre were critically approached as one; that was Barbara Hannah, in her book *Striving Towards Wholeness*. Although the book is a little dated (from its 1980s perspective), it still has some very salient points, especially in its exploration of the divided psyche in the

examination of Robert Louis Stevenson and his almost semi-autobiographical angst reflected in the portrayal of the fractured self of *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*.<sup>36</sup>

### Problematic Aspects of Jungian theory

In choosing a Jungian methodological approach with which to analyse the ghost stories of M. R. James, various problems needed to be overcome: some political, and others to do with the potential of a structuralist theory to limit or warp the scope of analysis. Theorists such as Susan Rowlands, Andrew Samuels, Christopher Hauke and Maureen O' Hara have suggested that Jung's system of psychoanalysis uses anti-Semitic, racist, colonialist, and sexist language. However, as I will outline below, they have as a body written literature that works to overcome these drawbacks by developing Jungian theory that melds post Jungian and structuralist literary theory in what Rowlands deems a 'romance or alchemical marriage'.<sup>37</sup>

In line with Kristeva and Maureen O'Hara's anti-essentialism, Christopher Hauke, quoting Andrew Samuels, suggests a move away from traditional Jungian theory by overcoming its idea of the external archetype and directing our thinking to the idea of "difference":

Each woman lives her life in interplay with such difference, this may lead to questions of gender role (for example how a woman can best assert herself in our culture), but these questions need not be couched in terms of innate femininity or innate masculinity, or...some feminine masculine spectrum. Rather, they may be expressed in terms of difference...<sup>38</sup>

Samuels suggests that difference can be substituted for notions of 'masculinity' or 'femininity'; they are just metaphors for the projections that society puts onto men

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<sup>36</sup> Barbara Hannah, *Striving Towards Wholeness* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1972).

<sup>37</sup> Susan Rowlands, *C. G. Jung and Literary Theory: The Challenge from Fiction* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), p.1.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Samuels, 'Beyond the Feminine Principle', in *Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities*, ed. by Christopher Hauke (London: Routledge, 2000), p.138.

and women. In post-Jungian theory, we are ‘leaving behind the literal/metaphorical issue of “biology”’.<sup>39</sup> We are thus rejecting one of the dominant paradigms that influenced Jung’s psychological thinking, and one we now see as the manifestation of a particularly ‘masculine’ rationality’.<sup>40</sup>

Post-Jungians like Andrew Samuels and Susan Rowland have taken Jungian analytical psychology and developed it to take into account other theories developed by the French feminists Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva. Their ideas on the theory of the psyche are utilised to move beyond patriarchal terminology and racist, eugenicist and reductionist language to make Jungian theory an essential psychological and cultural critique that can be used for the postmodern era. Susan Rowland refutes much of Jungian psychoanalytic theory’s misogynistic language throughout her book, *C. G. Jung and Literary Theory: The Challenge from Fiction*.<sup>41</sup> Rowland utilises the theories of Lacan, Irigaray, and Kristeva to deconstruct Jung’s more problematic biologically essentialist and racist presumptions and meld them with these theorists in a deconstruction of Jung’s archetypal writings.<sup>42</sup> The work of Michele Roberts, Lindsay Clarke, Nicholas Moseley, and Doris Lessing is read alongside this theory, to contribute a useful theory by which to interrogate Jung’s work.

As noted above, in the time that Freud and Jung were writing, the use of what is now viewed as racist and sexist language was unfortunately the norm. Critics had not yet begun to attack these stereotypes used in literary and psychoanalytic studies. As Michael Vannoy Adams (using James Hillman’s work on Jung) found, Jung also promulgated outdated colonial assumptions and language with regard to ideas of

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<sup>39</sup>Samuels, p.138.

<sup>40</sup>Samuels, p.138.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Rowlands, *C. G. Jung and Literary Theory: The Challenge from Fiction* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999).

<sup>42</sup>Rowland, *C. G. Jung*, p.38.

differing 'tribes of man', based on 'blood types', which today read as racist.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, Jung's attempt to create a 'culturally sensitive "psychology of difference"' was mired in racially profiling groups.<sup>44</sup> Unhappily, Jung based his approach on an assemblage of paired complementary qualities, arranged in lists organised on the basis of 'opposites'. Therefore, if Germans are earthy and emotional, Jews have to be presented as urban and rational; if Germans have all the advantages of a young culture, then Jews have all the disadvantages of an old culture; and if Germans have physical strength (like men), then Jews have to be devious to gain power over them (like women).<sup>45</sup>

One only need contemplate the Shoah to see where this disastrous theory would lead. Further work by Jungian scholars has taken into account Jung's historical writing on these outdated racial stereotypes, such as the critic Elio J. Frattaroli, who also found Jung's writings on the Shadow archetype reflected anti-Semitic thought.<sup>46</sup> As Samuels found:

Jung's anti-Semitic writings and misguided involvements in the professional politics of psychotherapy in Germany in the 1930s have, understandably in my view, made it almost impossible for Holocaust-aware psychologists – both Jewish and non-Jewish – to generate a positive attitude to his theories.<sup>47</sup>

As Samuels has stated in this essay, these biases in Jungian theory need to be acknowledged in any examination of literary interrogation utilising Jungian theory.

There are also implicit drawbacks in using a purely Jungian literary reading of any text, in that many Jungian literary readings, as structuralist readings, concentrate on the purely mythical underpinnings of a story. As Samuels found, there is an implicit formalism adopted by many critics who have used Jungian literary theory:

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Vannoy Adams, 'The Archetypal School', in Eisendrath & Dawson (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.115.

<sup>44</sup> Samuels, 'Beyond the Feminine', p.138.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Samuels, 'Introduction: Jung and the post-Jungians', in Eisendrath & Dawson (eds), *Cambridge Companion*, p.ix.

<sup>46</sup> Elio J. Frattaroli, 'Me and my anima: through the dark glass of the Jungian/Freudian interface', in Eisendrath & Dawson (eds), *Cambridge Companion*, p.179.

<sup>47</sup> Samuels, 'Introduction', p.ix.

Jungians and post-Jungians are perceived as over-formalised, with our neat little quartets of archetypes and our oh so carefully balanced structures of the psyche, too definitional given the theory of “opposites” that I described earlier, too backward looking and even reactionary when treating of cultural values and politics.<sup>48</sup>

This formalism can warp a reading of any text, as the use of Jungian literary theory can reduce a text to a simplistic pattern (as Samuels indicated) to find patterns that may not in fact actually be in the text at all, or elide aspects that don't fit the schema:

[t]his conservatism can lead to the embarrassingly simplistic deployment of ideas. In a novel or play, any woman important to a man at a deep level is his anima. Any piece of controlled self-presentation to the world is the persona. Opposites abound, mandalas are sought for, tricksters found out, heroes and heroines spotted on their journeys.<sup>49</sup>

It was precisely this simplistic application of the mythic side of Jungian literary theory, that I sought to avoid in my examination of M. R. James's ghost stories. This is why the individuation process is central in my interrogation of the stories and their characters and indeed by extension James as writer. The individuation process illustrates growth (and by extension, regression), when the characters' progress is interrupted by their rejection of their anima, or a reaction to their wasteland void in the antiquarians' lives that brings forth the shadow as avenging revenant.

This way of utilising Jungian literary theory as a process of reading growth and regression through the lens of the psychological processes and indeed the historical theories illustrated below, avoids the warping factor of too much focus on the mythical side of Jungian literary theory by drawing together these theories in a sustained reading of the stories.

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<sup>48</sup>Andrew Samuels, 'Foreword' in Baumlín et al (eds), *Post-Jungian Criticism*, p.xi.

<sup>49</sup>Baumlín et al. (eds), *Post-Jungian Criticism*, p.xiii.

As K. M. Newton notes, there are very many ways of reading any text, be it from a Marxist, New Critical, or psychoanalytical standpoint.<sup>50</sup> As I outline below, this thesis could have been read from many theoretical standpoints: Marxist, Lacanian, Freudian, or from a semiotic viewpoint. Indeed, James was aware that he was writing from an inter-textual point, at the time he started writing his stories. They had enough signifiers of the gothic in them to raise an eyebrow or two among readers that had been reading romantic fiction for many years.<sup>51</sup> He also added in his essays on the ghost story form that he had set out (as per a scholar and academic of his stature) to research the ghost story form before he started writing his stories. In his essay 'Some Remarks on Ghost Stories', which was really a literary review of all of the stories he had read in order to complete this task, he noted that,

the real happy hunting ground, the proper habitat of our game is the magazine, the annual, the periodical publication destined to amuse the family circle. They came up thick and fast, the magazines, in the thirties and forties, and many died young. I do not, having myself sampled the task, envy the devoted one who sets out to examine the files [...]<sup>52</sup>

Typically of James the scholar and academic, the task of writing his own stories required this survey of the literature already in the field. As Luke Seaber found in his article on the role of the reader in James's ghost stories, this form of self-referential inter-textual signposting can be discovered in texts by applying the theories of Umberto Eco. This places the reader in the position of uncovering traces of other texts and stories that have preceded the text that they are engaged in reading.<sup>53</sup> This makes the task of reading something new, but bearing traces of favourite references, and thus an enjoyable task.

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<sup>50</sup> K. M. Newton, *Twentieth Century Literary Theory* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), p.xv.

<sup>51</sup> M. R. James, *A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2000), p.114.

<sup>52</sup> James, "Some Remarks on Ghost Stories", *The Bookman*, (December 1929), pp. 169-172.

<sup>53</sup> Luke Seaber, "If I'm Not Very Careful Something of This Kind May Happen to Me!" The Preordained Role of the Reader in M. R. James's Ghost Stories', in Kostas Boyiopoulos, Anthony Patterson and Mark Sandy(eds), *Literary And Cultural Alternatives To Modernism unsettling presences* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), p.135.

Jungian literary theory might miss this pinpointing of the role of the reader, and the tracing of the inter-textual references of what has gone before, just as it misses the class-based theories of Adorno or Marx. However, it does work for a reading of M.R.James, as James's academics betray the psychological disorders of the guilt displayed in many other texts of the era, such as the angst of Dr Jekyll and the guilt of Dorian Gray.<sup>54</sup> The application of Jungian psychoanalytical theory renders these psychological disturbances in James's characters bare, as I outline below.

### The Alchemical Wedding of the Writing of James and Jung

James was a writer of his time, and very successfully portrayed the nineteenth-century guilt-ridden bachelor academic suffering from a life lived in an academic wasteland. As I outlined above in the introduction to this chapter, these characters' lives were haunted by monsters and revenants that can be read as allegorical or symbolic of this late nineteenth-century guilt. A Jungian psychoanalytic literary reading of M. R. James's ghost stories illustrates this hidden narrative of the individuation process at work in James's characters, and in the author, together with the intertwining mythic structures of the stories.

Indeed, James had published mythical studies of his own in the course of his long literary career, including *The Apocryphal New Testament and Old Testament Legends*.<sup>55</sup> James wrote a version of the Old Testament legends for children. He explained in the introduction that the book consisted of stories based on myths or parables:

When you read of a book being Apocryphal, something rather different is meant: either that it is "spurious" i.e. that it pretends to

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* (London: Penguin Books, 1994); Oscar Wilde, *The Picture Of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

<sup>55</sup> M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924); M. R. James, *Old Testament Legends* (London: Longmans, 1913).

be written by someone who did not write it; or that what is in it is fabulous and untrue, like the stories of King Arthur; or both.<sup>56</sup>

His scholarly works include a great deal of study of biblical apocrypha, and his knowledge of this area of the bible was exhaustive.

Jung tended to regard personal myth and dream analysis as the way forward for individual patients in analysis. As Baumlin et al. note, “[Jung] is most in the mode of grand theory when commenting on the psychological deficiencies of Enlightenment rationality...in definitively ascribing ghosts to the projections of the unconscious.”<sup>57</sup> In analysing James’s characters in this way, the patterns of lives lived in academic vacuums suddenly become clear; the ghosts that haunt these academics are revealed as projections of the feared Jungian Shadow, and the rejection of anima and animus is shown to be the result of a failed individuation process.

James the author was also capable of this guilt-ridden projection, as I illustrate in the conclusion to this thesis. His method of writing his stories, once a year, at fever pitch and without editing process, is arguably indicative of a psychological process of avoidance. In utilising this process of a Jungian psychoanalytic reading, even the author is shown to demonstrate a sense of nineteenth-century guilt.

#### The conjoining of historical theory with the Jungian individuation process

The historical theories I utilise in this thesis reflected the Jungian process of individuation remarkably well, especially the Darwinian theory of regression, which throws into relief the characterisation of many of the ghosts that James used to haunt his protagonists. As I illustrate in Chapter 4, “M. R. James and the Darwinian

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<sup>56</sup>James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, p.23.

<sup>57</sup>Baumlin et al. *Post-Jungian Criticism*, p.34.

Gothic”, the ghosts that pursue James’s men of learning are not pale wraiths that float into the vision of the character: rather they possess many of the characteristics of the devolved specimens that Darwin wrote about in *Origin of Species*.<sup>58</sup> They possessed the physicality and characteristics of an earlier state of man: hair, enlarged jaws, and fins (as in the monster in “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”, and the fin-tailed monster in “Count Magnus”). When James’s protagonists encounter these devolved specimens, their reaction is also elementary, in that they utilise their flight-or-fight instinct, and display behaviour that can only be compared to the theory of Kristeva’s abject. They scream and regress to an earlier stage of behaviour more typical of primates, and similar to an earlier state of psychosis.

This state also illustrates the character’s inability to meld their ego with their shadow in the individuation process, so that the shadow has been reduced to a psychoanalytic projection. Similarly, in the individuation process, when the anima or animus has been rejected, they can also reappear in a murderous projection, which I examine in my chapter on gender. There, I also utilise Gilbert and Gubar’s feminist theory of the idea of the anima defying her ‘textually ordained place’.<sup>59</sup>

I also consider Brown’s idea of the fragmented self as a reaction to the era of modernism, which worked well with the idea of James’s characters’ lives as an illusory wasteland. The ennui that permeates their lives can also be read alongside the idea of an interrupted individuation process, which gives rise to the shadow projection of the avenging Darwinian revenant. The historical and Jungian approaches dovetails nicely to allow this parallel reading.

### Other Potential Theoretical Avenues

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Darwin, *On The Origin of Species* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New York, NY: Yale University Press, 2000), p.7.

Freud has become almost a 'default setting' for many critics in the realm of Jamesian studies. This thesis seeks to broaden that theoretical landscape, although I have, naturally, made use of a wide range of critical approaches, including the Freudian, which was especially useful in the area of the use of the uncanny in the ghost story, particularly in the setting of the Victorian/Edwardian ghost story. As Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell note, this uncanny framing is engendered by an emphasis on the juxtaposition of the fast-approaching modern world of technology together with the Victorian urge to look to the past (an imagined world of Arthurian romance and fairytales).<sup>60</sup> This area of Freudian theory, along with Freud's theory of hysteria, was the first way in which I approached the stories. Every one of James's characters demonstrate an hysterical reaction in their encounters with the Jamesian revenant, and each story can be viewed as a self-contained world, much the same as a case study in the original Freudian vein.

In the realm of Jamesian criticism, there are many authors who have engaged in a Freudian reading of his ghost stories; therefore making an original contribution to Jamesian studies using Freud would have been difficult.<sup>61</sup> As James's biographer Michael Cox observed, James could be seen as absolutely pre-Freudian in that if he had been aware of the 'unintentional Freudian motifs scattered throughout his ghost stories he would have been horrified'.<sup>62</sup> Other authors, noting this, have applied Freud's theories to James's stories; Michael Chabon commented, 'that the very careful absence of sex and sexual themes in James's oeuvre made one think consistently of the sexual act, in that so many of his monsters had Freudian phallogocentric aspects in their makeup':

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<sup>60</sup> Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (eds), *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.1.

<sup>61</sup> S. T. Joshi & Rosemary Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious* (New York, NY: Hippocampus Press, 2007).

<sup>62</sup> Michael Cox, *M.R. James: An Informal Portrait* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.149.

For this story ['Oh Whistle'], is also prototypical James in that when at last we encounter the horror, there is something about its manifestation, its physical attributes, its *habits* that puts the reader in mind, however reluctantly, of sex. I say reluctantly in part because the cool, fleshy, pink, protuberant, furred, toothed, or mouthed apparitions one finds in M.R. James are so loathsome; and in part because James keeps his stories studiously free – swept clean – not merely of references to sexual behaviour but of all the hot-and-heavy metaphor and overt Freudian paraphernalia with which supernatural fiction is so often encumbered...But the fact remains that 'Oh, Whistle and I'll come to you My Lad' is a story about a man pursued into the darkness of a strange bedroom, and all of the terror is ultimately generated by a vision of a horribly disordered bed.<sup>63</sup>

This avoidance of sex gives an interesting aspect when Freudian theory is used to read James's stories. A writer who was wholly aware of Freudian tropes might have been more self-conscious about the inclusion of any kind of symbol or imagery that could be interpreted by a knowledgeable critic as indicative of authorial neuroses. When Freudian theory is applied, the stories reveal these hidden symbols. For instance, in "Casting the Runes", the hidden vagina dentata that frightens poor Mr. Dunning witless would be ruined by its substitution for a more wholesome item, and the terror induced by this subconsciously taboo symbol would be lost.

He put his hand into the well known nook under the pillow: only it did not get so far. What he touched was, according to his account, a mouth, with teeth, and with hair...<sup>64</sup>

The Freudian imagery of the vagina is obvious to modern audiences, but to obviate this symbol because of authorial prudence would render the story less successfully terrifying (and less personally revealing). These symbols are often the first to be identified by critics and this territory is already well-trodden, so my focus is more usefully deployed with Jung.

Freud's ideas in general were useful for approaching James's world. The Victorian edenic ideal was upended by the snake of psychoanalysis. As the author A.

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Chabon, *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along The Borderlands* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008), p.118.

<sup>64</sup>Chabon, *Maps and Legends*, p.137.

S. Byatt put it, “we are in a world which is so much more knowing now”.<sup>65</sup> It was especially interesting to approach the symbolism of James’s stories with a Freudian de-construction.

Kleinian object relations theory also makes links between the growth of an individual and the wider society, in a structuralist vein, and could have been used to examine James’s stories, especially as Klein’s work is relatively under-used in this field. This theory places the focus on the earliest months of infant development and tries to utilise it to establish links between the inner life of the individual psyche and outer society.<sup>66</sup> However, Kleinian inner subjectivity follows Freud’s thinking in that it is ego-centred and projects problems of subjectivity onto the wider world (as mother).<sup>67</sup>

This figure of mother absorbs infantile rage expressed when the conditions do not fulfil the desires that this ego-based (infantile) self seeks. Unfortunately, modern (patriarchal) society can never sufficiently fulfil this fragmented self’s desires, and it then projects the self’s weaknesses into the wider world. Therefore, Kleinian object-relations theory fails to include the missing link between individual self-hood and the trajectory into the wider world that is accomplished by successful Jungian individuation.

However, there is a drawback in applying Kleinian concepts to James’s ghost stories, such as the formation of individual identity through internalisation of maternal figures, as the maternal in James’s work is almost non-existent. We have feminine figures and female academics, but the good mother as the start of symbolisation would have been unsuitable to apply to James’s fiction, as he did not focus on the family as a structure. He has also (unjustly) has been blamed for a misogynistic

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<sup>65</sup> A. S. Byatt, *Passions of The Mind* (London: Vintage, 1993), p.181.

<sup>66</sup>Hauke, *Jung*, p.55.

<sup>67</sup>Hauke, p.234.

attitude towards the feminine by various critics. As I outline in my gender and sexuality chapter, James takes a surprisingly modern attitude to women's roles in society (for his social circle). He does not, however, feature mothers or the maternal in his stories. Kleinian theory would not have been useful in interrogating and reading James's stories, as its framework would have been incompatible with the material available in the texts, and exploring the absence of the feminine or maternal is, for the purposes of this thesis, covered more usefully from queer and Jungian perspectives.

A Lacanian framework with which to interrogate James's ghost stories would have been a useful way in which to read the inner states of James's characters, in that Lacan viewed the psyche of man as structured linguistically and often interrogated the linguistic slips and signifying words of a text to illustrate frames of mind and psychic disturbances. Luke Thurston's work on Lacan is interesting, in that he shows that these signifiers are often placed by James to indicate what is 'unhomely' or '*Unheimlich*' in a domestic setting, forestalling the nightmare that is soon to come to the protagonist.<sup>68</sup> For instance, in the story "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad", the whistle that Parkins picks up on the beach at the site of the templar's preceptor has an inscription that informs the reader that the object is an inorganic demon. This object is a host for a ghost or revenant that, once blown, will invite the haunting that pursues Parkins mercilessly, providing the denouement for the tale.<sup>69</sup> However, using Lacanian theory in this reading would have been problematic, in that this analysis was the second-most used form of literary analysis, and it was thus a less original contribution to the work being undertaken on Jamesian studies than my work on Jung.

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<sup>68</sup> Luke Thurston, 'Inhospitable Objects in M. R. James', in Jonathon Shears and Jen Harrison (eds), *Literary Bric-a-Brac and the Victorians From Commodities to Oddities* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), p.99.

<sup>69</sup>Mark Fisher, *The weird and the eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016); Thurston, 'Inhospitable Objects', p.106.

Elena Luminita's Lacanian reading of James's ghost stories concentrates on the work of Gaetan de Clerambault and a Lacanian interrogation of his works focused on 'The Fold'. This object-based analysis, however, defaults again to the one story that invites a Lacanian reading ("Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad"). The focus is again on the revenant that appears in Parkins's bedclothes.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, in Thurston's chapter "Broken Lineage", the focus for Lacanian readings seems to favour "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad", briefly contrasted with "The Mezzotint". Again, the focus is on an interrogation based on Lacanian object relations of the whistle and the 'indifferent mezzotint' in the two tales.<sup>71</sup> These Lacanian readings demonstrate that theorists pick only certain Jamesian stories to which to apply Lacan's readings, whilst my work on Jung and James engages more widely, finding a broader range of areas in his stories to apply Jung's theories of mythic and psychoanalytic readings. Through the use of Jungian readings, I am therefore avoiding the recently-trodden academic area of a narrow focus on certain stories, and seeking to widen the scope of psychoanalytic readings of M. R. James's stories.

Aspects of Marxist theory have also been useful to my analysis, though not a major focus. Marxist critic Fredric Jameson in particular considers Marx's 'mode of production' as a narrational heuristic structure that illuminates the relationship between 'social phenomena within an historical framework'.<sup>72</sup> In particular, it is the gaps in historical phenomena that these theories are utilised to explain, seeking similarities in the way that Jungian theory is used to find an 'historical perspective in the face of its denial'.<sup>73</sup> As Hauke notes:

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<sup>70</sup>Luminita-Elena Turcu, "A Person Not In The Story": Clerambault's and M.R. James's Textile/Textual Folds, *Messages, Sages, and Ages*, Vol. 2, No.2 (2015), pp.56-65.

<sup>71</sup> Thurston, *Literary Ghosts*. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.65, p.20.

<sup>72</sup>Hauke, *Jung*, p.73.

<sup>73</sup>Hauke, p.44

[s]ome may criticise Jung's idealism and his use of material derived from myth, medieval alchemy and Gnosticism to grasp the unexpressed text modern consciousness omits but, in doing so, Jung does seem to demonstrate an heuristic approach which compares with contemporary postmodern methods.<sup>74</sup>

James's stories are a response to the modern, in that they feature settings that are very hierarchical and almost set in amber – the upper class world of squires and country houses, contrasted with the lower class proletariat – who, interestingly, are never bothered by the curiosity that invites the wrath of the Jamesian revenant. It is when the modern world intrudes that the hauntings start – the use of 'modern' inventions such as binoculars or lanternslides, or a 'neighbour's landmark' being moved are actions that attract the attention of the revenant.<sup>75</sup> Change is an agent that is more feared than even an attack of a revenant in the stories. In "Count Magnus", the Count did not give up his grip on his land, properties or serfs, which he seemed to view as his vassals (common in the feudal era). When these serfs try to break his laws (believing him long dead), they are killed.<sup>76</sup>

In my focus on a Jungian psychoanalytical and historical reading of M. R. James's ghost stories, the Marxist idea of the contrast between the Jamesian upper-class who invite the attention of the revenant and the lower-class proletariat who know better than to meddle with artefacts (that may invite its attention) was useful as a historical tool with which to read the setting of James's stories. However, Marxist theory does not blend well with the psychoanalytic theories of Jung, unlike Kristeva's theory of abjection, which explained James's academic character's reaction to the devolved Jungian Shadow, or the Darwinian regressed revenants that haunt James's stories and characters.

### An Overview of the thesis

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<sup>74</sup>Hauke, p.44.

<sup>75</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.281.

<sup>76</sup>James, p.54.

## Reading M. R. James's ghost stories with Jung

In this initial chapter, I outline my Jungian approach to M. R. James's ghost stories, arguing that the psychoanalytical approach taken by Jung, when used to read literary texts, can uncover psychodynamic relations between the characters' selves, especially those drawn from the Jungian individuation process, aspects of neurosis and psychological imbalances, and more severe forms of psychological imbalance and psychopathology.

The mythological aspect of Jung's psychoanalysis can also be used to illustrate structural and narrational aspects of the short story form. In James's case, there are many stories where biblical and mythical underpinnings have been uncovered by this application. Jungian theory is a very good way in which to read James's ghost stories, as James is concerned fragmented psyches that are pursued by revenants, usually in response to a change in their circumstances, in stories rich in mythic symbolism and structure. This chapter is the first work to engage with these areas of Jungian literary theory in a reading of M. R. James's ghost stories.

### James and the Unseen: The divided reading in his ghost stories

Looking at James in terms of his historical context was vital to my interpretation of the crucial issue of why, despite religion being key to his life and his father expecting that he would, James was never ordained. I argue that James was very ambivalent about aspects of the church and that this is visible in his stories, where we see churchmen who are far from pious, and find pagan powers still influential. James's interest in the supernatural went far beyond conventional religion. The idea of the 'unseen' and the supernatural – other worlds and other powers operating beyond the ken of man – the other world that Denis Godfrey terms E. M. Forster's 'other kingdom', was a regular source of fascination for James. He

peppered his stories with not just occult and demonic lore but also folkloric and fairy-tale material, another Victorian and Edwardian obsession.<sup>77</sup>

James also used many motifs of the 'cursed object', or as Reza Negarestani terms them, 'inorganic demons' such as prayer books, scrap-books and whistles.<sup>78</sup> Demonic symbolism and occult phraseology are intertwined with ecclesiastical narrative in the stories, along with revenants summoned by priests who should have known better. This historical approach uncovered the deeper significance of these strands more than a purely structuralist approach could have, so combining them allowed the development of a broader analysis than each approach allowed alone.

The Jungian reading of this chapter was useful, however, in the way in which this divided reading was also indicative of an interrupted individuation process in James the author, as I argue in this chapter and in the conclusion. This is demonstrated in the divided reading as above, and as Steve Duffy has noted, in the way in which James came to write his stories.<sup>79</sup> Overall, the combination of the Jungian and the historical illustrated the ambivalence of James's treatment of the church and her servants in his ghost stories.

### M. R. James and the Darwinian Gothic

This chapter continues my historical and Jungian reading. Its first focus is the historical reading of James's portrayal of the ghost. Interestingly, H. P. Lovecraft, gave the first hints that the Jamesian ghost seemed to be more of a revenant, i.e. distinctly solid and corporeal, rather than a transparent floating ethereal figure.<sup>80</sup>

This led me to a reading of Darwin's thesis of the devolved specimen (1879) and Max Nordau's reading of the degeneration of man (1895), both Victorian

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<sup>77</sup> Denis Godfrey, *E. M. Forster's Other Kingdom* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd, 1968).

<sup>78</sup> Fisher, *The Weird*, p.82.

<sup>79</sup> Steve Duffy, 'Introduction' to James, *A Pleasing Terror*, p. xxiii.

<sup>80</sup> H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror In Literature* (London: Recluse, 1927).

theories that many authors of James's time engaged with in their own writing, such as H. G. Wells, Oscar Wilde and Richard Marsh.<sup>81</sup> I combine a historical reading with Jung's structuralist reading of the archetypal Shadow, Man's darker half of his unconscious, (a figure which also ties in with Stevenson's Mr Hyde), together with Kristeva's theory of abjection, which dovetailed with the Jungian idea of the Shadow. This reading illustrates the way in which the ghosts that haunt James's antiquarians are summoned by the wasteland quality of lives lived in an academic vacuum (the decadent quality that Nordau's theory illustrates), and the resulting abject reaction of the antiquarians of the revenant, which bears all of the hallmarks of Darwin's regressed beast-man signifiers (hair, claws, and teeth).

This action is repeated across many of James's ghost stories. For instance, in "Count Magnus" we have the fin-tailed revenant that kills Mr Wraxall; the tentacled fiend that reduces Mr Somerton to a 'beast' in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas", and the hairy monster that chases Mr Denton in "The Diary of Mr Poynter".<sup>82</sup> These combined theories work together in this chapter to interrogate Victorian ideas of eugenics, race and biology. The use of Jungian and historical approaches here adds to the canon of original works on Jamesian studies.

### Gender and Sexuality: the Cloistered World of M. R. James

Concentrating on a purely structuralist approach would have excluded viewing James as a product of his time, which I see as crucial to understanding both the man and his work. This led me to an examination of his attitude to women and specifically the position of women in the Victorian/Edwardian era, and the gendered division in

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<sup>81</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Connecticut: Martino Fine Books, 2014); H. G. Wells, *The Island Of Doctor Moreau* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967); H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1953); Wilde, *Dorian Gray*; Richard Marsh, *The Beetle* (Peterborough, Broadview Editions, 2004).

<sup>82</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.54, 95, 224.

his own all-male society. This led to questions of masculinity and ideas of boyishness and sexuality within this arena. A purely Jungian approach would have missed interrogating the particularly masculine structure of James's bachelor world, which is necessary, as many critics such as Mike Pincombe have interpreted James and the treatment of characters in his stories as covertly homosexual.<sup>83</sup> This opened up an interesting move into further explorations of the way in which James portrayed relations between men and women in his stories and whether sex was actually in the stories or not. This is important, as (as I outlined above) the area of sex is symbolic of late nineteenth-century anxieties and the neurosis and guilt of the late Victorian antiquarian bachelors who populate these stories.

Guilt is a trigger for many of James's characters, and it leads to an interrupted individuation process through the rejection of the anima or animus. The rejection of the anima results in a regression to the egoic stage of union with the shadow, which is then reduced to a shadow projection and the character is then pursued by an avenging revenant. We see this in "Martin's Close", where Ann Clark pursues George Martin after he rejects her.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, in "An Evening's Entertainment", the guilt experienced around a homosexual relationship descends into murder, and the rejected animus of a younger lover.<sup>85</sup>

### The Bridge from the Victorian to the Modern: The Evolution of James's Fiction

Approaching the body of James's stories via Jungian theory is not just a matter of utilising the theory of the archetypes and anima/animus. Via a Jungian approach it is also a matter of placing James as an author in his historical place, poised between the Victorian and Modern eras. Of particular interest is the way in

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<sup>83</sup> Mike Pincombe, "Homosexual Panic and the English Ghost Story: M. R. James and Others", *M R James Newsletter*, 2.2 (September 2002), pp.4-6.

<sup>84</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.171.

<sup>85</sup> James, p.320.

which James's character's live (as noted by Jack Sullivan) in an academic wasteland, devoted to niche academic pursuits that invite the attention of the revenant and produce (as Dennis Brown describes) the fragmentation of the self.<sup>86</sup>

This fragmentation also brings about an interruption in the Jungian individuation process, a regression to the Shadow stage of psychic integration and a psychotic disturbance as the revenant is projected by the psyche as a Shadow projection, which then haunts the character.

As James wrote his fiction, producing roughly one story per year over 33 years, the stories changed in format, from the Victorian era in which he started with "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook" to the last story written a year before his death in 1937, "A Vignette".<sup>87</sup> An historical reading demonstrates the nuances of the stories and the changes in position of narrators, the historical events portrayed in them, and the recent inventions produced in the time he was writing, such as the inclusion of the motorcar in "The Uncommon Prayer-Book". The application of a historical reading further demonstrates the increasing alienation in the stories and the encroaching ennui of the Modernist era that gave rise to the fractured self, as Brown termed it.<sup>88</sup>

The application of an historical methodological theoretical reading illustrated the conditions of modernity and the lifestyle it brought. Which usefully can position James within the realm of the gothic modern, as his antagonists, for instance the zombified form of the deceased but animated inn keeper in "Rats" and the invisible agent who torments the character's in "The Malice of Inanimate Objects" in his later stories are used to illustrate the psychological conditions suffered by the protagonists. These conditions, which brought upon the psychological stress

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<sup>86</sup>Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares*, p.75; Brown, *The Modernist Self*, p.2.

<sup>87</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.1; M. R. James,  *Casting the Runes and other Ghost Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.293.

<sup>88</sup>Brown, *The Modernist Self*, p.2.

suffered by the characters, included the industrialisation of nations, new technologies bringing a faster pace of life, the industrialisation of the Proletariat, women's suffrage and new cities with their swelling populations of invisible poor. This contributed to an ensuing sense of alienation and ennui that made many citizens feel fragmented from reality, torn apart from what they had thought of as their assured place in society, although Jung's analytical psychology, together with his myths and cultural theories were (as Hauke says) a response to this.<sup>89</sup>

### Conclusion

This thesis is based on the argument that the ghost stories of M. R. James can be read from the perspective of psychoanalytical and historical approaches; these approaches are drawn from the theories of Carl Jung, Julia Kristeva, Dennis Brown and Charles Darwin. This introduction has outlined the explanation for the selection and melding of these theories, and this is the first work to bring Jungian theory to bear on the fictional work of M. R. James.

James was very much a writer of his time, a fin de siècle author whose small body of work is remarkable for the fact that it reflects many of the concerns of the era. These range from: the position of women in his society and effeminate male characters who challenge the norms of that society, to the resulting guilt of his characters. Then we have the ennui and alienation many felt due to the pace of an industrialised era that replaced the bucolic countryside he was so fond of; and the war that saw the end of Britain's empire.<sup>90</sup> The thesis overall adds to ongoing work on James and Jung; it is only the second full-length work on James's ghost stories to emerge, the other being Patrick J. Murphy's *Medieval Studies and The Ghost Stories*

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<sup>89</sup>Hauke, *Jung*, p.284.

<sup>90</sup> Clive Bloom (ed.), *Creepers: British Horror and Fantasy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), p.69.

Of *M. R. James*. This departs from that study in that it offers a psychoanalytical and historical focus on the stories.

*The Collected Ghost Stories* have just been reissued again, this time with an introduction by Darryl Jones, and there are other issues that have been reprinted in these past years, such as Stephen Jones's *Curious Warnings* with its attempt to reword the writing to be more accessible to twenty-first-century taste.<sup>91</sup> This inexplicable lack of attention lies in the fact that there has been comparatively little accompanying critical appreciation of James's fiction.

The earliest critical attempts to study James's fiction took place while the author was still alive. One critic who attempted this task was Mary Butts, in her 1934 essay, 'The Art of Montague James'.<sup>92</sup> Butts summed up the charm of James's stories:

The brevity, the unpretentiousness, the crystal transparency set the scene, with incomparable ease and mastery— for what? That is, after all, the point. What is Doctor James writing about? What is a ghost story?...and why is it, as he has said himself, that no other subject has ever attracted him? While how is it that the ghost stories he has written are incomparable and unique; that he has found a formula for their telling more effective and like that of no other writer?<sup>93</sup>

Other critics such as Julia Briggs and Jack Sullivan included chapters on James as part of full-length studies of the English ghost story form, in *Night Visitors: the Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* and *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* respectively. Briggs places James in the setting of the antiquarian ghost story with its emphasis on historical and materialistic criticism, while Sullivan considers the psychological critical underpinnings.<sup>94</sup> However, these were again chapters on James and not full-length studies

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<sup>91</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*; M. R. James, *Curious Warnings: The Great Ghost Stories of M. R. James*, Stephen Jones (ed.) (Baker Street, London: Jo Fletcher Books, 2012).

<sup>92</sup>Mary Butts, "The Art of Montagu [sic] James," *London Mercury* 29 (February 1934): 306-17.

<sup>93</sup>Joshi & Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious*, p.61.

<sup>94</sup>Briggs, *Night Visitors*; Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares*.

showcasing his distinctive, witty, urbane and ultimately originally terrifying form of the ghost story.

Recent criticism has again followed this form. Some worth mentioning are Thurston's *Broken Lineage*, placing James in a literary tradition of ghost stories, and Smith's *The Ghost Story 1840-1920*, emphasising James as engaging with the modernist form.<sup>95</sup> Much of the new work on James has come in the form of introductions to reissued volumes of his stories; recently, we have had Roger Luckhurst's British Library version of this format, and volume 2 of the graphic novel version of James's stories, by illustrators John Reppion and Leah Moore.<sup>96</sup> Moore and Reppion's work is a refreshing take on the ghost story format, as it brings James's work to a new audience of readers who might prefer other forms of literature. However, these versions of James's work do not work to further academic debate on his work.

Full-length studies of James's ghost stories are thin on the ground; apart from Murphy's study and this thesis, there have been none. Darryl Jones's new book on the horror format, *Sleeping With The Lights On*, engages with James and interrogates the human need for catharsis through an engagement with being scared. Jones reads James through a psycho-geographical lens, seeing his stories as rooted in Britain's history of the landscape and its unsettling influence on the people who live there.<sup>97</sup>

This thesis, with its melding of a Jungian and historical reading of James's ghost stories, adds to a growing body of work on James. However, although full-length studies of James's oeuvre are few, there are many new articles published in

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<sup>95</sup>Thurston, *Literary Ghosts*; Smith, *The Ghost Story*.

<sup>96</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (London: British Library Classics, 2018); M.R. James, Leah Moore & John Reppion *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary, Vol. 2: A Graphic Collection of Short Stories by M.R. James* (St Pancras, London: Self-Made Hero, 2017).

<sup>97</sup> Darryl Jones, *Sleeping With The Lights On the unsettling power of horror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

academic journals. The website that Rosemary Pardoe curates also features new work as well as growing number of blogs, such as my own.<sup>98</sup> There are also a growing number of podcasts which debate any number of Jamesian topics, (such as the possible influence of Dickens on James) which the Warning to the Curious Podsite broadcasts regularly. Nunkie Theatre productions also add to the debate on James's stories and the man himself.<sup>99</sup>

Overall, there is now a growing body of work in what may be termed "Jamesian studies", to which I hope my thesis will contribute. As I note above, it is the first reading of James's oeuvre to combine the Jungian and Historical and as such makes an original contribution to the canon of work on James.

The next chapter explores how the stories of M. R. James can be read from the perspective of approaches drawn from the theories of Carl Jung, arguing that this approach uncovers hidden layers of what Jung termed 'archetypal imagery' and narration within the stories. More significantly, this approach reveals that James's characters suffer from the uniquely Jungian malaise of a crisis of individuation.

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<sup>98</sup><http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~pardos/GS.html>; <https://www.janemainley-piddock.com/>

<sup>99</sup><http://www.mrjamespodcast.com/episodes/>; <http://www.nunkie.co.uk/>.

## **Chapter Two: Reading M. R. James's ghost stories with Jung**

This chapter outlines how Jungian psychoanalytical theory can be used to read M. R. James's ghost stories, and how when this approach is taken the stories' narrative underpinnings are exposed as small studies of the Jungian self and its attempts to form a unitary whole. My Jungian approach to M. R. James's ghost stories in this chapter draws on Jung and key critics of Jung such as Joseph Campbell and Jack Sullivan to argue that the psychoanalytical approach taken by Jung, when used to read a selection of James's early stories, sheds light on the psychodynamics of the text in a new and highly revealing way.

The Jungian system of literary theory can engage with the unconscious of an author in a psycho-biographical reading (as above) and their motivations in the writing of their text, or it can also read the unconscious of the characters in the stories. It must be borne in mind that when the term "unconscious" is used, this refers to the hidden depths of a character's psyche, which cannot be accessed by the conscious mind. The part of the consciousness that has access to these hidden depths is the ego, and this is the part that usually works towards contact with the other hidden parts of the Jungian unconscious.

In the lifetime of a person or character in a story, a system of development (termed Individuation by Jung) is constantly at work in the unconscious of that individual. In the process, they will encounter various stages and meet with parts of their own personality: firstly, their Self (the 'house' of their personality), followed by their ego, which they will have to encounter in stages, and then work to unify these parts.

However, a wide reading of Jung's collected works gives a rough template of how the individuation process normally works. The process begins in childhood at

the point when the child has to outgrow their attachment to their mother. This is both their actual mother and the reflected Jungian archetype of 'Mother' in the infant's psyche. With the individuation process in a male child, he will replace her with the Jungian anima in his psyche. In the case of a female child, she will have the male animus. A successful integration in the psyche anticipates future relations with the opposite sex.<sup>100</sup>

As Jung wrote in his exploration of the mother archetype:

[t]he carrier of the archetype is in the first place the personal mother, because the child lives at first in complete participation with her, in a state of unconscious identity. She is the psychic as well as the physical precondition of the child. With the awakening of ego-consciousness the participation gradually weakens, and consciousness begins to enter into opposition to the unconscious, its own precondition. This leads to differentiation of the ego from the mother.<sup>101</sup>

Later in the process of individuation, the Self (the whole personality of the individual) will have to integrate its ego with the dark part of the personality, where all of our hidden wants, desires, and the nastier hidden drives of our personality are hidden, and which we have to come to terms with in order to grow as a person. That is, The Shadow. If the ego does not successfully meld with the Shadow and internalise and integrate it, then the Shadow becomes an overbearing presence in the house of the Self, and the personality, in rejecting the Shadow, projects it outwards to become a threatening psychosis that can affect the individual as hallucinations, ghosts or other manifestations.

In a Jungian reading, the "ghosts" that haunt M. R. James's characters are usually manifestations of a rejected shadow that have become projected outwards from the Self and return to threaten the personality that rejected them. The danger to

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<sup>100</sup> As I mention in Chapter 5 - Gender and Sexuality – the Cloistered World of M. R. James, Jung's writings on homosexuality and bisexuality are problematic, in that he viewed them as abnormal. P.199.

C.G.Jung, *Aspects Of The Masculine* (London: Ark paperbacks, 1989), p.x.i.

<sup>101</sup>C.G.Jung, *Aspects Of The Feminine* (London: Ark paperbacks, 1982), p.132.

the Self and Ego of the personality that will not integrate with its shadow is very real, as a failed individuation process can result in a kind of psychic death for that individual. If the Shadow is successfully integrated, then the evolving personality can meet with other Jungian personality archetypes. However, this depends on each individual's cultural heritage, as this influences the make-up of these archetypes. If the person has Native American heritage, for example, the archetype may be a trickster that is clothed by the Self as a coyote or if they have Russian heritage then the archetypal witch Baba Yaga may appear to guide the personality to encounter her in a number of perplexing dreams. This process will continue until the Self has made clear to the other parts of the unconscious just what barriers to wholeness have to be overcome in real life and understood by the unconscious on its journey through the individuation process.<sup>102</sup>

When the Jungian system of individuation is applied to James's characters, then the malaise of what may be affecting them at any point of the story suddenly becomes clearer. It may be that the character has had an interrupted individuation process, and their ego may have rejected the Shadow, which has returned to menace them as a psychotic projection. If James's stories are analysed in this way, the deeper narratives, motivations and symbolism of the characters and their actions take on new and richer meanings.

In this chapter, Jung's theory of individuation will be used to read the ghosts that plague James' characters as metaphors for the psychological consequences of an un-individuated personality, or rather a personality which has not united its inner "hidden" half with the outer consciousness, or the half that is presented to the

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<sup>102</sup>Jung, *The Masculine*, p.x.i.

outside world.<sup>103</sup> This reading adds a sustained reading of James through a Jungian psychological and archetypal lens to the canon of James's criticism for the first time. James's interest in the seventeenth century is arguably what lay behind his use of layers of mythical and Biblical allusions in his stories, the details of which belie the often-horrific denouement. As B. W. Young argued, James's interest in this particular century and its fascination with Biblical mythology lay in the fact that it was the last century where belief in the Bible as a guide was largely unquestioned, before the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries challenged the Bible as a representation of God's word. As Young found:<sup>104</sup>

As a historian, and one who edited and published a collection of mediaeval ghost stories dating from around 1400, in the *English Historical Review* in 1922, James was deeply aware of their great importance in opening up the worlds of the past to imaginative modern scholarship.<sup>105</sup>

Ghosts have played a large part in the myriad narratives that constitute what we know of European history, and the student of the Victorian ghost story can learn much by considering that long history. Recently, Keith Hopkins demonstrated how ghosts had strategically intervened in the uncertain belief systems of Ancient Rome. Later, between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, their appearances in England aided clarifications of theological doctrines concerning penance and purgatory, as religious uncertainties were replaced by ever more concrete dogmas.<sup>106</sup>

James's ghosts were representative of the continuance of belief, even into ages where the Bible was considered less important to mankind, as I argue in my chapter on James and religion. The mythic side of the Bible is found throughout James's stories and is thrown into sharp relief, particularly when a Jungian

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<sup>103</sup> C.G. Jung, *The Collected Works*, eds Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, M.D., M.R.C.P., and Gerhard Adler, Ph.D., translated from the German by R. F.C. Hull, vol 9 part ii, 'Aion: Researches into the phenomenology of the self' (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1959), p.147.

<sup>104</sup>B. W. Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century: An Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.155.

<sup>105</sup> M. R. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories', *English Historical Review*, 37, (1922), pp.413-422.

<sup>106</sup> Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal: Sociological Studies in Roman History* (Cambridge: 1983), pp.226-35.

interpretation is applied to them, as my reading of James's story "Two Doctors" below shows. The stories' use of myth echoes the Biblical tale, whose layered narrative of the original bad brother killing his good brother mimics later nineteenth-century tales such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. These stories illustrate the dichotomy between good and bad, over-shadowing the protagonists' natures.<sup>107</sup> As I argue below, they also show a fascination with the breakdown of the personality.

The names of the doctors – Quinn and Abell– clearly play on the Biblical names, and it is made clear that the story is one of brotherly jealousy when at one point Dr Abell refers to Quinn as "His Brother", a term of affection, in the midst of a fit of jealousy.<sup>108</sup> This story is an obvious reworking of a mythical tale, one lying behind the Biblical narrative: the two doctors are archetypes, the original brothers who turn on one another in a jealous rage. However, as Cain (Abell in James's tale) is the murderous brother, it is also possible to read him as having an unindividuated personality, and to argue that the Jungian shadow had taken over his personality, resulting in the murder of his "brother" Dr Quinn.

In another story, "The Ash Tree," numerous generations of the Fell family seem to be suffering from an inability to reconcile the sides of their anima/animus layers of their personality when they pit themselves inter-generationally against a local older woman called Mrs Mothersole, whom they accuse of being a witch. Their shadow side takes over, and she is executed.<sup>109</sup> As I illustrated above in my introductory chapter, in the course of Jung's career his thoughts on the process of what he termed "individuation" or the successful assimilation of the human

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<sup>107</sup>Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* (London: Penguin, 1994).Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>108</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), p.251.

<sup>109</sup> James, p.30.

personality evolved. In 1928 in *The Ego and the Unconscious*, he wrote of individuation as being a process that unites a 'single, homogeneous being'.<sup>110</sup> Later, as his thoughts on the individuation process matured, he saw it as a unification of differing layers of the personality, uniting the archetypes of the anima and animus as well as the ego and Shadow. In this chapter, I am specifically using his work on individuation in respect of the archetypal Shadow, or the dark aspect of the human personality.<sup>111</sup>

In James's stories the procession of "ghosts" that haunt the protagonists could be seen as shadow projections of un-individuated personalities. This phenomenon will be very familiar to Victorians; there are many manifestations of the Shadow figure in culture of the period, such as the doppelganger. It can be seen in novels such as *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*, where Stevenson's doctor unsuccessfully battled the dark half of his personality, even giving him free reign to exist as an individual presence in his own right, which ends in Dr Jekyll's death. Similarly, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde's protagonist's Shadow found life in a portrait, absorbing all of Gray's sins, leaving him to live a life of debauchery seemingly without consequences.<sup>112</sup> These themes could all be viewed as representations of Jung's archetypal figure of the Shadow, the representation of the un-individuated half of man. Jung noted that in primitive societies there were rites to unite these halves of the personality, but in modern times, the only way to unite them, would be through psychoanalysis, or living a full life.<sup>113</sup> He comments that

... it is quite certain that the fundamental goal of initiation lies in taming the original Trickster-like wildness of the juvenile nature. It therefore has a

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<sup>110</sup>Jung, *Collected Works*, p.202.

<sup>111</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 563.

<sup>112</sup>Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll. Wilde, Dorian Gray*.

<sup>113</sup>C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 563.

civilising or spiritualising purpose, in spite of the violence of the rites that are required to set this process in motion.<sup>114</sup>

Booker notes that James's villains resemble genetic throwbacks comparable to the monsters in Greek myths.<sup>115</sup> The spider monster in "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook" is one example:

However, the main traits of the figure I can at least indicate. At first you saw only a mass of coarse, matted black hair; presently it was seen that this covered a body of fearful thinness, almost a skeleton, but with the muscles standing out like wires. The hands were of a dusky pallor, covered, like the body, with long coarse hairs, and hideously taloned.<sup>116</sup>

These ghosts and monsters can be compared to the animalistic forms of the Minotaur, or Cyclops, as well as in the character of Mr Hyde, whom Stevenson describes as bestial. Throughout *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*, the references to Hyde are kept to a minimum, as if Stevenson cannot bring himself to write a full description, and we only see his blackness, his animalistic form, his temper, in short and shocking bursts:

... for Mr Hyde had numbered few familiars – even the master of the servant maid had only seen him twice; his family could nowhere be traced; he had never been photographed; and the few who could describe him differed widely; as common observers will. Only on one point were they agreed; and that was the haunting sense of unexpressed deformity with which the fugitive impressed his beholders.<sup>117</sup>

The choice of language here is interesting: as my chapter on James and Darwin demonstrates, it is suggestive of regression to an earlier era of man's evolutionary development. The villains are compared to animalistic forms, having regressed to the pre-human stage of primeval urges personified in the Jungian shadow, which has taken over Dr Jekyll and given birth to the figure of the shadow, Mr Hyde.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>C. G. Jung, 'Phenomenology of the Self', in *The Portable Jung*, ed, Joseph Campbell (London: Penguin, 1976), p.146.

<sup>115</sup>Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories* (London: Continuum, 2004), p.26.

<sup>116</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.7.

<sup>117</sup>Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, p.33.

<sup>118</sup>Stevenson, p.33.

These figures also both represent the figure of the Jungian Shadow. “Lost Hearts”, the second story that James ever wrote, evoked the monster figure with equal force: Uncle Abney is as thoroughly divided a self as was Stevenson’s Jekyll. Uncle Abney lost the battle to reconcile the dark half of his un-individuated personality, which Jung suggested could be reconciled with the ego through avoiding the deadly boredom that can affect modern daily life. Jack Sullivan links this ennui to the appearance of the ghosts in James’s stories, arguing that they arise from a vacuum in the protagonists’ life:

There is thus an implicit “Waste Land” ambiance to these stories. The characters are antiquaries, not merely because the past enthralls them, but because the present is a near vacuum. They surround themselves with rarefied paraphernalia from the past—engravings, rare books, altars, tombs, coins, and even such things as doll’s houses and ancient whistles—seemingly because they cannot connect with anything in the present. The endless process of collecting and arranging gives the characters an illusory sense of order and stability, illusory because it is precisely this process which evokes the demon or the vampire.<sup>119</sup>

As with Jekyll in Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*, Uncle Abney becomes a child murderer, usually noting the details of his murders in his diary:

To the testing of the truth of this receipt I have devoted the greater part of the last twenty years, selecting as the *corpora vilia* of my experiment such persons as could conveniently be removed without occasioning a sensible gap in society. The first step I affected by the removal of one Phoebe Stanley, a girl of gypsy extraction, on March 24, 1792. The second, by the removal of a wandering Italian lad, named Giovanni Paoli, on the night of March 23, 1805. The final victim – to employ a word repugnant in the highest degree to my feelings – must be my cousin, Stephen Elliott.<sup>120</sup>

Uncle Abney’s personality has therefore now become so un-individuated that he cannot even see these children as “victims” of his actions; they are nothing more than experiments in his quest for immortality. As a result of living an isolated, anti-

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<sup>119</sup> Jack Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), p.75. Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, p.11.

<sup>120</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.18.

social life for so many years, the dark projection of the Jungian Shadow has taken him over altogether.

The shadow projection links in with the idea of the Nyktomorphic monster identified by Christopher Booker, and as I identified in my introductory chapter, reflects many of the mythic monsters of the older Greek and Roman myths, such as the Minotaur or Cyclops. Joseph Campbell's work on the hero and archetypal criticism was one of the foundational works in the Jungian school. Campbell first identified that certain narratives had been told, with minor adjustments, over many different years and in many different cultures. In *The Power of Myth* he explores the use of the hero myth in two novels, the first of which is Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kroger*, where the son of the protagonist Tonio (Senior) has to escape his hometown and his father's shadow to go and find himself as an artist elsewhere.<sup>121</sup> Campbell's second example is James Joyce's *Ulysses*, where, in a sub-plot, Stephen Dedalus's conflict with his father is explored.<sup>122</sup> Similar psychological struggles can be found in many of James's characters as they struggle to reconcile their fractured divided selves, as I will outline in my close readings of the stories below. The characters' fractured selves, according to a Jungian reading, allow for the Jungian psychological projection of the darker half, ghost or monster.

To demonstrate the inclusion of these psychological conflicts in James's characterisation, I have chosen specifically to focus on a selection of stories in the Jamesian canon, which, when a close reading is undertaken, demonstrate the fractured personalities of the characters. The selection includes, "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook", whose protagonist spends most of the time cataloguing artefacts, oblivious to the monster that is beginning to hunt him in an old church in the

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<sup>121</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), p.4. Thomas Mann, *Tonio Kroger* (London: Penguin, 1955).

<sup>122</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Everyman 1999).

Pyrenees; “Lost Hearts”, whose protagonist sees the murder of children as a perfectly reasonable act; and “The Ash Tree”, where successive characters literally pay for an unassimilated anima. I also explore “Count Magnus”, in which the protagonist Wraxall has to go to a far-off mythical land to encounter the monster. Unfortunately, in this story there is a plot reversal as the monster kills the hero. James is playing against the usual archetypal plot of the hero in this story and in his story “Two Doctors”, which is a reworking of the Biblical story of Cain and Abel. In “Oh, Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad”, the protagonist Parkins literally meets his shadow projection in the intimate space of his bedroom; and “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas” where the hero is rescued from his Shadow by the tutelary or old man archetype personified in the figure of his valet, Mr Brown.

What is striking is that a Jungian reading demonstrates the fractured personality arising out of lives devoted to the pursuit of hobbies or knowledge. Other critics have noted this fact: Clive Bloom and Jack Sullivan (as above) found that James’s protagonists suffered from not just lives defined by ‘a deadly boredom’, but from a deadly compulsion to pursue these unhealthy obsessions, as I outline in Chapter 6, “The Bridge from the Victorian to the Modern-The Evolution of James’s Fiction”,

which added to the situations that summoned the range of deadly non-human projections to ensure the hapless protagonist’s demise.<sup>123</sup> However, it is a Jungian reading that gives the subsequent projection a name, the archetypal shadow or the other side of the character that arises to punish the man for his selfish intense interest in a subject that makes the rest of his life so utterly void.

When we read James’s stories through Jung’s theory of individuation, these mythical figures are immediately apparent. We recognise Mr Brown in “The Treasure

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<sup>123</sup> Clive Bloom (ed.), *Creepers British Horror and Fantasy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), p.69. Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares*, p.75.

of Abbot Thomas” as a tutelary figure or the archetype of the wise old man, who is a guiding figure, or even a rescuer of the main character, Mr Somerton, especially when the ghost of the story entices him down a well.<sup>124</sup> Other stories feature the archetype of the hero who has to go to a far-off country to face the monster, like Mr Wraxall in “Count Magnus”. The archetypes in the human unconscious represent the actual building-blocks or representations of primal fears and hopes. Thus, a shadow in a dream could be the bogeyman that we all instinctively fear, or the result of an un-individuated personality. Dreaming of the mother could embody an individual’s hope for home and acceptance for who he really is, as he was once accepted by his mother, or the result of one man’s successful amalgamation with his anima.<sup>125</sup>

Champions of Jung such as Joseph Campbell became enthusiastic proponents of Jungian criticism. Campbell used it to great success in books including *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, *Occidental Mythology*, *Oriental Mythology* and many more dealing with the theme of mythic criticism.<sup>126</sup> However, although Campbell used Jungian literary theory to illustrate the universal stories found across cultures in *Hero with a Thousand Faces* and *The Power of Myth*, he started as a Freudian critic: the first part of *Hero with a Thousand Faces* was based on work on Freud’s Oedipus myth, the father and son conflict and dream symbolism. It was later in his work on *The Power of Myth* that his use of Jungian archetypal theory found the mono-mythic pattern of the universal story told across aeons and cultures, along with mythic representations of such Jungian archetypes as the wise old man, the trickster, and the hero.

This emphasis on the archetypal pattern of the hero found its fullest

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<sup>124</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.93.

<sup>125</sup> C.G. Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections* (New York, NY: Random House, 1961), p.214.

<sup>126</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Princeton, New Jersey, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), p.53. Joseph Campbell, *Occidental Mythology The Masks Of God* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 1964). Joseph Campbell, *Primitive Mythology The Masks Of God* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 1987).

expression in 1944, when Campbell started work on Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, which he extended in 1949 with *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.<sup>127</sup> In James's ghost stories, the emphasis is on the deeds of the hero and the repetition of his story over the centuries. Campbell sets out down this regularly trodden path:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the Hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return, which might be named the nuclear unit of the mono-myth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder...<sup>128</sup>

He relates the form of the story to a kind of a universal mono-myth where the same story pattern can be found repeated through many eras and cultures.

Most remarkable, are the revelations that have emerged from the mental clinic. The bold and truly epoch making writings of the psychoanalysts are indispensable to the student of mythology; for whatever may be thought of the detailed and sometimes contradictory interpretations of specific cases and problems, Freud, Jung, and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic, the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive into modern times. In the absence of an effective general mythology, each of us has his private, unrecognised rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon of dream. The latest incarnation of Oedipus, the continued romance of *Beauty and the Beast*, stand this afternoon on the corner of forty-second street and Fifth Avenue waiting for the light to change.<sup>129</sup>

Campbell is using Jung's idea that the mass consciousness of mankind is assimilated into the individual through the mythic archetypes in 'our own private mythology', a form of Jungian Individuation which, when applied to James's stories, uncovers a pattern.

When James' protagonist is allowed to survive, he is usually a better or more enlightened human afterwards. In "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad", for instance, James makes a point of stating at the end, 'the Professor's views on certain points are less clear cut than they used to be'.<sup>130</sup> James's character at the

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<sup>127</sup>Campbell, *The Hero*, p. 40.

<sup>128</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, p.30.

<sup>129</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, p.45.

<sup>130</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.81.

beginning of this story demonstrated an intransigent, dogmatic personality, who dismissed the idea of otherworldly beings and ghosts out of hand. His encounter with the 'faceless fiend' challenged this worldview, and at the end, he has the grace to be more accepting of other views.<sup>131</sup> This story is one of James's most loved stories and perhaps this character's growth is part of the reason.

By extension, then, with an application of Jungian theory to James's ghost stories there are interesting parallels to be uncovered, which show the protagonists growing and learning after trials have been faced, as the therapeutic process ensures that each individual confronts and individuates their conscious and unconscious. The parallels are found in the protagonists' encounter with the supernatural agent or ghost in each of the tales. In the stories illustrated below, this confrontation with the supernatural ensures a growing process in the protagonist, or in the case of "The Ash-tree", the healing of a community, after the agent of evil Mrs Mothersole has been destroyed.

Jung postulated that psychic or psychological progress is halted in man when he ignores the larger part of the macro-consciousness of humankind by ignoring religion. In a significant parallel in James's stories, there is a similar motif in that the religious or larger purpose to life is ignored at the peril of the character: the supernatural agent or ghost is there to remind the protagonist that there is more to life than this earthly existence. Each story demonstrates this flight from the supernatural agent, beginning with a growing fear of attack, and then showing the terror being overcome by the protagonist either being rescued, being helped to confront his fears, or by confronting the terror directly, therefore accommodating the fear felt and ensuring that a process of individuation is undergone. Indeed, in each of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p.81.

the stories, the protagonist is punished after unleashing forces that are out of his control. Where a religious artefact is purloined, as in “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”, the protagonist is punished. As Tacey noted, in a new secular age where the church had been discredited by Darwin, the acquisition of religious artefacts was for serious study, not for the merely superstitious glorification of God.<sup>132</sup>

The characters in James’s stories often disturb the avenging forces of the monsters and spirits just when they have discovered the treasure and satiated their own inner desires to acquire it. The cursed treasure motif was one that found favour with many Victorians (perhaps tired of the materialism of their age). Authors like Robert Louis Stevenson exorcised their anxieties by writing stories about these ideas, as indeed James did to great effect in two of his stories, as Connors notes:

In both “Canon Alberic’s Scrap-book”, and “The Haunted Dolls’ House” The protagonist is manipulated into accepting the cursed object by others who take advantage of their avarice...As in Robert Louis Stevenson’s “The Bottle Imp”, the mere possession of the guilty artefact condemns the inheritor...<sup>133</sup>

According to Jung’s theories, in the age of Victorian materialism, James’s protagonists were spiritually malnourished because of their inability to reconcile their micro-consciousness or psychic inner reality with the macro-consciousness of the rest of humankind through individuation or religion.

In the selection of stories I have focused on for this chapter, two are concerned with a cursed object or ‘tomb raider’ motif. These have characters like Somerton in “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas” who tries to steal the treasure and is thwarted by its guardian, and Parkins in “Oh, Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad”, who is similarly hounded by the whistle’s guardian after picking it up on the beach. James has both men narrowly escape physical punishment for their covetous

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<sup>132</sup> David Tacey, *How to read Jung* (London: Granta Publications, 2006), p.28.

<sup>133</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.9 and 267. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Island Nights’ Entertainments* (London: Forgotten Books, 2017).

actions, a motif he had also utilised in “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook” and with the child protagonist in “Lost Hearts”. The formula is repeated, and becomes a Jamesian motif, reworked frequently. The character is punished by the faceless forms for their theft, and they only escape with their lives because they hand the treasure back.

In a Jungian reading, these repeated acts only reach a cathartic end after the individuation process is accomplished by the characters. The deviation from this pattern is “The Ash Tree” and the characters of Sir Matthew and Sir Richard Fell who meet their deaths because they do not seek to reach their own catharsis by accommodating the opposing force of Mrs Mothersole. Mrs Mothersole may also be seen in opposition to the Fells, as she is the personification of another Jungian motif (the animus). Jung hypothesised that each person was made up of the union of the two opposites, the feminine and the masculine Gender and Sexuality – as I argue in chapter three, the Cloistered World of M. R. James. In each man there were the female and male aspects, and each woman had her male side and corresponding female side, called the anima and animus:

There are both male and female elements in all of us, it was said that “every man carries a woman within himself”. It is this female element in every male that I have called the “anima.”<sup>134</sup>

For Jung, it was vitally important that each person work on making sure that both sides were acknowledged. Problems occur, according to Jung, when people are unable to reconcile the two,:

Unfortunately, whenever one of these personifications of the unconscious takes possession of our mind, it seems as if we ourselves are having such thoughts and feelings. The ego identifies with them to the point where it is able to detach them and see them for what they really are.<sup>135</sup>

Or, as Samuels explains,

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<sup>134</sup> C.G. Jung, *Man and his Symbols* (London: Picador, 1978), p.17.

<sup>135</sup> Jung, p.203.

Possession by either anima or animus transforms the personality in such a way as to give prominence to those traits which are seen as psychologically characteristic of the opposite sex. Either way a person loses individuality, first of all and then charm and values...<sup>136</sup>

Samuels' point can be positioned as a problematic dualism for the characters in 'The Ash-tree', and in many of James's tales there are problems when characters exhibit too much of their female side, like Parkins, in "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad". Conversely, the characters in "The Ash Tree" who try to suppress their feminine side pay heavily for their actions.

Jungian theory in itself has been seen as a feminine process, as Kermode remarks: 'Jungian analytical Psychology is far more rooted in the maternal and concerned with images of woman as devourer and destroyer as well as protector'.<sup>137</sup> This is illustrated clearly in "The Ash Tree." One woman, actually a harmless old lady, is seen as the all-powerful mother destroyer by one man whose projection of his fear of mother figures produces this disordered reading of the woman.

There are certainly many depictions of the feminine aspect in James's stories. In "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad", the character Parkins is pursued by a mysterious sheeted presence, which, according to Jung's theories, is a product of Parkin's unconscious projection of his unassimilated fears. The situation is made all the more terrifying for Parkins when his projection appears to him in his bedroom, in the unmade bed next to his own. However, James views Parkin's terrified response to the projection as "unmanly", and seems to wish that his character would display a stiff upper lip:<sup>138</sup>

With formidable quickness it moved into the middle of the room, and, as it groped and waved, one corner of its draperies swept across Parkin's face. He could not— though he knew how perilous a sound was— he could not keep

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<sup>136</sup> Andrew Samuels, Bani Shorter and Fred Plaut, eds, *A Critical Dictionary Of Jungian Analysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1986), p.24.

<sup>137</sup> Frank Kermode, ed, *Jung* (London: Fontana Press, 1973), p.70.

<sup>138</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.72.

back a cry of disgust, and this gave the searcher an instant clue. It leapt towards him upon the instant, and the next moment he was half-way through the window backwards, uttering cry upon cry at the utmost pitch of his voice, and the linen face was thrust close into his own...<sup>139</sup>

The choice of language in this passage is important as it demonstrates the attitude that James holds towards his character and the aggressor. Parkins is described as too frightened by the spirit's aggression to be able to conceal his fear, and is described by James as 'uttering cry after cry', suggesting an infantilised response.<sup>140</sup> James is showing here that his character is distinctly unmanly, associated with a baby. The spirit, however, is associated with the act of leaping towards Parkins. Leaping is a muscular "manly" act that we associate with strength, and the spirit is certainly the one with the advantage here.

Although Parkins flees from the ghost, he is at last confronted by it in his bedroom, when it manifests in the bed next to him, and tries to embrace him in the bed sheets. The presence is confronting Parkins; if Parkins could find the courage to face his projection, then he might be able to reach catharsis and individuation. However, even though Parkins cannot find this courage, catharsis is achieved after all, as this is when the actual hero, the hyper-masculine colonel of the story, makes his rescue. The Colonel, who has been staying in the same lodging house, bursts in and rescues Parkins. The ghost might be seen as a templar, indicated by the start of the story when Parkins's colleague exclaims to Parkins,

Oh, Parkins, said his neighbour on the other side, if you are going to Burstow, I wish you would look at the site of the Templar's preceptor, and let me know if you think it would be any good to have a dig there in the summer.<sup>141</sup>

As the Templar's were a military sect or an order of soldiers founded in 1189 by Hugh De Payens, it would not be too much of a leap to link the temple with the ghost

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<sup>139</sup>James, p.80.

<sup>140</sup>James, p.80.

<sup>141</sup> James, p.65.

who guarded the ruins of the Templar preceptor. Perhaps it is the presence of a living military man that makes it realise it has met its match.<sup>142</sup>

Parkins, however, needed rescue; he could be seen as the princess of the tale. James is very disparaging of Parkins at the very beginning of his story,

In repeating the above dialogue I have tried to give the impression which it made on me that Parkins was something of an old woman— rather hen like, perhaps in his little ways;...<sup>143</sup>

James, in the guise of his narrator, is specifically labelling his character woman-like in order to reinforce the idea of Parkins as being in need of rescue by a strong masculine character.

However, as Samuels observes, 'images evoke the aim of the instincts', and in Jungian terms the ghost indicates that Parkins was lonely in his little cloistered world, clinging to what he knew.<sup>144</sup> After the trip into the outside world and a confrontation where he had to deal with his repressed personality in the shape of the ghost, he was rescued by a much-needed friend. The views on the supernatural that Parkins clung to (that ghosts did not exist), were also challenged, and he returned to his confined world at college a wiser man, which is usually the aim of a mythic or fairy story.

Parkins has lost his dogmatic viewpoint, but gained a more open view and two new friends. However, as Jung asserted on the myth of the hero, it is not the hero's efforts that are the focus of the story, but the change in his character:

The myth of the hero is the most common and the best known myth in the world...this pattern has psychological meaning both for the individual, who is endeavouring to discover and assert his personality...but another important characteristic of the hero myth provides a clue. In many of these stories the early weakness of the hero is balanced by the appearance of strong "tutelary

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<sup>142</sup> Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie, ed, *The Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia of History, Rites, Symbolism and Biography* (Cambridge Library Collection – Spiritualism and Esoteric Knowledge) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.44.

<sup>143</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.67.

<sup>144</sup>Samuels et al. (eds), *A Critical Dictionary Of Jungian Analysis*, p.21.

figures”, i.e. figures that come to his rescue. Their special role suggests that the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individuals’ ego-consciousness, his awareness of his own strength and weakness, in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him.<sup>145</sup>

Perhaps in the light of Parkins trying to face the fears personified by the figure of the ghost, (albeit with the tutelary figure of the colonel there to give him much-needed courage), this balance has been struck. According to Jung, because Parkins has managed to reach individuation as he has overcome the attack by the projection, and balanced out the effects in his ego, he may be judged as a hero after all. This also fulfils the idea of the quest myth, in which the hero undergoes a search for treasure, which in Jungian terms is a metaphor for reconciling the lost parts of his personality.

One story by James that has all the mythic or fairy-tale qualities discussed is “Lost Hearts”, written originally as a ‘filler’ at his publisher’s request. The story was not one of his favourites.<sup>146</sup> However, it is of interest here because the story has the structure of a fairy-tale. The orphan boy Stephen is rescued from what would have been a life of penury by a fairy godfather, his Uncle Abney. Except all is not as it would seem: from the start the narrator mentions that the inclusion of a small boy into Mr Abney’s rather austere household is something of a mystery to his friends. Together with references to Mr Abney’s interest in pagan rites, the seeds of anxiety are sown by James to make the reader question the situation. Stephen is also curious, asking Mrs Bunch some very awkward questions about the hall and Mr Abney.

Certainly there were plenty of things about the Hall and the Hall gardens which Stephen, who was of an adventurous and inquiring turn, was anxious to have explained to him. “Who built the temple at the end of the laurel walk?

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<sup>145</sup>Jung, *Man and his Symbols*, p.101.

<sup>146</sup> M. R. James, *A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft: British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2000), p.25.

Who was the old man whose picture hung on the staircase, sitting with a skull under his hand?" These and many similar points were cleared up by the resources of Mrs Bunch's powerful intellect. There were others, however, of which the explanations furnished were less satisfactory".<sup>147</sup>

The dreams that plague Stephen as soon as he is ensconced at his uncle's function as a warning. At this juncture, James does not say whether this warning is a product of Stephen's consciousness, or whether it is a warning sent by the spirits of the children, Phoebe and Giovanni previously adopted by Uncle Abney, who each vanished under unexplained circumstances.

Jung's theories on dreams are the cornerstone of many of his psychoanalytic practices:

Jung believed that dreams have a prospective aspect, an unconscious anticipation of future conscious achievement. Nevertheless, he recommended that the dream be taken as a preliminary sketch map or a plan roughed out in advance rather than a set of directions...<sup>148</sup>

Stephen has quite a few dreamlike sequences that give the story a sinister fairy-tale quality, begging the question of whether he might be imagining the strange things he witnesses.

Jung took a great interest in the existence of what he termed "spirits", calling them the "non material aspect of man", and linking them with "purpose", a kind of intuitive force that connects and influences events and endeavours.<sup>149</sup> Whilst not actually advocating the existence of ghosts, Jung was interested in how people reacted to them as personifications of a fractured personality, or as indicators that all is not right with an individual psyche. Here Stephen's reaction is to worry whether his cousin has seen them and to run down to his study, where he finds him dead.

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<sup>147</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.13.

<sup>148</sup> Kermode, Jung, p.25.

<sup>149</sup>Jaffe Aniela, *An Archetypal Approach to Death Dreams and Ghosts: Foreword by C.G.Jung*, (Solothurn: DaimonVerlang, 1999). p.141.

Mr Abney was found in his chair, his head thrown back, his face stamped with an expression of rage, fright and mortal pain. In his left side was a terrible lacerated wound exposing the heart...<sup>150</sup>

It seems that “nice” Mr. Abney has been removing the hearts of children and eating them in pagan rites, which he thought, would give him godlike powers of immortality. He wrote in his diary the results of these rites.

To the testing of the truth of this receipt I have devoted the greater part of the last twenty years, selecting as the *corpora vilia* of my experiment such persons as could be removed without occasioning a sensible gap in society...Phoebe Stanley...Giovanni Paoli...my cousin Stephen Elliott.<sup>151</sup>

Stephen was to be his last victim. Mr Abney was so intent on becoming god-like by cannibalising his child victims’ hearts, that in Jungian terms, he can be said to have undergone a split personality. Jung’s theories of the split in personality came from his own experiences of poverty and embarrassment at a family secret of illegitimacy, a rumour that one of his ancestors had been an illegitimate son of Goethe.<sup>152</sup>

Like anyone who is capable of some introspection, I had early taken it for granted that the split in my personality was my own purely personal affair and responsibility. Faust, to be sure, had made the problem somewhat easier for me by confessing, “Two souls, alas, are housed within my breast”; but he had thrown no light on the cause of this dichotomy...<sup>153</sup>

Jung’s theory of the split or schism in the personality is the result of a personal trauma that results in the personality-halving, one half to deal with the traumatic event, another to withdraw into the shell of the person, to be shielded from the events unfolding. Jung’s own personal experience of this split was of ‘A schoolboy who could not grasp his algebra and was far from sure of himself; the other was important, a high authority, a man not to be trifled with’. This other side of his personality, although he recognised it as perhaps manufactured from his ‘ancestral

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<sup>150</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.19.

<sup>151</sup>Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections*, p.52.

<sup>152</sup> Jung, p.52.

<sup>153</sup> Jung, p.261.

memory' or his family's collective experience, protected his fragile childish personality.<sup>154</sup>

However, Jung recognised that this phenomenon, when disguised from the person who has undergone the split, can result in the divided self, and can result in the kind of good/evil dichotomy that creates a personality like James's Mr Abney. There is on the one hand 'nice' Mr. Abney who opens his home up to lost children and on the other the evil monster that eats their hearts. As Jung asserted,

Complexes are comparable to demons which fitfully harass our thoughts and actions; hence in antiquity and the Middle Ages acute neurotic disturbances were conceived as possession. Thus, when the individual consistently takes his stand on one side, the unconscious ranges on the other side and rebels<sup>155</sup>

Or

We have many selves Jung said that complexes behave like independent beings...he also argued that there is no difference in principle between a fragmentary personality and a complex splinter psyche...<sup>156</sup>

The cannibalisation of children is also found in fairy-tales like Hansel and Gretel, where children have to find a way to escape from the evil adult who wishes to kill and eat them (the witch, in the case of Hansel and Gretel). As Bettelheim asserts, 'As the story tells, unrestrained giving into gluttony threatens destruction'; then 'The adult (witch) is a personification of the destructive aspects of orality and is bent on eating up the children.'<sup>157</sup> Bettelheim is using Jungian mythic analysis of the story of Hansel and Gretel, and applied to this story the parallels are clear. The children in the fairy-tale kill the witch, as do the ghost children here. Rather than calling the police, who after all are also adults, the children have taken matters into their own hands, and slaughtered Mr Abney as they were slaughtered by him. Bettelheim justifies this act

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<sup>154</sup> Jung, p.52.

<sup>155</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types: The Collected works Of C G Jung, Vol 6* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.109.

<sup>156</sup> Jung, p.141.

<sup>157</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1973), p.161.

as he applies Jung's theories that children are unformed personalities, who view this as justified.

Turning the tables on the witch is justified on another level: children who have little experience and are still learning self control are not to be measured by the same yard stick as older people, who are supposed to be able to restrain their instinctual desires better. Thus the punishment of the witch is as justified as the children's rescue...<sup>158</sup>

Stephen survives because of the ghost children's murder of Mr. Abney. The parallels with Hansel and Gretel and the resulting rescue of the children in both stories make interesting reading when viewed in the light of a Jungian analysis. The fairy-tale aspect of the figure of the lost child is personified in Stephen, who is rescued by Giovanni and Phoebe, themselves victims of a ritualistic cannibal slaying. The story takes place in a dreamscape setting, which may also be the result of Stephen's personality developing and integrating frightening aspects of an adult society as part of reaching the Jungian stage of individuation.

On the night of which I am speaking, Stephen Elliott found himself, as he thought, looking through the glazed door. The moon was shining through the window, and he was gazing at a figure which lay in the bath...A figure inexpressibly thin and pathetic, of a dusty leaden colour, enveloped in a shroud-like garment...the hands pressed tightly over the heart...The terror of the sight forced Stephen backwards and he awoke to the fact that he was indeed standing on the cold boarded floor of the passage in the full light of the moon...<sup>159</sup>

These dream passages illustrate Stephen's journey from first arriving at the hall, through all of his encounters with Phoebe and Giovanni, until the night when he finds his uncle dead. This is the only time in the story when he is fully awake, although safe, as the villain has been slain.

Another of James' stories, "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas", reads like a fairy-tale from the start. Again, its main character is living in a world of self-deception. Mr Somerton has to undergo various trials to retrieve the treasure of the title. It has

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<sup>158</sup>Bettelheim, p.43.

<sup>159</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.14.

Jungian elements of the Archetypal Hero, the Monster or guardian of the treasure, the tutelary father figure, or rescuer, and the good deed done in the returning of the treasure, at the end of the story. We find the hero of the story, Mr Somerton, at the start wanting to find the treasure of Abbott Thomas, which he had read of in an old book that he was translating, 'as he finished copying the lines from that rather rare and exceedingly diffuse book, the *sertumsteinfeldensenorberrtinum*'.<sup>160</sup> We know from this assertion that Mr Somerton falls into the hero mould, as he has a talent (he is learned and can translate Latin), and that he is searching for the treasure, i.e. he has taken up a quest for the hidden. He is also not afraid to travel in search of a mystery. Accordingly, after the trials of translating old texts, and deciphering hidden messages hidden in stained glass drawings, Mr Somerton sets off for Germany to find the treasure.

And, as Mr Somerton was a man of leisure, he set out on a pilgrimage to the private chapel with very little delay. His conjecture was confirmed to the full. Not only did the style and technique of the glass suit perfectly with the date and place required, but in another window of the chapel he found some glass, known to have been brought along with the figures, which contained the arms of Abbot Thomas von Eschenhausen.<sup>161</sup>

James pauses in his tale here, to let the reader know that while on his quest, Mr Somerton has been set upon by misfortune. He tried to get the treasure, but was attacked by its guardian. In fright, he has taken to his bed. We are told this by Mr Somerton's valet William Brown's letter to the Rector of Parsbury, Mr Gregory. Brown and Gregory then assume the position of tutelary figures or wise old man archetypes in this story. As Booker explains, this is another Jungian archetypal figure, which is reproduced across many differing cultures and in different stories to guide and often save the hero character,

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<sup>160</sup> James, p.82.

<sup>161</sup> James, p.84.

In modern storytelling there is no more memorable an example of this archetypal figure than the all seeing wizard Gandalf, who guides Frodo in *Lord of the rings*.<sup>162</sup>

Gregory fulfils this role by travelling to Germany, where he finds the hero in his bed, afraid to put the treasure back. The tutelary figure overcomes the hero's weakness returning the treasure himself: 'Brown and I managed easily enough to get the slab into place, and he fixed it very firmly with the irons and wedges you had desired him to get'.<sup>163</sup> In keeping with the fairy-tale theme, the villain/monster is described thus,

A horrid, grotesque shape – perhaps more like a toad than anything else and there was a label by it inscribed with the two words, "Depositum custody...keep that which is committed to thee..."<sup>164</sup>

However, with the appearance of the hero and the return of the treasure to its hiding place, all is well. The archetypes of this story have been used in Jungian terms to convey a message. To solve the riddle of the unconscious, the hero must travel to a far-off land and confront a monster, then overcome it with help from another tutelary character. It is a metaphor for a confrontation with the unconscious. A person troubled by their unconscious has to look inward, to the far-off land of the unconscious.

Perseus had to cut off the head of the gorgon Medusa, whose horrifying visage and snaky locks turned all who gazed upon them to stone. He later had to overcome the dragon that guarded Andromeda. Theseus represented the young patriarchal spirit of Athens who had to brave the terrors of the Cretan labyrinth with its monstrous inmate, the Minotaur, which perhaps symbolised the unhealthy decadence of matriarchal Crete...<sup>165</sup>

Therefore, in Jungian theory, dreams and landscapes represent the inner unconscious of the personality, and hero figures are mythic symbolic representations of the persona in differing stages of life, as young or old man, daughter, wife, mother, etc. This follows on from the mythological pattern of the quest myth, that this myth is

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<sup>162</sup>Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots*, p.78.

<sup>163</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.97.

<sup>164</sup>James, p.97.

<sup>165</sup>Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections*, p.117.

ingrained in Jungian terms into the collective unconsciousness of humankind expressed in such universal tales as the Grail Legends, or as above the Greco-Roman Tradition of *The Odyssey* and the biblical *Exodus*. The hero has to go out into the world to find treasure and answers to questions, which resonate with uniting fractured elements of his personality. As McNeely observes, this search can be located in

The Archetypal context in which can occur the leap of trust that allows a relatively undifferentiated psyche, to anticipate and await gratification with some degree of self-reflection. This theme can be found in countless fairytales in the form of the hero's or heroines' convoluted journey toward patience and self-containment...<sup>166</sup>

This critical point raised by McNeely that of the hero's journey toward self-containment is precisely that of the Jamesian narrative; the stories all place the hero in this convoluted position of attempting to acquire treasure or solve a problem. This process is precisely what invites the wraith in the first place. Then the mythic figures or the hero now have to understand what the trouble is, personified in the monster. Finally, the hero needs the tutelary figure of the analyst to help them understand the problem, to guide them over their fear of confrontation, and to help them out of the problem, i.e. to reconcile the fractured part of the ego.

Jung devoted most of his seminal last work of his life to the explanation of how society has always used mythic stories and fairy-tales to explain the yearning of the unconscious to repair itself. These archetypes and symbols could also be found (according to Jung) in every part of human culture and in every holy book, from the Bible with its stories of the serpent, or Jesus overcoming forty days of temptation by Satan, to the tales of Kwan Yin the Japanese goddess rescuing maidens in the

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<sup>166</sup> John Beebe, Deldon McNeely and Gordon McNeely, 'The Case of Joan, archetypal, and developmental approaches', in Polly Young Eisendrath and Terence Dawson (eds), *The Cambridge Companion To Jung* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997), p.207.

gardens made barren in Japanese tales.<sup>167</sup> For Jung the symbols all personify the attempts of man to come to terms with being born, making sense of his world, and passing the lessons learned to the next generation. In order to assimilate these tales, they are put into universal terms, stories, symbols and myth. However, excitement over symbols is not exactly what sends Mr Somerton's valet running in terror up the steps, with Mr Somerton dangling in the embrace of the guardian of the well.

Somerton describes the experience as 'repellent':

My dear Gregory, I am telling you the exact truth...I was conscious of a most repellent smell of mould, and of a cold kind of face pressed against my own, and moving slowly over it, and of several – I don't know how many – legs or arms or tentacles or something clinging to my body. I screamed out, Brown says, like a beast, and fell away backward...<sup>168</sup>

The shock of being touched in this intimate way by this unidentifiable monster is terror itself to Somerton. As I identify earlier in this study, it is the absolute abjection identified by Kristeva as the point when someone has reached their limit of fear and the point of psychosis.<sup>169</sup> The dark, small space that Somerton is dangling in and the presence in the dark and cold of an unidentifiable "other" pressed to his face, is enough to induce this breakdown in James's character; again, it would seem that the character is suffering from a rejection of intimacy from their buttoned-up ordered world.

Somerton is similar to many of James's characters in that there is no indication that this character has any kind of intimate relationship outside his professional life, apart from with his valet. Using Jungian theory opens up the possibility of reading these stories as projections of James' own horror of intimacy. As I will illustrate in my chapter on sexuality, James had many friendships, but they

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<sup>167</sup>Beebe et al., p.61.

<sup>168</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.95.

<sup>169</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia: New York, 1982).

were very casual and the only time we really have any indication of any actual intimacy, it is manufactured in the guise of childish pranks and practical jokes.

Horseplay— always a feature of Monty's [sic] closest friendships— was not infrequent: I then called on St Clair...He eventually came to my rooms and I speedily originated a rag by hanging his hat on the coal scuttle. Marshall and Thomas thought my bookcases were falling and came to see if they could render any assistance. We were at that moment somewhat mixed on the hearthrug...<sup>170</sup>

This account from Cox's biography of James was taken from the diary of James's friend St Clair Donaldson's in 1882. In both biographies of James, there are friendships and close companionships with both men and women, but there is always an underlying distancing of himself when it came to intimacy.<sup>171</sup>

James was a man whose knowledge was perhaps only equalled by his disinclination to talk openly about himself. He seemed constitutionally opposed to intimate self revelation —certainly in public, but also to a large degree in private. His published recollections, *Eton and King's*, may seem curiously impersonal for this reason, though it apparently shows how he wished to appear to posterity.<sup>172</sup>

When there is an indication of a friendship deepening, it is couched in this juvenile practical wrestling, typical of childlike behaviour at the stage when adolescents are beginning to discover how to behave in intimate relationships. Marie Louise Von France used the term PuerAeternus, or the archetypal term "Eternal Boy", to describe this complex. Hers was the first work devoted to understanding and placing the term into a psychological grounding, and used Jungian terms to illustrate the complex, which is essentially a defensive avoidance of domesticity in favour of a grandiose personality, which takes refuge in a creative pursuit.<sup>173</sup>

In his work on men and masculinity such as *Iron John* and *Sleepers Joining Hands*, Robert Bly further grounded this term in a comparison with the Greek

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<sup>170</sup> Michael Cox, *M.R. James An Informal Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.55.

<sup>171</sup> Richard William Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James* (London: Scolar press, 1980), p. 62.

<sup>172</sup> Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.ix.

<sup>173</sup> Marie-Louise Von France, *The Problem of the PuerAeternus: Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian Analysts* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2000).

pantheon, likening the spirit of the god Dionysius to a representational archetype of the PuerAeternus, who personified the flight from respectability and descent into drunken debauchery.<sup>174</sup> Again, as identified in my earlier chapter, whilst not claiming that James's psyche fits the classic PuerAeternus archetype, there are enough parallels to link in with my identification of James as almost childlike in his demeanour, or boyish in his attitude to intimate behaviour.

Another instance of a childish projection is that of the night visitor, or the childish fear of the Monster, usually under the bed, or in the closet. This fear is particularly strongly referenced in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas" and previously in "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad" and "Lost Hearts", especially the person who came to rescue Mr Somerton. Mr Gregory had the experience of one knocking at his hotel room door, during the night:

If Mr Gregory woke once or twice in the small hours and fancied he heard a fumbling about the lower part of his locked door, it was, perhaps, no more than what a quiet man, suddenly plunged into a strange bed and the heart of a mystery, might reasonably expect. Certainly he thought to the end of his days, that he had heard such a sound two or three times between midnight and dawn.<sup>175</sup>

Could this be a fiend trying to be intimate with these characters? As I identify in my chapter on gender and sexuality, Pincombe found in his research into James and his history that intimacy in James's world was problematic, and usually replaced with other activities, such as midnight readings of James's stories, which can now arguably be seen as metaphors for repressed feelings. In his introduction to this work which he completed just weeks before his death in June 1961, Jung explained this procedure:

The human mind has its own history and the psyche retains many traces left from previous stages of its development. More than this the contents of the

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<sup>174</sup> Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (London: Rider, 2001), p.30.

<sup>175</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p. 87.

unconscious exert a formative influence on the psyche. Consciously we may ignore them, but unconsciously we respond to them, and to the symbolic forms—including, myths, symbols, and dreams- in which they express themselves...<sup>176</sup>

In these stories, we have common symbolic heroes and villains, but they differ in that one is 'blacker than black', almost a representation of Jung's shadow, the other 'whiter than white'. The question is will they balance each other, to achieve the integration of the ego with the shadow that Jung's work on the unconscious was trying to bring about? As Storr said in his book on Jungian analysis,

This predilection for the solitary accounts for the fact that Jungian Psychology is principally concerned, not with interpersonal relationships, but with processes of growth and development of personality seen as taking place within the charmed circle of the individual psyche...Jung's notion is of an end point of integration or balance within the individual mind itself...<sup>177</sup>

This point can be located precisely in the structure of the Jamesian story. These particular stories have these fairy-tale elements when read in the Jungian vein, precisely because the hero, like Mr Somerton, was trying to escape the adult world of sexuality, which when read in a Jungian interpretation, can be found in the symbolism of the tale. Jung disagreed with Freud over the particulars of identifying sexual dysfunction in patients; particularly with the method of 'free association' that Freud first employed to identify individuals' problems in this area.

Perhaps I have now said enough to show how I came to disagree with "free" association as Freud first employed it...I had a more far reaching purpose in mind than the discovery of complexes...But to know and understand the psychic life processes of an individual's whole personality, it is important to realise that his dreams and their symbolic images have a much more important role to play...<sup>178</sup>

Applying this philosophy as a whole, the story of "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas" reads very like the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, where the hero Theseus had

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<sup>176</sup>Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections*, p.98.

<sup>177</sup>Anthony Storr, *Jung* (London: Routledge, 1973), p.10.

<sup>178</sup>Storr, *Jung*, p.12.

first to slay the gorgon Medusa, whose snaky locks of entanglement and death remind one of the tentacled guardian of the well that descended onto the unfortunate Somerton's chest. This is female symbolism, the snaky tentacles of the guardian reminding one forcibly of the female genitalia.

It hung for an instant on the edge of the hole, then slipped forward on to my chest, and *put its arms round my neck*...I was conscious of...several - I don't know how many-legs or arms or tentacles or something clinging to my body...<sup>179</sup>

The well is the dark descent into the female mysteries of the Greek theatre, into which Theseus had to descend to confront the Minotaur, just as Somerton had to descend into the female depths of the well to confront the object of his desire or curiosity, the treasure. The well, void or pit is a very old cultural motif, symbolising the bad feminine, the devouring furies or gorgons. The flight overseas, the well, and the running up and down of ladders, the appearance of the guardian of the tale, tentacles and slimy, all are representations of female genitalia, and the sexual act. These personal symbols are all present in the personal unique dreamscape of the tale, which is representative of Somerton's unique theatre of dreams, in a Jungian setting.

Another Jungian element is that of the "Mother". "The Ash Tree" can be read as one man's fear of the mother, the projection of this fear onto a defenceless other, and the resulting revenge. The story begins with a powerful man, the sheriff, Sir Matthew Fell, spotting an old local woman, Mrs Mothersole, out cutting twigs from a tree one night. Instead of dismissing this act as just an eccentric old lady getting twigs for decorations, he immediately accuses her of being a witch.

But what seems to have been fatal to the woman was the evidence of the then proprietor of Castringham Hall – Sir Matthew Fell. He deposed to having

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<sup>179</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.95.

watched her on three different occasions from his window, at the full of the moon, gathering sprigs from the ash tree.<sup>180</sup>

Sir Matthews's behaviour is a shocking act; because of this, Mrs Mothersole is arrested and hanged. In Jungian terms, Sir Matthew has plainly not assimilated his anima, his feminine side, into his personality.

The individuation process is characterised by the encounter with the soul image, which in the man is the Anima and in the woman, the Animus...It represents the image of the other sex that we carry in us as individuals and also as members of our species. Every man has his own Eve within him, says a German proverb...the latent undifferentiated, still unconscious contents of the psyche are always projected, and this applies to the man's Eve as well as the woman's Adam.<sup>181</sup>

The Jungian idea of balancing the psyche again is therefore to unite the ego with the shadow to seek balance in the personality; therefore, if we cannot, or will not, assimilate the opposite in us, we will project onto members of the opposite sex these fears or attractions. If Mrs. Mothersole had been young and beautiful, Sir Matthew would have been drawn to the sexual impulse of conquest, perhaps rape, to subjugate and disempower her.<sup>182</sup> However, as her crime is to be old, the projection becomes the dark other, that of Witch.

People who have had overbearing mothers, Jung suggested, often fear the archetype of the witch. Mother in her darker form is often associated in man's psyche as this archetype, and Jung sees this as a universal pattern.

A man who had a powerful overbearing mother will often have within his soul an anima personified as a Witch or Priestess...Women who have links with forces of darkness and the spirit world...the Greek Sirens or the German Lorelei also personify this dangerous aspect of the anima, which symbolises destructive illusion...<sup>183</sup>

Because the superstitious person knows nothing of the motivation of his own accidental actions, and because the fact of this motivation strives for a place

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<sup>180</sup> James, p.31.

<sup>181</sup> Jung, *Man and his Symbols*, p.186.

<sup>182</sup> Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C.G.Jung* (New York, NY: Yale University Press, 1988), p.85.

<sup>183</sup> Jacobi, p.187.

in his recognition, he is compelled to dispose of them by projecting, or displacing them into the outer world. <sup>184</sup>

A Jungian reading of Sir Matthew's irrational response to Mrs Mothersole suggests that perhaps he harboured a secret fear of "Mother" in her older, dark, devouring form. The times were such that the fear of witchcraft was strong. After her hanging, the body disappears, and soon after that, the deaths start occurring.

The feeling of surprise and indeed disquiet, was very strong when it was found that, though her coffin was fairly sound and unbroken there was no trace whatever inside it of body, bones, or dust. Indeed, it is a curious phenomenon, for at the time of her burying no such things were dreamt of as resurrection-men, and it is difficult to conceive any rational motive for stealing a body otherwise than for the uses of the dissecting room. <sup>185</sup>

Sir Matthew is found dead in his bed, bitten and black. The death is suspicious, and then animals in the park outside his house also start dying of the same symptoms. After Sir Matthew's death, his successor moves his bedroom to another side of the house, away from the ash tree that stood outside Sir Matthew's window. The next part of the story concerns the ash tree of the title:

As you looked at it from the park, you saw on the right a great old ash tree growing within half a dozen yards of the wall, and almost or quite touching the building with its branches. <sup>186</sup>

The spiders that bit and killed Sir Matthew and his descendant came from inside the tree, so there is no life giving force at work here, but rather a life-taking force. The spiders were seen prior to their discovery, by Sir Matthew and the visiting vicar.

What is it that runs up and down the stem of the Ash? It is never a squirrel? They will all be in their nests by now! (The Vicar) he could have sworn, he said though it sounded foolish, that squirrel or not, it had more than four legs... <sup>187</sup>

The next morning, Sir Matthew is dead. The eventual discovery that the tree was hollow is made when a servant spots a white cat on the tree's branches, looking into

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<sup>184</sup> Jacobi, p.150.

<sup>185</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.35.

<sup>186</sup> James, p.38.

<sup>187</sup> James, p.39.

the darkness inside. There is quiet again for a while in the household, until the next successor, Sir Richard, decides to move back to the old bedroom that had been occupied by his ancestor. Despite warnings not to, he leaves his window open one night, and the next day is found dead in his bed.

There is an investigation this time, and at last the culprit is identified by the cat as described. The tree is set on fire, and soon, out come scurrying black shapes:

First at the fork, they saw a rounded body covered with fire— the size of a man's head— appear very suddenly, then seem to collapse and fall back. This, five or six times, then a similar ball leapt into the air and fell on the grass, where after a moment it lay still...<sup>188</sup>

These spider-like creatures have been living at the bottom of the Ash Tree, coming from the slowly decaying body of the old lady, Mrs Mothersole. The question of how she came to be at the bottom of the ash tree decades after she had supposedly been hanged and buried is part of the horror of James's story. The real horror seems to be, however, how the projection of the original Sir Matthew's fear of women, and older women in particular, could have turned what was essentially a harmless old woman into the living personification of Jung's dark devouring mother, the witch in all of her primordial evil.

We have, then, a story, about a woman who is old enough at the start to have been the main protagonist's mother. He sees fit to punish her for (in his eyes) unseemly behaviour, but after her death she becomes the personification of the dark mother, sending out her murderous progeny to inflict death and destruction for the harm that was done to her. In life, she was powerless, but after death she is transformed into a dark and terrible force that blights the countryside for years after.

This might be seen as fear of mother in its darkest form. James's tale is redolent of this primeval fear innate in all of us. How many people fear the dark, the

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<sup>188</sup> James, p.40.

unknown and particularly the thought that harmless old ladies could literally kill and devour us? This is found in fairy-tales such as “Snow White”, “Sleeping Beauty” and “Red Riding Hood”: the Jungian reading of James’s stories unlocks these dark allusions to this inner fear of the dark or bad mother, captured in this particular triumvirate of fairy tales as Orenstein found in the archetype of the Bzou:

The Bzou might be a male figure; it might also be an ogress, the symbol of maternal oppression, when motherly protection becomes a hindrance to independence. The bzou or ogress attempts to tie the girl to the bed, but she slips the leash and goes off on her own – a classic metaphor for attaining independence<sup>189</sup>

What is important in this quote from Orenstein’s book on the “Little Red Riding Hood” metaphor is the Bzou, a universal archetype of the devouring, older dark mother from myths the world over. Older women have power and knowledge. They are no longer virgins and therefore worldly wise. This power makes them dangerous, hence the drive to kill the figure of the Bzou, inherent in tales where the bad or dark stepmother, mother or grandmother deserves this fate.

Jung would recommend that people always confront the shadow side of their personality, and these convergences can also be found in James’s stories. In these stories the mythic structures have been typically fairy-tale-based, but “Two Doctors” is an allegorical reworking of the Biblical tale of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. In this story, it was Cain who slew Abel out of jealousy (also the motivator in James’s story). He was marked by God for life for this crime and had to roam the earth as a pariah.

The story concerns two doctors, Dr Abell and Dr Quinn, whose names are obviously a play on Cain and Abel. It is set in 1718, which for James is a little more far removed than the setting of most of his tales. The narrator is telling the tale from

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<sup>189</sup> Catherine Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked, Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002), p.81.

a set of notes found in an old ledger, written firstly from the point of view of a servant, Luke Jennett, then the rector of Islington, Jonathan Pratt. It is in a conversation with Pratt that we first hear of Dr Abell's dislike of Dr Quinn, whom he believed to be stealing his patients:

“Damn Quinn”, Says he; “talk no more of him: he has embezzled four of my best patients this month; I believe it is that cursed man of his, Jennett, that used to be with me, his tongue is never still; it should be nailed to the pillory if he had his deserts.”<sup>190</sup>

Unfortunately, Dr Quinn was not a very good physician. Despite this, even though his patients died, he continued to have enough money to live wherever he chose. In conversations with him, the reverend begins to feel a sense of foreboding, as does the reader when the doctor begins talking of making bargains with invisible entities to gain the power of moving objects by thought.

“A convenient thing enough”, said Dr Abell to me, “If by some arrangement a man could get the power of communicating motion and energy to inanimate objects”. As if the axe should move itself against him that lifts it; something of that kind?<sup>191</sup>

The reverend counsils him against bargains of that kind, as “including a heavier payment than a Christian would care to make...” and indeed Dr Abell continues to alleviate suspicion by continuing to attend church. In the meantime, Dr Quinn is plagued by prophetic dreams of his impending death, and is found smothered with his own pillow: ‘Nothing was to be seen of his face, the two ends of the pillow or bolster appearing to be quite closed over it’.<sup>192</sup> The verdict at the inquest is ‘Death by visitation of God.’<sup>193</sup>

This story is a mythic reworking of the Genesis story, but with the brother's positions reversed. Abell kills Quinn out of jealousy; James even drops a hint of the

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<sup>190</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.254.

<sup>191</sup>James, p.254.

<sup>192</sup>James, p.257.

<sup>193</sup>James, p.257.

familial relationship on the first page of this story when Abell refers to Quinn as “My Brother Quinn” which even in the 1790s was a very familiar term, even if one was in a similar profession. The device of the prophetic dream coming to Dr Quinn is also as old as Genesis: it features in the Old Testament a number of times, such as the pharaohs of Egypt being visited by dreams when the angel of God warned him of his eldest son’s impending death in Exodus. These devices of prophetic dreams are also found in cave paintings and are mentioned in *The Golden Bough* as being seen as prophetic to the most savage of societies.<sup>194</sup> James knowingly chose to interweave these older mythic projections and backgrounds into his stories.

James’s inclusion of religious motifs in his stories fits with (as mentioned above) Jung’s warning against casting off religion in favour of a secular life. In his autobiography, Jung wrote:

I find that all of my thoughts circle around God like the planets around the sun, and are as irresistibly attracted by Him. I would feel it the grossest sin if I were to oppose any resistance to this force.<sup>195</sup>

As Samuels et al. observe above, Jung’s viewpoint was that man had to reconcile the function of religion in his life in order to function as a complete whole entity. As I observed, his view on these matters differs from Freud’s, who viewed religion as a psychotic projection. Jung’s ideas of the reconciliation of man with God have been noted by many critics as essential to the integration of the mass consciousness of the human race. For Jung, religion is inescapable. We may reject it, revile it, revise it, but we cannot get rid of it. When he was accused of being a mystic, Jung objected that he did not invent the idea of *homo religiosus*, but only put into words what everyone knows. His vast clinical experience with people afflicted with neurosis or

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<sup>194</sup> Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough – A Study in Magic and Religion* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Reference, 1993), p.181.

<sup>195</sup> Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections*, p.13.

psychosis impressed upon him the fact that half his patients fell ill because they had lost the meaning of life.<sup>196</sup>

“Two Doctors” is an illustration of how the sin of jealousy finds its way into a man’s psyche. The resulting fracture is a divorce from the larger or macro-consciousness of the human race, creating a schism in the personality that attracts psychotic episodes or projections of ghosts. This divorce from the macro-consciousness is also illustrated in many of the stories, as it is precisely when a treasure is purloined (or a murder committed) that the psychotic projection or wraith appears. The burying of his guilt, Jung considered, brought upon man the projection of that guilt, into the archetypal shadow: the dark side of man, which, once confronted, could be balanced as light and dark in one person, however in this instance led to the projection of a monster that preys on the psyche:

Like all contents capable of entering consciousness, initially they appear in PROJECTION and when consciousness is in a threatened or doubtful condition, shadow manifests as a strong irrational projection,...so far as shadow is concerned, the aim of PSYCHOTHERAPY is to develop an awareness of those IMAGES and situations most likely to produce shadow projections...To admit (to analyse) the shadow is to break its compulsive hold...<sup>197</sup>

As in James’s story “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”, the sacristan has not confronted his guilt over the possession of a religious artefact, which has been defaced and turned into an object for sale. Jung would have seen this guilt as producing the monster guardian of the book that has been plaguing him. Dennistoun, though, buys the book and takes it back to his hotel to look at. He is then confronted by the monster, his shadow projection:

The shape, whose left hand rested on the table, was rising to a standing posture behind his seat, there was black and tattered drapery about it; the coarse hair covered it. The lower jaw was thin...like a beast’s; teeth showed

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<sup>196</sup> Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections*, p.239.

<sup>197</sup>Samuels et al. (eds), *A Critical Dictionary Of Jungian Analysis*, p.139.

behind the black lips; there was no nose...the fiery yellow eyes showed hate and lust to destroy life. There was an intelligence of a kind in them...<sup>198</sup>

Dennistoun's reaction is to scream and wave the crucifix at the apparition. He is saved by 'two sturdy little serving-men'.<sup>199</sup> The next day, the sacristan admits that he has been plagued by this monster for as long as he was in possession of the book, without saying why it was in his possession, or if ever felt guilt at owning it. James's focus is on Dennistoun's coveting of the book, to the extent of ignoring the sacristan and the implicit warnings given previously that to buy this book will bring a visitation.

Jung felt that once the shadow had been confronted, and the guilt of whatever had caused the projection admitted and worked through, that the shadow would disappear, i.e. be balanced with the opposite of the light in man. The shadow must exist in unison: it cannot ever be buried (he felt).

A sense of guilt is necessary to avoid the projection outward of SHADOW contents so that it is the other's guilt that strikes one and excites moral condemnation... the avoidance of neurosis may require a sense of guilt. Even if this is irrational, it will lead into charged areas of unconsciousness. Central to this idea of Jung's is the conviction that PROJECTION of the shadow diminishes the personality, even to the point of an annihilation of humanity.<sup>200</sup>

However, Dennistoun confronts this projection by rejecting the book, and putting it into a museum. It could be argued that, as Dennistoun gave the book away and did not keep it for himself, the guilt over the original desecration of the theft of religious artefacts had been assuaged by a selfless act. Dennistoun had confronted his shadow projection, even though he had to be rescued. He donated the book for other people to enjoy and balanced the darkness of the shadow with his own human light. As Jung counselled, this is the only way to stop the shadow projection, or in the story's description, the monster.

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<sup>198</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.9.

<sup>199</sup>James, p.9.

<sup>200</sup>Samuels et al. (eds), *A Critical Dictionary Of Jungian Analysis*, p. 64.

In the end, Dennistoun's pursuing demon is exorcised by ripping up the drawing that had been made of him.<sup>201</sup> We can almost feel the narrator's relief at the end of the tale, but will it stop the demon pursuing him again? We cannot know for sure, because the hidden will almost always rear up again to pursue someone in denial.<sup>202</sup> At the end of the story, James seems to maintain a detached, almost urbane air towards Dennistoun. Dennistoun had paid for prayers to be said for Canon Alberic, and James ends the story with a note of comedy that almost seems misplaced, when Dennistoun observes 'with a touch of the northern British in his tone', "I had no notion they came so dear".<sup>203</sup>

The inclusion of mythical and Biblical motifs uncovered by the application of Jungian literary theory points very strongly to James's struggle with his desire to believe in a Christian religion in a post-Darwinian age (as I further examine below). Pfaff suggests that in his days at Eton James had entertained thoughts of eventual ordination, but that during his time at Cambridge he encountered others whose views took him away from the religious observation of his childhood, such as Batiffol and Duchesne. According to Pfaff, such companions led him away from religious conservatism into a state that accommodated more of the secular. Although there is no way of ever proving why James did not take ordination, or accounting for the lessening of religious observation in his life (by comparison to his brother and father), it seems highly likely that his university experiences complicated his understanding of his faith.

However, an application of Jungian theory to his ghost stories – specifically to the recurrent pursuit of hapless academics by ghosts and demons – uncovers this schism between religious observation and the scholarly life in James's thinking. This

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<sup>201</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.6.

<sup>202</sup>Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies On Hysteria* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p.15.

<sup>203</sup>M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.10.

is not just a coincidence of plot: it is as if James cannot let the characters deviate from the moral path. Their wrongdoing, in his eyes, has larger and more significant repercussions. This can be seen in stories where man has deviated from Christian devotion, and begins to covet the symbols of god (as in “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”) or kills another out of envy (as in “Two Doctors”). This authorial action places James in the position of replacement god, judging the actions of his characters: it also links to Jung’s belief that to exile the religious function from the mass-consciousness of humankind causes psychosis.

There are also other stories where a Jungian application uncovers characters who have constructed artificial worlds around themselves with an outer appearance of propriety, like Mr Abney in “Lost Hearts”, who is in reality a cannibal, eating the hearts of children to fulfil a prophecy from an alchemical textbook. The application of Jungian theory illuminates a crisis of individuation in both the characters and James. James had to observe Christian fellowship within King’s, but his research and fiction was informed by occult and apocryphal knowledge. A Jungian reading of his work demonstrates that he was haunted both within and without by these cultural mores. The occult side of his research had to be hidden and only acknowledged in story form, almost becoming apocryphal in itself, whilst his Christian belief had already been shaken by the time he started writing his stories, as both his biographers demonstrate.<sup>204</sup>

An application of Jungian theory is the only approach that can explore the failure of individuation through uncovering these hidden literary tropes within James’s stories, in his own life, and in the macro-consciousness of the period. The

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<sup>204</sup>Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.63.Cox, *An Informal Portrait*, p.72.

post-Darwinian rejection of organised religion prompted a wider search for alternate religions and belief systems, such as theosophy and spiritualism, as Owen noted:

Many of the spiritually inclined no longer identified in any way with formal Christian observance. They turned instead to the heterodox spirituality of occultism, with its animistic sense of a living universe, and a broad range of teachings drawn from sources as diverse as those of mystical Christianity, the hermetic traditions of the west, and the religious east...In certain respects the “new” occultism represented a somewhat elitist counterpoint to the hugely successful Victorian spiritualist movement that had preceded it.<sup>205</sup>

James’s interest in religion and religious systems is distinctly twofold, demonstrating his interest in the occult, but also his need to balance this with his lifelong commitment to the Christian beliefs. He attended church most Sundays, remarking to his friend Gwendolyn McBryde that lapsing made him feel like “a worm”.<sup>206</sup>

James’s academic and fictional oeuvres display an inner struggle to reconcile a balance of occult and Biblical religious knowledge. The battle to reconcile the outer public face of a devout Kings scholar with the inner consciousness of the occult is visible in his stories where the occult and the forbidden found an outlet and expression for his outer consciousness. Jungian theory is the lens through which these patterns in James’s stories are all revealed. James’s characters suffered from crises of unindividuated personalities, which resulted in the projections of their anxieties in the form of ghosts. While it is not possible to claim with any certainty that James himself suffered from an unindividuated personality, this chapter has sought to establish that he wrote his ghost stories as a cathartic act. The very act of writing them functioned to offset the struggle between his outer consciousness as a Cambridge don in an era of propriety, and his inner need to reconcile this with a less conventional faith in the mythical and mystical, ensuring that he managed the ongoing Jungian symbiosis of individuation.

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<sup>205</sup>Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2004), p.5.

<sup>206</sup>Gwendolen McBryde, *M.R.James: Letters to a Friend* (London: Edward Arnold, 1956), p.18.

### **Chapter Three: James and The Unseen: The divided reading in his ghost stories**

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”<sup>207</sup>

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on what I term the divided reading in James’s ghost stories. While James was a very religious man, he never undertook ordination into the church. The question of why James did not get ordained is a major area of concern for anyone in the area of Jamesian studies. An historical methodology was a particularly useful way in which to examine the question of why James avoided being ordained when it was obvious that his Christian faith was extremely important to him because it allowed me to situate James’s attitude towards religion and the supernatural more generally, and the way this is reflected in his stories, in the context of changing attitudes towards religion during his adult life. his ambivalence generated an divided reading in his ghost stories, many of which embody James’s internal uncertainty by depicting the church in ambivalent ways, include a church undermined by paganism, and figures in the church who were less than holy, and what we might call ‘the unseen’. In this chapter I will focus on a selection of stories depicting this ambivalence in both the church and ‘the unseen’, ranging from “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook” in James’s first collection from 1904, to “A View from a Hill” from his final collection from 1925.

To fully understand James’s religious ambivalence that led to the divided reading of his ghost stories we must first situate it in its historical context. As I argue in Chapter Four (‘M. R. James and the Darwinian Gothic’), in 1859 the publication of Darwin’s

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<sup>207</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.195.

magnum opus *The Origin of Species* caused ‘an intellectual, emotional and psychological shock’ to Victorian Society, whose resonances are still felt today’.<sup>208</sup> Darwin’s theory of evolution challenged Biblical literalism which, coming after similar theories from men like Charles Lyell or Jean Baptiste Lamarck, made it increasingly difficult to read the Genesis account of creation as literally as before. This allowed the questioning the rest of the Bible, and thus central Christian doctrine.

While Darwin’s impact was not the thunderbolt dividing society and demolishing religious faith that it has been popularly represented as, it undeniably put pressure on traditional modes of interpreting the Bible, and on the traditional Christian view of man as entirely separate from animals. The zeitgeist of the era, according to Max Weber was that there was no longer any room for the belief in religion or the magical, as scientific naturalism had already disproved its existence.<sup>209</sup> One reaction to this growing undercurrent of rationalist secular materialism was a renewed belief in older faiths and traditions, such as spiritualism, occultism and supernaturalism, shepherding in a counter-movement of belief in hidden worlds, and what we might call ‘the unseen’. The idea of the ‘unseen’ and the supernatural – other worlds and other powers operating beyond the ken of man – the other world that Denis Godfrey terms E. M. Forster’s ‘other kingdom’- was a regular source of fascination for James. His stories were with not just occult and demonic lore but also folkloric and fairy-tale material, another Victorian and Edwardian obsession.<sup>210</sup> These areas of the unseen and the dichotomy of the demonic and ghostly can be seen particularly clearly in the stories: “After Dark in the Playing Fields,” “The Rose Garden”, “A View from a Hill”, “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”, “The Residence at Whitminster”, “The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral”, “An Episode of

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<sup>208</sup> Darryl Jones, *Sleeping With The Lights On: The unsettling story of horror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.60.

<sup>209</sup> Jones, p.59.

<sup>210</sup> Denis Godfrey, *E. M. Forster’s Other Kingdom* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd, 1968).

Cathedral History” and “The Uncommon Prayer-Book”, which will form the basis of my analysis. My own focus will be on the divided reading and the unseen in James’s ghost stories, as well as his un-individuated personality, as it seems most pertinent when focusing on James’s own crisis of faith and his decision to not undertake ordination and how this can be identified in his fiction.

These themes were termed ‘the re-enchantment of the west’, by the theologian Christopher Partridge:<sup>211</sup>

[a] great modern flowering of the distinct but overlapping practices of spiritualism, occultism and supernaturalism. The formation of the Society for Psychical Research (1881), The Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn (1888), and The Folklore Society (1878) all date from this period-the last-named codifying a renewed interest in folk-lore studies.<sup>212</sup>

The scene was set by the publication in 1848 by a book that pertained to undertake a social study of the supernatural. *The Night Side of Nature* by Catherine Crowe offered a sampling of reports in the British Isles of poltergeists, ghosts, haunted houses, doppelgangers and precognition. This study, according to Darryl Jones, inspired an outpouring of folkloric stories focusing on topics of neglected gods and the hidden lands of fairy such as Machen’s *The Great God Pan*, and *The Hill of Dreams*.<sup>213</sup>

Following this revived interest in folklore, it is also no coincidence that this was also the period of the flowering of the modern ghost story. Writers from Charles Dickens to Sheridan Le Fanu, Margaret Oliphant to Lettice Galbraith all started penning their own versions. As Jones notes, all of this literary activity was a reaction

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<sup>211</sup> Jones, *Sleeping*, p.60.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, p.61.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, *Sleeping*, p.61

Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature: An Investigation of the Paranormal and the Unexplained* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2000); Arthur Machen, *The Great God Pan and The Hill of Dreams* (Mineola: Dover Publications Inc, 2006).

to the scientific materialism that brought about a loss of faith in some quarters in Britain, expressed in lower attendance at churches countrywide.<sup>214</sup>

In examining James's life and ghost stories there is a parallel, in that while James's father Herbert and his brother Bertie both undertook ordination and devoted their lives to their church, despite familial expectations, James did not, although he retained a conservative outlook throughout his life and remained a faithful attendee at religious services. In the ghost stories, however, there can be found a reaction against un-questioning belief, the focus is on the unseen and supernatural, and he populates his stories with revenants, demons and the fae. This is an important point, as the stories are not scenes of clerical life focusing on everyday politics or crimes in the parish, such as those written by his contemporary G. K. Chesterton. Rather, these are stories populated by supernatural entities, often hell-bent on killing the clerical protagonist.<sup>215</sup> The scenes are lit by using the supernatural to illustrate the shortcomings of the religious figures. Further, the church is not shown to be faultless through the actions of the vicar or theologian (unlike readings of Chesterton's *Father Brown*). The fact that James wrote his thirty-one ghost stories at all is worthy of comment: many scholars have had trouble believing that a Cambridge don as conservative as James could have a side-line writing ghost stories.<sup>216</sup>

On reading the stories, we gain a sense of a divided reading, in that God is not present in the house of worship and there are pagan presences that betray an earlier system of worship existing in parallel with the church and its ecclesiastical settings. As I have argued in Chapter two, "Reading M. R. James with Jung", this divided reading caused in James what Jung termed an un-individuated personality.

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<sup>214</sup>M. A. Crowther, 'Church Problems and Church Parties', in G. Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain: IV Interpretations* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.ix.

<sup>215</sup>G. K. Chesterton, *Father Brown: The Essential Tales* (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2005).

<sup>216</sup>P. R. Quarrie, 'M. R. James at Eton', in Lynda Dennison (ed.), *The Legacy of M.R.James* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2001).

Jung argues that belief in a religious system helps to assimilate all of the areas of human personality and thus an inability to achieve this results in an un-individuated personality.<sup>217</sup>

James certainly seemed in his stories to be focusing his doubts into the moral fallibility of his clerical and academic characters. The stories I focus on in this section of the thesis are strongly indicative of this. Many have pagan presences alongside protagonists who may be termed (in the psychoanalytic sense) to have split personalities, giving the outside world the face that is considered 'proper' in contrast to a very different face in private. James also evinces a sense of unease towards the guardians of the faith.

James's ghost stories are singled out by Steve Duffy as not just full of religious references, but also occult and pagan at their core. It is as if James wishes to ensure that his audience appreciates the balance of good and evil in God's kingdom:

James was in thrall to the supernatural. A scrupulously observant Anglican, he seems to have sought in the doings of those fiends and monstrosities from the early church manuscripts proof of the preternatural on Earth; it's been suggested by at least one commentator that James picked through the Apocrypha, much as he did the accounts of the seventeenth-century witch-trials, with an eye to accumulating evidence-evidence of the miraculous that might satisfy the most scrupulous of academic standards.<sup>218</sup>

This juxtaposition of the godly and the occult is the influence that guides the divided reading; as Helen Grant, Ron Weighell and Simon MacCulloch found, James often included an 'underbelly' of occultism, paganism and often demonology in his ghost stories. James's Jungian unindividuated personality, where he was not sure of his own religious path, arguably made him more critical of those who had really 'fallen', i.e. committed the sins of greed (Mr Poshwitz in "The Uncommon Prayer-Book"),

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<sup>217</sup> C.G. Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections* (New York, NY: Random House, 1961), p.235.

<sup>218</sup> Steve Duffy, 'Introduction' to M.R. James, *A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2000), p.xxi.

apostasy (Lady Sadleir in “The Uncommon Prayer-Book” and Dr Haynes in “The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral”), meddling with demons (Saul and Frank in “The Residence at Whitminster”), covetousness (Dennistoun in “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”) and vanity (the Deans in “An Episode of Cathedral History”). However, upon examining James’s life’s work, on the texts of the apocrypha and manuscripts, and especially in his fiction, we can find a balance being struck. This is also apparent in the ghost stories; what could be a better example of the continuation of the soul and life after death than a ghost?

The inclusion of apocrypha in the stories also lends them an air of authenticity, with the referencing of Biblical texts, church architecture, and clerical concerns, devices that are clear indicators to the reader that they are reading M. R. James. Here, James was continuing a habit begun early in life. Pfaff called these esoteric interests ‘precocious’ and as Luxmoore noted, his student was often occupied with the lesser byways of Biblical study, ‘dredging the deeps of literature for refuse’.<sup>219</sup> It was not just manuscripts and apocrypha that James found ‘fascinating’: at Temple Grove, his prep school, he noted that ‘[t]he week-day school library afforded *Curzon’s Visits to Monasteries in the Levant*, which I believe first inspired me with a curiosity about manuscripts.’<sup>220</sup> His school library also afforded him inspirational reading in another religious area, that of Christian martyrs. As James said in his autobiography, *Eton and Kings*, ‘I collected martyrdoms of saints, the more atrocious the better’, which he used to great effect at home, making up stories about the martyrs to terrify his sister, Grace.<sup>221</sup> Telling stories to terrify found its earliest roots here.

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<sup>219</sup>Michael Cox, *M.R. James: An Informal Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.40.

<sup>220</sup>M. R. James, *Eton and King’s recollections, mostly trivial 1875-1925* (London: Williams and Norgate Ltd, 1926).

<sup>221</sup>Cox, *Portrait*, p.5.

It is the juxtaposition of James's work in apocrypha and Biblical studies with the imagery of church architecture, old documents, priests and ecclesiastical settings that gives the stories their unique flavour, along with the utilisation of the saintly positioned against the ungodly villains and deeds of church personnel. However, the other area of the unseen that was also gaining ground at the same time as the Victorian and Edwardian revival of folklore and fairyland was 'psychical research', which James detested.<sup>222</sup> This debate found new focus when the future archbishop of Canterbury Edward White Benson founded the Ghost Society in the 1860s, which formalised the debate. Henry Sidgwick and his wife Eleanor founded The Society for Psychical Research in 1882, which included many Cambridge dons. Although by James's time all of this ghostly activity had long been a part of Cambridge life, James did not approve of the societies' formulaic scientific approach, declaring that he 'exercised caution as to the existence in ghosts'", always maintaining that 'if there was evidence he would treat it with caution'.<sup>223</sup> James maintained this stance to his deathbed, in his last conversation with Sir Shane Leslie, typical of his reticence on the subject of the spiritual world.<sup>224</sup>

For James, ghosts always belonged in the pages of stories, as fictional figures, not in the Cambridge debating hall. Benson and Glanville may have formalised the ghost into a subject for debate, but James declared that, 'Ghosts are the subject of quasi-scientific research in this country at the hands of Glanville, Beaumont and others; but these collectors are out to prove theories of the future life and the spiritual world'.<sup>225</sup> As this demonstrates, James found the scientific focus on the figure of the ghost too clinical and the results of many

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<sup>222</sup> M. R. James, 'Ghosts— Treat Them Gently!', *Evening News* (17 April 1931).

<sup>223</sup> Sir Shane Leslie, 'Montague Rhodes James', in, S. T. Joshi & Rosemary Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious: A Sheaf of Criticism on M.R. James* (New York, NY: Hippocampus Press, 2007), p.37.

<sup>224</sup> Leslie, 'Montague Rhodes James', p.37.

<sup>225</sup> M. R. James, "Some Remarks on Ghost Stories", *The Bookman* (December 1929)

of these experiments inconclusive and rather pedantic, declaring that they were just vehicles for amusement:

I am speaking of the literary ghost story here. The story that claims to be “veridical” in the language of the Society of Psychical Research is a very different affair. It will probably be quite brief, and will conform to some one of several familiar types...<sup>226</sup>

All these, [experiments] if they do afford what our ancestors called amusement (Dr. Johnson decreed that Coriolanus was “amusing”), to do so by a side-wind. The Castle of Otranto is perhaps the progenitor of the ghost story as a literary genre, and I fear that it is merely amusing in the modern sense.<sup>227</sup>

There is a sense here that James used the form of the ghost story to work out his anxieties on the page, devoting his fiction to the ghost. From the earliest age he had found this subject fascinating, initially in the figure of the ghost in a Punch and Judy show with ‘an unusually long visage’.<sup>228</sup> However, many in this era found the combined fascination in table-rapping, spiritualism and psychical research and the concomitant turning away from organised religion worrying. A cursory reading of Robert Browning’s poems, for example, illustrates anxiety about the imagined malignancy at the heart of Victorian society, which had been left over from the Romantic era and progressed into the *fin de siècle*. Browning, like James, focused on these authorial anxieties, singling out those that troubled his authorial psyche, such as false mediums like the lampooned Mr Sludge. Sludge represents, for Browning, the inability of man to provide answers to that beyond the mortal coil. Similarly, the figure of the dead who refuse to stay dead fascinated James and many of his characters represent the animated figure of the corpse or zombie.

However, James’s avoidance of the religious mainstream in favour of the more remote backwaters of Christianity was becoming worrying for Herbert James. Letters between father and son contain a debate that was central to the Victorian

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, James, ‘Ghosts – Treat Them Gently!’

<sup>227</sup> James, ‘Some Remarks on Ghost Stories’.

<sup>228</sup> James, ‘Ghosts – Treat Them Gently!’

era, played out not only in the James household, but in others. For example, in his autobiographical novel *Father and Son*, Edmund Gosse chronicles his religious differences with his own father. Some of these are amusing, such as Gosse's father praying for spiritual guidance when Edmund, aged eleven, wishes to go to a friend's birthday party.<sup>229</sup> The elder Gosse worries about the material world distracting his son from the spiritual, in the same way that Herbert James worried about his son. This reflected the intergenerational chasm over religious observance that opened in some families after the advent of Darwin's books and the theories of Lyell, as I argue in Chapter four, "M. R. James and the Darwinian Gothic".

However, a closer reading of James's stories demonstrates that he may also have been using his stories to attack the secular and the type of young men (like Gosse) who were affected by the loss of faith brought about by Darwinism. James wrote his stories originally to be read to an audience of ecclesiastically-minded dons and Eton schoolboys. As Pfaff notes,

To move with ease in high ecclesiastical circles was a mark of MRJ's immediate coterie of friends, one of whom became Archbishop of Brisbane and Bishop of Salisbury, another Bishop of Ely, a third Dean of York.<sup>230</sup>

This was an appreciative audience for James's ghost stories in which he satirises those who veer from the religious path. As B. W. Young observed,

aspects of his Anglicanism assumed a vigorous, not to say vindictive form in the sometimes repulsive logic of his fiction. Opponents of the Church of England at its most triumphant were wont to meet grisly ends.<sup>231</sup>

Oliffe Richmond described one typical reading of the ghost stories to a group that included at least four chaplains and reverends:

Monty disappeared into his bedroom. We sat and waited in the candlelight. Perhaps someone played a few bars on the piano, and desisted for good reason...The people in the room varied from year to year, but some of the

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<sup>229</sup> Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son: A study of two temperaments* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1907).

<sup>230</sup> Richard William Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James* (London: Scholar Press, 1980), p.53.

<sup>231</sup> B. W. Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century: An Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.178.

following were sure to be present:...the Revd Swain, or his successor, F. E. Hutchinson, our chaplain...<sup>232</sup>

Those present would appreciate the irony of Christian men being punished for the tragic flaw in their natures that James satirises and the ecclesiastical setting. King's was particularly rich in its religious life, with its chapel, choir and devotion to its own and wider traditions of college and country. Eton masters acted *in loco parentis* to the students, funnelling them into the tradition of religious observance.<sup>233</sup>

James's tutor Luxmoore, who was also firmly bound to these traditions, remarked on his feelings towards them, which he passed on to his pupil. His remarks here convey something of the regard in which they were held:

Chapel, Combination Room and the Lodge is a combination nowhere else attained. The Club, the country house and – well, the Chapel for to that there is no parallel – all rolled in one...<sup>234</sup>

The juxtaposition of the ghostly set amongst the religious and often the pastoral is what makes James's stories all the more horrific, in a strikingly modern way. James also utilised certain devices that have now become the hallmarks of his particular brand of ghost story, such as the revenant and its vehicles. This usually (in what becomes something of a Jamesian trope) manifests through an exterior object:

many common objects may be made the vehicles of retribution, and where retribution is not called for, malice. Be careful how you handle the packet you pick up in the carriage-drive, particularly if it contains nail-pairings and hair. Do not in any case bring it into the house. It may not be alone...<sup>235</sup>

Here, James is clear that such objects are potentially objects of 'retribution' and 'malice'; he certainly deliberately utilised this narrative technique as a vehicle in which to punish his protagonists for their fall from grace. An academic whose life is devoted to the past usually uncovers the object (another Jamesian favourite). Such dry lives lived as a 'waste land' invite the wrath of the demonic. These exterior

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<sup>232</sup>Cox, *Portrait*, p.134.

<sup>233</sup>James, p.266.

<sup>234</sup>Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.216.

<sup>235</sup> M. R. James, "Stories I Have Tried to Write", *The Touchstone*, 2 (30 November 1929).

objects, such as a book, a box, a shew-stone or a pair of binoculars, are examples of what Reza Negarestani terms an inorganic demon:

[Some] ancient super-weapons are categorised as Inorganic Demons or xenolithic artefacts. These relics or artefacts are generally depicted in the shape of objects made of inorganic materials (stone, metal, bones, souls, ashes, etc). Autonomous, sentient and independent of human will, their existence is characterised by their forsaken status, their immemorial slumber and their provocatively exquisite forms[...] Inorganic demons are parasitic by nature, they [...] generate their effects out of the human host, whether as an individual, an ethnicity, a society or an entire civilization.<sup>236</sup>

The horror is engendered when an inorganic demon in the form of a tempting object generates the revenant to terrorise the hapless victim. The terror induced again is the punishment James metes out to his protagonist for their meddling in the occult.

In “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”, the inorganic demon or object that is the catalyst for the appearance of the demonic manifestation of the revenant is the eponymous scrapbook. However, this revenant has already spent years tormenting the sacristan, long before the protagonist Dennistoun is even aware of its presence, which he then dismisses as a mental failing on the sacristan’s part:

[the sacristan] was perpetually half glancing behind him; the muscles of his back and shoulders seemed to be hunched in a continual nervous contraction, as if he were expecting every moment to find himself in the clutch of an enemy. The Englishman hardly knew whether to put him down as a man haunted by a fixed delusion, or as one oppressed by a guilty conscience, or as an unbearably henpecked husband.<sup>237</sup>

As we will see, the sacristan has been protecting an evil force, which is taking its time to manifest. The suspense is slowly built for the reader, rather like the appearance of the revenant. As Grant and Weighell both note, the demon shares occult similarities with one of the fifty-eight demons summoned by King Solomon.<sup>238</sup> This is symbolic of a religious icon who has been brought low by the immersion in the occult. James studied and wrote on the *Testament of Solomon*, an

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<sup>236</sup> Mark Fisher, *The weird and the eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), p.82.

<sup>237</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), p.1.

<sup>238</sup> Ron Weighell, ‘Dark Devotions: M. R James and the Magical Tradition’, in Joshi and Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious*, p.134.

apocryphal book of the Bible, and he would have been very familiar both with this demonic lore and the moral of the tale, which in the end evil will destroy anyone foolish enough to meddle with it, even a king.<sup>239</sup> In the story, James continues to build on the idea of evil intruding into an ecclesiastical setting. He provides many beautiful descriptions of the church interior: ‘the wonderful church that dominates the little hill of comminges’, and ‘the gorgeous stalls’.<sup>240</sup> However, the building is blighted by the neglected interior of the church, with its ‘dilapidated organ, and the dusty crocodile’.<sup>241</sup> This is further illustrated in the town itself, which James describes as “decaying”.<sup>242</sup>

There is an almost Biblical sense in this narrative setting of the myth of sin, despoiling what had once been a place of worship, and soon the reader begins to anticipate evil to come. Sure enough, after Dennistoun is offered the chance to buy the scrapbook, the conclusion arrives with devastating swiftness. Again, as Grant has noted, the demon shares aspects of the many summoned by Solomon as well as features that would identify it as a specific demon found both in the *Testament of Solomon*, and *the Koran*:

The demon Ornias is a likely candidate [as a model for James’s demon]: he is able to offer gold to the boy who captures him with Solomon’s ring, and he can see the future. He also strangles his victims [...] He can take several forms—might the “talking voices” (plural) of the demon in the cathedral in “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook” perhaps be the voices of those different forms?<sup>243</sup>

However, there is also the matter of Canon Alberic’s decidedly unchristian behaviour, which is compared by James to that of Saul, a king who degenerated from Christian piety to a practitioner of the occult. There is a moral in this tale, which

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<sup>239</sup> Helen Grant, ‘The Nature of the Beast: The Demonology of ‘Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook’ in Joshi and Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious*, p.234.

<sup>240</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.2.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> Grant, ‘The Nature of the Beast’, p.234.

James is gently satirising here. James's audience, as discussed, would have appreciated the pursuit of the sacristan and the descent of Dennistoun from sanity to covetousness for the poisonous scrapbook.

Similarly, "The Residence at Whitminster" contains demons that manifest slowly, invisible to the reader and many of the characters in the story.<sup>244</sup> The reader is led to believe that this is because the young protagonists (Frank and Saul) are wrapped up in a world separate from adult concerns and thus the demons could be figments of a childish imagination. In another Jamesian motif, the demons are also apprehended by the peasants of the village, and again they appear after Frank and Saul use a shew-stone to summon them.

Dr Ashton, looking out of an upper window, saw the two boys playing... at a game he did not understand. Frank was looking earnestly at something in the palm of his hand. Saul stood behind him and seemed to be listening. After some minutes he very gently laid his hand on Frank's head, and almost instantly thereupon, Frank suddenly dropped whatever it was that he was holding, clapped his hands to his eyes, and sank down on the grass.<sup>245</sup>

James utilises the narrative device of introducing his antagonist to build tension, so when it finally arrives it produces the desired "pleasing terror".<sup>246</sup>

Let us, then be introduced to the actors in a placid way; let us see them going about their ordinary business, undisturbed by forebodings, pleased with their surroundings; and into this calm environment let the ominous thing put out its head, unobtrusively at first, and then more insistently, until it holds the stage.<sup>247</sup>

In "The Uncommon Prayer-Book", the revenant is introduced later in the story, but the terror is again manifested slowly, by unseen hands that turn the pages of the prayer books, in a little-used chapel in a country manor garden. Similarly, "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" have invisible animalistic presences, which invade the mental space of the murderous Archdeacon Haynes. In all these stories, we can

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<sup>244</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.198.

<sup>245</sup>James, *Ibid*,p.201.

<sup>246</sup>James, 'Some Remarks on Ghost Stories'.

<sup>247</sup>M. R. James, 'Prologue' to Sheridan Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Tales of Mystery* (London: G.Bell and Sons Ltd, 1923), p.5.

apprehend James's delight in using these hidden forms to build the fear of the readers.

James often used the device of pagan retribution in a Christian context, in that the object is a catalyst that frees the revenant. It is, however, interesting that this horror is frequently staged in a religious setting. Simon MacCulloch observed this contradiction in many of James' stories, noting that James often represents the church as using the demonic as an instrument of revenge to protect itself, so that justice is often delivered by the gods and servants of an older pagan religion:

James was troubled by the dichotomy between the comfortable Christian worldview of his upbringing, which he wanted to accept but could not, and the darkly amoral version of pantheism which, try as he might to deny it to himself, he felt truly reflected the state of the world.<sup>248</sup>

It is also of interest that James's revenants follow this tradition of being summoned by inorganic demons(as Negarestani terms them) or xenolithic artefacts that then manifest what was (at the start of the story) an invisible force.<sup>249</sup>

There is an ironic reversal in James's stories reflecting the Victorian/Edwardian loss of faith. These stories are full of irony: each protagonist is meant to be a member of a community respected for higher values, of the church, aristocracy and academe, but they fall from grace due to various sins. For example, just two of the stories I focus on in this chapter feature murder (Dr Haynes in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral") and fanaticism (Lady Sadleir ("The Uncommon Prayer-Book")).<sup>250</sup> How was it, then, with his firmly Christian upbringing and background, that James's life remained an uneasy balance between the religious and the secular, or even the pagan and occult? One reason may have been the increasing professionalization of the clergy. In his father's day, although the workload

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<sup>248</sup>Simon MacCulloch, 'The Toad in the Study: M. R. James, H. P. Lovecraft, and Forbidden Knowledge', in Joshi and Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious*, p.78.

<sup>249</sup>Fisher, *The weird*, p.82.

<sup>250</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.146, 268.

of the country clergyman could be heavy, he could still find time for amateur botany or any of the range of hobbies that occupied the country gentleman parson.<sup>251</sup> In the nineteenth century, the evangelicals had changed that outlook. As so-called 'serious Christians', they insisted that their ministers devote all of their time to their religious duties. This idea of being a professional clergyman with no time for his own independent research would not have appealed to someone like James, as is evident in the anxiety expressed by Herbert James in his letters.<sup>252</sup> Herbert exhorted his son to eschew the Sunday dining societies at Cambridge, and the plays that were usually put on: 'don't dine out on Sundays if you can avoid it. I should make a point of as quiet an evening as I could get on that day. It will tell in the long run.'<sup>253</sup>

There is, as Pfaff notes, no evidence that James took his father's advice, and he seems to have continued his habit of Sunday dining and appearances at the theatricals of the Cambridge Amateur Dramatic Club.<sup>254</sup> James felt that applying himself to his studies, certainly the areas of the Bible that he applied himself to, was at least not a total deviation from devotion to God.<sup>255</sup> However, there also seems to be a subtext in the stories, in that James was aware that vanity (e.g. in the case of Dr Haynes's murderous intent on the office of Archbishop) was also a cautionary tale. Wanting ordination for the sake of fulfilling other people's expectations would be wrong for him if he really did have doubts about fully accepting Christian higher office into his life, as demonstrated by his attacks on the hypocritical by the use of an agent of the supernatural. This is further illustrated in other stories, which frequently contain clergymen behaving in decidedly un-Christian ways. In "The Residence at Whitminster", for instance, the story revolves around Christian values being distorted

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<sup>251</sup> Josef L. Altholz, *The Warfare of Conscience with Theology* (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1976).

<sup>252</sup> Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.63. Herbert James, letters, King's College Library Archive, Cambridge, 1886.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, p.63.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. P.63.

<sup>255</sup> MacCulloch, 'The Toad in the Study', p.76.

by greed and ambition, amongst other vices. The inorganic demon in this story is a shew-stone possessed by the protagonist, Lord Saul. As Ron Weighall has noted, shew-stones or scrying are traceable to both Egyptian and Hebrew occult traditions.

The technique of scrying, or crystal gazing, described in “The Residence at Whitminster”, is traceable in its entirety to both Egyptian and Hebrew sources. The Egyptian version is recorded in the “Leyden Papyrus”, a magical work dating from the third century C.E., though the material contained is clearly of a much earlier origin. Its Hebrew equivalent, perhaps inspired in part by a reference in the Talmud to ‘Princes and Rulers of all shining objects and crystals’, gives more complete details of the choosing of a male child, the anointing and placing of a crystal in his hand.<sup>256</sup>

This ritual begins when Saul places the shew-stone in Frank’s hand, and then stands over him muttering words that the reader is not a party to.<sup>257</sup> It is also a despoiling of an Edenic setting, which then expels those who have transgressed.

The story starts with Dr Thomas Ashton, Doctor of Divinity, sitting in his room at his beautiful desk, and his view over a lovely garden bordered by a great wall, keeping evil out of his orderly world. However, the comment Dr Ashton makes next (“[a]bominable!”) shows the reader that not all is well. The doctor has brought the teenage son of an associate into his house. We might think that this is a charitable act, but are told that Dr Ashton has done this as the boy, Lord Saul, has an income of his own, which will be added to Doctor Ashton’s household income; there is also the possibility of a Bishopric for his trouble. These reasons for Saul’s inclusion in the household are more avaricious than Christian.

It was perhaps with half an eye open to the possibility of an Irish Bishopric (at which another sentence in the Earl’s letter seemed to hint) that Dr Ashton accepted the charge of Saul and of the 200 guineas a year that came with him....<sup>258</sup>

Saul’s father is condemned as selfish and cold by James for he has no interest in his son at all, describing him as “whimsical” to Dr Ashton, and apparently glad to hand

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<sup>256</sup>Weighall, ‘Dark Devotions’, p.131.

<sup>257</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.201.

<sup>258</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.200.

him over to someone he barely knows. Here, James demonstrates the High Church's disregard for an abandoned, very disturbed, child. As soon as Saul arrives in Dr Ashton's house, he is barely acknowledged, and left to take up a friendship with Dr Ashton's much younger ward, his nephew Frank.

There are no personal loving relationships with God here; instead, James depicts Dr Ashton's lack of spiritual conscience, as the boy is looked upon as useful for his allowance and the fulfilment of a personal ambition. Unfortunately, as James makes clear, this pact is something of a Faustian bargain. The letter from Saul's father to Dr Ashton at the beginning of the story allows James to link Saul to the demonic, through this warning:

...'not that he is sickly'...' twas only today his old nurse came expressly to tell me he was possess'd: but let that pass; I'll warrant you can find a spell to make all straight...The truth is, he has here no boys of his age or quality to consort with, and is given to moping about in our raths and graveyards: and he brings home romances that fright my servants out of their wits. So there are you and your lady forewarned...<sup>259</sup>

The letter mentions using spells to set things straight. Has Dr Ashton been a frequent user of the occult to get what he wants? Even if this is only a figure of speech, the seed is planted in the reader's mind. He certainly does not seem to heed this warning, and Lord Saul duly arrives at the Doctor's residence. His arrival does nothing to calm anyone's fears; the horses rear up in a panic, and one horse steps straight on to a servant's foot, wounding him.

Saul is described as 'a thin youth of, say, sixteen years old, with straight black hair and pale colouring'.<sup>260</sup> Saul is soon put into the care of Frank, Dr Ashton's ward, and the two boys are very much left to their own devices. Apparently, the servants love Saul, but there is an unsettling footnote to this calm setting, as James notes that Mrs Ashton suddenly found that her maidservants deserted her and her usual

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<sup>259</sup>Ibid.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid.

suppliers suddenly declined to send her any more. Lord Saul, it seems, is having a bad influence on the whole household. We also see this when he first arrives, and goes to the horse at the front of the carriage and pats it:

Whether he made some movement that scared it or not, there was very nearly a nasty accident, for the beast started violently, and the postilion being unready was thrown and lost his fee, as he found afterwards, and the chaise lost some paint on the gateposts, and the wheel went over the man's foot who was taking out the baggage.<sup>261</sup>

James is sowing the first hints of unease about the new arrival. Whereas in the other Jamesian story of a charitable act towards abandoned children, "Lost Hearts", we immediately warm to the lost Stephen, Lord Saul has been marked as 'different,' from the beginning. However, Dr Ashton ignores this, and a veil of Christian piety is drawn over the situation. In his essay on this story, MacCulloch remarks that childlike imaginations left to run wild soon upset the balance of a Garden of Eden. Saul and Frank render the household in chaos, although all seems well on the surface.<sup>262</sup> As in "Lost Hearts", the surface of a Christian act is hiding the inner decay of evil, which will soon burst out into the light, taking the family with it.<sup>263</sup>

James is making the point that there is no true religion here; this is all about appearances and smoothing over the obvious signs of evil. Saul feels no compunction about continuing in the same vein as he did in Ireland. His behaviour is not addressed and he is soon influencing Frank, who begins participating in his acts of scrying and witchcraft, with the taking of Mrs Ashton's black cockerel to make a 'devils ladder', in which a number of black feathers are bound together, considered by many magical practitioners a powerful tool to grant wishes.<sup>264</sup> These are not the usual games that boys play, and together with the disappearance of Mrs Ashton's

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<sup>261</sup>Ibid.

<sup>262</sup>MacCulloch, 'The Toad in the Study', p.91.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid.

<sup>264</sup>Judika Illes, *The Element Encyclopaedia of 5000 Spells: The Ultimate Reference Book for the Magical Arts* (London: Harper, 2004).

black cockerel and Frank dying of a fever, readers may feel that there is more to Lord Saul than meets the eye. Before Frank's death, he apologised for his part in taking the black cockerel and prophesied that Saul would soon be very cold. Saul has killed Frank, by accident or intention, though Frank's father's neglect is also shown to be a key factor.

Weighell notes that the taking of a black cockerel is a classic offering to summon the invisible and demonic:

Lord Saul's invocation involves the classic mode of summoning the dark powers, the slaughter of a black cock, and the resulting manifestations point to Beelzebub as the demon petitioned. Dr. Oldys subsequent encounter with a monstrous insect constitutes the only appearance of the Lord of the flies in supernatural fiction (up to that time), to conform completely to the accounts of the major Demonologists.<sup>265</sup>

Pfaff wrote that, throughout his long career, James was always aware of the importance of human kindness and understanding, through the medium of the church and of those in loco parentis.<sup>266</sup> He observed that when James was Provost of Eton, he took the religious guidance and care of the boys very seriously.<sup>267</sup>

Looking at this particular story with this in mind, we see that James finds the dereliction of duty shown towards Saul and Frank a particular kind of horror, just as he regarded Mr Abney with revulsion. Saul is unsympathetic as a character, but he is shown no compassion, understanding or care. The Ashtons did not even care that Saul was often seen by the villagers wandering about at all hours of the night and early morning. They were more concerned about the invisible companions that seemed to be with him, companions that in the end turned on him (he is later found dead clawed to death and clinging for rescue to the door of the minster).<sup>268</sup> It seems that Saul wanted to be noticed. His dying position is symbolic of a last desperate

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<sup>265</sup>Weighell, 'Dark Devotions', p.131.

<sup>266</sup>Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.348.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid, p.302.

<sup>268</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.204.

attempt to claim the love that was so lacking in his life. It seems, however, that even in death, Saul was unwanted and ignored, as in the next part of the story; we learn that the house was left empty for over a hundred years until new tenants, Dr Henry Oldys and his niece Mary, took up residence in the year 1824.

At first, the new tenants find their new residence very appealing, apart from the ever-present sawflies that cannot be removed from an upstairs bedroom. This room is remarkable for the fact that there is nothing in it apart from an old press and a solitary chest of drawers. Soon, Mary has her dreams interrupted by frightening visions of pink arms waving out of the drawers of the chest, and Dr Oldys is set upon in the dark of his bedroom by what seems to be a presence with very thin arms. It seems Mary has second sight, as Saul's old scrying glass is found in the garden and Mary starts to see visions in it. Saul is still crying out for attention and inclusion in a family. Mary starts to see events that happened to him, unobserved by other people.

I saw in my bedroom in the broad sunlight [...] a prospect strange to me [...] a grey stone ruin [...] in this stood an old and ugly woman talking to a boy dressed in the fashion of maybe a hundred years ago. She put something into his hand that glittered and he something into hers, which I saw to be money...on the walls of the ruin were bones and a skull [...] next the same boy beckoned with his hands and over the top of the wall some moving objects were becoming visible [...] whether heads or other parts of some animal or human forms I could not tell [...] <sup>269</sup>

Again, James is juxtaposing the world of comfortable Christian piety with the world of the demonic and occult, in this case the monsters that have risen up to punish Saul for meddling in a magical world that he knows little about. However, even in death he has managed to reach out to the same residents of the house in search of recognition and peace. This is made horribly concrete by James's use of the macabre device of leaving the remains of his protagonist in the old press in a room haunted by sawflies. It would seem that Mary's use of the inorganic demon (the

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<sup>269</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.207.

shew-stone) has summoned Saul; again, James does not present us with a stereotypical ghost, but with a much more horrible revenant:

Something seemed to rush at me, and there was – I don't know how to put it – a sensation of long thin arms, or feelers, all about my face and neck, and body. Very little strength in them, there seemed to be [...] I tore at the curtain and somehow let in enough light to be able to see something waving which I knew was an insect's leg, by the shape of it: but lord what a size! Why, the beast must have been as tall as I am. And now you tell me sawflies are an inch long or less.<sup>270</sup>

Saul has been transmogrified into a horrifying insect-revenant, which haunts the house. The occult circumstances that surrounded him even in the bosom of the church have ensured that he has existed in this in-between death and life situation, terrorising the house and appearing to the villagers as the 'thin ghost' that scratches at windows, like the sawfly that James compares him to in the passage above.<sup>271</sup>

The introduction of Saul as antagonist into a Christian world of piety is James at his most satirical. He uses the moral of a divided world, the walled gardens that contain the house and the world of the village, and further afield, Ireland, where Saul (again named for a demonic biblical king) practised the dark arts that would tear apart this Edenic world. The dark force of Saul was invited (as a demon would be) into this world, thanks to the greed of Dr Ashton.

Whilst James set "The Residence at Whitminster" in an ecclesiastical setting, he often (as covered above) liked to allude to other hidden worlds, of not just Biblical and occult lore, but the folkloric and fantastical, especially that of the fae or world of the fairies. Three of these worlds appear in "The Rose Garden", "A View from a Hill" and "After Dark in the Playing Fields".<sup>272</sup> This last story was written in 1924 and published in June for Issue 10 of *College Days*, an Eton ephemeral. It is seen as a

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p.216.

<sup>272</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.337, p.104.

companion piece to James's book *The Five Jars*.<sup>273</sup> Rosemary Pardoe has termed this story a 'seriously underrated piece', and a close reading supports this theory.<sup>274</sup> It has a sinister air, with its references to the world of fairyland and the fairies' ways of punishing those who gain access to their world. The story begins harmlessly with the narrator taking a night stroll through the grounds of Eton. This tale is exceptional in that the narrator is none other than James himself. It is one of only two tales where the Jamesian tactic of narratorial distance is not maintained (the other being "A Vignette"), which somewhat undermines the theories that many critics (and James) maintained that distance is necessary to maintain plausibility.<sup>275</sup>

At the beginning, the tale has a whimsical, almost fairy-tale air, which can be compared again to his full-scale fairy-tale *The Five Jars*. This device works to give an intimate air, yet also distances the author from the tale he is telling. James is enjoying the stillness of his night walk, when his reverie is interrupted by an owl:

The hour was late and the night was fair. I had halted not far from Sheep's Bridge and was thinking about the stillness, only broken by the sound of the weir, when a loud tremulous hoot just above me made me jump. It is always annoying to be startled, but I have a kindness for owls. This one was evidently very near: I looked about for it. There it was, sitting plumply on a branch about twelve feet up. I pointed my stick at it and said, "Was that you?" "Drop it," said the owl.<sup>276</sup>

There it is! The shock the reader feels suddenly introduces the pleasant shudder very early in this tale, at the thought of a dark silent night interrupted by a supernatural agency of a talking animal. The tale is very similar to its precursor with its echoes of Edwardian whimsy and also to the tales of *Alice in Wonderland*, and *The Wind in the Willows*.<sup>277</sup> However, the tale has a darker side to it. The owl is not

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<sup>273</sup> Rosemary Pardoe, 'Introduction to *The Five Jars*', in James, *A Pleasing Terror*, p.529. M.R. James, *Five Jars* (London: Book Jungle, 2008).

<sup>274</sup> Pardoe, 'Introduction to *The Five Jars*', p.529.

<sup>275</sup> James, *A Pleasing Terror*, p.487.

<sup>276</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.337.

<sup>277</sup> Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, edited by Martin Gardener (Strand, London: Penguin Books, 2001). Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows* (Strand, London: Penguin Books, 2005).

the only supernatural agent at large on this night, and it is also a subjugated member of an underclass to the fairies that persecute it in this tale.

James chooses to give the owl a working class accent, indicated in its poor grammar and dropped 'h's, similar to all the shopkeepers, clerks and servants that people his tales:-

“Well,” said the owl ungraciously, “I don’t know, as it matters so particular tonight. I’ve had me [sic] supper as it happens, and if you ain’t [sic] too long over it– ahhh!” Suddenly it broke into a loud scream, flapped its wings furiously, bent forward and clutched its perch tightly, continuing to scream.<sup>278</sup>

The fairies are introduced into the tale at this point, trying to pull a tail feather from the owl. The fairies have clear voices, upper-class accents and good diction. It is midsummer night and the fairies are celebrating with dancing and merriment, which is sarcastically mocked by the owl: “I should kindly ’ope [sic] not, said the owl, drawing itself up. “Our family’s never give in to dancing, nor never won’t neither.”<sup>279</sup>

The link with dancing is illustrated further by James introducing an inter-textual reference to another folkloric tale, that of William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which has all the classic folkloric fairy myths of animal transmogrification, fairy kidnappings, and the fairy joy of dancing. Pardoe notes that James was fascinated by fairy mythology from his childhood:

James was no stranger to the faerie kingdom, having been interested in the subject from an early age. In his pre-or early teens, at Temple Grove School, he wrote, “I want to know what Leprechaunes and Cluricaunes are, they are a kind of supernatural beings but that’s all I know about them”.<sup>280</sup>

Although Pardoe noted that James’s version of fairyland was ‘distinctly different’ from that of Shakespeare, there are many allusions in this tale that are classically similar to the folkloric underpinnings of earlier English tales, especially the ‘Ballad of Tam

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<sup>278</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.337.

<sup>279</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.338.

<sup>280</sup>M. R. James, ‘After Dark in the Playing Fields’ in James, *A Pleasing Terror*, p.382 (fn).

Lin'.<sup>281</sup> This ballad appeared first in print in 1549 in *The complaint of Scotland*, but its origin is lost. It concerns a mortal woman, Janet, who finds she is pregnant by Tam Lin after picking a rose on her father's estate, which the fairies view as their land. The story contains many typical fairy traditions: time is different in their land, animals talk, and the fairies are combative and amoral, especially in dealings with mortals.

James's fairies are more typical of the fairies in these older folk tales. The owl does not like them, seeing them as something to be avoided and feared. This is justified when they try to hang it in the middle of its conversation with James:

Hardly had the owl given its last emphatic nod when four small slim forms dropped from a bough above, and in a twinkling some sort of grass rope was thrown around the body of the unhappy bird, and it was borne off through the air, loudly protesting, in the direction of Fellows Pond. Splashes and gurgles and shrieks of unfeeling laughter were heard as I hurried up. Something darted away over my head, and as I stood peering over the bank of the pond, which was all in commotion, a very angry and dishevelled owl scrambled heavily up the bank, and stopping near my feet shook itself and flapped and hissed for several minutes without saying anything I should care to repeat.<sup>282</sup>

James is illustrating that fairies are not the benevolent beings sometimes found in story-books. Instead, in the English tradition, they are changeable beings who guard the borders to their lands very jealously. They are evidently punishing the owl for giving away the secret that, in their world, animals can communicate with mortals.

Another folkloric motif found in this story is the effect that midsummer night can have on any mortal foolish enough to be found walking at midnight: they may develop second sight, or the gift to be able to see past the veil of this mortal plane. The person who develops this gift or curse after encountering fairies can be seen by them ever after and vice versa, which James uses as the sinister finish to this story:

All this took place some years ago, before summer time came in. I do sometimes go into the Playing Fields at night still, but I come in before true midnight. And I find I do not like a crowd after dark— for example— at the Fourth of June fireworks. You see— no, you do not, but I see— such curious

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<sup>281</sup> James, p.382.

<sup>282</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.338.

faces: and the people to whom they belong flit about so oddly, often at your elbow when you least expect it, and looking close into your face, as if they were searching for someone— who may be thankful, I think, if they do not find him.<sup>283</sup>

The idea of the fairies kidnapping those who encounter them can be found in many of the Grimm and Andersen tales. James translated Andersen's tales in 1930, and these folkloric ideas can be found in many of his ghost stories. The folkloric underpinnings of James's tales have (as illustrated earlier) been identified in Jacqueline Simpson's articles.<sup>284</sup> However James's intrusion into this hidden world has repercussions for him: he can now see things that he would rather not

The trope of the thing which should remain hidden being revealed is also a feature of another James story, "The Rose Garden". This story features three concurrently running aspects: a meditation on marriage, a parable on the idea of "letting sleeping dogs lie" and a sinister story of what can happen when the past intrudes into the present. The Anstruthers are a very English couple: we are introduced to them at the start of the story, when Mrs Anstruther, one of James's Amazonian women of temperament, insists her husband postpone his round of golf and go into the nearby town to look into the purchase of some 'knitted things' for her bazaar stall. It is clear that Mrs Anstruther is used to having things done her way, as Mr Anstruther immediately capitulates. Other characters continue to give in to her wants, and it becomes clear that what Mrs Anstruther wants is a rose garden, in an area of their large garden that has for a long time remained undisturbed.<sup>285</sup>

The setting for the rose garden is a typical Jamesian one: an old English country hall. On the day we are introduced to the Anstruthers, they are 'at breakfast in the parlour of Westfield Hall, in the county of Essex', as English a setting as one

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid, p.339.

<sup>284</sup> Jacqueline Simpson, 'The Rules of Folklore in the Ghost Stories of M. R. James', in Joshi and Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious*, pp.144, 142.

<sup>285</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.104.

could wish for.<sup>286</sup> The only thoughts the characters have beside golf and knitted things are the planned rose garden. The garden as it is planned will not even take much effort, as their staff will do the hard work of digging the garden while Mrs Anstruther plans to do some painting. The class divide is alive and well in this story, and again the first notes of caution are noted by the Anstruther's gardener, Collins. Collins tries to advise Mrs Anstruther that the place she has chosen is too dark for a rose garden and has an old post that will be very hard to move right in the centre:

It was a small, dank clearing,...almost bare of grass and dark of aspect...Clearly Collins had not been put in possession of his mistress's intentions with regard to this plot of ground: and when he learnt them from Mr. Anstruther he displayed no enthusiasm...Collins advanced, and shook the post with both hands: then he rubbed his chin. "That's firm in the ground, that post is," he said. "That's been there a number of years, Mr Anstruther. I doubt I shan't get that up not quite so soon".<sup>287</sup>

The voice of reason from the mouths of the lower classes is now a recognisable device utilised by James, and the reader starts to feel a growing recognition that perhaps the planned rose garden would be better in another location. James reinforces this with Miss Wilkins, the only living member of an old family who lived for many years at the hall. We are regaled with a section set in the recent past, of Miss Wilkins' brother's encounter with the legends of that patch of ground. He fell asleep by the post and awoke screaming at nightmares that were prophetically linked with the past of another resident of the area; a judge tried and executed people in a very unjust fashion. His revenant was heard around the parish for years after until the local clergy exorcised his wraith into the ground at the hall and sealed it in place with the old post that Mrs Anstruther wants removed.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> James, p.104.

<sup>287</sup>Ibid, p.105.

<sup>288</sup>Ibid, p.107.

The device of a post being utilised to seal in a revenant is a very old folkloric tradition used in many continental (especially Danish) fairy-tales.<sup>289</sup> James would have been aware of this old tradition from his translation of the Hans Christian Andersen tales, and all of his other engagement with the folkloric and bardic literature of these countries. Jacqueline Simpson outlined these traditions, linking this tale with an earlier Danish story of a priest whose wife wants an old stake pulling up to make way for a garden. In Danish belief, if the ghost is released by uprooting its stake, it may manifest itself as a sinister 'night-raven' (perhaps a nightjar?); hence, possibly, the owl in James's earlier story. It may be worth noting that in one of Kristensen's versions, the removal of the stake is due to the foolish obstinacy of a priest's domineering wife, who wants to turn part of the orchard into her personal garden, and secretly uproots the post, which she had promised never to disturb.<sup>290</sup>

There are definite similarities between this older folkloric tale and James's story. When the post is removed, the Anstruthers are haunted by owls at their windows. Mr Anstruther has the same prophetic dreams as the younger Wilkins, and at last the wraith appears to the unfortunate Mrs Anstruther as a face, pink and hairless with a single tooth, and the Guy Fawkes hat that marks him out as belonging to a much earlier period of history.<sup>291</sup> Mrs Anstruther is subjected to her own private abjection. She finds the safety of the house before her total nervous collapse; her whole body shuts down as her senses refuse to assimilate what she has witnessed and she spends the winter abroad recuperating from the ensuing shock. As with the unfortunate Somerton in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas", Mrs Anstruther will take a long time to mentally recover from her encounter with James's revenant.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Simpson, 'The Rules of Folklore', p.153.

<sup>290</sup>Ibid.

<sup>291</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.112.

<sup>292</sup>Ibid, p.82.

Another James story interrogates the idea of the hidden, through an unusual device: invisible revenants who are only apprehended through one of Reza Negarestani's inorganic demons, a pair of 'hellish binoculars'. "A View from a Hill" concerns a local amateur archaeologist, Baxter, who uses the dead bones from two men who had previously been hanged for their crimes, melting them down and filling a pair of binoculars with them.<sup>293</sup> This grisly application enabled whoever used the binoculars to view the scenery through dead men's eyes. Baxter comes to a very nasty end when the invisible ghosts return to claim him. The story commences with a superb descriptive passage that draws the reader into the *mise-en-scène*:

How pleasant it can be, alone in a first-class railway carriage, on the first day of a holiday that is to be fairly long, to dawdle through a bit of English country that is unfamiliar, stopping at every station. You have a map open on your knee, and you pick out the villages that lie to right and left by their church towers...<sup>294</sup>

Thus, the story opens with James pontificating on the ideal setting for a railway journey taken in early summer. His thoughts are those of an author marvelling at the unspoilt English unspoilt countryside, until he seems to shake himself out of this mood and start the story proper. James introduces the 'Traveller' and immediately returns to his usual method of moving quickly into the story.<sup>295</sup> In typical James fashion we have gone from a slow idealisation of the Albion-esque perfection of the countryside, to the author's impatience with his own lengthy scene-setting, and immediately the pace of the story quickens. The protagonist is introduced, a 'man of academic pursuits' on his way to stay at that mainstay of Jamesian settings, 'a hall' at the invitation of Squire Richards.<sup>296</sup> The story concerns two men from society's upper echelons, who met whilst pursuing their own interests in an unnamed town.

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<sup>293</sup>Ibid, p.291.

<sup>294</sup>Ibid.

<sup>295</sup>Ibid.

<sup>296</sup>Ibid.

Mr Fanshawe is immediately at the railway station met by a local porter, who instructs him how to get to the hall. James gives the porter his usual accent:

Fanshawe was told by a cheerful country porter that the car from the Hall had been up to the station and left a message that something had to be fetched from half a mile farther on...But I see, continued the porter, as you've got your bysticle, [sic] and very like you'd find it pleasanter to ride up to the'all [sic] yourself...<sup>297</sup>

Soon, however, James turns his attention from the setting to his revenant. It appears when Mr Fanshawe sets out to inspect the countryside that surrounds the hall taking with the binoculars. The Jamesian object, like the scrapbook in "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook" or the mezzotint in the story of the same name is, again, one of Reza Negarestani's inorganic demons or cursed objects. The field glasses seem to Mr Fanshawe to be a little too heavy and when they are first taken out of their box, Fanshawe cuts his hand on it, as if they are reluctant to be used again:

'Why your disgusting Borgia box has scratched me, drat it' said Fanshawe. '...and here are the glasses. They *are* pretty heavy, as you said, but I think I'm up to carrying them.'<sup>298</sup>

Later on, Fanshawe finds that there is indeed something wrong with the glasses. They show views very different from what is actually there in the modern day: the same places, but decades earlier, including the hanging of the revenant of the story. We are not really introduced to the actual ghost, but instead the story lingers on the grave robbing and desecration of a certain Mr Baxter, who was something of an amateur archaeologist in that region a few years earlier.<sup>299</sup>

Mr Baxter attempts to pass himself off as a professional antiquary when in fact he was an amateur. James derides him for this effrontery:

'What a good man!' said Mr Fanshawe. 'Good?' said the squire, pulling up brusquely. 'I meant useful to have about the place,' said Mr Fanshawe....' 'I

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<sup>297</sup>Ibid.

<sup>298</sup>Ibid, p.292.

<sup>299</sup>Ibid, p.293.

don't know about that either,' said the Squire;..." 'I didn't like him,' he added, after a moment...<sup>300</sup>

Baxter's crime of boiling down remains to put them into a pair of field glasses is a thoroughly new type of crime and fits the air of English eccentricity that only James's Antiquarians could possibly have thought of.<sup>301</sup> Although both dark and disgusting, this is a sort of schoolboy villainy that almost reads as a prank. The combination of schoolboy pranking, disdain for over-reacting, black humour and inorganic demons could only be found in a James story.

In James's story "The Uncommon Prayer-Book", again he sows the seeds of unease very early on. The inorganic demon is manifested by the prayer-books of the story, which are shown to be continually disturbed by unseen presences, in the little chapel that they have occupied for many years. Their caretaker is the only person that apprehends these unseen presences:

[...] these books. Every time, pretty near, that I come in to do up the place, I shuts 'em and spreads the cloths over 'em to keep off the dust, ever since Mr Clark spoke about it, when I first come; and yet here they are again and always the same page – and as I says, whoever can it be as does it with the door and winders shut;...<sup>302</sup>

The books are then stolen by Mr Poschwitz, who meets a very nasty end as his theft of the books summons the revenant of the story. Lady Sadleir is a lay person, but her politics are profoundly religious in origin:

The figure of old Lady Sadleir became more substantial to his imagination, as of one in whom love for Church and King had gradually given place to intense hate of the power that had silenced the one and slaughtered the other.<sup>303</sup>

The ghost stories I have chosen revolve around the discovery of evil in the bosom of the church with increasing frequency. Religion is a theme in many of James's stories, specifically focused on demonstrating that the church is lacking in its

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<sup>300</sup>Ibid.

<sup>301</sup>Ibid, p.291.

<sup>302</sup>Ibid, p.272.

<sup>303</sup>Ibid, p.175.

teachings when the outcomes are not the intended ones. In “The Uncommon Prayer-Book”, James has set the scene for the appearance of the revenant (Lady Sadleir) with hints of malice to come. This is done very cleverly with unseen hands turning the pages of the prayer books on the stall-desks in the chancel, and the chapel that has lain quite undisturbed for years. The hints of supernatural agency to come are built up until Sadleir arrives to kill Poschwitz. James also demonstrates that Lady Sadleir was a religious fanatic who had used religion for her own particular ends, appointing herself judge and jury to those who did not meet her religious ideals in both life and death (as James shows us, she continues to punish transgressors).<sup>304</sup> James is reminding us in this story that religion has not always been the New Testament version of tolerance, but rife with war and bloodshed.

In “The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral”, again the revenant is conjured by James out of the unseen, but this time the readers do not see the antagonist: the agent of the supernatural is only hinted at. There are three wooden figures carved into a stall, and a household pet that may have despatched the religious figure (Dr Haynes) who has transgressed in various ways. We see Dr Haynes’s greed as he murders his Dean in order to inherit the role; and in “The Residence at Whitminster”, we see the dereliction of duty of Dr Ashton towards his ward. James uses these protagonists to illustrate evil twisting the idea of religious duty. James was never so concerned with the spiritual idea of the church; its “Holy Ghost” is, ironically, not found in his stories. The “Uncommon Prayer-Book” is a story that critics such as MacCulloch read as following: whatever one might think of the Christian New Testament ethos of ‘turning the other cheek’, James’s version of the church is very well equipped to take care of any enemies itself:

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p.279.

A book dealer who steals prayer books from a chapel finds that they are capable of more than mere self defence by virtue of the fact that they have been imbued with a desire to punish an earlier and greater enemy of the church.<sup>305</sup>

Although it is not the books that kill in “The Uncommon Prayer-Book” but the books’ guardian, this is another of James’s stories where, very like “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas”, the treasure has a guardian. Although something may be a holy relic, the church, almost as a sentient organisation, looks after its own. This moral is all the way through this tale. It starts out innocently enough: an elderly gentleman takes a walk through unfamiliar countryside and finds by chance an unassuming chapel which has been long abandoned and which now only receives a monthly dusting from its caretaker. James attributes human characteristics to the chapel, especially with this passage:

Of the Chapel a word must be said. It stands about a hundred yards from the house, and has its own little graveyard and trees about it [...] the interior is complete and rich [...] screen work, pulpit, seating and glass all of the same period [...] organ case with gold embossed pipes in the western gallery [...] dust cloths over the blue velvet cushions of the stall desks.<sup>306</sup>

The use of the possessive pronoun ‘it’s’ suddenly provokes the sympathy of the reader, giving the chapel a personality of its own. The damage that is about to be done to the possessions of the chapel by Poschwitz, creates a special resonance, a desire to see justice done. We may also feel after this description that the chapel is content with this situation; in keeping with its hall which has ‘all the lookin’-glasses (sic) covered up, and the paintin’s, (sic) and the curtains and carpets folded away’, it is quite content to slumber in peace.<sup>307</sup>

It is at this point in the story that we discover that even though the chapel’s caretaker continually dusts and cleans and leaves the chapel with its stalls covered and its prayer books shut and covers intact, when she chances to go back into the

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<sup>305</sup>MacCulloch, ‘The Toad in the Study’, p.88.

<sup>306</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.271.

<sup>307</sup>Ibid.

chapel the next time, the books are always open at one particular psalm: Psalm 109. James calls this psalm 'savage' but the description of the old man Mr Davidson looking at the prayer books is James at his best, utilising his background in palaeography in his remarks on the binding of the books, their lettering and how, in the narrator's opinion, Mr Davidson is no expert on books:<sup>308</sup>

The date was 1653; the printer [...] Anthony Cadman. He turned to the list of proper psalms for certain days; yes, added to it was that same inexplicable entry: for the 25<sup>th</sup> day of April: the 109<sup>th</sup> psalm. An expert would no doubt have thought of many other points to inquire into, but this Antiquary, as I have said, was no expert. He took stock, however, of the binding a handsome one of tooled blue leather, bearing the arms that figured in several of the nave windows in various combinations...<sup>309</sup>

It is this expertise that gives an air of realism to the inclusion of the psalm. This 'savage' psalm was attributed to April 25<sup>th</sup> for a reason: it is Oliver Cromwell's birthday. Cromwell was the enemy of Lady Sadleir, who at that time owned the parish the chapel is in. She felt a great deal of hatred towards Cromwell for the revolution, which saw her religious beliefs outlawed and her king executed. James's vision of religion here is profoundly violent. He portrays Lady Sadleir at the centre of religious rites practised in her chapel with a group of people ready to perform almost any act to reinstate their particular brand of religion as the one true church:

What curious evil service was that which she and a few like her had been wont to celebrate year by year in that remote valley?[...] and again, did not this persistent opening of the books agree oddly with the other traits of her known to him?<sup>310</sup>

One might conclude that the moral is that the church is well-equipped and ruthless in its deployment of demons to protect its property and derives its authority to be so from its deity's equally jealous protection of the fruits of the trees of knowledge of good, evil and life.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>308</sup>Ibid, p.272.

<sup>309</sup>Ibid, p.273.

<sup>310</sup>Ibid, p.275.

<sup>311</sup>Ibid, p.88.

This is the Old Testament God: the jealous God. Lady Sadleir is his instrument of punishment in both life and death; her revenant follows the book dealer who steals her prayer books, and her funeral shroud is seen on the top of his car as he drives away. Back at his office, she falls upon him, biting him in the neck; her bite is described as being as venomous as a snake's, emphasising the non-human reptilian quality.<sup>312</sup>

James's vision of Lady Sadleir as a murderous avenging revenant is a warning about religious devotion becoming twisted into fanaticism, where an individual's religious beliefs derange them to the extent that they punish those they view as breaking religious tenets. According to this story, Lady Sadleir lost her humanity long before her death, running her own illegal services and forcing her tenants to attend them:

"The Uncommon Prayer-Book" involves a singularly nasty revenant (though the story suggests that Lady Sadleir may have been equally nasty when alive). Her ghost revenges the theft of the prayer books from the family chapel, her shroud seen as "a long white bundle" on top of the culprit's motorcar when he drives away. Later she falls on Poschwitz from the safe where he's stored the stolen books, and her bite has the same instantly haemolytic effect as snake venom.<sup>313</sup>

We are mindful that, as Lady Sadleir hated the religious wars of her era, she would have not tolerated religious debate of any type and she almost certainly would have hated any religious doubt. Indeed, the psalm that the prayer books are open at is a bastardisation of a religious ceremony. April 25<sup>th</sup> is also St Mark's day, marked in the Catholic Church by prayers and observances.<sup>314</sup>

Indeed, the printing of these prayer books at all at that time was illegal and punishable by death (clearly Lady Sadleir saw herself as above the law). The books themselves, as MacCulloch noted, have earlier been used as instruments of

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<sup>312</sup>Ibid, p.200.

<sup>313</sup>John Alfred Taylor, "'If I'm Not Careful': Innocents and Not-So-innocents in the Stories of M. R. James', in Joshi and Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious*, p.201.

<sup>314</sup>Taylor, 'If I'm not Careful', p.203.

punishment, but using these prayer books as an instrument of terror is wrong, as they were meant to be the word of God upon earth.<sup>315</sup> In these stories, we have protagonists who inflict bloody revenge instead of turning the other cheek, and commit deeds that are so dreadful that even in death they can find no rest.

James uses two very unsympathetic antagonists in this story: the apostate Lady Sadleir and Mr Poschwitz. The division in this tale is illustrated powerfully by the small chapel's world being torn apart by the theft of the books, as Poschwitz is not killed until he has reached his office in London. This division reflects the divided reading that James gives his stories, a satirical focus on comic protagonists who meet with antagonists who punish them for crimes against Christianity. Another sin against Christianity (revenge) reappears as a powerful frame in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" which takes a very Old Testament line. MacCulloch notes that justice is a central theme in many of James's stories; where the world of man might fail to see the crime, there are powers in the world that will not ignore an evil deed.<sup>316</sup>

[...] James understood that the church and the tradition for which it stands sometimes inspire very little confidence. However, the general tenor of his stories reflects a mind whose confidence in the Christian tradition was under pressure but had not quite broken. It is philosophically interesting to see how the imagination develops in a mind that has reached this position.<sup>317</sup>

This position can be seen quite clearly in this story. It begins with an obituary notice recording the death of an archdeacon Dr Haynes at his house in Barchester. The narrator remarks that it was by chance he read this particular notice and decides that, in his line of work (he is another of James's antiquarians) to look over the local records of that area. The next time we meet this antiquarian he is cataloguing the manuscripts of the college to which the Archdeacon belonged. As we have seen previously, James regarded the cataloguing of manuscripts with something

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<sup>315</sup>MacCulloch, 'The Toad in the Study', p.88.

<sup>316</sup>Ibid, p.78.

<sup>317</sup> Martin Hughes, 'A Maze of Secrets in a Story by M. R. James', in Joshi and Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious*, p.261.

approaching reverence and this character approaches the work with an air of almost religious zeal. He quickly finds the antiquarian's fantasy: a sealed box, which the resident librarian regards with anxiety, even fear:

Lastly, there was a tin box, which was pulled out and dusted. Its label, much faded, was thus inscribed: "Papers of the Ven. Archdeacon Haynes" [...] The librarian was very willing that I should take the box and examine it at leisure. "I never looked inside it myself" he said, "but I've always been meaning to. I am pretty sure that it is the box which our old Master once said ought never to have been accepted by the college. He said that to Martin years ago; and he said also that as long as he had control over the library it should never be opened."<sup>318</sup>

The box that should not be opened is an obvious reference to the classical myth of Pandora; opening things which are more wisely left alone is a very human action. The narrator takes the box home and begins to go through the journals and letters it contains. One shocking letter reveals the deceased archdeacon to be guilty of murder, having paid the maid of his predecessor to place the carpet over a stair rod, which the old Archdeacon Dr Pulteney tripped over and duly fell to his death, allowing Dr Haynes to take his position soon afterwards. The letter is from the maid, Jane, who indicates in the letter that she did as he asked, and goes on to note that now she is short of money. The narrator remarks that after this letter was received the sum of £40 was paid by Dr Haynes to Jane.<sup>319</sup>

What type of justice might be served? James has Dr Hynes continue his good work of putting straight the accounts of the cathedral and investigating the interior with its beautiful fabrics and music. He undertakes these duties for over three years before the first hint of something being afoot. Dr Haynes's studies concerning the furniture of the cathedral reveal something of particular interest to the motions of justice in this tale: the three carvings on the end of the prayer desk, carved from local wood taken from a tree known as the 'hanging oak.' While the reader might feel

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<sup>318</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.148.

<sup>319</sup>*Ibid.*, p.155.

uneasy, the Archdeacon is delighted with his find and thinks it a charming example of local rural culture. The narrator remarks in his diaries that Dr Haynes continues to be in high spirits. However, from this point on his diary entries suddenly start to read very differently, speaking of loneliness and a craving for company. The narrator remarks that his diary entries show 'a shadow coming over him', which brings a sense of foreboding. Even if life has moved on in the tale, man's misdeeds are not forgotten, recorded for retribution to be delivered at a later date.<sup>320</sup>

This is not the only story of James's where the church is undermined by paganism. In "An Episode of Cathedral History"; there is a widespread sickness affecting the surrounding village when the remodelling of the inner sanctum of a cathedral unearths a demon, which has been living for hundreds of years in a tomb underneath the pulpit.<sup>321</sup> The symbolism of a very much alive old god in the very breast of the new religion is redolent of James's fears for the sanctity of the church and its ability to appeal to the new generation. It is almost as if the remodelling of the interior of the church caused it to fight internally. This was arguably reflected in the two movements debated in the church of James's day, especially the Low Evangelical church championed by James's university of Cambridge and the high Anglican/Catholic Oxford Movement of the University of Oxford, one standing for the old body of the church, one its more Low Church soul or conscience. This dichotomy would play itself out in James's own life.

Indeed, in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" the ability of the church to dispense justice to the murderer of Dr Pulteney is seen to be in some doubt, as the hanging oak carvings are symbolic of paganism. As I have already said, Simon MacCulloch and Helen Conrad O'Briain have noted a vein of the occult running

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<sup>320</sup>Ibid, p.152.

<sup>321</sup>Ibid, p.237.

through James's stories, in opposition to the often-religious background of the narrative.<sup>322</sup> However, this should not surprise anyone familiar with James's long-running interest in magic and the occult; as Cox notes, James had long been interested in the 'marvellous':

He was certainly beginning to indulge his taste for the fantastic and the supernatural [as a young man] – for instance, we hear of him 'going diligently on with Erckmann-Chatrian, two celebrated nineteenth century writers of ghost stories'. However, the supernatural coalesced with his more 'scientific' researches in his eager scramble for knowledge.<sup>323</sup>

The result of James's 'eager scramble' of research into the fantastic and marvellous is what makes his ghost stories so unique. He could, like some of the more conventional ghost story writers of his age, such as Mrs Oliphant, have written religious tales with long moralising caveats attached.<sup>324</sup> However, it is the contrast or dichotomy of the occult or pagan against the religious background in James's stories that give them an especially modern reading. In this passage in "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" this pagan or magical influence, hiding in the bosom of the church, illustrates James's often-whimsical touch. He describes:

[...] three small but remarkable statutes in the grotesque manner. One is an exquisitely modelled figure of a cat, whose crouching posture suggests with admirable spirit the suppleness, vigilance, and craft of the redoubted adversary of the genus *Mus*. Opposite to this is a figure seated upon a throne and invested with the attributes of royalty; but it is no earthly monarch whom the carver has sought to portray [...] the prick ears and curving horns betray his Tarturean origins [...] between these two figures is a shape [...] the sunken features and the rent flesh upon the cheekbones portray the King of Terrors.<sup>325</sup>

It is the magical, not the religious, that in the end brings justice to this tale of envy and greed. These figures start to impinge upon the sanity of the new archdeacon as he starts hearing voices and imagining that there is a cat on his

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<sup>322</sup>Ibid, p.78.Helen Conrad O'Briain& Julie Anne Stevens (eds), *The Ghost story from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*(Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), p.48.

<sup>323</sup>Cox, *Portrait*, p.15.

<sup>324</sup> Richard Dalby, *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* (London: Virago, 1992), p.150.

<sup>325</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.151.

stairs, which is actually seen by his friend Allen when he visits. Events conclude with Dr Haynes dying – like Dr Pulteney– after falling down the stairs, although Dr Haynes’s features have been obliterated by the scratches of an animal: justice red in tooth and claw. A fitting Old Testament type of justice is meted out not by the church, but by pagan creatures. James is making the point that even in the most outwardly respectable situations, there can still be a vein of evil hiding in the bosom of the pious. Despite the church’s beautiful trappings (think of James’s attention to the ornate stalls in “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”), its servants can be evil.

This divided reading is again satirically performed by the protagonists of this story, as the maid Jane is given money by Dr Haynes to ensure that Pulteney falls down the stairs. However, it is not a typical Jamesian revenant that delivers justice to Dr Haynes, but three small oak carvings and what may be read as a household cat, perhaps the devoted pet of Dr Pulteney. This is almost verging on the camp horror of a Vincent Price movie, or Hammer House of Horror. The irony is that these are all meant to be servants of the Christian church and faith. This is the divided reading of James’s ghost stories, emphasising the fallibility of the representatives of the church, and the church itself.

### Conclusion

James claimed to have been very much a product of his times, as one of his characters (the un-named narrator in “A Neighbour’s Landmark”) remarks: “Remember if you please...that I am a Victorian by birth and education and that the Victorian tree may not unreasonably be expected to bear Victorian fruit...”<sup>326</sup> However, the times in which he began writing his apocryphal texts and his ghost stories were more turbulent than he may have realised. As Ronald Pearsall reflected,

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<sup>326</sup>Joshi and Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious*.

'Beneath the rationalism and the optimism of Victorian England, there was a wide feeling of unease. God had been dismissed from his universe, and had left a yawning chasm.'<sup>327</sup>

Unquestioning faith became problematic for James when (according to Pfaff) his friend Seton Donaldson drowned in 1882, after which James was very depressed by his subsequent inability to maintain the type of faith that so comforted his parents.<sup>328</sup> Pfaff outlines the ongoing depressions affecting James, which were tied to his loss of faith and his eventual decision not to pursue ordination, and quotes a letter from a friend that illustrates the deep connection between James's depression and his relationship with religion:

You ended your letter in a very wrong and gloomy way Montie, which you mustn't do again, because I know you don't mean it. What you mean by saying that you are very near to losing the spiritual sense I don't quite know, and I don't think you do either.<sup>329</sup>

This letter (from his friend Ted Butler in 1889) notwithstanding, Pfaff comments that the scholarly life James chose to pursue and the subjects that he devoted his professional life to were enough for him.<sup>330</sup> It seemed that it was the tradition of the church that was important to him, not the spiritual belief. In *Eton and King's*, James outlines his lifelong interest in apocrypha, hagiology, palaeography, and all of the traditions of the two institutions that he called home.<sup>331</sup>

James's decision not to seek ordination is tied to the reaction against scientific materialism and may have been the answer to one of the major unanswered questions that troubles any academic who works on M. R. James: why, unlike his father and brother Bertie, and despite a clear life-long engagement with the church,

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<sup>327</sup> Ronald Pearsall, *The Table Rappers: The Victorians and the Occult* (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2004).

<sup>328</sup> Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.88-91.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> James, *Eton and King's*.

he was never ordained.<sup>332</sup> I suggest that this decision was part of his questioning of Christianity as a system of belief; he was unable or unwilling to wholeheartedly accept the church into his life as his father and brother had. Instead, James's lifelong engagement with religion and his sustained study of different forms of theology results in a 'divided reading' in his ghost stories, where the Jungian un-individuated personality that resulted from his ambivalence can be seen clearly.

The critical consensus is that James saw religion as a cultural tradition. His fiction is full of references to churches, Bibles, church architecture, hierarchy and the body of the church; the spirit or soul is less obvious. His vast output of research into manuscripts and apocrypha, which is really his life's work, was a compromise to this end. As Weighall and other critics such as Pardoe have noted, although James took the final decision not to take holy orders, his love of the church can be seen throughout his stories.<sup>333</sup> As MacCulloch maintains, the stories of M. R. James make it clear that you cannot always depend upon Christianity (the new religion) for answers, nor the old religion (paganism) with its cruel old gods and arbitrary justice.<sup>334</sup> Who, then, do we depend upon for guidance? James shows Christianity being continually undermined from within and without. As noted above, from an early age he was fascinated by the magical and the occult. This interest in later life saw him catalogue the library of the mage John Dee.<sup>335</sup> This is almost a reflection of the old age giving way into the new, the inner life of the modernist period. Where James's father and the older generation of the Victorian age were more sure of their values, the later generation, with the influence of Darwinism and scientific advances

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<sup>332</sup>Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.62.

<sup>333</sup>Weighell, 'Dark Devotions', p.92.

<sup>334</sup>MacCulloch, 'The Toad in the Study', p.92.

<sup>335</sup>Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.324.

generally, and the religious debates challenged by liberalism and biblical criticism, found the matter of belief much more complex.

The frequent recurrence of a seam of occult or evil presences in the bosom of the church can also be seen as James questioning how much power the Christian faith has to counteract evil, when it shows its presence. The servants of the church are often shown, as in the case of Dr Haynes and Dr Ashton, to be guilty of hypocrisy or downright evil. Others have been twisted into fanaticism, like Lady Sadleir. James seems to have questioned the whole system of Christian faith in his fiction, whilst continuing his quest for evidence of the actuality of God's word in his apocryphal studies.<sup>336</sup>

James may have loved certain aspects of the church, and indeed committed his life's scholarly research to the study of its theology, but his religious doubts led to his inability to commit to it in a formal way with the ordination that his father so wished for. However, as Pfaff notes, he remained conservative in the religious application of his pastoral care and administration in the posts he undertook, and the theological underpinning of his ghost stories can never be overstated. James certainly seemed to be projecting his own religious doubts on his characters in his stories. James's stories reflect his un-individuated personality as a result of his inability to reconcile the differing areas of his faith.<sup>337</sup>

Focusing on James's fascination with the unseen confirms Lehmann Imfeld's point in her chapter on James in *The Victorian Ghost Story and Theology* that James's ghost stories are often treated as a charming side-line to his theological studies, but they demand to be taken much more seriously. When they are read alongside his theological studies James's questioning of his faith is brought into

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<sup>336</sup>Weighell, 'Dark Devotions', p.133.

<sup>337</sup>Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections*, p.235.

relief, through not only the divided reading, but the inclusion of the unseen and the frequent use of demonic and occult imagery. This is significant because it shows his un-individuated psyche working out his religious doubts in his stories.<sup>338</sup> James's decision not to seek ordination may relate to his reasons for satirising his protagonists for falling from grace. He wished not to sin by taking ordination for appearances sake, as this would have been vanity. His stories are full of a knowing irony where his protagonists invite the attention of the antagonist or revenant for the sins of meddling in the occult, or coveting an object (Negarestani's Inorganic Demon) which invites the attention of the revenant that is symbiotically attached to this object.

This religious ambivalence is present in many of James's stories, an almost religious dichotomy or division between James's appreciation of the many church interiors and architecture that he often describes in his stories, and the behaviour of many of the servants of the church. It is as if he wishes to emphasise the fallibility of man in opposition to the beauty of the representation of the church as seen in its materials. This fallibility is emphasised in the divided reading of the church and the juxtaposition of the demonic and pagan in many of his stories. As Weighall has argued, of James's 33 stories, 13 were devoted to the ritualistic and demonic<sup>339</sup> Although his decision to avoid ordination may now never be answered, his un-individuated personality, resulting from this psychological burden and the inclusion of the seam of the paganistic, demonic and magical in his fictional output give an answer all of their own.

James often read these stories to an appreciative audience who viewed them as highly entertaining, as the stories are full of what to them would have been in-jokes, and a thorough mocking of the idea of ecclesiastical protagonist's sins against

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<sup>338</sup> Zoe Lehmann Imfeld, *The Victorian Ghost Story and Theology* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, AG, 2016).

<sup>339</sup>Weighall, 'Dark Devotions', p.124.

their profession. To the reading audience of today, this is not as apparent, until we consider the original way in which James wrote these stories, for his intended audience of nineteenth-century bachelor dons and churchmen. In conclusion, James's reason for avoiding ordination will never probably now be known. However, his stories represent a mind reacting to the era of scientific materialism, with revenants, demons and fairy folk that appear out of the unseen to punish the transgressors that have sinned against organised religion. It was as if James needed to punish representations of the church who reminded him that Christianity was fallible. The only trouble was, that as with others of his generation and indeed a lot of us in this era today, the idea of faith in the church is harder to accept than a belief in the other unseen world, that of the supernatural.

#### **Chapter Four: M. R. James and the Darwinian Gothic**

As the previous chapter sought to analyse the divided reading in James's ghost stories after the split in the church after Darwin, this chapter discusses further ramifications in James's fiction that also bear a Darwinian influence and continues my historical and Jungian reading. This chapter focuses on a range of stories which portray the revenant as physically and morally degenerate and abject, including "The Haunted Dolls' House", "A Warning to the Curious", "The Mezzotint", "Count Magnus", "An Episode of Cathedral History", "The Uncommon Prayer-book" and "The Diary of Mr Poynter". Its first focus is the historical reading of James's portrayal of the ghost. H. P. Lovecraft gave the first hints that the Jamesian ghost seemed to be more of a revenant, i.e. distinctly solid and corporeal, rather than a transparent floating ethereal figure.<sup>340</sup> This led me to a reading of Darwin's thesis of the devolved specimen and Max Nordau's concept of the degeneration of man, both highly influential Victorian theories that many authors of James's time engaged with in their own writing, such as H. G. Wells, Oscar Wilde and Richard Marsh.<sup>341</sup> I combine a historical reading of the impact of these evolutionary concepts a reading drawing on Jung's structuralist reading of the archetypal Shadow, Man's darker half of his unconscious, together with Kristeva's theory of abjection, looking at its overlap with the Jungian idea of the Shadow. This reading illustrates the way in which the ghosts that haunt James's antiquarians are summoned by the 'wasteland' quality of lives lived in an academic vacuum, and at how the resulting abject reaction of the antiquarians of the revenant bears all of the hallmarks of Darwin's regressed beast-man signifiers.

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<sup>340</sup> H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror In Literature* (London: Recluse, 1927).

<sup>341</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Connecticut: Martino Fine Books, 2014); H. G. Wells, *The Island Of Doctor Moreau* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967); H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1953); Wilde, *Dorian Gray*; Richard Marsh, *The Beetle* (Peterborough, Broadview Editions, 2004).

In 1893 when M. R. James read his first ghost stories, “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook” and “Lost Hearts” aloud to the Chit Chat society, the general public were still assimilating the scientific theories of Charles Darwin. Darwin’s books *The Origin of Species* (1859), *The Descent of Man* and *Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) had been published to a wide and curious readership in the preceding decades.<sup>342</sup> Ultimately, Darwin’s theory of evolution proved very divisive for the Victorians, provoking a split between science and religion that made many ask where God the creator was in this debate.<sup>343</sup> As I will argue, this question was never answered for M. R. James. However, we must ask how much this nineteenth-century divide between science and religion affected a writer with as religious an upbringing as James had. The answer, this chapter suggests, can be found in his ghost stories.

Darwin’s theory of evolution promulgates that man descended ultimately from primates, and that further back along the evolutionary path was a creature with scales and webbed fingers.<sup>344</sup> The idea of man regressing to a creature of lower intelligence caught the imaginations of other thinkers such as Max Nordau and Cesare Lombroso who were influenced by the degenerative theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, positing that man could also regress to lower criminal types of animalistic behaviour, as eugenic studies of criminals had tried to prove.<sup>345</sup>

This idea of ‘beast people’ and the changing of human identity to something akin to a crossbred human-animal has been termed ‘Darwinian gothic’ by critics such as Kelly Hurley in *The Gothic Body* and Virginia Richter in *Literature after Darwin*.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>342</sup>Richard William Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James* (London: Scolar Press, 1980), p.114; Charles Darwin, *On The Origin of Species* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in relation to sex* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>343</sup> Adrian Desmond & James Moore, *Darwin* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.677.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>345</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Connecticut, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2014); Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, *Zoological Philosophy: An Exposition with Regard to the Natural History of Animals 1809* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>346</sup>Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin De Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.1; Virginia Richter, *Literature after Darwin: Human Beasts in Western Fiction 1859-1939* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.1.

Here, human identity has been remodelled into something more physically amorphous, indistinguishable from the genetic throwbacks of a Darwinian past.

Through this discourse, man is replaced by the beast-man or ab-human.<sup>347</sup>

Degeneracy betrays itself among men in certain physical characteristics which are denominated stigmata or brand marks...such stigmata consist of deformities...squint eyes, hare lips, irregularities in the form or position of the teeth, pointed or flat palates, webbed or supernumerary fingers.<sup>348</sup>

Both Nordau's *Degeneration* and Lombroso's *Criminal Man* grew out of these theories on the idea of genetic devolution, and also came to have a large impact on society. Both books espoused the idea of societal decline at the fin de siècle, pronouncing art and literature bad influences on the 'weaker types' in society. Nordau singled out 'mystic and decadent works', especially poetry and literature written by aesthetes such as Beardsley and Wilde, whilst Lombroso preferred to find criminal counterparts in Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky.<sup>349</sup>

James's stories are clear examples of Darwinian gothic, embodying Nordau's anxieties about degeneracy amongst un-masculine men of the type James chooses as his protagonists, and concerns about the evolutionary throwback as embodied by James's terrifying revenants. James's antiquarian scholars are unmanly specimens, according to Nordauian reasoning: their interests are arcane and esoteric, their personalities introverted and obsessive, and their lives unhealthily cloistered and unadventurous. Their reaction when they encounter a revenant is hysterical and, more importantly, abject.<sup>350</sup> This is not surprising, perhaps: James's range of regressed bestial revenants are horrible apparitions who bear all the hallmarks of the

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<sup>347</sup>Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.3.

<sup>348</sup>Nordau, *Degeneration*, p.16.

<sup>349</sup>Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, p.309.

<sup>350</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia, 1982), p.3.

Darwinian gothic, with tentacles, hair, and slime. They tear and harass the poor antiquarian, sometimes even killing them.<sup>351</sup>

According to Nordau's discourse, James's protagonists are not muscular heroes, but effete, degenerate men who concentrate on niche hobbies. These 'hysterical unmanly degenerate' antiquarians' reactions to ghosts demonstrates Kristeva's theory of the abject, as well as Darwin's 'alarm reaction' (which is better known by the name given to it by Walter Cannon in 1915, the 'fight or flight' reaction).<sup>352</sup> This hysteria is found in all James's stories. His professional, cynical men start each story in the pursuit of knowledge, uncovering an artefact or a secret that summons the avenging bestial form, which pursues them until they succumb to the abject, hysterical state that would confirm Nordau's theories.

For instance, in "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad", Professor Parkins's ordeal at the hands of the revenant in his bedroom leaves him with symptoms of post-traumatic stress: for years after this ordeal he was unable to even encounter a 'surplice hanging on a door quite unmoved'.<sup>353</sup> In "The Haunted Dolls' House", "A Warning to the Curious", "The Mezzotint", "Count Magnus", "An Episode of Cathedral History" and "The Uncommon Prayer-book", all the ghosts are revenants, with hellish degenerative regressive aspects to their physical makeup. "The Diary of Mr Poynter" also features a Darwinian throwback, a monster made up entirely of hair. All these stories represent the idea of a monstrous ghost who has regressed to a pre-*homo sapiens* state.<sup>354</sup> The stories I have used to illustrate these tropes in James's fiction were chosen precisely because the villains demonstrate the themes of

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<sup>351</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), p.319.

<sup>352</sup> <https://www.psychologistworld.com/stress/fightflight.php>, 19.05.2019.

<sup>353</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.81.

<sup>354</sup> I am making a distinction a line between my interpretation of a ghost, which is to say the idea of a diaphanous shape that does not engage with the protagonist, and James's ghosts, which are in the discourse of Darwinism, revenants: regressed figures which bear the hallmarks of earlier stages of man's evolution i.e. fins, hair and tentacles.

Darwinian discourse, Lamarckian degeneration and abjection. Whilst I am not claiming that James deliberately included these themes in his stories, they can certainly be identified in them, demonstrating that subconsciously the discourse may well have made its way into his own consciousness. This can also be used as a useful contextual frame through which to read James's stories because it perfectly illustrates his Jungian unindividuated personality, because of this splitting of religion and science. This can be located in the stories where his bestial revenants attack his unmanly antiquarians, whose reactions to these attacks demonstrate the breakdown of the nervous system at being attacked by the 'strongest representation' of Kristeva's abject, the corpse.<sup>355</sup>

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance.<sup>356</sup>

Kristeva describes the reaction of anyone who had confronted a corpse. This relates closely to the way that the antiquarians in James's stories behave when they are pursued by the walking representation of the corpse, the revenant, and are confronted with the abject. According to Kristeva, the corpse is the signifier of what follows when the protagonists in James's stories meet the pursuing ghosts: shock, nausea, shutdown of all of the body's normal functions, and falling into psychosis.<sup>357</sup>

Therefore, reading M. R. James's ghost stories through the lens of Darwinian evolutionary biology, Lamarckian degenerative theories, and Kristevan abjection helps us to understand James in relation to his Jungian unindividuated personality. James may have been living in an age of increasing secularisation, and clearly embraced some of this, but, as I argue in chapter three, "James and The Unseen:

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<sup>355</sup>Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror*, p.3.

<sup>356</sup>Ibid.

<sup>357</sup>Ibid.

The divided reading in his ghost stories”, he regarded the Darwinian challenge to the traditional Christian worldview as anathema. Humankind now appeared to reject the earlier belief in religion and embrace the new science. James was not known for his faith in science: he absolutely detested the subject at his prep school Temple Grove and abstained from the subject at Eton.<sup>358</sup> In fact, some authors, notably Penelope Fitzgerald, have suggested that James detested the idea of scientific influence on the quickly-changing world in which he lived.<sup>359</sup> She notes that it was not the machinations of scientific apparatus that repelled him, but the sense that humankind was on the wrong path and thus adherence to the old order of church and faith was the only salvation. The inclusion of scientific discourse of influence in many of his ghosts would seem to bear out this anxiety. Hurley found that many of the anxieties of this age were projected into the rejection of these theories by distancing them into the realms of the gothic, where ideas of mad scientists and monsters found new expression in the popular fiction and the penny dreadfuls of their day.<sup>360</sup>

This may be identified in James’s portrayal of his protagonists meeting dreadful ends when they carelessly pursue religious objects. For instance Mr Poschwitz’s theft of the prayer books in “The Uncommon Prayer-Book” or long-buried secrets such as those uncovered by Mr Wraxall in “Count Magnus”, without regard for the danger and as if the whole enterprise of research was an academic game. This is why when the antiquarians in his stories seek their various objects or theories they meet the devolved abject ghost, the agent of scientific punishment.<sup>361</sup> That this discourse had made its way into the characterisation of James’s protagonists, and the bodies of the ghosts demonstrates his inability to

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<sup>358</sup> Michael Cox, *M.R. James An Informal Portrait* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.25.

<sup>359</sup> Penelope Fitzgerald, *Ghost Writer*, *The Guardian*, Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2000.

<sup>360</sup> Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.6.

<sup>361</sup> B. W. Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century: An Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.178.

resolve his personal religious crisis. His father frequently urged him in their exchanges by letter to 'come out for Christ' and seek ordination, as his brother Herbert had done.<sup>362</sup> Richard Pfaff suggests that his reluctance to seek ordination was symptomatic of James moving away from the evangelical tradition of his family, but that otherwise the reasons why James might have made this move are 'something of a puzzle'.<sup>363</sup>

However, as I argue in my chapter on James and religion, considering all the evidence presented by authors including Pfaff, to Michael Cox in his biography of James and B.W. Young in *The Victorian Eighteenth Century* outline, his reluctance may come from the religious and scientific divide promulgated by Darwinism. At the point when James entered Cambridge this undercurrent made the prevailing orthodoxy such that the culture of 'unbelief' rendered James's own quiet kind of Anglicanism quite obsolete.<sup>364</sup> Indeed, looking at James's personal letters from that time, one gains a sense of an increasing reluctance to engage with religion, especially the writing and giving of sermons, which had been up to that time part of his larger work in the community. James wrote to Gwendolen McBryde, in letter dated 11<sup>th</sup> February 1918:

The nightmare of an Ash Wednesday address at Salisbury is taking shape. I feel sure my views on country church services (which have somehow come to be the subject) will not be wholly acceptable. Still, they asked for views on something and they must just take what's put before them.<sup>365</sup>

It is evident from his letters up until that particular exclamation that James's views on the possible reception of his religious ideas had taken on the air of someone who was largely 'out of the prevailing fashion' of the times.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>362</sup>Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.63.

<sup>363</sup> Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.62.

<sup>364</sup>Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century*, p.184.

<sup>365</sup> Gwendolen McBryde, *M. R. James: Letters to a Friend* (London: Edward Arnold, 1956), p.77.

<sup>366</sup>Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.62.

This split between scientific godlessness and religion was such that James accepted the provostship of Eton and moved there in September 1918.<sup>367</sup> As I argue in my chapter on Jung and James, this is arguably the result of what Jung called an unindividuated personality.<sup>368</sup> This is, I argue, also demonstrated in James's ambivalence about the way in which he wrote his ghost stories.<sup>369</sup> As Steve Duffy demonstrated in his introduction to a collection of James's work, *A Pleasing Terror*, James viewed his ghost stories as a pleasant diversion from what he considered his real work (i.e. his academic research into apocrypha and palaeography).<sup>370</sup> His ambivalence about his ghost stories included not bothering to proofread them before he presented them to his publisher. When Steve Duffy and Rosemary Pardoe examined the manuscript of "A Warning to the Curious", they note many ink spots, crossings out and mistakes, suggesting a decided authorial ambivalence.<sup>371</sup> The method of composition is also telling: James usually wrote at break-neck speed and then read them to a few carefully selected friends at collegiate gatherings.<sup>372</sup>

James expressed the unindividuated parts of his psyche in allowing his revenants out into his stories to terrify his hapless protagonists. Indeed, one only need look at how he composed his stories to understand these repressed parts of himself as bursting through to the surface and onto the page. Novels that were written at this time, such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, H.G Wells' *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Dr Moreau*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* also reflect the intellectual currents of these theories.<sup>373</sup> Termed the 'evolutionary novelists' by John Glendening, these authors wrote novels which,

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid, p.52.

<sup>368</sup> Carl Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 563.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid, p.62.

<sup>370</sup> Steve Duffy, Introduction, in *M.R.James: A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2001), p.ix.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, p.xvii.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin Books, 1992); H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (London: Pan Books, 1953); H.G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967); Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

like James's stories, all had themes of evolutionary biology and Lamarckian Degenerative discourse running through their narratives.<sup>374</sup>

The ghosts in James's stories are more like the beast people in Wells' novel *The Island of Dr Moreau* and *The Time Machine's* degenerate sub-humans. However, the language of these discourses points to the horror of the hidden side of man, which could reveal itself at any point.<sup>375</sup> These ghosts do not bear any resemblance to the popular idea of the genteel white apparitions so beloved of regency fiction.<sup>376</sup> Instead, they are what Christopher Booker called nyktomorphic: an indefinable, solid amorphous form that the brain cannot grasp because of its grotesqueness.<sup>377</sup> Critics such as H. P. Lovecraft have compared the avengers in James's stories to other forms of animal, existing between beast and man.

In inventing a new type of ghost, [James] has departed considerably from the conventional Gothic tradition; for where the older stock ghosts were pale and stately, and apprehended chiefly through the sense of sight, the average James ghost is lean, dwarfish, and hairy – a sluggish, hellish night-abomination midway betwixt beast and man – and usually *touched* before it is *seen*.<sup>378</sup>

That these ghosts are usually touched before they are seen confirms the trope of the nyktomorphic monster and intensifies the characters' fear. The protagonist of "Casting the Runes" Mr Dunning is brought face-to-face with the abject when he feels beneath his pillow in bed to try and locate his pocket watch. Instead, he touches, "A mouth with teeth, and with hair about it, and he declares, not the mouth of a human being" ...<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> John Glendening, *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), p.1.

<sup>375</sup> Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.2.

<sup>376</sup> H.P. Lovecraft, 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', in *Warnings to the Curious: A Sheaf of Criticism on M.R. James*, ed. S.T. Joshi & Rosemary Pardoe (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2007), p.50.

<sup>377</sup> Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots* (London: Continuum, 2007), p.451.

<sup>378</sup> Lovecraft, 'Supernatural Horror', p.50.

<sup>379</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.137.

*The Time Machine* also reflects this degenerative discourse, with Wells' traveller forced into the future by the malfunctioning of his machine. On stepping out into what he expects will be a dazzlingly successful society, he finds instead two warring races, the effeminate Eloi and the cannibalistic Morlocks, that each reflect Nordau's theories of degeneracy: a bloodline made defective by effeminacy and ape-like creatures who have descended from man, but have degenerated in the process.<sup>380</sup> As Lovecraft noted, the revenant or degenerative ghost has taken the place of the stately Regency ghost in the Jamesian ghost story. They are not shades of human beings who transparently float into the vision of the protagonist: these villains touch their victims, tear at them, pursue and sometimes kill them. They are a completely new type of mechanism to bring the reader face-to-face with his own buried fears.<sup>381</sup>

As MacCulloch found, where the past had once been a safe place to leave buried secrets, now with the ideas of Darwinian evolutionary theory and degenerative discourse it was no longer the far-off country of our ancestors.<sup>382</sup> The apprehension after Darwin, that man was just another animal, a monkey who was part of a bigger overall map of the evolutionary tree, was problematic for many in Victorian society. If, as Richter suggests, Darwin explained that man was just a part of this map, then he was just as capable of savagery as any other beast, and did not enjoy a privileged position at the 'top of this tree'.<sup>383</sup>

Mary Butts observed that these pseudo-scientific threads are woven into many of James's ghost stories.<sup>384</sup> She noted the sequence of events in his stories when the antiquarians encounter James's ab-human protagonists: '... these tranquil

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<sup>380</sup>Wells, *The Time Machine*, p.30.

<sup>381</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.54.

<sup>382</sup>Simon MacCulloch, "The Toad in the Study: M. R. James, H. P. Lovecraft, and Forbidden Knowledge", in Joshi and Pardoe, *Warnings to the Curious*, p.76.

<sup>383</sup>Richter, *Literature after Darwin*, p.6.

<sup>384</sup>Mary Butts, 'The Art of Montague James', in Joshi and Pardoe, *Warnings to the Curious*, p.53.

ordinary men of learning come suddenly upon creatures, tangible as men, but of a different order; intelligences 'less than that of a man, more than that of a beast'.<sup>385</sup> Indeed, the very first ghost story that James wrote in 1893 was "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook", in which his protagonist Dennistoun encounters a degenerate specimen that, to his mind, resembles 'one of those awful bird catching spiders of South America'.<sup>386</sup> Both Dennistoun and Butts describe these regressed villains as monstrous, bearing no resemblance to the white shades Lovecraft argues are found in Regency literature. This discourse, and the accompanying concerns, match the Darwinian biological language and the Lamarckian, Lombrosian and Nordauish discourse of regression, as the protagonist is similar to an insect or beast and has regressed from a specimen recognisable as *homo sapiens*, and bear no resemblance to a Regency ghost.

James's monsters are not pleasant or intelligent. They are there to fulfil a task, guard a treasure or punish a wrong-doer. These ghosts are not ephemeral but real and they are not afraid of engaging with James's protagonists. Lovecraft suggested that while Regency-style ghosts exist chiefly to convey a message, James's ghosts traverse boundaries, and engage as directly and forcefully as any other species.<sup>387</sup>

This is indicative of the all-prevailing concerns of the Darwinian biological and Lamarckian discourse of the fin de siècle. The antiquarians are devolved figures according to Nordau's discourse; they are unmanly specimens in that they are terrified by the appearance of the monstrous devolved revenant that appears. Instead of dispatching the revenant with a pistol, as might be done by the manly characters so beloved of H. Rider Haggard, they scream and run, bearing out the

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<sup>385</sup>Ibid, p.55.

<sup>386</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.7.

<sup>387</sup>Lovecraft, 'Supernatural Horror', p.50.

discourse of Darwin's unfortunate genetic regressed lesser specimens.<sup>388</sup> This instinctive fight or flight behaviour of James's antiquarians is often the only action that could save them from the murderous rage of the revenants. In story after story, James's unwitting protagonists are confronted, often violently, by these living representations of the corpse.

For example, in "Count Magnus" we are reminded that the count was supposed to have died ninety-two years before he was seen in pursuit of Mr Wraxall, which as Lovecraft points out, is not enough to deter Mr Wraxall's research on Count Magnus.<sup>389</sup> Lovecraft outlines how Mr Wraxall was aware of the warnings surrounding the legend of Count Magnus, in particular an engraving in three scenes on the Count's sarcophagus, which delineates in horrific detail the appearance of the Count's 'companion', described thus:

round the edge of this latter are several bands of engraved scenes, including a singular and hideous delineation of a pursuit—the pursuit of a frantic man through a forest by a squat muffled figure with a devil-fish's tentacle, directed by a tall cloaked man on a neighbouring hillock.<sup>390</sup>

In this story, we have a walking revenant, the representation of the corpse, and a muffled figure with fins and tentacles. Many of James's other villains display other signifiers of the corpse, like the smell of decay which the guardian of "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas" emits when it drapes itself around the neck of poor Mr Somerton.<sup>391</sup> The reaction of Mr Somerton to this physical invasion of his bodily space is abject. His nervous functions completely shut down, and he is rendered incapable of language, only managing to scream before he faints.

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<sup>388</sup> Darwin labelled the groups of specimens he found to display regressed tendencies 'Aberrant'. In *Origin of Species* he notes, 'In the chapter on Geological Succession I attempted to show, on the principle of each group having generally diverged much in character during the long-continued process of modification, how it is that the more ancient forms of life often present characteristics in some degree intermediate between existing groups. As some few of the old and intermediate forms have transmitted to the present day descendants but a little modified, these constitute or so called osculant or aberrant species'. Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p.410); H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (London, Penguin Classics, 2007).

<sup>389</sup> Lovecraft, 'Supernatural Horror', p.51.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.95.

My dear Gregory, I am telling you the exact truth. I believe I am now acquainted with the extremity of terror and repulsion which a man can endure without losing his mind. I can only just manage to tell you now the bare outline of the experience. I was conscious of a most horrible smell of mould, and of a cold kind of face pressed against my own, and moving slowly over it, and of several – I don't know how many-legs or arms or tentacles or something clinging to my body. I screamed out, Brown says, like a beast, and fell away backward from the step on which I stood...<sup>392</sup>

The descriptive language used in this passage evokes the horror Mr Somerton feels at the touch of this tentacled beast. He is being exposed to the deathly extremity of his own abjection, and the physical response is one of total bodily shutdown. The description of the creature echoes the discourse of degeneration, as mutated life-forms can possess tentacles, and its contact is limited to the primitive expression of touch. This creature also embodies two of the categories of the abject: the discharges of the human body which we most fear: mould (with its links to decomposition) and slime. Anyone reading this story would find the discomfort experienced much more of a physical reality than anything dreamed of in the earlier stories of stately, refined ghosts of the Regency.

Instead of staying safely buried, these nightmarish apparitions reappear. However, they have not reappeared in a form that many would identify as a ghost: instead, they are amorphous, their forms having mutated into something more like a genetic throwback of man himself. They shift and move through an endless parade of genetic possibilities, from short amphibious forms like Count Magnus's helper, to moth-like chrysalises like the revenant of Lady Sadleir, to hairy, lean skeletal beings like the spider monster in "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook". They are the nyktomorphic form manifest. James's revenants highlighted the mutable forms of the new human

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

being. In “Count Magnus”, a genetic throwback that accompanies the “Count” is described as follows:

...a figure unduly short, and for the most part muffled in a hooded garment which swept the ground. The only part of the form which projected from that shelter was not shaped like any hand or arm. Mr Wraxall compared it to the tentacle of a devil fish...<sup>393</sup>

The count’s companion fulfils the discourse of degeneration and Darwinism: his body has mutated into that of a reptilian beast-figure, with tentacles and fins. From this description, the reader discerns that this dwarfish figure is a hellish beast, there to do the evil count’s bidding. James does not linger over this description; in a few short strokes of his pen he has created an evil-doer who fulfils the material purpose of scaring the reader and the hapless protagonist.

Unfortunately, however, the only ‘evil’ deed that the hopeless Wraxall had done was to express a wish that he might have known the Count. This wish is granted and poor Mr Wraxall finds that he has two unwanted companions on his journey back to his homeland. This story has also moved on in a fatalistic sense from the first of James’s stories, “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”, as in this earlier story the protagonist Dennistoun manages to utilise the earlier belief system of religion, using a crucifix to repel the demon. Once the drawing of the demon is ripped up, it is exorcised. This system does not help Mr Wraxall, as when he cried to God to save him from the Count there was no reply, and Mr Wraxall is killed.

James implies strongly in these stories that the past should be left buried, and that doing otherwise invites violent death, a death that even God cannot save his protagonists from. “Count Magnus” is a story of this kind of pursuit of the unwitting traveller, who found himself in what he, thinks of as a familiar world, but which is nothing of the sort. This world may seem safe and welcoming, but there are layers

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<sup>393</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.61.

that, if reached, can be dangerous. The message that James is keen to convey to his readers is that we can never be sure exactly what is going to be unearthed, and as with James's stories, what may be summoned forth is not usually friendly. "Count Magnus" is set out like many of James's stories: a gentleman of middle age, with means, alone in the world, sets out on a holiday with the express purpose of doing some research, as with "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral" and "Two Doctors" James has a narrator tell the story, drawn from Mr Wraxall's journals and papers.<sup>394</sup>

To many Victorians the setting of the story would have been exotic; James employs the landscape of a country that had long been associated with the Scandinavian folklore of fairies and trolls of Hans Christian Andersen, but which modern travel had made accessible.

On what proved to be his last expedition, he was plotting another book. Scandinavia, a region not widely known to Englishmen forty years ago, had struck him as an interesting field...<sup>395</sup>

The dichotomy of the old and the new, often found in the Jamesian story, looms large in this tale. The past is a comfortable landscape as the story of the Count is told through papers and documents, which is all that remains of Mr Wraxall. In this case, James's narrator helps the reader understand the events, remaining nameless. His reason for telling the story are unclear, other than that we know Mr Wraxall's papers came into the narrator's possession to furnish details of Sweden for a book on travel. From this position we can understand Mr Wraxall's past more clearly, through the lens of the fin de siècle discourse of the Victorian setting, and the Darwinian description of the villainous Count Magnus's companion.

Straight away the reader feels comfortable in the setting; it is intriguingly foreign, but the academic character is familiar. His trip starts out in the usual

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<sup>394</sup>Ibid, p.54.

<sup>395</sup>Ibid.

Jamesian way, with the study of some papers in an old mansion house, and the procurement of rooms in a comfortable village inn. What is not so old and familiar, however, is the juxtaposition of the language of the gothic discourse with Count Magnus's papers, which are found to concern alchemy. Their description relates more to the Darwinian throwback man-beast mentioned earlier:

The shelf he had lit upon was occupied mostly by a collection of account-books...But one among them was not an account book, but a book of alchemical and other tracts in another sixteenth century hand...Not being very familiar with alchemical literature, Mr Wraxall spends much space which he might have spared in setting out the names...The book of the Phoenix...the book of the Toad... and so on...<sup>396</sup>

The names of these books bring immediately to mind the Darwinian discourse of the bodily amorphousness of the various stages of evolution, where all forms are mutable and not immediately identifiable. As Hurley outlines, the idea of the 'Bodily Amorphous' is the breaking down of the construct of the human body into a series of new models modelled on the discourse of evolutionism, naming this spectacle a process which dissolves into the ab-human instead of the fully human;

One may read its obsessive staging and restaging of the spectacle of ab-humanness as a paralysis, a species of trauma, but one must also note the variety and sheer exuberance of the spectacle, as the human body collapses and is re-shapen across an astonishing range of morphic possibilities; into slug-men, snake women, ape-men, beast people, octopus-seal-men, beetle women, dog-men, fungus people.<sup>397</sup>

Here the earlier forms are illustrated in the series of books that the protagonist examines, making the appearance of the Darwinian gothic in the Victorian setting uncanny. The reader knows that these books are in a sixteenth-century hand, but they are being examined by someone in the 'modern' setting of James's Victorian story, by the narrator who has already been designated the voice of academic reason. This voice of reason is another plot device that belongs to the Victorian

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<sup>396</sup>Ibid, p.58.

<sup>397</sup>Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.3.

Darwinian Gothic.<sup>398</sup> Hurley defines this later Victorian Gothic as a reproduction of the earlier nineteenth-century Gothic. This Gothic form, she explains, is a representation, including a ‘more visceral readerly [sic] reaction’ to its Darwinian protagonists, and the collective participation in the formulaic expectations, including hesitating to believe the story until the interruption of the reasonable, educated narrator.<sup>399</sup>

By extension, the reader is also hesitant about believing the story; it is this hesitation that signifies the ghost story, and the hallmark of the gothic, especially this later Darwinian Victorian form. It is the mutable feeling that infects the strain of the gothic, where nothing is as it seems. James’s stories are something of a deviation from this formula system. His villains are usually the beings infected by the gothic, where each villain is usually a genetic throwback.<sup>400</sup> As James himself noted, in writing his ghost stories, he was aware that he was in some respects reproducing the forms of the mid nineteenth-century gothic, as he explained in the preface to *More Ghost Stories of An Antiquary*:

I am well aware that mine is a nineteenth- (and not a twentieth-) century conception of this class of tale; but were not the prototypes of all the best ghost stories written in the sixties and the seventies?<sup>401</sup>

“Count Magnus” concerns a decayed aristocrat whose family has degenerated to the point where he is the last of the line. He has a dark secret, having made a “Black Pilgrimage” to the Biblical town of Chorazin, where he is supposed to have summoned the demon Aeris, and thereafter had immortality and a permanent degenerate helper. Even before this pilgrimage, though the Count was a decadent character, who delighted in torturing and murdering his tenants:

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<sup>398</sup>Ibid.

<sup>399</sup>Ibid, p.4.

<sup>400</sup>Ibid, p.3.

<sup>401</sup> M. R. James, *A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2000), p.114.

If his tenants came late to their work...they were set on the wooden horse, or flogged and branded in the Manor House yard. One or two cases there were of men who had occupied lands which encroached on the lord's domain and whose houses had been mysteriously burnt on a winter's night with the whole family inside...<sup>402</sup>

A thoroughly old black gothic type of character, then, almost as if James's revenant is a parody of a character created by Edgar Allan Poe. However, it is not the Count's revenant that is the focus, but his non-human helper, which appeared shortly after the Count's 'death'. According to the story, Count Magnus never really left his land. Ninety-two years later, the landlord of the inn tells Mr Wraxall that two hunters were warned not to hunt on the count's land: "No, do not go; we are sure you will meet with persons walking who should not be walking. They should be resting, not walking."<sup>403</sup> The hunters ignore this advice and next day they were both found, one mentally deficient and the other dead with 'the flesh sucked off his bones'.<sup>404</sup> Similarly, Mr Wraxall ignores these warnings and is himself found dead, pursued by 'two figures' on his return to England.

Count Magnus had a companion who is a fish-man, whilst another of James's stories, "The Haunted Dolls' House", has a villain who is more of a frog-man. This character avenges a death in a Medean form of revenge, killing only the children of the household. This story reads very much as a narrative of degeneration, in that it shows children paying for the sins of their fathers. A collector, Mr Dillet, in a dishonest transaction with a dealer, Mr Chittenden, acquires the dolls' house. However, the dealer knows that there is something very wrong with the dolls' house, and is glad to let it go. The dolls' house is haunted, and each night it plays out the

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<sup>402</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.56.

<sup>403</sup>Ibid, p.59.

<sup>404</sup>Ibid, p.57.

events that led to a family's demise. The events happened in real life, we discover, enacted each night to an audience of whoever happens to own the house.

The first night, Mr Dillet watches in horror as the events unfold. Firstly, the grandfather of the family is poisoned by his daughter-in-law in collusion with his son:

Suddenly the old man started up in his bed - and he must have uttered some cry...He was a sad and terrible sight - flushed in the face, almost to blackness, the eyes glaring whitely, both hands clutching at his heart, foam at his lips...the old man collapsed...the features, contorted with agony and rage, relaxed slowly into calm.<sup>405</sup>

Next, revenge is taken when a frog-like shape murders the children in their beds:

The seer does not like to dwell upon what he saw entering the room: he says it might be described as a frog - the size of a man - but it had scanty white hair about its head. It was busy about the truckle-beds, but not for long. The sound of cries...appalling, reached the ear.<sup>406</sup>

The only clue to the frog-like apparition being the grandfather is that it has white hair about its head. The grandfather has degenerated after death into another amphibian reptilian revenant. It is as if James could not bring himself to have the grandfather actually murder the children in his human form, but rather maintained a distance from the act by changing him into a beast, who was then allowed to carry out the infanticide. This authorial distancing is characteristic of James, in that, as he noted himself, in his own research into the type of ghost story he originally wanted to create, he deliberately avoided the over-use of gore and the style of the 'grand Guignol':

And it is very easy to be nauseating. I, *moi qui vous parle*, could undertake to make a reader physically sick, if I chose to think and write in terms of the Grand Guignol. The authors of the stories I have in mind tread, as they believe, in the steps of Edgar Allan Poe and Ambrose Bierce (himself sometimes unpardonable), but they do not possess the force of either.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>405</sup>Ibid, p.263.

<sup>406</sup>Ibid, p.264.

<sup>407</sup>James, *A Pleasing Terror*, p.479.

This authorial distance and careful observance to avoid overstepping into the Grand Guignol is perhaps what made James use the revenant instead of a human. As Butts observes, James's characters usually come up against these creatures, which are 'tangible as men, but of a different order', and which are 'originally minted' from the mind of James himself.<sup>408</sup> The creation of the grandfather, who degenerates after death into a frog that murders his own grandchildren, is, as Butts stresses, part of James's utterly original array of degenerate characters.

The grandfather's body has many features of the bodily amorphous; it has changed or collapsed after death into a frog-man, and although an amphibian, James has given him the accompanying features we would expect of a reptile. In the language of the abject, this means (as with the tentacle-fish-man-beast from "Count Magnus", and the tentacled mouldy guardian in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas") slime, a reptilian smell, and the bent legs of a frog. As Butts says, the grandfather has not stayed dead but rather has transformed to go about his hellish business, as with James's other murderous revenants.<sup>409</sup>

[James's protagonists] are going about their business. Then, as a man might turn a corner or the page of a book, they meet the Unspeakable. Are brought up sharp against the dead who are not dead; who are out and about on hellish business; who, if they have long remained quiescent, are stirred by some trivial accident into hideous activity.<sup>410</sup>

James deliberately chose to make the revenging creature a Darwinian throwback, as this is part of the horror of the infanticide in this story. It is all the more horrific because of the distortion of what should have been a kindly old man into this mutated figure. The decayed form of the grandfather has wiped out his own bloodline in revenge for his own murder, committed by his daughter.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>408</sup>Butts, 'The Art of Montagu James', p.55.

<sup>409</sup>Ibid.

<sup>410</sup>Ibid.

<sup>411</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.263.

James's avenging genetic throwbacks are there to destroy; they are all regressions to an earlier time, where the savage was part of everyday life. However, in this case he almost seems to be making the point that man may be eminently respectable in every way, but that the savage beast is always a part of society, and can be expected to appear at any time. Another revenge motif that James deployed to great effect in another of his stories is "The Mezzotint". "The Mezzotint" is redolent of the themes of revenge on an old and decaying family, revenge by a bodily amorphous form that kidnaps the only male heir to the estate, so ensuring their end. The revenant in "The Mezzotint" highlights the Darwinian discourse of evolution in a few well-positioned pages. When it enters the story, it is bent on all fours; when it next appears again, it is 'erect and stepping swiftly with long strides'.<sup>412</sup> The revenant has undergone the process of evolution in the process of the story. There is a deliberate reference to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* at this point in the narration which signposts the theory of the decayed ancient ancestry poisoning the bloodline of the present.<sup>413</sup> This old bloodline is wiped out by infanticide.

The theme of the savage beast lurking by or even in man was another theme in James's stories, that no matter how respectable and wholesome society became, there was always something that could burst forth at any time. The veneer of respectability could be ripped aside at any moment, and in James's stories, the protagonists do not need to do much to bring the original villains to the surface. In one story, one of mythology's original creatures is unearthed, because of the decision to update the interior of a cathedral. "An Episode of Cathedral History" begins in typical Jamesian fashion with his 'learned gentleman', the narrator Mr Lake, being given the job of examining and reporting on the archives of the cathedral

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<sup>412</sup>Ibid, p.27.

<sup>413</sup>Ibid, p.28.

of 'Southminster'. The cathedral is a symbol of respectability, but as in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*, a secret evil is buried under that veneer of respectability.<sup>414</sup> Mr Lake is examining the records of the cathedral in the year 1890; James ensures that we the readers know that this is set in the present day, as he mentions that on setting out to examine the cathedral at night, the narrator and the verger resemble two characters from Dickens's novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.<sup>415</sup> This lets us know that we are about to hear a mystery all of our own.<sup>416</sup> The mystery of this story starts in the year 1840, when the then Dean, Dean Burscough became infatuated with the Gothic style and pushed for the cathedral to be modernised accordingly. James makes a few disparaging comments here about everything being swept away in the wake of modernity: when an older canon comes forward to ask Dean Burscough not to demolish the old pulpit, the Dean seems quite mocking of the old man's views.

The strongest opposition, however, came from the oldest of the body, who up to the last moment objected to the removal of the pulpit. 'You ought not to touch it, Mr Dean' he said with great emphasis one morning...you don't know what mischief you may do.'<sup>417</sup>

The Dean ignores this advice and the pulpit is removed, uncovering an altar tomb that has laid in peace, according to James, since "Saxon times".<sup>418</sup> The altar tomb is cracked, leaving a gap of about three inches. After it is opened, the parishioners begin to suffer from sickness and disturbed dreams. One of the parishioners, an old lady, says she has had dreams of a shape, with red eyes, that left the cathedral and flitted about the neighbourhood, leaving as the sun came up. These dreams are

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<sup>414</sup>Wilde, *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*; Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*.

<sup>415</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (London: Penguin, 2009).

<sup>416</sup> Indeed, this novel of James's day was such a source of fascination to James and his friends that they had their own society at the time, to decipher the outcome of Dickens's unfinished novel. Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.226.

<sup>417</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.230.

<sup>418</sup>Ibid, p.228.

followed by deaths of the oldest parishioners and a feeling of general malaise creeps across the whole area.

The canons start to notice that all is not well with the neighbourhood, and comment to each other on the crying noise that has kept everyone awake: 'rather too much of Isaiah xxxiv ...the Satyr shall cry to his fellow'.<sup>419</sup> Surprisingly, James has named one of his villains, developing them beyond the stock figure of the genetic throwback, into a genuine literary character of the old mythological genre. A satyr is a beast of the woodlands, a sexual predator, which seduces by music. It is described as having hairy lower legs and hooves, a man's chest and head but with horns.<sup>420</sup> These mythical creatures were common fare to the well-read of the fin de siècle. They can be found in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which is a huge descriptive catalogue of myths of the classical period onwards.<sup>421</sup> The one element that James adds to deviate from this old description is that his satyr is also a vampire. It has been taking blood from the older parishioners, hence their deaths. The vampire was also a favourite preoccupation of the fin de siècle; Sheridan Le Fanu wrote *Carmilla* about this time, and James was responsible for Le Fanu being published in this country, after combing magazines for his unnamed articles and putting them together to make *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Tales of Mystery*.<sup>422</sup>

The satyr is described as 'A thing like a man, all over hair and two great eyes...black...a mass of hair and two legs and the light caught on its eyes...'<sup>423</sup> The description is again a pure genetic throwback, like a man but less than a man, with two great eyes, which it has evolved to be able to see in its dark lair over the centuries it has been entombed. The revenant has chosen to flee from the scene of

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<sup>419</sup>Ibid, p.223.

<sup>420</sup> H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London: University Paperbacks, 1965), p.169.

<sup>421</sup> Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough – A Study in Magic and Religion* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Reference, 1993).

<sup>422</sup> Sheridan Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Tales of Mystery* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd, 1923); Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (London: Valancart Books, 2009).

<sup>423</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.239.

his crime rather than confront his pursuers. He has been entombed in dirt and discomfort rather than fight his way out of his tomb. The blend of the Darwinian gothic and degenerative discourse is found here in James's villain. His satyr is black, which in the fin de siècle colonial discourse means 'bad'. He has too much hair, big eyes and is a mythological creature; all of this marks him out immediately as a villain.

The horror of the spectacle, as the narrator emphasises it, lies in the indifferenciation of the monstrous body, an indifferenciation that serves most notably to defamiliarize human identity. He recurs to the human body consistently as his point of reference, only to note it's admixture across a fantastic range of morpic possibilities: arms like tentacles, taloned hands, snaky extremities, faces with octopus jaws. These creatures blend human racial characteristics as well, being black like "natives..."<sup>424</sup>

It might be said that hair is a Jamesian preoccupation. Many of his villains have this particular genetic mutation, including the demon in "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook", the curtain monster in "The Diary of Mr Poynter" and this satyr. James's villains all bear the hallmarks of his own working out of the fears of the abject, villains with too much hair and spider-like limbs. We know from Cox that James feared spiders and hair, phobias that he projected onto his genetically regressed villains.<sup>425</sup>

Reading M. R. James's ghost stories through the lens of the nineteenth-century split between science and religion illustrates James's Jungian un-individuated personality, in that he had never quite accepted the privileging of the Darwinian creed over his own type of low-church evangelical upbringing. As McCulloch and Pardoe have both found, James, in his studies on occultism and magic, believed that the age's disillusion with religion (as I cover in my chapter on James and religion) meant his own worldview on religion had altered somewhat from that of his other family members.<sup>426</sup> Helen Conrad O' Briain has also identified this strain of 'paganism' running through James's stories, from the first of his stories like

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<sup>424</sup>Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.23.

<sup>425</sup>Cox, *An Informal Portrait*, p.109.

<sup>426</sup>Ibid, p.52.

“Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”, where religion saved Dennistoun from the spider villain. His later stories grew darker (e.g. when Wraxall cries to God for help, but receives no answer).<sup>427</sup>

As I outlined in my chapter on James and Jung, I argue that James was suffering from a Jungian un-individuated personality, as Jung terms a psyche that has not managed to assimilate the differing aspects of his personality.<sup>428</sup> These aspects of James’s personality were divided, as in his family religion was a defining and important part of their life, with his father Herbert being a country vicar, and his brother Bertie taking ordination. Although Darwinism was not the sole reason that religion was not accepted without question in the late Victorian era (the higher criticism of the Bible by George Eliot and others was also a factor), it certainly led to many families such as the James’s seeing a generational split, between believers and the newly lax of faith. This anxiety demonstrated itself for James in his ghost stories, where the degenerate ‘morlock’- type regressed beast revenants (representing the Darwinian pagan) attacked the ‘eloi’ antiquarians, (the representative of civilised man) just when these protagonists went looking into the past to try and find their treasure. This treasure usually had some religious aspect to it, whether it was a crown, a book, or information.

James’ stories were clearly influenced by the Darwinian narrative. The idea of the punishments meted out to his hapless heroes by the succession of degenerate villains may have been just stories to him, as he often argued.<sup>429</sup> However, the hapless heroes have to find some way of defending themselves against the revenants of the past, a competition that we might read as symbolic of the survival of

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<sup>427</sup> Helen Conrad O’Brian & Julie Anne Stevens (eds), *The Ghost story from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), p.50.

<sup>428</sup> Carl Jung, *The Collected Works Vol 9*, pt ii, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology Of The Self*, ed. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, MD, MRCP, and Gerhard Adler, PhD, trans from the German by R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p.70.

<sup>429</sup> M.R. James, “Some Remarks on Ghost Stories”, *The Bookman*, (December 1929), p.169-172.

the fittest. Religion may, according to Jung, be humankind's way of reconciling the two halves of humankind (the subconscious, and the conscious holding the abject at bay) and repressing it into the group psyche, via a belief in religion, which Jung often recommended humankind needed for individuation of the personality.<sup>430</sup> However, James's unindividuated personality was the result of his inability to reconcile these differing strains that questioned religious belief i.e. the scientific dogma of Darwinism, and the higher criticism of the Bible (as outlined in my chapter on religion).

James ensured that events in his stories demonstrated the results of a pagan universe, like some old god who is not even sure which of the characters will survive, his own psyche reflecting his Jungian unindividuated personality, where his heroes do not survive the attack of the revenant. For instance, the villain in "A Warning to the Curious", William Ager, is certainly better suited to his surroundings, as the hero of sorts Paxton is attracted to the beach by Ager, who then kills him. Even something as safe and Christian as a prayer book could have a revenant attached to it, which could bite and kill a person with snake-like venom.<sup>431</sup> James's ghost stories have a vein of Darwinian narrative and the series of villains he uses are often genetic mutants of man's evolutionary past.

We have villains with hair, as in the tale "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook", which looked like a devolved man with spider-like arms and legs, or slimy tentacled short mutant creatures, like Count Magnus's companion. James suggests strongly in "Count Magnus" that the past, (represented by the religious treasures in many of his stories) is to be left buried, and the past being unearthed results in a death that even God cannot save his protagonists from. "Count Magnus" is a story of this kind,

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<sup>430</sup> Carl Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections* (New York, NY: Random House, 1961), p.235.

<sup>431</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.268.

containing the pursuit of the unwitting traveller in a supposedly safe and familiar world. The message that James is keen to convey to his readers is that the past may be safe if it is left buried, but we can never be sure exactly what is going to be unearthed or whether it will be friendly.

Even so, this argument of the egoic defence still leaves the stories standing alone with their idea of the past continually haunting the present. Each protagonist is hurt by James's villains precisely when he delves into the past. Even stories like "Lost Hearts" where the protagonist has not sought a treasure, include a moment when the hero is threatened by his degenerate uncle, who clearly is harking back to a time of man's inner savage. Stephen's Uncle Abney is a throwback far more evil than any of Darwin's Fuegian savages.<sup>432</sup> Even Darwin's savages did not practice cannibalism or satanic blood rites.

The degenerate villains that populate James's stories are devolved specimens. Nordau laid the blame for retrogression of the human specimen on too much exposure to literature and culture, and Uncle Abney, who may at one time have been a civilised academic, has degenerated to this savage state according to this discourse, just as the academic Karswell has degenerated to a villain in "Casting the Runes".<sup>433</sup> Uncle Abney has degenerated to the point where he is capable of cannibalism; he is the very symbol of Lombroso's *Criminal Man*, a decayed, decadent shadow of the ideal human specimen of a male.<sup>434</sup> The reason Stephen survives his decadent uncle's plans for him is that his latent defence mechanism or 'flight or fight' instinct takes over, showing that even James's heroes still have the latent animal instinct. Another of James's hapless heroes only lives because the

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<sup>432</sup>Desmond & Moore, *Darwin*, p.106.

<sup>433</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.128.

<sup>434</sup>Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, p.3.

flight instinct makes him run away from the hairy villain pursuing him (Mr Denton in “The Diary of Mr Poynter”).<sup>435</sup>

James may be safely said to be part of the fin de siècle tradition of reacting to the permutation of Darwinian and later degenerative themes and introducing them unconsciously into his stories. These mechanisms were his way of facing his own abject and if he had tried to think himself away from these theories, then, as the *Pall Mall Gazette* said on the day of Darwin’s burial, he would have had to think himself entirely away from his age.<sup>436</sup> His own anxieties over hair and spiders were projected onto his villains. James’s stories are redolent of the idea that the past is not a safe place, as in Darwin’s time he refuted the idea of life as seen through the Revd William Paley’s eyes: a sunny vicarage lawn where everything was content and bucolic. Rather, life was savage and unpredictable. The past was unknown and could come back to haunt, terrify or kill at any moment.<sup>437</sup> The Darwinian and degenerative strains running through James’s ghost stories demonstrate James’s inability to reconcile the scientific privileging over religion, resulting in James’s Jungian unindividuated personality.

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<sup>435</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.217.

<sup>436</sup> Desmond & Moore, *Darwin*, p.677.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid*, p.78.

## Gender and Sexuality – the Cloistered World of M. R. James

Whilst the revenants in James's stories bear the hallmarks of the Darwinian strain, as I argued in chapter two, "Reading M. R. James with Jung", they also demonstrate a reaction to sexuality which, I showed, is fruitfully explored through the Jungian concept of the assimilation of the Anima and Animus in the growth or regression of the self. James was, of course, a product of his time, and this is crucial to understanding both the man and his work. Therefore, in this chapter I offer an examination of his attitude to gender and sexuality, referring to a range of stories from James's whole writing career. The chapter focuses mainly on "A School Story", "Martin's Close", "The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance", "An Evening's Entertainment" and "Wailing Well", all of which feature psycho-sexual storylines, as I will show. My analysis here draws on and extends the work of Andrew Smith, Mike Pincombe and David G Rowlands.<sup>438</sup> I undertake an examination of questions of masculinity and ideas of boyishness and sexuality within this arena, together with an interrogation of the particularly masculine structure of James's bachelor world, which is necessary, as many critics such as Mike Pincombe have interpreted James and the treatment of characters in his stories as covertly homosexual.<sup>439</sup> This opens up further explorations of James's attitudes to and portrayal of sexuality and gender.

"What does woman want?" asks an apparently unsure Freud, in a letter to Marie Bonaparte.<sup>440</sup> As Shoshanna Feldman remarks, this is a quintessentially male question "that arises from a woman's resistance to their place in a patriarchal

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<sup>438</sup> Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840–1920 A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.181.

Mike Pincombe, "Homosexual Panic and the English Ghost Story: M. R. James and Others", *M R James Newsletter*, 2.2 (September 2002), pp.4-6. David G. Rowlands, 'M.R. James's Women', in *Warnings to the Curious A Sheaf of Criticism on M. R. James*, ed. S. T. Joshi & Rosemary Pardoe (New York, NY: Hippocampus Press, 2007), p.138.

<sup>439</sup> Mike Pincombe, "Homosexual Panic and the English Ghost Story: M. R. James and Others", *M R James Newsletter*, 2.2 (September 2002), pp.4-6.

<sup>440</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Life and Work* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p.421.

society”.<sup>441</sup> It is therefore interesting, but not altogether surprising, that both James and Jung both found the notion of “woman” (and by extension “the feminine”) problematic, as we see in both of their work.

The society James inhabited was an old-fashioned one even by the standards of 1895 when he read his first ghost story aloud. James lived in an all-male, exclusive society, where contact with the female sex was with sisters, mothers or servants; it was not the inclusive society of today. Mike Pincombe saw this world as a locus of cloistered men who feared being outed as gay, which rather backs up Eve Sedgwick’s theory of “homosexual panic”.<sup>442</sup> Sedgwick offers a social commentary exploring the fears of men in that era of being outed as gay and losing their social position. However, in my reading of James’s stories and his biographical information, I believe that the so-called panic in his case, while resembling “homosexual panic”, can also be seen in relation to sexual relationships with women. This suggests that James could usefully be read as bisexual, but – more significantly – that he could also be read as finding sexuality personally difficult in ways which help us understand some of his stories in greater depth.

There has been a critical consensus that James avoided the inclusion of sexuality in his ghost stories; Michael Cox one of James’s biographer’s wrote of his fictional oeuvre “for this is a world where sex is not”.<sup>443</sup> As my analysis will show, however, this does not mean that sex is absent from the stories; far from it. James was also noted for reticence about the portrayal of the sexual act itself - his own pronouncements on this subject are something of a defence; in a number of articles he wrote on his fiction, he said that he did not agree with engaging with the subject

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<sup>441</sup> Shoshanna Feldman, *Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins’s University Press, 1993), p.7.

<sup>442</sup> Mike Pincombe, ‘Homosexual Panic and the English Ghost Story: M R James and Others’, *M R James Newsletter*, 2.2 (September 2002), pp.4-6.

<sup>443</sup> M.R. James *Casting The Runes and other Ghost Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). p.xxiv

of sexuality or sex. In his article “Some Remarks on Ghost Stories” in *The Bookman* in December 1929, he explained his own views on the subject:

...[T]here is much blatancy in a lot of recent stories. They drag in sex too, which is a fatal mistake; sex is tiresome enough in the novels; in a ghost story, or as the backbone of a ghost story, I have no patience with it.<sup>444</sup>

James’s everyday world was certainly very ordered, and apart from a few friendships, there was no outlet in his life for intimacy. However, the treatment of male and female characters in his stories reveals interesting elements of James’s personality, in that he includes scenes which are open to being read as sexual, and in a particularly dark way. They degenerate into rape, sadism and violence. In this chapter I will argue that James seems to utilise these scenes as a working out of his frustrated libido, which can be seen in this tendency to hint at sexuality as being something dangerous, and in his characterisation of different genders. As I note in the introduction to this thesis, while Jung and subsequent Jungian Analytical Psychologists have been accused of discussing gender using biologically essentialist language, for his time and his class, James departed considerably from these essentialist positions, the portrayals of men and women in his stories taking a different focus.

As David G Rowlands has noted, James had a “type” of male and female that he liked to feature in his stories, an strong older Amazonian woman of temperament, and a younger but more effeminate male:-

Dr. James has particular use for the strong--minded determined woman who has triumphed--for good or ill--over the restrictions of

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<sup>444</sup>M. R. James, ‘Some Remarks on Ghost Stories’, in *A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2001), p.275.

sex, Society, the Establishment or the Law: not least those required to manage feebler men...<sup>445</sup>

In terms of Jung's individuation process, the older females that James portrays are people who have successfully accommodated their male animus, and are confident in their own house of their self. The younger, more academically focused, and less worldly-wise effeminate males suffer from their inability to accommodate their anima, in place of their mother archetype. These younger males also possess a younger ego, a mind focused on their college work, research or hobbies, at the expense of building relationships outside of their work, or hobbies. This inability to deal with the wider world is often what gets these younger males into trouble. Their lives resemble what Jack Sullivan has termed a wasteland; when their Shadow archetype manifests itself, they cannot accommodate their anima.<sup>446</sup>

As John Beebe discovered in his reading of Jung's mature writings on the individuation process, as a result of alchemical processes

Jung's work on western alchemy began to appear in print after he was sixty years old, and is deeply grounded in the experience of masculine individuation after mid-life. The process of incubating wisdom that the alchemical essays reflect and obliquely describe is one whose specific character and contents will be known only to those who are privy to the reflections of psychologically maturing individuals.

As he was putting his alchemical opus together, Jung gradually understood that even the masculine and feminine principles are not given; they are built up through experience, although the conditions for their creation follow archetypal laws.<sup>447</sup>

James's portrayals of younger male and older female characters follow these alchemical and archetypal processes of their own individuation, as I will demonstrate in this chapter. When read using a Jungian lens, the stories express elements of

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<sup>445</sup> David G. Rowlands, 'M.R. James's Women', in *Warnings to the Curious A Sheaf of Criticism on M. R. James*, ed. S. T. Joshi & Rosemary Pardoe (New York, NY: Hippocampus Press, 2007), p.138.

<sup>446</sup> Jack Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), p.75.

<sup>447</sup> John Beebe, introduction to C.G. Jung, *Aspects Of The Masculine* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1993), p.xvi.

Jungian notions of interiorized femininity within the masculine, (see my discussion in Chapter Two – “Reading James with Jung”, page 59). For instance the character Parkins in “Oh, Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad” is labelled by James as “something of an old woman– rather hen like, perhaps in his little ways”;...<sup>448</sup>

James, in the guise of his narrator, is specifically labelling his character woman-like in order to reinforce the idea of Parkins as being in need of rescue by a strong masculine character. At the end of this story we also have the hyper-masculine minor character of the colonel, who shows up in time to rescue Parkins from the clutches of the linen monster.<sup>449</sup>

In addition to this focus on the interiorized femininity of the male character’s James also demonizes some female characters who demonstrate female otherness, (a woman who strays from the idea of the ideal feminine) such as Mrs Mothersole (see my discussion of “The Ash Tree”, on p.73). Mrs Mothersole demonstrated this female otherness, by being an older female, a woman who possessed no intention of pleasing the male patriarchy. The character demonstrates this trait by climbing trees in the night, looking for sticks from an ash-tree that also happened to be on the property of the bastion of the patriarchy, the local landowner, (most probable- although James does not spell this out in the story, in that time he would have been her landlord). James uses the squire “Sir Matthew Fell” to punish Mrs Mothersole for this female otherness.

However, when read as a whole, there are ways in which James did have positive ways in which the feminine and masculine were represented in his stories. For example, he addressed the idea of effeminate characters and homosexual relationships in his fiction; his story “Wailing Well” has three anima figures who

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<sup>448</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), p.67.

<sup>449</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.80.

transgress the boundaries of their textually ordained places, even for female villains; “An Evening’s Entertainment” features two protagonists whose relationship was questionable for James’s social circle and class.<sup>450</sup>

James’s social circle and world was a place where, according to Graham Robb, homosexuality did not even have a label until the article written by W.T. Stead in the Pall Mall Gazette, which led to the Labouchère amendments.<sup>451</sup> It was the spotlight thrown onto this hidden world which had alienated the public and raised public awareness of, and hostility to, men who had sexual relationships with men... Amongst James’ social circle, both of the Benson brothers were homosexual, as were other of his Cambridge acquaintances such as E M Forster. These facts were known, just not discussed. As Cook argues,

What is more important is the way in which the way the scandals... publicized the existence of homosexual subcultures and made them into a matter for mainstream politics...<sup>452</sup>

Stead went so far as to say in his article that if this was to be believed in its entirety then there would be a mass exodus from the old all-male bastions of Eton, Harrow, Winchester, Rugby and the two universities of Oxford and Cambridge to the prisons of the country. This old-fashioned world, where sexuality did not really have a place, was the reality I would argue that James preferred to inhabit, even if he took pains to ignore the actual world that he occupied himself.

James embodies Andrew Smith’s theory of the divided male subject, in that he asserted his own social role in order to overcome the distracting biological presence of sex in his everyday life.<sup>453</sup> If we examine James’ fiction through Smith’s

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<sup>450</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.341; *ibid*, p.320.

<sup>451</sup> Graham Robb, *Stranger: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Picador, 2003), p.95.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid*, p.67.

<sup>453</sup> Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons, Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-De-Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p.4.

lens, reading James, as Smith suggests we must, as someone highly influenced by Charles Kingsley's notion of gentlemanly Christian values, it becomes clear that while James' outward life had the air of propriety, his sublimated sexuality plays itself out in his fiction.<sup>454</sup>

When examined in detail, there are many unconscious references to sex in James' stories; there are as many female revenants, monster women and dark female characters as there are effeminate men and sadistic male ghosts. The stories acted as an outlet, perhaps the only safe outlet available to James, who punishes his literary characters from deviating from the societal norms he may have wanted to violate himself.

As Smith argues,

Havelock Ellis in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928) and Edward Carpenter in *The Intermediate Sex* (1908) radically problematised the relationship between gender and sex designation by suggesting that a subject's adherence to the dominant masculine script was no guarantor of that subject's sexual preferences. The presence of masculine homosexuals and feminine heterosexuals, for example, challenged any notion of a fundamental or 'natural' link between gender and sex; indeed, it implied that any such link would be ideological.<sup>455</sup>

When applied to James, Smith's argument seems to make sense of his world. On the one hand, we have a man who is held up as a representative of the respectable male elite, of public school and university, but who is jealously protective of his privacy and evasive on the notion of marriage or relationships.<sup>456</sup> His fiction may have been the only expression of the true complicated inner world of his psyche when it came to relationships.

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid, p.3.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid, p.165.

One of the stories which is particularly suggestive of this subsumed sexuality is “Martin’s Close”, with Ann Clark, its female revenant, stalking her unwilling lover George Martin. The plot, which is really an early “fatal attraction” story, is made all the more horrific in that today we would recognise Ann Clark as a socially disenfranchised girl with an intellectual disability, who is well below the well heeled George Martin, which made her all the more open to being abused by him. Her unfortunate death reverses this situation, and Ann becomes a particularly cloying horrific sexual predator, intent on following her beloved even after her death :-

Something dark come out of the water at the edge of the pond farthest away from him, and so up the bank. And when it got to the top where he could see it plain against the sky, it stood up and flapped the arms up and down, and then run off very swiftly in the same direction the prisoner had taken; and being asked very strictly who he took it to be, he said upon his oath that it could be nobody but Ann Clark.<sup>457</sup>

Ann Clark is now stalking her murderer George Martin, weeks after he had killed her by slashing her throat with his tobacco knife and putting her corpse into the same pond. However, if a Jungian lens is applied to this story, Martin may be viewed as one of James’s immature males, whose self who is trying to reject the next stage of individuation. Its anima, personified as Ann Clark then regresses to the previous stage of individuation, the Shadow, after this rejection, and then starts to stalk Martin, wanting to force Martin to face it and accept the assimilation of the anima.

In the story “Wailing Well”, James created some particularly gruesome female and male vampires, who regularly kill people who venture into the field which contains the “wailing well” of the title. The killing of the protagonist Stanley Judkins is redolent of a primal sex scene; his eviscerated corpse is hung from a tree, after the three female vampires have gorged themselves on his blood.

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<sup>457</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.173.

They had just entered the field when they met Mr Hope Jones. Over his shoulder hung the corpse of Stanley Judkins. He had cut it from the branch to which he found it hanging, waving to and fro. There was not a drop of blood in the body.<sup>458</sup>

The vampires here are, in Jungian terms, animas who are straying from their textually ordained place as women who demonstrate the ideals of the feminine norm, as Gilbert and Gubar term it.<sup>459</sup> They are also sometimes figures like Mrs Mothersole, a demonized female character; in each case, James uses them to punish the figure of the eternal boy or peuraternus, who has also violated the expected standard of behaviour of a boy scout.

Later in “The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance” James included a male rape scene filtered through the guise of a dream sequence within another dream sequence, the distancing which in that era would have been necessary in order to lessen the impact on the reader, in light of the penalty which the act would have cost the perpetrator.<sup>460</sup>

The stage got perceptibly darker as each crime was consummated, and at last there was one murder which was done quite in the dark, so that I could not see nothing of the victim, and took some time to effect. It was accompanied by hard breathing, and horrid muffled sounds, and after it Punch came and sat on the footboard and looked at his shoes, which were bloody.<sup>461</sup>

As Chris Barker has described this particular story as having embedded codings for what Andrew Smith has termed “dark edged masculinity”; here, bondage, portrayed in the “tying down,” and erotic asphyxiation in the “hooding”, plus the blood, which demonstrates roughness in the sexual act of penetration itself.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.349.

<sup>459</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New York, NY: Yale University Press, 2000), p.7.

<sup>460</sup> Matt Cook, ed., *A Gay History of Britain, Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford/Westport, CT: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007), p.112.

<sup>461</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.246.

<sup>462</sup> Christopher Barker, ‘Unpleasant Demons, Violence and Cruelty in the Jamesian Tale’, *Weirdly Supernatural*, 2 (2004), p.4; Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840-1920 A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.3.

In “An Evening’s Entertainment”, the ideal of a male relationship is outlined, where the two protagonists are allowed for a while to live in domestic harmony in a little cottage within a wood, an almost fairy-tale setting, a surprising and brave move of James, given the prevailing social ethos after the Labouchère amendments.<sup>463</sup>

James may be seen as more enlightened than Jung when it came to portraying same sex relationships, as Jung’s writings on homosexuality are problematic in that he did not recognise homosexuality as a valid life form of sexual identity, but rather a phase that some individuals had to go through in order to arrive at the ideal of adult heterosexuality. This however, could be understandable in the time in which he lived:

[t]here is little doubt that he saw homosexual practice as abnormal, though he recognised the psychological necessity for some people to pass through a homosexual period.<sup>464</sup>

The difficulties that James had with homosexuality become more apparent, though, when we examine the story more closely: James’s representation demonstrates a deeply sublimated fascination expressed through horror, with the relationship descending into a brutal attack, when the younger of the two men murders the other in a particularly nasty scene:

There was a long table in the room, more than the length of a man, and on it there lay the body of Mr Davis. The eyes were bound over with a linen band and the arms were tied across the back, and the feet were bound together with another band. But the fearful thing was that the breast being quite bare, the bone of it was split through from the top downwards...<sup>465</sup>

There is another scene which can be read as a male rape scene in “A Warning to the Curious”:

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<sup>463</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.320.

<sup>464</sup> AndrewSamuels, Bani Shorter and Fred Plaut (eds), *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1986), p.67.

<sup>465</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.325.

Well then, when I was making the tunnel, of course it was worse, and if I hadn't been so keen I should have dropped the whole thing and run. It was like someone scraping at my back all the time: I thought for a long time it was only soil dropping on me, but as I got nearer the – crown, it was unmistakable. And when I actually laid it bare and got my fingers into the ring of it and pulled it out, there came a sort of cry behind me...<sup>466</sup>

We see this again in “A School Story”, whose protagonist Mr Sampson has been missing for over thirty years, kidnapped by the wraith which had been seen climbing into his window. Their bodies are found down a well, and James’ description can certainly be read as at least potentially sexualised:

Amongst the rags of the clothes that were on one of the bodies. A bad business, whatever the story of it may have been. One body had the arms tight around the other one...<sup>467</sup>

All these ghost stories have scenes which include sadistic sexual acts, as I will demonstrate further in a series of close readings of these stories.

There is a marked horror of physical contact in this selection of James’s stories, where the horror is in the revenant’s physical make up, and the way in which they inflict injuries on a range of hapless victims. The protagonist in the stories never has to do much to bring the horror upon themselves, and when it comes, it is always very physical.

Portraying women in his ghost stories was evidently a little problematic for James. His stories are often fleshed out best with the portrayal of the male academic, one thinks here of the start of “Oh, Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad,” with the male academics at dinner. Then we have the inner thoughts of Dennistoun in “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”, with his sacrilegious intentions on the purloined

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid, p.313.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid, p.103.

scrapbook, and the hapless unintentional necromancer the unfortunate Wraxall in “Count Magnus”.

However, the portrayal of women in the stories is often more two-dimensional; they tend to be minor characters, wives, sisters, helpmeets and servants. One critic of James’s stories described his portrayal of women as giving them minor walk-on parts as supporters or foils to the main characters.<sup>468</sup> Nevertheless, when the entire run of James’s stories are looked at, overall, some surprisingly significant and impressive female characters emerge. One thinks here of Mary Oldys in “The Residence at Whitminster”, for example; she may be a niece, but the latter part of the storytelling is built up through her eyes. She is almost an amateur psychic detective, and we are given access to her innermost thoughts by James, who makes a point of explaining her methods of interrogating the other characters to get to the truth:

“How will Miss Oldys manage to make her remember about the box?”...”Mary? Oh, she’ll make her sit down and ask her about her aunt’s last illness...something quite off the point. Then as Maple says, one thing brings up another, and the right one will come round sooner than you could suppose.”<sup>469</sup>

Mike Pincombe made the point that James chose to inflict damage on his range of incredulous male characters for the supposed sin of “homosexual panic”. However, while exploring this to better understand how James sublimates his sexuality in his literary work, we need to remember that there is a good range of very nasty female revenants in James’s repertoire of ghostly villains.<sup>470</sup> One thinks of Lady Sadleir in “The Uncommon Prayer-Book”, who kills in what could be seen as a sexual way, with a bite to the neck of her victim. James’s depiction of these female

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<sup>468</sup> Rowlands, ‘M. R. James’s Women’, p.138.

<sup>469</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.213.

<sup>470</sup> Pincombe, ‘Homosexual Panic’, pp.4-6.

revenants could betray an inner fear of women and relationships with them in the same way that Pincombe argues James' horribly corporeal male revenants indicate homosexual panic. James seems to have felt similarly frightened of both. As Richard Holmes argues, in James's stories

...one moves through the catalogue of James's bestial aggressors towards the unavoidable notion of the feminine. Here I think one may be close upon the central horror. There are several specifically female apparitions in the ghost-stories. Noticeable among them are the flapping, goose-like shape of Anne Clark in "Martin's Close" as she rises from the pond on the moor to take revenge upon her lover; and the ghastly, antiquated lump of Mrs Sadleir in "The Uncommon Prayer Book", who like 'a great roll of shabby white flannel', falls from a dark cupboard on the neck of the luckless antiquarian...<sup>471</sup>

Holmes also identifies the fear of too much intimacy with either sex with the identification of fear in being touched, personified in the attack by the linen monster in the bedclothes of "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad".<sup>472</sup> Its shape in the bedclothes marks it out as neither specifically male nor female. The physicality of all of the revenants would identify this fear, a fear that would point to a fear of intimacy of the cloying of a real life relationship with either sex. The stories identify this as the real fear that James seemed to have, that in order to fully mature one is supposed to build real life relationships that may be physical and emotional. This adult process also involves the individuation process. Many of the stories feature horror of intimacy as an interruption to this process, foregrounding male and female characters' avoidance of the next stage in the individuation process, i.e. assimilating their anima or animus. The result of this reluctance is that they regress to a point where they have to meet their shadows, in the form of the revenants that haunt James's characters.

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<sup>471</sup>Richard Holmes, *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer* (Hammersmith: Flamingo, 2000), p.169

<sup>472</sup>Ibid.

The fascination James had with strong women carries on with his portrayal of female amateur academics; for instance, Lady Wardrop the historian who loves mazes in “Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance” or Mrs Anstruther from “The Rose Garden”, the amateur artist. There are also the other female revenants of the stories, Mrs Mothersole from “The Ash Tree”, and Lady Ivie, also Elizabeth Merewether who colluded with her husband in the death of her father in “The Haunted Dolls’ House”.<sup>473</sup>

These portrayals do not really match up with the idea of the “Angel in the House” ideal; while the idealised angel figure was a support to her husband and nurturer of children, these women that James created reject dependence and are figures in their own right, whether educated women or monsters who murder children and relatives.

Then there are the cast of minor characters, who often know more than the main academics or amateur bachelors who make up James’s main characters. Where James’s main characters are often in the wrong place at the wrong time, inviting the ghost or revenant’s revenge, the minor characters, usually servants or helpers of some sort, often move the plot along with observations or warnings of some type of folkloric knowledge.

The females who make up the minor cast in James’s stories are rich in their characterisation. For example, Mrs Bunch the housekeeper in “Lost Hearts” has to field some very insistent, often awkward questions from Stephen about his eccentric uncle Mr Abney, and Mrs Betts in “Rats” knows more than she seems to about her unusual lodger, but who is not about to let on to her other guest, the Cambridge

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<sup>473</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.176, 104, 30, 281, 258.

academic Mr Thomson.<sup>474</sup> Then we have the giggling maidservants who have to clean Parkins' room in "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You My Lad", and the barmaids in "Martin's Close" who know more about Ann Clark than the presiding judge of the murder trial is prepared to believe.<sup>475</sup>

These characters are often used to great effect by James to overcome the incredulity of the audience, or to deliver facts to this end, often in a very down-to-earth manner that the main characters or the establishment, figures of authority like the trial judge, choose not to heed. In heeding these testaments these figures would have to face a real life existence of an actuality which might not match up to the chaste inner worlds that they cling to for comfort, as it may be said James did with his idealised worlds of King's and Eton, cancelling out his real life need for a physical intimate relationship of any kind with any sex. (This need to cling to an idealised world, also incidentally a mark of a boyish nature was commented on by Shane Leslie when writing up James's obituary; he wrote that James was wedded to his two colleges, Kings and Eton.<sup>476</sup>)

James tends to use minor characters in a consistent way, regardless of gender. Some are meant to give a gentle humour in the reading of the story, for instance Mrs Maple in "The Residence at Whitminster" with her comic delivery on bats: "I couldn't help thinking to myself, if you was bats, where should we be this night?"<sup>477</sup> Then there is the grandmother of "An Evening's Entertainment", who seems to delight in telling her very gruesome story to her captive audience of two

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid, pp.11, 332.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid, pp.65, 160

<sup>476</sup> Shane Leslie, 'Montague Rhodes James', in Joshi&Pardoe, *Warnings to the Curious*, p.28.

<sup>477</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.215

young grandchildren, and then cruelly denying the understandably terrified children a nightlight after.<sup>478</sup>

As above the characters were well sketched out and deviated from the norms expected in many Victorian/Edwardian stories; and it could be argued that there is a certain amount of sexuality in the stories; but with James's style of writing it is cleverly concealed and the reader has to ask themselves certain questions to unmask it. James stages these stories to work out his own fears about sexuality. The violence he chooses to inflict on his characters is a safety valve for his own frustrated and very contained libido.

These characters are often non-traditional compared to the people that James knew in his own world. As I have noted above, they are monster women and effeminate men, who cross the bounds of their society and are punished for doing so. In the story "Martin's Close" the questions that the reader would need to ask themselves would be why would a man like George Martin, who comes from a landed prosperous family and whose Cambridge education is preparing him for a privileged life, pursue a relationship with a girl like Ann Clark? James describes this character as "[a] poor country girl...of weak understanding...very uncomely in her appearance...with a face like a hoppit toad."<sup>479</sup> The most obvious answer is surely "for sex", but it is also possible to read the character of George as the Jungian self, looking to meld with its anima in the next stage of individuation. The relationship continues, with George Martin visiting Ann's street every week, and whistling for her to come to him. James is evidently not entranced with his female character; she definitely does not entrance him the way that Tess, also a lower-class female

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid, p.328

<sup>479</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.165.

protagonist, entranced her creator Thomas Hardy.<sup>480</sup> James makes Ann exceedingly ugly. The word “toad” cannot but conjure up physical disgust; it creates that involuntary shudder that is so much a part of James’ work, and works to distance the reader from any sympathy for this character. Ann is not endowed with a single redeeming feature; there is no intimacy between the characters as such just the implication that Martin is using Ann for his own libidinal ends. The intimacy, if it was imagined at any point in the reader’s mind, is met with a physical and emotional distancing, as the reader in this age recognises that this well-heeled young man is using a young girl with an educational disability for his own needs, and not forming a real relationship with her. The reader is implicitly invited to judge Martin harshly for behaving like this.

However, we need at this point to ask ourselves, why Ann, (as an anima) is portrayed in this over the top way, which alienates the reader from her. If we read the character of George Martin as a Jungian self, and Ann as the anima, we can see that Ann/the anima is distanced enough to make sure that individuation cannot take place, and the self will regress to the part of individuation where the ego meets with the Shadow.

Indeed, in the proceedings of the court that tried George Martin for the murder of Ann Clark, George Martin is condemned for pursuing the relationship:

“...[f]or as we shall make it appear, the person murdered was a poor country girl (whereas the prisoner is a gentleman of a proper estate) and, besides that, was one to whom providence had not given the full use of her intellects, but was what is termed among us commonly an innocent or natural: such a one, therefore, as one would supposed a gentleman of the prisoner’s quality more likely to

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<sup>480</sup>Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (Oxford: OUP, 1992).

overlook, or, if he did notice her, to be moved to compassion for her unhappy condition...<sup>481</sup>

Martin pursues a relationship with Ann Clark against the advice of her sister, who fears he is mocking her, and even after the people in the New Inn Tavern start to make fun of him dating so unlikely “a sweetheart”.<sup>482</sup> The relationship is pursued until Martin’s new fiancée (a match with a social equal initiated by his parents) finds out about the villagers’ gossip over her intended and breaks the engagement.<sup>483</sup>

After this, Martin becomes enraged, and tries to end the relationship with Ann Clark. However, because Ann Clark is, as the story terms, of weak intellect, she only makes more effort to try to hold on to the man she sees as her beloved. She starts to undertake what we today would term stalking. James’ depiction of this misused, intellectually handicapped girl following George Martin around, even to the point of her being whipped and abused by him, evokes a kind of nausea in the reader. It is almost pure psychological horror. Taylor summed this feeling up very well:

Ann Clark..., who haunts her murderer up to the moment of his execution, may not be doing it out of revenge, but from continued affection. Witness her ghost singing the answering part of “Madam, will you walk” outside the New Inn while Martin cowers within. In the end this constant mindless fondness may be harder to endure than anger...<sup>484</sup>

This relationship descends into nightmare territory when George Martin kills Ann Clark by cutting her throat and dumping her body in a nearby pond.<sup>485</sup> Then the real nightmare starts, because Ann Clark will not let go of her sweetheart, even in death. Her ghost, an anima which has now regressed to the pursuing form of the shadow, follows George Martin, mindlessly singing the song they shared as a love

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<sup>481</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.164.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid, p.168.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid, p.166.

<sup>484</sup> John Alfred Taylor, “If I’m Not Careful”: Innocents and Not-So-Innocents in the Stories of M. R. James’, in Joshi&Pardoe, *Warnings to the Curious*, p.202.

<sup>485</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.171.

song in life. The victim of love that has gone very, very wrong and will not let go is a persistent psychological horror. However, starting with folkloric beginnings, through later tales such as Robert Hichens's short story "How Love Came to Professor Guildea" where the male professor who prizes unfeeling intellect above emotion is an unwilling victim of an invisible spectre who wishes to merely love him, it is very resonant with our times now in the twenty-first century. <sup>486</sup>

There have been many films where the pursuer is thought to have been eradicated, only to reappear and continue the pursuit. Here, the most obviously famous is Adrian Lyne's 1987 film *Fatal Attraction*, another examination of the unwilling lover stalked by his rejected paramour, which is seen in retrospect as a film which exorcised male 1980's fears of strong willed career women.<sup>487</sup> James certainly seems to be exorcising his own fears of intimacy in this story, the physicality of the sexual aspect and the mindless devotion of the protagonist causing complete revulsion in her lover.

Whilst the story "Martin's Close" featured a male and female coupling, demonstrating the demonizing of a female character by James, which illustrates to some extent that not all James's stories feature violence exclusively propagated by men against other men, other stories particularly "An Evening's Entertainment" portray a male/male relationship which descends into a particularly brutal murder.

(As above), Jung viewed homosexual love as a phase that men or women pass through, instead of a valid life choice although, again at least he did recognise

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<sup>486</sup>Robert Hichens, *How Love Came to Professor Guildea*(Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2008).  
<http://gaslight.mtroyal.ab.ca/pguildea.htm>

<sup>487</sup> Adrian Lyne, *Fatal Attraction*, Jaffe/Lansing Productions, 1987.

the existence of same sex relationships, as other theorists such as Freud, thought of this type of relationship as a misdirected drive.<sup>488</sup>

Jung said that often a younger male would idealise an older man, and through this idealisation, particularly through the elevation of the male phallus, the homosexual relationship would blossom through the reciprocal idealisation of their twinned masculinity, and the transference in the individuation process of the boy's anima being substituted for a form of Eros, through the animus.<sup>489</sup> The older man who is idealised in this relationship, possesses (through the alchemical process in middle-age) a self which is already complete, and has already weathered the process of uniting with his anima, possibly having substituted this stage for a form of Eros through this earlier integration

The protagonists in "An Evening's Entertainment" offer a personification of this homosexual, Jungian pairing of a younger man, and an idealisation of an older man as teacher, lover, and father-figure

[...] the young man went on quick...and said, 'That's to say, Mr Davis and me's company enough for each other, ain't we, master? "[a]nd then there's a beautiful air there of a summer night, and you can see all the country round under the moon"...<sup>490</sup>

The language James uses in this quotation is certainly romantic, and illustrates a relationship that the reader can see for themselves is not just platonic. This is a story where there are some positive portrayals of an interiorized femininity within the masculine, despite the later negative descent into murder.

However, James did use minor characters to demonize masculine characters who deviate from the norm, especially again with female protagonists who espouse

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<sup>488</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Historical and Expository Works* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975), p.222.

<sup>489</sup> C.G.Jung, *Aspects of the Masculine* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1993), p.37.

<sup>490</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.323.

this female otherness. The story told to the Eton Boy Scout Troop by James and read at their campfire at Worbarrow Bay in August 1927, "Wailing Well" features three female vampiric revenants, which kill by draining victims of their blood, in a field named after the well it contains. These three are animas who have rejected their textually ordained place, and choose instead to hunt younger victims. It is interesting that James chose to feature three female vampires and one male vampire, as this has parallels with the three vampires in *Dracula*, one of the most overtly – and darkly - sexual novels of the fin de siècle.<sup>491</sup>

James had read *Dracula* in the late 1890s and pronounced that "[i]t suffers from excess".<sup>492</sup> However the idea of three female vampires has parallels in this tale, except that the three here are wraiths, made up of "[w]hity bones, no faces, and teeth," very different from the three seductive and beautiful vampires in Stoker's book.<sup>493</sup> James, unlike Stoker, is distancing himself from his sexualised characters again, and choosing to make the revenants as unattractive as possible. He chose to give the four characters here labels of male and female, rather than presenting them as sexless, and again the distance from the female characters is maintained through the device of making them undesirable portrayals of demonized female otherness. There certainly is no orgiastic sex scene with these three women as there is in the Stoker tale.<sup>494</sup> Nor is there even a uniting with a self or ego in the individuation process. Whereas Stoker's characters seduced and mesmerised men for blood, these vampires are much more savagely predatory, draining their victims of their life force, actually hanging them from a tree, to make sure that every drop is obtained from the corpse. In Freudian terms, this is sexuality at a much earlier stage, the oral,

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<sup>491</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1993), p.176.

<sup>492</sup> James, 'Some Remarks', in James, *A Pleasing Terror*, p.478.

<sup>493</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, p.176.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid*, p.50.

and it is utilised by James to heighten the reader's sense of horror whilst distancing himself, as author, from the intimacy of the sexual act. The three women as animas kill the young Boy Scout or peuraternus Stanley Judkins in this way and leave his eviscerated corpse hanging from a tree.<sup>495</sup>

James is utilising his strong females in the act of punishing the younger male protagonist, as the three vampires are certainly predatory. As a parody of the "angel in the house" they serve as the ideal of the feminine monstrous, a catharsis to work out male frustrations and anxieties on the safe space of the page. As Gilbert and Gubar note, this is the deeply ironic manoeuvre of the male author using the bad woman to replace the ideal feminine:

[i]ndeed, if we return to the literary definitions of "authority"...we will see that the monster-women, threatening to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author's power to allay "his" anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, bitch, fiend, monster) and, simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained "place" and thus generates a story that "gets away" from its author...<sup>496</sup>

In this case, it would seem that James deliberately utilises these female vampires in a sexual scene, which plays out his own anxieties about sexuality, as the bloodsucking that precedes the death of Stanley Judkins has unfortunate but unmistakable parallels with the sexual act. It is unfortunate in this case as Judkins is a child, but it echoes Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*, who is exposed as having been feeding on children before she is killed by Van Helsing.<sup>497</sup>

These women are the nightmare reversal of perfect mothers. Interestingly Haefele-Thomas has identified the idea of the monstrous mother running through

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<sup>495</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.349.

<sup>496</sup> Gilbert &Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.28.

<sup>497</sup>Stoker, *Dracula*, p.176.

several novels of the nineteenth century, whereas in this case the mother figure and the vampire appear as one.<sup>498</sup> This is identified further with the figure of the vampiric paedophile, as the three wraiths are known to pick both male and female victims they also call into question the nature of perverse sexuality in their choice of victim and the way in which they drain their victims of their life force. The wraiths all display uneasy sexual boundaries, which make them marginalized, or to use the description, in the way that Haefele-Thomas utilises it, queer characters:

[t]he sexual desire in this scene is monstrous because it calls the myth of the “good English mother” into question. Here, the mother figure and the paedophilic queer turn out to be one and the same. The stereotype of the vampiric queer as paedophile will be revisited in many nineteenth century vampire stories, and continues to this day.<sup>499</sup>

These figures can be found in novels such as Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire*, Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*, and of course as mentioned earlier Stoker’s *Dracula*.<sup>500</sup> James could be identified with the prevailing reaction of the fin-de-siècle against marginalised figures, of the homosexual or the reaction against colonialisation, as the vampires in this story are also products of miscegenation as they are described as “three black figures” by James.<sup>501</sup> In a close reading of the tale, however, we can discern James’ underlying enjoyment of his monster women punishing a character who has deviated from the normal behaviour of a well-behaved young man, and who has been punished for this deviation. James certainly seems to enjoy letting his strong female characters undertake these actions.

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<sup>498</sup>Ardele Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic, Transgressing Monstrosity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), p.103.

<sup>499</sup>Ibid, p.2.

<sup>500</sup> Florence Marryat, *Blood of the Vampire* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2010); Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (London: Valancart Books, 2009); Stoker, *Dracula*.

<sup>501</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.348.

Lucy's role as "the bloofer lady" parallels these vampire women of James's exposing women as the threat to the existing order.<sup>502</sup> As these women prey on children, they are exposed as "wild women", not the traditional wife or mother who give birth to and nurture children. Instead, they prey upon children for their blood and life force.<sup>503</sup> Dijkstra explores this fear in relation to Stoker in a way that makes the parallels with James' use of the same figures clear:

Lucy turns into a wild woman, one of those horrible creatures who prey upon that central symbol of the future potential of mankind: the child. Woman's misplaced virginity, that masculinising force which in real life encouraged feminists to renounce the holy duties of motherhood, and as it were prey upon their as yet unconceived babies, manifests itself henceforth in Lucy in the form of a pre-determined blood lust for children. As she dies, she slides back into a state of primal bestiality and soon children begin having their throats torn open on Hampstead Heath...<sup>504</sup>

James seems to delight in placing women in these bestial roles. As with his fascination with strong females, there is almost a joy in his creation of woman as beast, there to eviscerate children, or stalk well-heeled undergraduates, tormenting them into killing her.

The inclusion of these monster women in James' stories would certainly seem to validate this. The fascination is almost a voyeuristic impulse; James delights in including them in his tales, but in real life could only fantasise about a physical relationship, as the physical aspect would have been problematic for him. All of the biographical evidence points to a person who saw his society as a brotherhood of likeminded men, who seems curiously old fashioned by the standards of the era in which he lived and who was reticent about sex to the point of prudery. One episode in his life is particularly illustrating, his reticence in translating Walter Maps "De

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<sup>502</sup>Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others*, p.103.

<sup>503</sup>Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity – Fantasies Of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.41.

<sup>504</sup>Ibid, p.41.

NugisCuralium”, which he overcame to a point, as he could not resist something he found academically fascinating. He compromised only by omitting the offensive passages in the collection of stories.

James’s prudery in dealing with the occasional salacious passages in the De Nugis resulted in some omissions. As he wrote in his “Translators Preface”, remarking on some passages left in the original Latin, “The truth is that I found them too odious to translate...”<sup>505</sup>

James commented that in translating this piece he felt “revolted”.<sup>506</sup> Young remarked that the writing of his ghost stories seemed to him to be the outlet for the exhausted scholarly mind, where the facets of everyday life that James avoided were dealt with as almost a form of cleansing or catharsis. But there seems to have been a remarkable avoidance on James’s part of physical intimacy with either sex in his life. He certainly did not seem to seek this type of relationship at all.<sup>507</sup>

Another way in which James’ desire to distance himself from women can be seen in his stories is in the creation of the vampiric figures as seen in “Wailing Well”. James’ stories can be read as an avoidance of any relationship with women, as though if the temptation to give into the sexual urge is followed then the ending would be as an eviscerated corpse drained of life force, like Stanley Judkins, who actually then adds to the number of vampires in the field with the wailing well.

The female vampires here lust after blood from their victims, which again reads as having parallels with the sexual act. As Cox said, James would have found highly embarrassing (if not offensive) to have his stories analysed in this way.<sup>508</sup> James’s avoidance of the subject of sex or intimacy in its entirety seems to have been something that he accepted in his life. The acceptance is arguably part of his

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<sup>505</sup>Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, pp.229-232.

<sup>506</sup>[http://vunex.blogspot.co.uk/2006\\_05\\_01\\_archive.html](http://vunex.blogspot.co.uk/2006_05_01_archive.html), 21.09.2010.

<sup>507</sup> Michael Cox, *M.R. James: An Informal Portrait* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.153

<sup>508</sup> M. R. James, *Casting the Runes and other Ghost Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.xxiii.

voyeuristic distancing of himself from any potential physical relationship; James lived a very cerebral life, and there was never any mention in all of the biographies, auto biography and criticism of the man of any kind of physical relationship. The only time there was ever a hint of physical contact in James's life is the regular "horseplay" that James indulged in with his friends. Mike Pincombe observed that this horseplay or "ragging" was regularly indulged in by James's entire circle from school to university and even after, with the last account of James indulging in this at 41.<sup>509</sup> This is the only account of James ever having any kind of physical contact with anyone.

However, the tension that would have inevitably arisen from a celibate life not chosen freely can be found in his stories. Where James made his female characters as unfeminine as possible, his male characters are often punished for being effeminate. One particular story in which such punishment is meted out for this stigma is the story of "An Evening's Entertainment" which starts out as a fireside story told as a sort of 'modern legend' or cautionary tale, told to a pair of children by their grandmother.<sup>510</sup> The story is set in the grandmother's past, and is told to the children to prevent them wandering too far into a nearby lane. It features a male relationship, which, while the relationship is not explicitly sexual, is surprising for the homophobic time and society in which James wrote it, especially as it appears to be both cross-age and cross-class.

James utilises the grandmother to try and explain this living arrangement in the way that the local people of that time would have tried to view it.

"...this young man and he lived together for some long time, and went about together, and whether he just did the work of the house

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<sup>509</sup> Mike Pincombe, Class war in "Casting the Runes, <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk> , 2011. P.3.

<sup>510</sup> James, Collected Ghost Stories, p.320.

for Mr Davis, or whether Mr Davis was his teacher in some way, nobody seemed to know.”<sup>511</sup>

As in “Wailing Well” and “Martin’s Close”, James makes the uncanny figure unattractive, describing him as a “[p]ale, ugly young fellow ...[who]...hadn’t much to say for himself,” which seeds the doubts that the individuation process will work, as already there are doubts about the anima figure.<sup>512</sup> Mr Davis and the young man were soon seen wandering along the country lanes together and camping overnight in the local woods. Then the grandmother tries to gloss over the more obvious overtones of this relationship in the telling of this tale.

Well, now what did those two men do with themselves? Of course I can’t tell you half the foolish things that the people got into their heads, and we know, don’t we, that you mustn’t speak evil when you aren’t sure it’s true, even when people are dead and gone. But as I said, those two were always together...<sup>513</sup>

The story could be read, in a Jungian analysis, as placing Mr Davis in the form of a self looking to reach the next stage of individuation, melding with the figure of his young man to integrating his anima. The relationship between Mr Davis and the young man falters when the self rejects the young man, who then regresses to the shadow, which then kills Mr Davis.

The story can, in one reading, be seen as a fantasy of an idealised relationship, with an older man who lives a self-sufficient life and is able to support his younger lover. However, there are undertones of this fantasy descending into guilt over the inevitable condemnation by society, as homosexual relationships were more widely known about after the Labouchère amendment, and very much frowned upon. <sup>514</sup>

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<sup>511</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.322.

<sup>512</sup>Ibid, p.322.

<sup>513</sup>Ibid, p.323.

<sup>514</sup>Cook, *A Gay History Of Britain*, p.112.

James manages to convey this relationship descending into this guilt, with the device of the grandmother telling the story, where she quickly corrects herself as to the type of relationship she is describing to her grandchildren:

Of course I can't tell you half the foolish things that the people got into their heads, and we know, don't we, that you mustn't speak evil when you aren't sure it's true, even when people are dead and gone. But as I said, those two were always about together, late and early, up on the downland and below in the woods...<sup>515</sup>

With the spectre of what happened to Oscar Wilde over his own relationships with young men, the relationship between Mr Davis and his young man would have brought its own stigma and horror to the men of that day.<sup>516</sup> Inevitably, James does not allow this relationship to continue so idyllically. Soon the horror intrudes on this quiet world, and the body of Mr Davis' young man is discovered by the local woodsmen.

The punishment meted out to this character by James is shocking, even by Jamesian standards.

Mr Davis' young man: dressed in a sort of white gown he was, and hanging by his neck to the limb of the biggest oak, quite, quite dead: and near his feet there lay on the ground a hatchet all in a gore of blood...<sup>517</sup>

The body of Mr Davis himself is also discovered. He has also undergone a similar ordeal, except that he was tortured before death. The figures of the shadow are now punishing the older man for his rejection of the anima by his giving into cultural norms and trying to hide his relationship with its personification in the body of the younger man...

There was a long table in the room, more than the length of a man and on it there lay the body of Mr Davis. The eyes were bound over

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<sup>515</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.32.

<sup>516</sup>Cook, *A Gay History of Britain*, p.141.

<sup>517</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.325.

with a linen band and the arms were tied across the back, and the feet were bound together with another band. But the fearful thing was that the breast being quite bare, the bone of it was split through from the top downwards with an axe! Oh it was a terrible sight; not one there but turned faint and ill with it...<sup>518</sup>

Not only had Mr Davis been tortured, but again James hints at sexual overtones, noting a little further on in the story that Mr Davis had been given a sleeping drug and violated before being tortured and murdered in this very gruesome fashion.

They...searched about to see if they could find out how such a frightful thing came to pass. And in the cupboards they found a quantity of herbs and jars with liquors, and it came out, when people that understood such matters had looked into it, that some of these liquors were drinks to put a person asleep. And they had little doubt that wicked young man had put some of this into Mr Davis's drink, and then used him as he did...<sup>519</sup>

All of this extreme sexual horror and violence seems a little out of place in James's fiction, especially this particular story, which is set in a familial narrative of a bedtime tale. The Grandmother seems almost to delight in the telling of the story to her grandchildren, carefully making sure that her son is sound asleep before the tale is told. James was evidently enjoying the crafting and narration of his tale through the rather dark figure of the grandmother. Again she is one of James's older, stronger figures, who have already undergone the trials and processes of a successful individuation process, and are now telling cautionary tales to the next generation, perhaps to try and warn them, albeit rather archetypically, couching the warning in a fairytale or folkloric form.

Andrew Smith noted that James's stories are the key to understanding the schism between James' public face - the respectable Monty James, provost and

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<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

eminent researcher - and his more complex inner life.<sup>520</sup> In the stories, James' ambivalence about some of the most important aspects of his life appear in sublimated layers of uncontrollable or dangerous sexuality, which burst out of the carefully crafted narratives like the many revenants which populate them. Many of James's characters have a sexual punishment meted out to them, not just the pursuit by revenants. In his tales, he took the Victorian ghost story and added new darker depths of violence.

James propelled his characters into an arena of dark horror and savage violence. His monstrous creations not only touched their victims, they crawled over them, and then tore open their sleek white throats with bestial talons. One might even argue that James was personally responsible for gilding the mainstream ghost story with a particular brand of dark edged, violent masculinity...<sup>521</sup>

This brand of extreme "dark edged masculinity" can be located in another particularly disturbing story, "The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance". The story is striking with its undertones of hidden sexual projection, as there is a story within a story, linked in with the popular Victorian entertainment of Punch and Judy. This entertainment form was important to James; he noted in his biography *Eton and King's* that it was the Punch and Judy figure of the Ghost that inspired his lifelong interest in writing ghost stories.

What first interested me in ghosts? This I can tell you quite definitely. In my childhood I chanced to see a toy Punch and Judy set, with figures cut out in cardboard. One of these was the ghost. It was a tall figure habited in white with an unnaturally long and narrow head, also surrounded with white, and a dismal visage. Upon this my conceptions of a ghost were based, and for years it permeated my dreams...<sup>522</sup>

The inclusion of Punch and Judy as a sub plot in this story projects hidden sexual aggression, as it again involves the rape and torture of a male victim. As

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<sup>520</sup>Smith, *The Ghost Story*, p.175.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid, p.3.

<sup>522</sup> M. R. James, 'Ghosts – Treat Them Gently!' in *A Pleasing Terror*, p.481.

Barker noted, many of James's stories involve extreme cruelty; the story begs the question of why this tale of a nephew trying to locate his missing uncle suddenly devolves into a dreamscape setting of two male figures hooding, tying down and raping a male protagonist?<sup>523</sup> It can be viewed as a cautionary tale, to a younger male protagonist, of what can happen if there is a rejection of the next stage of his individuation. If there is too much prevarication, then there will be a reckoning; the regression will mean he will have to face the shadow, in the form of a revenant.

There is the notion of distance again in this section; the physical aspect is twice removed from the narrator by James' location of the action in a dream sequence which is being watched by the protagonist on a stage. The distancing is the result of fear on the part of the younger male who has set out to find out what has become of his older male relative. If there was guilt over the voyeuristic aspect by the younger man, after viewing this involuntary dream, then, it can be absolved by the setting in a dream, which is involuntary. However, in James' stories, dreams also act as warnings to tell the pursuer of truth the actuality of the situation.

"The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance" begins with a series of letters, signed with initials alone, from a writer who is left unidentified by James's unnamed narrator. This device seems to have been a deliberate authorial attempt by James to further distance himself from the story as much as possible, as its content of an act of sodomy (although only hinted at) which was outlawed by acts of parliament at that time raised obvious difficulties; and given the content of this story this distancing can be read as authorial guilt over the inclusion of these sexually violent scenes.

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<sup>523</sup> Barker, 'Unpleasant Demons', p.4.

These letters are all addressed to the protagonist's brother, identified as "Robert"; they detail the disappearance of their uncle Henry, the Rector of a small town. James further maintains the large distance in the story from the narrator and the letter writer, and does not identify the town, as if he is already embarrassed by the tale he is about to tell. His character of the Rector is a typical bachelor, devoted to his job, described as "not the most genial of men...and had more than a little of the *martinet* in his composition..." a reference to a person who likes to maintain strict discipline.<sup>524</sup> The letter writer, "W.R." assumes the role of an amateur sleuth to try to identify what happened to his uncle and throughout these letters to his brother; the reader is taken along on this detective mission.

We are soon informed that although "Uncle Henry" may have been a strict man, that he was generous with his time, and spent a great deal of it helping his parishioners, especially the sick; his housekeeper loved him, and he had a large congregation. The only sour note is struck by the innkeeper of the local tavern, The Kings Head, who it seems has been taken to task over the condition of his beer, and informs "W.R." of this. Apart from the hurt feelings of the innkeeper, there is no motive for "Uncle Henry" meeting this particularly nasty end, especially not for his death to involve sexual assault.

The scene itself is cleverly disguised. We only know the identity of the victim as Uncle Henry because he was wearing the bands of a rector, which early on in the story we are informed, was old fashioned even by the standards of that time. The scene of Henry's end is more of a projection of authorial fantasy, in that it is set in a dream that W.R. had the night before his uncle's body was found. The dream is set

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<sup>524</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.241.

within a Punch and Judy show, but instead of the usual script, Punch is shown murdering his victim in the dark.

The stage got perceptibly darker as each crime was consummated, and at last there was one murder which was done quite in the dark, so that I could see nothing of the victim, and took some time to effect. It was accompanied by hard breathing and horrid muffled sounds, and after it Punch came and...looked at his shoes which were bloody...and sniggered in so horrible a fashion.<sup>525</sup>

Barker identified this particular piece as involving male rape, and after a close reading of the text of the story I am inclined to agree with his opinion.<sup>526</sup> It is interesting in that the choice of words James uses points to the sexual act, i.e. “consummated”; this could be deliberate or it may have been a Freudian slip, which again points strongly to some disassociation of the author from the sexual act being played out on the page, as if the authorial father wishes to have nothing to do with his perverted literary creations, or children, but cannot stop them from revealing both themselves and him.

Again, in this story we see James distancing himself from the physicality being played out on the page. The action is being utilised as a catharsis by James, in the position of author, whilst the audience are being utilised as participants in the voyeuristic situation; there is a thrill to be gained by the teller of the tale to the audience.

The story of an appearance and a disappearance features an extremely disturbing dream sequence involving a Punch and Judy show...possessing particularly strong sexual overtones, Rape and Murder...<sup>527</sup>

In the next sequence we find out that the victim was Uncle Henry, and that he had been hooded and tied down by his assailant. “He was a sturdy figure clad in

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<sup>525</sup>Ibid.

<sup>526</sup>Barker, ‘Unpleasant Demons’, p.4.

<sup>527</sup>Ibid.

black and wearing bands, his head was covered in a whitish bag..."<sup>528</sup> The hint of a rape already committed before the discovery of the hooded body is found in the prior quote about the bloody shoes that punch was wearing, (as above).

The dream projection scene has sexual undertones with the hooding and tying down of the victim and the scene is also saturated with sexual sadism. With the distancing of the action through the use of a dream sequence, James seems to take the levels of violence to a new height:

The crack of the stick on their skulls, which in the ordinary way delights me, had here a crushing sound as if the bone was giving way...and at last there was one murder which was done quite in the dark... accompanied by hard breathing and horrid muffled sounds...<sup>529</sup>

This is a long sequence involving many murders, hard breathing, infanticide, rape and sexual perversion with the tying down of the victim and the hooding, which, can be read as erotic asphyxiation, where one person stops the airway of another in order to heighten orgasm. It casts the author as the procurer of the fantasy, who then distances himself by casting it in a dream sequence. The audience are made to act as voyeurs, which then gives the whole act a new fetishistic thrill: who is the voyeur here, the author who has quite cleverly distanced himself from the sheer physicality of the action, or the audience? James neatly implicates the reader in any voyeurism they perceive. Michael Rowe's work on voyeurism and the queer male gaze has illustrated that the setting of horror in film works to excise fears of being outed as a homosexual, as the intended audience can derive enjoyment from the depiction of

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<sup>528</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.246.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid*, p.249.

gay sex without outing themselves, whilst working to maximum effect to ensure the frisson of watching others.<sup>530</sup>

James as author has little to do with the scene, and can derive a vicarious thrill from the reaction of the audience (let us remember that he liked to read his stories aloud to his friends and pupils), while at the same time distancing himself from the physicality of the sexual act. As Kaye points out the audience are made complicit in this voyeuristic act, whilst the setting of the scene itself is also very interesting in that it is set in the realm of Punch and Judy.<sup>531</sup> As Leach discovered, Punch and Judy works on many levels of the psyche, and has many elements of sexual fantasy, sadism and catharsis.<sup>532</sup> As he explains,

[b]elow the level of social satire...there is also a level of potent sexual fantasy. The elements of sexual fantasy in Punch and Judy are manifold, from the sexual role-play of Punch with Judy, which results in the unwanted baby that is dispatched by Punch. To the replacement of Judy by a much less complicated female character Polly, to the extended phallic protuberance of Punches' nose and belly, and much more, such as the gay role play between Punch and the elusive Joey, where a lot is made of their desire for the sausages which never make the frying pan...<sup>533</sup>

All of this allows sexual role-playing and fantasy, which act as a catharsis in a safe setting for the outlet of sexual frustration. James takes this safe setting, this catharsis, and injects it into the setting of a male rape and murder within one of his character's minds. This multi-layering of sexual frustration refuses to be contained and bursts forth onto the scene, but it is difficult to identify the source of the violence as this dream is located within a dream, simultaneously allowing the expression and the rejection of these problematic desires.

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<sup>530</sup>Michael Rowe (ed.), *Introduction to Queer Fear: Gay Horror Fiction* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001), p.3.

<sup>531</sup>Robert Leach, *The Punch and Judy Show: History, Tradition and Meaning* (London: Batsford, 1985), p.25.

<sup>532</sup>Ibid.

<sup>533</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.26.

In each of these stories, the protagonists seem to have been either punished for a sexual relationship, or the killing in the story has a sexual edge to it as Stanley Judkins' death in "Wailing Well" does. The next story I discuss has another protagonist who has committed the sin of having a gay relationship, but this time the corpse of the discarded paramour comes back to drag him to the depths of horror.

"A School Story" has many elements of traditional Jamesian style, from Latin inscriptions and the mythology of ghost stories; the terror is introduced slowly, as usual, with the arrival of a new Latin teacher, Mr Sampson. Mr Sampson is haunted by automatic writing, which appears, on the essays he has been marking, and his reaction to this writing tells the reader that he may not be all he seems, and may be hiding elements of his past. Again, as with the story of "The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance" the automatic writing is there as a warning, in that to progress in the next stage of his life, Mr Sampson will have to integrate his anima, instead of sequestering himself away, in a world of Latin verbs and marking. There is a decided irony in James having focused so much on academics that hide themselves away from life and concentrate on books, as he was usually seen by many biographers of doing the same thing.<sup>534</sup> However, in her biography of Penelope Fitzgerald, Hermione Lee notes that James often showed a very whimsical approach to academia. Fitzgerald describes mentioning one occasion when he was definitely facetious about the idea of debating: "[a]t dinner, overhearing two under-

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<sup>534</sup> See for instance Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*; Cox, *M.R. James: An Informal Portrait*; S.G. Lubbock, *A Memoir of Montague Rhodes James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939); M. R. James, *Eton and Kings* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1926); Gwendolen McBryde, *M.R. James: Letters to a Friend* (London: Edward Arnold, 1956).

graduates disputing a problematic point...he rapped on the table sharply with his pipe and called out, "No thinking, gentlemen, please!"<sup>535</sup>

Maisie Fletcher also recounted that James could be almost obstinate about discussing his fictional or academic work. Here there is a distancing of the man from the author. When questioned about his fiction, James would often make jokes about it being just read by patient friends, or deflect any compliments by playing the piano and singing "I'm a man whose dun wrong to my parents" in a mock tragic-comedic cockney voice.<sup>536</sup> It does not add up to a man who was trying to hide himself away from his work; it does however, add up to a man who was conflicted about his work and his position in society, and his stories portray his academics battling these conflicts, which appear as pursuing revenants. In "A School Story", the luckless Mr Sampson has to confront a pursuing form from his past.

When Mr Sampson comes across an apparently meaningless Latin saying amongst the boys' grammar work, he appears distressed and frightened, and dismisses the class quickly. Shortly afterwards a figure is seen climbing into Mr Sampson's window, and the next day he is found dead.<sup>537</sup> However, it is the way in which he met his end and how the body is found that has parallels with the previous stories. He has been pursued by the shadow, another of James's revenants, eager to make the next stage of individuation, and engage with the anima.

James's writing contains many layers, and many elements. This is especially clear in relation to Jungian notions of interiorized femininity within the masculine, with his portrayal of his two "stock types", effeminate academic men and strong

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<sup>535</sup> Hermione, Lee, *Penelope Fitzgerald: A Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), p.369.

<sup>536</sup> Maisie Fletcher, *The Bright Countenance* (London: 1957), p.73).

<sup>537</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.98.

Amazonian women, who formed a large part of his positive representations of the masculine, as is evident in my discussion of Lady Wardrop in “Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance” above. The stories themselves begin with brief snapshots of everyday domestic scenes - a scout party on their day out, a class room, or a village scene of lovers courting – and, as always with a Jamesian tale, the horror is introduced gradually, building slowly to its expected climax.<sup>538</sup>

However, there is also another undercurrent where the type of horror has definite undertones of bestial sexuality. This is when James’s demonization of otherness comes into its own with characters such as Mrs Mothersole, who is punished for her defiance of the female norms of society, by being hanged as a witch, or the three vampiric figures in “Wailing Well” who punish the Boy Scout Stanley Judkins.

Reading the treatment of gender in these stories through a Jungian lens allows us to see the characters as personifications of the unification of the anima or animus in the growth stage of individuation. There is an educational purpose in this for James, who hopes to encourage his readers, especially the Eton and Kings student’s he wrote for, not to sequester themselves away, surrounded with books, papers and Latin, but to engage with the present. To do this they must progress from being young men whose mother is a force in their life, by sidelining her so that they can assimilate their female selves, the animus. A successful integration means they can progress to the next stage. Unfortunately, too many of M. R. James’s characters cannot manage this, and instead find themselves fleeing from the regressed form of the shadow, in the shape of James’s many-formed revenants.

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<sup>538</sup> Ibid, p.3.

## Chapter Six: The Bridge from the Victorian to the Modern – The Evolution of James’s Fiction

Although James’s writing career was not itself long, it spanned a significant shift from the high Victorian to what could be termed the beginnings of modernism. In this section of my thesis, I am going to put James’s work into the context of the time of its production, demonstrating that there are shifts in form and content in James’s work as it moves from the Victorian, through the Edwardian, to the quasi-modernist mode. This chapter explores the significance of these changes in form, as James is influenced by his literary context, and also argues that his revenants reflect societal concerns of their respective eras, culminating in late James’s distinctive ‘gothic modernism’. Situating James as a Victorian, Edwardian or proto-Modernist writer is complicated by the disagreement in the critical sphere as to the exact times in which to place the terms Victorianism, Edwardianism and Modernism. There is also a case, made by critics such as Max Saunders that the times in which to place these literary terms remain even now in flux.<sup>539</sup> Further, as Saunders argues, Harold Bloom fixes these periods of time in which the academic terms (of Victorianism, Edwardianism and Modernism) can be placed, to cover the era roughly between 1883 to 1935 in which James wrote virtually all of his stories.<sup>540</sup> In her book on Victorian modernism and the decadent movement, Jessica Feldman also places an emphasis on these eras of English literature as ‘the bridge from Victorianism to high Modernism’.<sup>541</sup>

James wrote his ghost stories in the years between 1885 (“Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook”) and 1937 (“A Vignette”), just before his death. I will argue in this chapter

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<sup>539</sup> Max Saunders, ‘Introduction’, in Laura Colombino & Max Saunders, *The Edwardian Ford Maddox Ford* (New York, NY: Rodopi, 2013), p. 18.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>541</sup> Jessica R. Feldman, *Victorian Modernism Pragmatism and the Varieties of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 63.

that the stories, although modest for a lifetime's work, are unusual for the literary progression they embody. They chart a move from the Victorian era with its concerns of encroaching technology, through the Edwardian era and the focus on the country's loss of empire, to the modern era where the birth of psychoanalysis reflects authors' focus on the 'stream of consciousness' and psychological conditions such as shellshock after the Great War. The Jungian fragmented self that James's characters display, which is noted by Sullivan as 'a wasteland quality', can also be observed, which I argue mirrors the modernist fragmented self.<sup>542</sup>

Despite a measure of critical focus on the ghost stories of M. R. James, little or nothing has been written concerning the apparent chronological regularity by which he wrote. Richard Holmes's chapter on James in the biographical collection *Sidetracks* noted this unusual aspect of his fictional oeuvre:

Then there is the question of the regularity of the ghost stories, which if not obsessive was certainly ritual. James was 31 and he produced approximately one story every year for the next quarter of a century. The dates of the collections speak for themselves: *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, 1904; *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, 1911; [comprised of stories where the reader is brought more into the action] *A Thin Ghost and Others*, 1919; and *A Warning to the Curious*, 1925 [which are full of anxieties of the Great War and stories that reflect the concerns of later stages of literary modernism.] *The Collected Ghost Stories* appeared in 1931, and were reissued this autumn.<sup>543</sup>

These ghost stories can be seen as a bridge from the Victorian to the Modern in terms of style. Reflecting each era in which the stories were set, they act as mirrors, each allowing the reader a glimpse into the history of that time.

## The Victorian Era

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<sup>542</sup> Jack Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), p.75.

<sup>543</sup> Richard Holmes, *Sidetracks: Explorations of A Romantic Biographer* (Hammersmith: Flamingo, 2001), p.163.

The first stories are clearly Victorian, and their plots and style reflect the literature of the time. As McCulloch notes:

[a]n important feature of James's technique is to utilise the device of narrative layering, to create the effect of a strong authorial connection with the events he is relating. The stories therefore have an immediacy of authorial delivery emphasising the role of the real M. R. James as narrator it resulted from the fact that James did not take a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of his audience for granted, but invoked the authorial presence in an active attempt to instil belief...this may mean that some of his stories remain best suited...to the context of personal delivery by the author for which many of them were originally designed...<sup>544</sup>

His initial writings were published in magazines, and were subsequently included in the book *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (published in 1904). These stories often positioned the narrator in the first person, a device that harks back to early Victorian novels, such as Dickens's *Great Expectations*.<sup>545</sup>

At the time that James wrote the first of these stories in 1895, the arts of storytelling and reading aloud were often the only form of entertainment for families, in an era predating radio and television. Stories were often serialised in magazines for families to read to one another, and similar to the soaps of today, people would wait for the next instalment. Dickens's ghost stories featured in the magazines *All The Year Round* and *Household Words*.<sup>546</sup> These magazines were cleverly published at Christmas time, to take advantage of the contrast between dark early nights and a warm fire to keep ghosts at bay. In the 1890s, a decade of both social and technical innovation, yet still haunted by the supernatural, the Victorian age was reaching a phase of uncomfortable progress. The advent of the telephone in the 1880s made disembodied voices a reality. The railway opened up the countryside,

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<sup>544</sup>Simon MacCulloch, 'The Toad in the Study: M. R. James, H. P. Lovecraft, and Forbidden Knowledge', in S. T. Joshi & Rosemary Pardoe (eds), *Warnings to the Curious: A Sheaf of Criticism on M. R. James* (New York, NY: Hippocampus Press, 2007), p.103.

<sup>545</sup> Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008).

<sup>546</sup> Jerome Monahan, "Frightnight", *TES Magazine*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2005.

and the gramophone made music available without the need for a musician in the room.

As observed by Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell, the Victorian lifestyle appeared saturated by the supernatural advent of technology, and many people sought comfort in an imaginary world of literature that harked back to an imagined faux reality. This reality was populated by old gods, fairies, demons and spirits, and a revival of an older form of literature: the folk tale or reproduced medieval tale of the woods and countryside.<sup>547</sup> James was aware that his type of ghost story was a recent development of the folkloric tale, as practised by himself and the storyteller he most admired, Sheridan Le Fanu, consistent with the idea of tales being written for recital. He commented, 'I have tried to make my stories consistent with the rules of folklore.'<sup>548</sup> Jacqueline Simpson finds clear links between James's tales and those of one of his favourite authors, Hans Christian Andersen.<sup>549</sup> James was very familiar with Andersen's work, due to his many holidays in Denmark in the 1880s and to the enthusiasm of the Cambridge librarian Eirikur Magnusson (who, Simpson suspects, first introduced James to Danish folklore).<sup>550</sup> Andersen's stories are based on the ancestral tales of his homeland Jutland, which is populated with the ghosts that share certain characteristics with James's ghosts, such as being '[d]oomed to walk for their past sins'. They are vengeful and physically attack their victims, though there is never a reason given, whether occult or psychic, for their manifestations.<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (eds), *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.1.

<sup>548</sup> M. R. James, Preface to *Collected Ghost Stories* (1931) in M. R. James: *A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2000), p.368.

<sup>549</sup> Jacqueline Simpson, 'The Rules of Folklore in the Ghost Stories of M. R. James', in Joshi & Pardoe (eds) *Warnings to the Curious*, p.144.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, p.149.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, p.153.

There is also a great deal of British folklore to be found in James's tales – for instance, the idea that ghosts come at dusk but can be kept at bay by candlelight or a warm fire, like Lord Saul's thin ghost in "The Residence at Whitminster."<sup>552</sup> Then there are the ghosts who creep slowly towards their victims, like the one in "The Mezzotint" which, as Simpson says, can be traced back to west of England legends.<sup>553</sup> This quote below illustrates this folkloric motif, with the wraith of the gamekeeper Gaudy who creeps slowly towards the manor house to kidnap the hapless baby:

In the middle of the lawn in front of the unknown house, there was a figure where no figure had been at five o' clock that afternoon. It was crawling on all-fours towards the house, and it was muffled in a strange black garment with a white cross on the back.<sup>554</sup>

There are also other tales, as I argue in chapter two, Reading M. R. James with Jung, in which James used pure fairytale mythic structures, like "Lost Hearts" where the villain Abney hopes to procure magic powers by eating the hearts of children.<sup>555</sup>

Such myths can be found in a variety of fairytales, like "Hansel and Gretel", and "Little Red Riding Hood". For Bettelheim, the cannibal motif in many cultures can be traced back to the ancient myths of the Assyrian and Babylonian eras.<sup>556</sup> James's tales also use minor characters to good effect, with their local accents and colourful colloquial language. Such rustic characterisation can be found in both the Brothers Grimm fairytales and the folkloric tales of Hans Christian Andersen. These characters add credibility to the stories with their observations on what was happening in the woods, churchyard or tavern, indicated with authentic accents in Andersen. As Simpson notes,

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<sup>552</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), p.198.

<sup>553</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.20; Simpson, 'The Rules of Folklore', p.144.

<sup>554</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.24.

<sup>555</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1973), p.25.

<sup>556</sup> Bettelheim, *Enchantment*, p.25.

in the plain language his informants used, without embellishments... [Andersen] kept close to the Jutland idiom, including turns of phrase which jarred on the sensibilities of the educated classes, and pleading with his readers to accept “this simple and true-hearted quality” in regional speech...<sup>557</sup>

This stylistic feature links in with James’s own love of mimicry. He was renowned by many of his friends for possessing this talent.<sup>558</sup>

This mimicry can be seen in many of the minor characters that populate the stories; although they are one-dimensional, they are also utilised to move the plot along or to act as witnesses, to authenticate plotlines. James’s stories are very much like a road with signposts pointing the way to the events of the era in which he lived and wrote. Starting on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1895, with the magazine publication of his first two stories, they later appeared in his first book, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, with its collection of Victorian tales.

The first two stories James wrote were intended to be recited to a gathering of his close friends and colleagues at one of the meetings of the Chitchat Society, a ‘literary and convivial club then in its thirty-third year’.<sup>559</sup> Gurney Lubbock, one of James’s closest friends, observed that:

[i]t had for its object the promotion of rational conversation. It met on Saturday evenings, when papers were read and discussed; church portals, Sheridan Le Fanu, and Breton Ballads were among the subjects on which James himself read papers. The 601<sup>st</sup> meeting was held in Mr James’s rooms on Oct 28<sup>th</sup> 1893; present were Mr James, W.G Headlam, E.F.Benson, V.W.Yorke, R.C.Bosanquet, A.B.Ramsay, F.H.Cornish and Gurney Lubbock.<sup>560</sup>

It was at this meeting that James read “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook” (title changed from the rather bland “A Curious Book”) and “Lost Hearts”. The snuffbox was passed around, and “Whales” or anchovy spread on toast was served at a break in the proceedings. James’s stories, which had been written at such a great speed that the

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<sup>557</sup>Simpson, ‘The Rules of Folklore’, p.151.

<sup>558</sup> S.G. Lubbock, *A Memoir of Montague Rhodes James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), p.28.

<sup>559</sup> Richard William Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James* (London: Scholar Press, 1980), p.114.

<sup>560</sup>Lubbock, *A Memoir*, p.44.

ink was still wet on the page, were read with the light of just one candle behind him, with the rest of the room in darkness.<sup>561</sup>

Peter Haining notes that James's friends had little idea of what had just taken place: at this first reading, they simply applauded him and asked if he would repeat the performance once a year, preferably on Christmas Eve. It was only in 1904 that the suggestion was made that there were enough stories for a book to be made of them, with James's close friend James McBryde as illustrator. James seemed to hesitate at the idea of a book being compiled of his stories. The idea only gained momentum because of the enthusiasm of his friends, and during the publication process, the untimely death of James McBryde made the process into something of a tribute to the young man's artistic talent.<sup>562</sup>

The stories were always executed in a manner found refined and elegant by some, but "stuffy", over-mannered and Edwardian by others.<sup>563</sup> James regarded himself as very much a Victorian. This found verbal expression in one of his narrator's monologues:

Remember if you please...that I am a Victorian by birth and education and that the Victorian tree may not unreasonably be expected to bear Victorian fruit...<sup>564</sup>

James was born in 1862, and his first story "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook" was written in 1893, therefore placing it firmly in the late Victorian era. However, while James may have had his own ideas concerning his fiction, critics have taken differing viewpoints. The first critic to review James's fiction was Mary Butts, in a 1934 article (which he described to friends as "[f]ulsome").<sup>565</sup> Butts categorised James as an antiquarian as he used his knowledge to skilfully place his characters in a world of

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<sup>561</sup> Peter Haining, *M. R. James Book of the Supernatural* (Slough, Berkshire: W. Foulsham and Company Ltd., 1979), p.14.

<sup>562</sup> Haining, *Book of the Supernatural*, p.108.

<sup>563</sup> S. T. Joshi, *The Weird Tale* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990), p.140.

<sup>564</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.281.

<sup>565</sup> Mary Butts, 'The Art of Montague James', in Joshi & Pardoe, *Warnings to the Curious*, p.53.

centuries gone by. This device works to bring them more richly alive than the mere pastiches or one-dimensional foils created by other authors, to be found in the outpouring of ghostly fiction by authors such as Marie Corelli and Rhoda Broughton, where the characters are often left relatively undeveloped.<sup>566</sup> Butts notes that James' characterisation is 'effective' and allows us a 'means of transport to the past.'<sup>567</sup> Other (later) critics praised James for his effective characterisation, but also in line with Butts's appraisal see him very much as a late Victorian writer. For instance, McCulloch writes that, '[f]or all James's prose is far leaner, he seems a more old fashioned writer hearkening back to the early Victorians with their "Dear Reader" devices...'<sup>568</sup>

Christopher Booker, who places James's storytelling at the end of the Victorian era, voices an additional perspective on the Victorian context of James's style. He notes that through the Middle Ages, the belief in the supernatural diminished to such an extent that through the Renaissance and the Victorian age, the idea of the old 'monsters' of an earlier time like the dragon or minotaur coming back into vogue would have seemed improbable.<sup>569</sup> However, at the end of that era James started writing stories that adopted this style, including villains who were genetic throwbacks comparable to the monsters in Greek myths, like the spider monster in "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook". Booker notes that James raised the form onto a new plane of terror, comparing the development of the monster in "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook" with Stoker's *Dracula*, which initiated the development of a new fascination with the trope of the monster. "Lost Hearts" again raised the monster

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<sup>566</sup> Christopher Barker, "Unpleasant Demons, Violence and Cruelty in the Jamesian tale", *Weirdly Supernatural* 2, 2004, p.1.

<sup>567</sup> Butts, 'The Art of Montague James', p.53.

<sup>568</sup> Darrell Schweitzer, 'M. R. James and H. P. Lovecraft: The Ghostly and the Cosmic', *Studies in Weird Fiction* No.15 (Summer 1994); MacCulloch, 'The Toad in the Study', p.78.

<sup>569</sup> Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots* (London: Continuum, 2009), p.27.

figure to a new height as Uncle Abney is as thoroughly divided a self as Stevenson's Jekyll.

The earlier tales were first published in 1895, in the *National Review* and the *Pall Mall Magazine*. They conform to the Victorian device of the first person narrator, which conventionally authenticates the plot of a story and suspends the disbelief of an audience. However, later tales use distinctly different narrative techniques. This was noted by later critics such as Julia Briggs who identifies a 'prosaic matter of fact tone' in the narration.<sup>570</sup> "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook" was set in the town of St Bertrand De Comminges in France. It is stylistically Victorian, with an understated air differing from its gothic predecessors set ten years before its composition, in 1883. As Birch and Hooper, contend:

[w]here early gothic fiction had been unconcerned with either historical details or present realities, the best writers of Victorian ghost stories set supernatural incidents in convincing everyday settings...<sup>571</sup>

Indeed, the reader is very much drawn into the story with its "Englishman abroad" theme. We have the convincing interior of St Bertrand's Church, where every detail is lingered over lovingly. There is the church architecture, the organ, the stalls, paintings, altar and even the dusty crocodile that hung over the font, seemingly out of place in its setting; the reader feels that they are accompanying the protagonist Dennistoun in his visit to the church. The narrator is also present for much of the visit, and frequently interrupts the proceedings with observations. The device of the narrator as a recorder of events was also a mark of Victorian fiction, used by novelists such as Wilkie Collins in *The Woman in White*. Indeed, the narrator lets the reader know that this story had been recited to him by Dennistoun:

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<sup>570</sup> Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p.32.

<sup>571</sup> Dinah Birch and Katy Hooper, *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.280.

I have never quite understood what was Dennistoun's view of the events I have narrated. He quoted to me once a text from Ecclesiastics...On another occasion he said 'Isaiah was a very sensible man'...<sup>572</sup>

This part of the story implies that the unnamed narrator is a person who knows Dennistoun well (possibly a friend or colleague), as we often hear Dennistoun's thoughts and innermost feelings, especially about the other characters or the procurement of the scrapbook. This device imbues the story with a touch of rationalism, subsequently addressed to a sceptical Victorian audience, as contended by Birch and Hooper:

[I]terary ghost stories were largely a Victorian creation and often included admonitions to rationalism. Others took account of attempts to establish the objective existence of supernatural phenomena by devising narratives in which the author posed as the recorder of events.<sup>573</sup>

This device lends credence to the protagonist's version of events, as the readers are put into a modern setting where the characters go about their everyday business.

The horror is introduced gradually in the first part of the story, in which Dennistoun is disturbed by the behaviour of the Sacristan, who is ostensibly there to guide him around the church. The cringing mien of the sacristan unnerves Dennistoun, but he dismisses this behaviour as an eccentricity. However, with the device of the narrator's intrusion, the reader starts to feel that there is something a little amiss and the suspense starts to build as we follow Dennistoun. The reader's initial disbelief is suspended very efficiently by this narrative development. Suddenly, we are introduced to the demon in all his horrifically crafted glory. The demon is only initially glimpsed by Dennistoun while he is poring over the canon's purloined scrapbook.

[H]is attention was caught by an object lying on the red cloth just by his left elbow. Two or three ideas of what it might be flitted through his brain...a pen wiper...a rat...a large spider...no. Good God! A hand like the hand in that picture. In another infinitesimal flash he had taken it in. Pale, dusky

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<sup>572</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.10.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid*, p.280.

skin...coarse black hairs...nails rising from the ends of the fingers...grey, horny and wrinkled. He flew from his chair...<sup>574</sup>

The demon of this tale is a new form of revenant invented by James. As my chapter on the Darwinian nature of many of James's revenants argues, it is similar to what Christopher Booker calls a 'nyktomorphic monster'. Whereas the older form of ghost in the gothic novel had been stately and apprehended by sight, James's apparition is a pure genetic regression to man's earlier stage of development, perhaps reflecting the scientific anxieties of the Victorian age. Its description is purely Darwinian, with 'intelligence below a beast' shining out of its eyes. Before this encounter, the demon had been apprehended through a painting that had hung in the church.<sup>575</sup>

As Smajic contends, in the Victorian era the supernatural was apprehended chiefly through the subtle use of plot devices such as paintings or drawings, mostly in a visual way, rather than a prolonged encounter between the character and the entity. Indeed, there are links between the plot of "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook" and Scott's "The Tapestry Chamber", one of which is that they are rarely seen clearly.<sup>576</sup>

The marvellous more than any other attribute of fictitious narrative, loses its effect by being brought much into view. The imagination of the reader is to be excited if possible, without being gratified. Supernatural fiction should be subtly provocative rather than declarative, suggestive rather than bluntly explicit. What is brought...into view both literally (through visual imagery) and figuratively (through verbal explication) ought to remain just barely visible.<sup>577</sup>

James's story fits Smajic's vision: the demon is brought just about into view by the picture in the church, the narration of the story, and later a sketch in the scrapbook, which when torn, exorcises the demon. The demon is never fully apprehended by the character or the reader. This follows the Victorian literary plot device to the letter.

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<sup>574</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.8-9.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>576</sup> Srdjan Smajic, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, And Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.150.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid, p.4.

## The Edwardian Era

James moved on from his earlier stories with their narrative distance to other techniques in stories such as “Number 13” and “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas”, both published in *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* in 1904. Russell notes a change in James’s style, which both avoided the Victorian pitfalls of crude melodramatic sensationalism and ‘satisfied the sophisticated modern taste’.<sup>578</sup> In both these stories, the ghost touches the protagonists. In “Number 13”, the hand of Nicholas Franken brushes Mr Anderson, who is saved by being dragged away:<sup>579</sup>

... [Anderson’s] back was now to the door. In that moment the door opened and an arm came out and clawed at his shoulder. It was clad in ragged, yellowish linen, and the bare skin, where it could be seen, had long grey hair upon it.<sup>580</sup>

In “The Treasure of Abbot Thomas”, the slimy guardian of the treasure falls on to the neck of Mr Somerton, who is saved by the quick thinking of his valet, Mr Gregory.<sup>581</sup> There has been a collapse of distance, plunging the reader into the bewildering and enjoyable horror of the tale, instead of being regaled by the story in ballad or folk tale form through a narrator, as in the Victorian era tales.

In 1911, James published *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, reflecting the concerns of the Edwardian period with its focus on the country house and a sunny ideal of England, and moving into a quasi-modernist mode.<sup>582</sup> The stories are brilliant works of understated terror, and can, as stated earlier, be regarded as signposting the changes in fiction over the era. They move from the older gothic style to Victorian, Edwardian, past the First World War into the stories commentators have seen as at least partially quasi-modernist, and finally the last stories in the books A

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<sup>578</sup> Samuel D. Russell, ‘Irony and Horror in the stories of M R James’, in James, *A Pleasing Terror*, p.609.

<sup>579</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.51.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid*, p.151.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid*, p.95.

<sup>582</sup> M. R. James, *Casting the Runes and other Ghost Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.288.

*Thin Ghost and Others*, and *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories*, which have a modern *Waste Land* quality permeating them.

Julia Briggs argues that James's stories revolved around three distinct classical plots of antiquity (unsurprising given James's classical background):

All of James's ghost stories resolve themselves into three basic patterns, Bluebeard, Faust or the spirits of revenge...nevertheless, one cannot help noticing that many of his most successful stories occur in the first two collections and that the two later volumes are largely made up of variations on earlier designs...<sup>583</sup>

For Briggs, James's fiction is made up of classical motifs, and variations on those themes. While she does leave the footnote that many short story writers seem to repeat themselves, she seems to have given his stories a quick reading as many of the nuances picked up by other critics have been missed.<sup>584</sup>

*More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* comprised stories written in the period 1904-1911 and reflect the golden Edwardian pre-war era, when the empire that Britain had built over the preceding centuries began to contract. The Boer War had been an unmitigated disaster, convincing the rest of the world that the might of the British military force had been routed by a bunch of African farmers. As Samuel Hynes argues, England found herself in a period of introspection, and dwelt upon an imagined time of the countryside as a rural idyll, with a focus on the mansion house and the gardens surrounding it.<sup>585</sup> The stories James wrote at this time reflect this ache for the countryside and its beautiful manor houses. They are redolent of the concerns of loss of empire. For example, "The Rose Garden" features Mrs Anstruther and her desperation to possess a piece of land that she can call her own.<sup>586</sup> These pieces of land in James's characters' minds seem to compensate for

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<sup>583</sup>Briggs, *Night Visitors*, p.139.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

<sup>585</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Pimlico, 1968), p.17.

<sup>586</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.104.

what they believe they have lost, although James does seem to be parodying the idea of the British middle class with the idea that owning land and houses compensates for their country losing its empire.

Whilst “Canon Alberic’s Scrapbook” was written in 1893 and adopts the techniques of Victorian literature, a later piece of fiction James (planned from 1903 onwards and finally written in 1916) is purely Edwardian. The only full-length book James ever wrote, *The Five Jars* could be seen as a piece of literature for children.<sup>587</sup> The book has an air of late Edwardian whimsy, and tells the tale of a character named M who discovers a series of jars opening the inner senses to the world of fairies. With the aid of animals who talk and a band of boys (The Right People), they battle with bad fairies. As Pardoe comments, M is based on James, and has all of his mannerisms (including a hatred of spiders and love of cats).<sup>588</sup> The “Right People” have the refined manners and accents that mark them out as upper class. James introduces them to the reader when they are curious about a game of patience M is playing:

...what is he really doing?” “Laying out rows of flat things on the table, with marks on them.” “I don’t believe it.” “Well, you go and look yourself”...“I say, do look out...”<sup>589</sup>

This dialogue was old-fashioned even by the standards of the time, and certainly by 1922 when the book was finally submitted for publication.<sup>590</sup> The style is also immediately identifiable as over-mannered, typical of the Edwardians and perhaps this is what has prevented the book becoming a classic of children’s literature.

Like other Edwardian whimsical novels such as *The Wind in the Willows*, the bad fairies are distinguishable by their conduct and bawdy nature. Narratives like this

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<sup>587</sup>M. R. James, *Five Jars* (London, Book Jungle, 2008).

<sup>588</sup> Rosemary Pardoe, ‘Preface to *The Five Jars*’, in James, *A Pleasing Terror*, p.529.

<sup>589</sup> James, *Five Jars*, p.74.

<sup>590</sup> Pardoe, ‘Preface to *The Five Jars*’, p.529.

offered a commentary on the 'condition of England' in a series of sketches about talking animals and an England of perpetual countryside. The love of fairies in the Edwardian era was also part of the collective interest in Arthurian legend and a re-imagination of the medieval period. *The Five Jars* fits neatly into this vein.

The 'Right People' are shown to be Elizabethan period by their dress:

I had now my first good chance of seeing what they were like. They all wore the same fashion of clothes— a tunic and close fitting hose and caps – seemingly very much what a boy would have worn in Queen Elizabeth's time. The colours were sober—dark blue, dark red, grey, brown—and each one's clothes were of one colour all through. They had some white linen underneath; it showed a little at the neck. They were both fair and dark among them: all were clean and passably good looking.<sup>591</sup>

All of these characters are immediately identifiable as good and upstanding, the very representation of members of an idealised society, gradually being eroded even in James's day with the continued expansion of industrialised cities and encroachment into the countryside. This re-imagination of the idealised countryside and the idea of the golden rural past infused the national psyche. Britain was beginning to lose the empire that had been carefully built over the preceding centuries and these anxieties were reflected in the books as conflicts between imaginary characters, such as the characters of *The Wind in the Willows* or the fairies in *Peter Pan*.

The conflicts between the "Right People" and the bad fairies in *The Five Jars* are in a similar vein. James uses the characters of talking owls and cats as devices with which to explore the darker side of the fairytale. He also subsequently successfully reused these characters in a later story in 1924, "After Dark in the Playing Fields", which Pardoe views as an abandoned attempt at a sequel to *The Five Jars*, featuring some of the characters from the book such as the owl and the Right People.<sup>592</sup> The book had not become a classic like *Peter Pan* or *The Wind in*

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<sup>591</sup> M. R. James, 'The Five Jars' in *A Pleasing Terror*, p.550.

<sup>592</sup>Pardoe, 'Preface to *The Five Jars*', p.529.

*the Willows*, but was met with critical acclaim from other authors, notably J. M. Barrie, who told Gwendolyn McBryde that he kept a copy by his bed and frequently read it before going to sleep.<sup>593</sup>

*The Five Jars* is perhaps a little darker than *The Wind in the Willows* featuring topics such as death and characters with physical defects, such as fairies with red-rimmed eyes. James's story "Wailing Well," written for the Eton Scout troop, reveals an understanding that children need cathartic fear to exorcise some of their buried fears about growing older. The Edwardian novel of childhood was part of a general re-imagining of the idealised state of childhood initiated by the Victorians, the inventors of childhood, who later banned childhood labour and opened church and boarding schools to educate poor children.<sup>594</sup> Later in the century as literacy rates improved, storybooks were specifically written for children and instructional books and biblical stories began to proliferate.<sup>595</sup>

Was Britain a land of countryside and mansions, with a feudal class system, or an industrial landscape with smoky cities and a rising urban population? Clive Bloom attributed James's stories to a reaction to rural depopulation.<sup>596</sup> This was also the start of the era of tourism, day trips and excursions: the Baedeker guide and the railway and car excursion came into existence. David Lowenthal critiques this movement as nostalgia for an imagined country that never actually existed.<sup>597</sup>

The book that came after *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* was published in 1919 after the end of the Great War, entitled *A Thin Ghost and Others* and comprising stories written during this terrible time. James remarked in a letter to his lifelong friend Gwendolyn McBryde (widow of James McBryde) that the war 'stilled

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<sup>593</sup> James, *Five Jars*, p.56.

<sup>594</sup> Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study, A Social History of The English novel 1875-1914* (London: Fontana, 1991), p.142.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid*, p.400.

<sup>596</sup> Clive Bloom (ed.) *Creepers: British Horror and Fantasy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), p.65.

<sup>597</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

my pen', and there were times that he struggled to focus on his work, whether fictional or academic.<sup>598</sup> This can be seen still in the next book of stories, *A Warning to the Curious*, in which Briggs notes that James's ghosts turned even more malevolent, as they had now been endowed with the ability to kill.<sup>599</sup> Two of the stories in this volume, "A Warning to the Curious" and "The Uncommon Prayer-Book" feature characters that are actually hunted down and killed by revenants. The fear of foreign invasion and the protection of England are definite themes in this book. The Great War had an effect on many authors, as before this war any fighting had taken place miles away from the home country, and news of the fighting had been sporadic and often by word of mouth. The expansion of literacy and the British press changed all that as news was quicker to be printed and distributed and war photography brought home the reality of the horrors of the front.<sup>600</sup> James had many opportunities to converse with injured soldiers, and indeed spent many hours talking to those convalescing at Cambridge in December 1917:

I hope that my two wounded officers, who have been here over a month, will still be with me. The elder is named Briscoe and the younger Fairweather. ...I like them both very much...<sup>601</sup>

In further letters to Gwendolyn McBryde, James described the impact that the war had had upon the two officers, and that they often went to their rooms to cry.<sup>602</sup> The study of shell-shock was in its infancy in the First World War, but many authors wrote about it nevertheless. One of the best-known examples can be seen in the character Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, who ultimately commits suicide. Similarly, an examination of Paxton in "A Warning to the Curious" shows that, prior to his untimely death at the hands of William Ager; he was clearly suffering from this

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<sup>598</sup> Gwendolen McBryde, *M.R. James: Letters to a Friend* (London: Edward Arnold, 1956), p.74.

<sup>599</sup> Briggs, *Night Visitors*, p.175.

<sup>600</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past*, p.1.

<sup>601</sup> McBryde, *Letters to a Friend*, p.74.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*

form of stress: he is described as constantly in a state of nerves or fidgets, and while talking to Henry Long and James's un-named narrator, he begins to cry.<sup>603</sup> The young man is described by the unnamed narrator thus:

It became plain to me after a few minutes that this visitor of ours was in rather a state of fidgets or nerves, which communicated itself to me, and so I put away my writing and turned to engaging him in talk.<sup>604</sup>

The revenant William Ager is the protector of a crown, in an ancient legend destined to protect Britain from foreign invasion. When Mr Paxton, a treasure seeker, unearths this crown and removes it, he is pursued and slain by Ager, on the beach, the site of invasion in James's day. The introduction to the story features two characters, Henry Long and the unnamed narrator, who are visiting the seaside town of Seaburgh. At their hotel, we are introduced to Mr Paxton, who is ostensibly visiting the town in pursuit of treasure, in the form of one of England's Saxon crowns. These crowns, the reader is informed, should never be disturbed as they protect England from foreign invasion. James introduces this piece of information through an old man in the foyer of the church that Paxton visits on his mission to unearth the crown. Paxton is warned that the crown is much more than just an artefact.

“and do you know the meanin' of them three crowns that's on it?”...“Well, then”...he said “I can tell you something you don't know. Them's [sic] the three 'oly [sic] crowns what was buried in the ground near by the coast to keep the Germans from landing”...<sup>605</sup>

The spectre of invasion at the time that James was writing this particular story was still haunting the national psyche and James (like many of his generation) had first-hand experience of the horrific effects on Britain of the Great War. Indeed, his biographer Pfaff records that James disliked the Germans intensely after the war:

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<sup>603</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London, Penguin Modern Classics, 2000); James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.314.

<sup>604</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.307.

<sup>605</sup> *Ibid*, p.308.

MRJ's attitude towards the War, and especially towards Germany, remained bitter... [In] his celebrated pamphlet "The Wanderings and Homes of Manuscripts"...he added an almost gratuitous statement..."Our concern is with what exists today, or what did exist until the nation, which has contributed so largely to learning and history in the past, turned apostate, and to its lasting shame destroyed and dispersed what more ignorant men had spared. The mischief Germany has done— and it will be long before we learn the full extent of it— she has done with open eyes".<sup>606</sup>

James wrote this particular passage in 1919 and the story of "A Warning to the Curious" also dates from around that time. The story is built around retribution for weakening England's defences. Paxton is certainly punished for this theft as, as soon as he finds the site where the crown is buried, in William Ager's burial barrow, he is hunted by Ager:

It began when I was first prospecting, and put me off again and again. There was always somebody—a man—standing by one of the firs. This was in daylight, you know. He was never in front of me. I always saw him with the tail of my eye on the left or the right, and he was never there when I looked straight for him.<sup>607</sup>

James ensures that the reader recognises Paxton as a treasure-hunter rather than a serious academic by the use of the term 'prospecting', thereby rendering him undeserving of sympathy. When Paxton unearths the crown, we are told that William Ager is right behind him, and at one point on Paxton's back.<sup>608</sup> Here begins the pursuit of Paxton by Ager. Ager is relentless, and Paxton begins to display signs of post-traumatic stress before William Ager finally hunts him to his death on the beach, which even by James's standards is horribly violent. Paxton is found with his jaw smashed to pieces and sand and stones in his mouth.<sup>609</sup> The violent end he meets is a sign of Paxton's status as a traitor, leaving England defenceless against the German invaders. James names Germany in the story as the possible invader,

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<sup>606</sup> Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.336.

<sup>607</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.313.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, p.319.

suggesting that it may be an attempt to exorcise the worst of the wounds he felt had been inflicted on his own and the national psyche by Germany.

### James's Place in Modernism

As Fielding and Smith note, many authors have found James 'hard to place' in relation to modernism.<sup>610</sup> However, in gothic modernism, James's fictional oeuvre does strike a chord, as he does engage with many of the tropes of this movement. Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace argue that this term connects a number of authors whose work reflects modernism's fascination with 'high culture, and the elite' versus 'the gothic's association with low art'.<sup>611</sup> Norman views gothic modernism as a literary sub-genre that takes the tropes of the gothic and uses them to represent new forms of haunting. Smith and Wallace refer to this (above) as the high culture of ennui, alienation, dissolving selves and other forms of psychosis brought on by the strain of living with the modern problems of time speeding up, the move from the rural to the modern, and the alienation of the Great War. As Norman puts it:

Modernism has been traditionally understood as forward-looking and violently breaking with its literary ancestors—'make it new,' as Pound's battle cry demands—the tones, tropes, language, and conventions of the Gothic appear with surprising frequency in modernist texts. These Gothic conventions and language include ghosts and haunted houses, vampires, succubi, incubi, monsters, witches, curses, nightmares, necrophilia, necromancy, possession, confinement, doppel-gängers, somnambulists, the uncanny and much more. ..."Gothic Modernism"—a strain of Modernism that makes use of the well-established conventions, tones, and language of the classic Gothic, in order to express recognizably Modernist concerns about the nature of subjectivity, temporality, language, and knowledge.<sup>612</sup>

Ironically, Clive Bloom found in James's stories the strain of the popular that could be conceived as part of the 'low art' identified above by Smith, Wallace and Norman.

He accuses James of portraying his ghosts as 'hob-goblins' and pandering to

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<sup>610</sup> Penny Fielding, 'Reading Rooms: M. R. James and the Library of Modernity', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 46, 3 (2000), pp.749-771; Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840–1920 A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.181.

<sup>611</sup> Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace (eds), *Gothic Modernisms* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p.1.

<sup>612</sup> Taryn Louise Norman, 'Gothic Modernism: Revising and Representing the Narratives of History and Romance.' PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2012.

naiveté, but then goes on to identify a 'knowing and ironic' tone to James's whole oeuvre, suggesting that in the combination of low art and high culture, we can see James as an early gothic modernist working, a contemporary to the early modernists:

Read James and you will find few genuine ghosts and only a suggested number of returns from the dead. James's presences, those poised to break the veil are much more hobgoblins than the returned undead...James's oeuvre as a whole demands, perhaps, to be interrogated for its knowing and ironic innocence of purpose...<sup>613</sup>

The phrase 'knowing and ironic innocence' is interesting, as Bloom asserts that James preferred to utilise his status as a writer of fiction alongside his profession as an academic, similar to Woolf's position as a privileged author writing on the issues that plagued the underclass in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Gothic modernist tropes are plentiful in James's later work, for example in the inheritance of madness through a defective bloodline in "Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance", in which the nephew of a solitary academic inherits a decaying mansion, with a maze at its centre.<sup>614</sup> "The Malice of Inanimate Objects" and "The Mezzotint" play with time. "The Mezzotint" staging the kidnapping of a helpless baby by a wraith, shown in a mezzotint of a house; while "The Malice of Inanimate Objects" follows James's protagonists through the events of a day. The structure of these two stories echoes both *Mrs Dalloway* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. James's last story "A Vignette" crosses the boundaries of the protagonist's perception of his place in time, fragmenting reality and contrasting the pastoral setting – significantly, James's nostalgically remembered childhood home –with the objects of modernity, specifically a railway platform and engine.<sup>615</sup> Then there is "Rats" where boundaries

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<sup>613</sup>Bloom, *Creepers*, p.67.

<sup>614</sup>John Paul Riquelme (ed), *Gothic and Modernism: Essaying Dark Literary Modernity* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008), p.12.

<sup>615</sup>Riquelme, *Gothic and Modernism*, p.16.

of the living and dead are questioned, with the ghost at the centre of the story represented by the revenant of an innkeeper, living zombified amongst the living in a seaside inn.<sup>616</sup> The zombie is a figure of late Victorian degeneration, a relic of the past, but here apprehended by a man who has arrived by train. The merging of an older culture with a new time is uncanny in the extreme. The zombie is an echo of Freud's writing on E. T. A. Hoffman's "The Sandman", except that in place of the doll Olympia, the deceased body of the innkeeper holds sway.<sup>617</sup> It is the apprehension of the thing that ought to have been buried by the young academic, Mr Thomson that provides the uncanniness of this story, as Royle (quoting Ernst Jentsch) notes:

In storytelling, one of the most reliable artistic devices for producing uncanny effects easily is to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether he [sic] has a human person or rather an automaton before him in the case of a particular character.<sup>618</sup>

As readers, we are left in the dark by James, unsure whether this character is a zombie, an automaton, a revenant or a psychotic vision. Has stress caused Thomson's self to become divorced from his shadow, and is it his shadow being brought forth as a Jungian psychic projection before him? These are all questions that this uncanny effect throws open to the reader.

Again, it is the feeling of unreality or the uncanny, very cleverly produced by James that is felt by the reader, in a mirroring of Freud's text. As in "The Sandman", James's story also conveys a reading-effect of unreality:

What 'The Sandman' shows, above all perhaps, is that the uncanny is a reading-effect. It is not simply in the Hoffman text, as a theme ('spot the uncanny object in this text') that can be noted and analysed accordingly. The uncanny is a ghostly feeling that arises (or doesn't arise), an experience that comes about (or doesn't) as an effect of reading.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>616</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.332.

<sup>617</sup>Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.39.

<sup>618</sup>Ibid.

<sup>619</sup>Ibid, p.44.

As readers, we join Mr Thomson in his exposure to the uncanny brought about by this tale, but instead of an automaton we (and James's) protagonist are exposed to the haunting effect of an animated figure, which has defied the natural laws of reality.

In Chapter Four of this thesis, I explored the significance of James's revenants having physiques that are blurred, and bear no resemblance to the human form. This is also a marker of gothic modernism, as Smith notes:

The interest in the amoral is historically grounded in a series of shared knowledge's between the late Victorian Gothic and the modernist text. Theories of degeneration, for example, had a cultural prominence throughout the late Victorian and the early twentieth-century period. The idea that civilisation was threatened by the possibilities of atavistic reversion are developed in works such as R. L. Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* (1886), H.G. Well's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) and, in an instance which combines an image of physical decline with aesthetics, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).<sup>620</sup>

As Penny Fielding remarked of James, '[he] would be hard to place in relation to literary modernism', but she does find that James was engaging with many of the signifiers of modernism that authors of that time wrestled with, such as 'irresponsible science, degeneration, recidivism, racial difference, homosexuality [and], sexually dangerous women'.<sup>621</sup> Andrew Smith, however, warns against trying to read James as a 'neglected modernist', arguing that James's formal conservatism precludes it:

[I do not wish to] suggest that James should be properly read as a neglected modernist; his robust formalism precludes such literary experimentation. Nevertheless, at one level he is engaging with some of the issues which were of concern to the modernists, and although he does not experiment with form, he does play with it.<sup>622</sup>

According to Smith, these 'issues' include a voyeurism and amorality at the heart of James's characters, particularly in "The Mezzotint" and "The Haunted Dolls' House".<sup>623</sup> James's characterisation of a group of academics in "The Mezzotint"

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<sup>620</sup> Smith and Wallace, *Gothic Modernisms*, p.3.

<sup>621</sup>Fielding, 'Reading Rooms', pp.749-771.

<sup>622</sup> Smith, *The Ghost Story*, p.181.

<sup>623</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.20, 258.

discussing golf and tea, whilst the artefact displays the gruesome kidnapping of a vulnerable baby by a thin, frightening figure draped in a funeral shroud, shows disengagement with the concern that should have been present in a normal human interaction. This ennui would also point to a disintegration of a healthy self, another key modernist concern. In opposition to this idea of a moral vacuum, in the other story Smith mentions (often noted as a sister story to “The Mezzotint” by James), the character Dillet, after witnessing the role-play of infanticide shown by the doll’s house, needs to recuperate at the seaside.<sup>624</sup> These two stories demonstrate a modernist response to trauma after the harrowing events of the First World War, and the returning soldier’s psychological issues of shock and post-traumatic stress.

Dennis Brown deals with the idea of the fragmentation of the self as a response to trauma:

The Modernist discourse of self-hood is haunted by the ghost of some lost self which was once coherent and self-sufficient – Joyce’s Ulysses, Pound’s heroes of the Renaissance virtu, Yeats’s men of ‘pride’, Ford’s pre-war Tietjens, Eliot’s Fisher King (before the curse), Woolf’s Percival in *The Waves*. When Bloom meditates on the baffling discontinuity ‘me – and me now’, or when Eliot’s Thames maiden laments her desolate estrangement, ‘I can connect/Nothing with nothing’, they are expressing an experiential fall from some mythic self-wholeness.<sup>625</sup>

Brown notes that this idea of the modernist fragmented self is also a ‘dissolving self’, which also resonates with the Jungian idea of the individuation process that has been interrupted. This can also be seen in the alienation that can overcome an individual in an era that has become disorientating due to the rise of the industrial over the agrarian, and the resulting process of a move to the city, another facet of the areas that the modernists were engaging with within their writing.

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid, p.267.

<sup>625</sup> Dennis Brown, *The Modernist Self in Twentieth-Century English Literature: A Study in Self-Fragmentation* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989), p.2.

James reacts to this process by harking back to times that were more agrarian, with an idealised view of the countryside. The settings are all very 'English' and both Clive Bloom and Peter Ackroyd single James out as the quintessential English ghost story writer. Both note their essentially old-fashioned form, but Ackroyd identifies the stories as functioning on a higher level of aesthetics, celebrating the unique character of, in his terms, the 'Genius Loci' or the English Holy Ghost, the feeling of being haunted by the archetypal spirit of England herself.<sup>626</sup> This is the feeling one experiences in quiet, out-of-the-way places (the English wood, the country churchyard), as if James's stories can be located the past of the land herself:

Like Sherlock Holmes "In the Valley of Fear", James was "a believer in the genius loci". It is the sudden silence in a wood, or the sound of footsteps in an empty street; it is the English sense of being haunted by place and by a specific history associated with it. A country so preoccupied with its past, and with the traditions of that past, cannot help but be haunted by time itself...<sup>627</sup>

For Ackroyd, James's stories are haunted not just by an array of creatures but by a larger presence, a form just visible beneath the text: the spirit of the place of England herself. This spirit looms over James's body of work, the timeless spirit of Britannia made flesh. Bloom observes that James's work is also haunted nostalgia for times gone by, but times that were never real.<sup>628</sup> Bloom accuses James of glossing over the reality of England and her countryside with artistic license, in that his stories celebrate an England of unspoilt fields and clean pristine streets, of Arthur and nostalgic ephemeral places that were supposed to exist in a mythic golden time.<sup>629</sup> For Bloom, this began with the tourist industry, at the same time that James started to publish. This harking back to the country idyll was symptomatic of an author

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<sup>626</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002), p.378.

<sup>627</sup> *Ibid.*, p.376.

<sup>628</sup> Bloom, *Creepers*, p.70.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67

cushioned from reality, as many of his stories feature a land only beginning to be populated by the trappings of modernisation: ‘cars, trains and games of golf’.<sup>630</sup>

The trope of altered states of reality, and modernist alienation, are also found frequently in James’s stories, as the idealisation of the pastoral in James’s stories stands in stark contrast to the experiences of many of his characters. The setting in no way protects his protagonists from the revenants. For example, in “Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance” the manor house and its maze intrudes upon the psyche of Mr Humphreys, until he is experiencing altered states of reality and a crippling ennui that prevents him from realising the danger he is in until the last moment.<sup>631</sup> This alienation and ennui reflect the alienation felt by characters from a new world encroaching on the old, similar to Virginia Woolf’s characters in *Mrs Dalloway*. Against the rural pastiche, we have very modern characterisation of Lady Wardrop, the historian who arrives at the manor house in her motor car, signifying that the house is being dragged into the modern world. The antagonists are also rural pastiches of yews, bushes and a wasp-like antagonist that again displays gothic modernism’s altered forms. This ghost is not the correct form for a ‘proper’ ghost with its trappings of Marley-esque chains:<sup>632</sup>

To an urban mind it is the importance of the nostalgically rural, conditioned by a nascent tourism that is the central message of these tales...this writing is already nostalgic for its own age, let alone a past one, the tales speak of a passing moment...Ghosts added to the “correct atmosphere”, English, eccentric, rural and harmless, essentially the appearance of apparitions and haunted houses was rapidly becoming part of the charm of Olde England...<sup>633</sup>

James set his stories in idealised English worlds, such as the seaside, the charming local inn or church, but other modernist authors reacted to the move from the country to the city in quite a different way. Virginia Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway* saturates the

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<sup>630</sup>Ibid.

<sup>631</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.196.

<sup>632</sup>Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Books* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008).

<sup>633</sup>Bloom, *Creepers*, p.64.

settings and characters with ennui, an alienation that stands in contrast to James's idealised settings. Each is personifying a reaction of the self to a process that makes it, as Brown notes; dissolve in reaction to the progress of the era. In "A Vignette", we see a character who often cannot tell where he is (on a railway platform, or in his childhood home). In "The Mezzotint", we see characters without empathy for a stolen child, even as they watch the kidnapping first-hand.<sup>634</sup> Similarly, Woolf populates *Mrs Dalloway* with a series of characters alienated from their surroundings, like the unnamed narrator in "A Vignette". However, these transient protagonists are lower-class characters, standing out from the more middle-class characters of Clarissa or Peter Walsh. Some critics have argued that Woolf is using these characters to illustrate the gulf between the 'vanishing middle classes and the lower echelons'.<sup>635</sup> Similarly, in "Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance" the lower-class characters of railway porters and servants illustrate the vanishing upper class, like the uncle who has just died and the passing of the hall to his nephew in a new era.

One character that stands out from the rest of these is the 'battered woman', whom 'Woolf would call Anon...the aged street singer whose song [was] ee um fah um so foo swee too'.<sup>636</sup> This woman is cast adrift in her surroundings by the wartime bombing of London that made many people homeless. Pawlowski depicts this woman as the voice of the tribe, a medieval story-teller. However, it is clear that she is not part of everyday London, but perhaps a symbol of alienation. She is more alienated than any of the other characters and not even named by Woolf. She has no link to any of the other characters, and is only in the scene as a reflection of the thoughts of Peter Walsh as he makes his way through the park.<sup>637</sup> The characters

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<sup>634</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.24.

<sup>635</sup>Merry Pawlowski, 'Introduction' to Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1996), p.xvii

<sup>636</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>637</sup>Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p.32.

here again are looking at the world from their own perspective, which is not always the truth of the situation. Similarly, the characters in “The Malice of Inanimate Objects” on their jaunt out into the country experience their surroundings as newly hostile, and indeed their alienation is brought on by a series of everyday objects that are perceived as newly threatening.<sup>638</sup> Fielding has also noted that James’s protagonists usually possess a fragile sense of self, whose whole subjectivity is located in the obsessive cataloguing and possessing of artefacts, or research in obscure corners of academia.<sup>639</sup> Taken with Jack Sullivan’s idea of James’s character’s lives as a void or wasteland, the supernatural in his stories has a way of materializing out of this void in his character’s subjectivity.<sup>640</sup>

As in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and *Mrs Dalloway* the lives of James’s characters are fragile and almost illusory. Their lives are a void, a wasteland in which they seek to substitute tangible objects for real human contact. However, the wrath of James’s avenging pre evolutionary revenants is brought forth by this very action, as the void interrupts the Jungian individuation process in response to its fragmented self, and the Jungian Shadow is torn from its unification with the ego. “The Mezzotint” illustrates the Shadow being brought forth to avenge a hanging, where the shroud enveloped revenant kidnaps a baby, the last of a decaying family’s bloodline. This is viewed with a sort of distant horror by James’s characters, Mr Williams; Mr William’s ‘skip’ Robert Filcher, Nisbet and Professor Binks. Their amorality, as noted by Smith above, is indicative of protagonists who cannot seem to connect with the present. However, this ennui also triggers the fragmentation of their selves from their shadows. The modernist’s sense of a fragmented self, as Dennis Brown viewed it, is a response to trauma where the self is torn apart by (as he terms it) self-

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<sup>638</sup> James, *Casting the Runes*, p.288.

<sup>639</sup> Fielding, ‘Reading Rooms’, p.764.

<sup>640</sup> Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares*, p.75.

fragmentation. This results in shell-shock, (as the condition was called in the nineteenth century) where the symptoms include hallucinations that the unfortunate sufferer is back in the theatre of war surrounded by the deaths of his fellow men, even though he may be awake.<sup>641</sup>

The Jungian fragmented self occurs when, due to stress, the self or the house of the personality is reduced to an earlier stage of individuation or the uniting of all of the aspects of an individual's whole personality, to when the individual was a child. This is when the shadow or the infantile repressed aspect of the person was meant to unite with the ego, but it is rejected by the traumatised self and instead experienced as a psychotic projection outside the self. This was a popular subject (as I cover in Chapter Four of this thesis) with writers such as Oscar Wilde and Robert Louis Stevenson explored the fragmentation of the self from the shadow.<sup>642</sup> James's characters, when exposed to the outside stresses of the modern era, often experience their fragmented selves as a pursuing revenant.

The sense of being frozen and unable to connect with anything is another facet of a fragmented self, which can make people feel that they cannot move on from this damaged subjectivity. This sense of hopelessness is illustrated by James's story "Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance", which demonstrates that James was engaging with some of the issues that concerned the modernists, such as the sense of moral paralysis that can fence people and even races into a certain style of thinking and feeling.<sup>643</sup> This can be seen for instance in Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), a collection of stories with a vein of moral paralysis running through it, a sense of Ireland as a country frozen in time with its archaic governance unchanged. This can

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<sup>641</sup>Brown, *The Modernist Self*, p.43.

<sup>642</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin Books, 1992); Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

<sup>643</sup> Smith, *The Ghost Story*, p.168.

be compared to some of James's tales in which the horror arises from the sense of being boxed into a mode of behaviour by the past, or the expectation of how the living are meant to carry out the concerns of the dead.<sup>644</sup> "Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance" (1911) challenges the idea of earlier propriety, in that the living are bound to the past to carry out the binding tradition of earlier centuries. The protagonist of the tale inherits a maze from his great uncle, which figuratively binds him to the expectations of his decaying bloodline. This inversion of the sunny pastoral, infected by the strain of madness passed down by inheritance, is another mark of gothic modernism, as Riquelme notes: '[t]he crossing of boundaries into darkness...throughout the long twentieth century is frequent and emphatic.'<sup>645</sup>

Through the design of the maze, the uncle guides Mr Humphreys towards to the centre, where there is a column with a globe on it. On this column are designs of various Biblical and Classical men whom James describes as 'patriarchs of evil'.<sup>646</sup> The uncle wants his nephew to encounter this design, in order to become part of this exclusive club and continue his legacy of fulfilling its obscure rituals, rituals which are hidden from other people (hence the maze's continuous efforts to keep other people out by guiding them down the wrong path or hiding the way with weeds).<sup>647</sup> This is an inversion of the sunny pastoral, as what could be a beautiful country house and garden is instead a threatening building. This building houses an ancestral menace about to reappear as a gothic trope in an era of modern change.<sup>648</sup>

There is another thread running through this tale that evokes the troubling agency of disturbing sexuality, another modernist trope. Here, sexuality is linked to eugenics, through the inheritance of the hall and its library and maze, which focuses

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<sup>644</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>645</sup>Riquelme, *Gothic and Modernism*, p.7.

<sup>646</sup>Joyce, p.191.

<sup>647</sup>Ibid, p.189.

<sup>648</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.176.

our attention on the defective bloodline at the centre of the story.<sup>649</sup> As Fielding noted, this also threatens the space of the library, crossing boundaries of propriety:

All of James's stories are haunted by sexual danger for men. Sometimes this is the threat of homosexuality, as in "A School Story" or "Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You". More often, it is a deadly female sexuality. Not surprisingly, given the fate of collectors' desires for fullness, the most terrifying and repeated threat occurring in James's stories is that of an imagined female sexuality that constitutes a direct threat to the potential wholeness of the library. Female sexuality – culturally defined by absence and lack – is in direct contravention of the rules of collection.<sup>650</sup>

James was never a proponent of a feminist agenda. However, as noted earlier in the chapter on gender and sexuality, James likes to play with gender norms, and was especially drawn to strong women. Fielding notes the troubling presence of a disturbing feminine sexuality in the form of "an Irish yew" that is seen by Mr Humphreys in various different places, and brings to mind "a creeping form".<sup>651</sup>

Humphreys decides to repeat his cataloguing activities in the library by making a plan of the maze, as if its troublesome interiority could be cured by its exterior representation. No sooner has he embarked on this perilous mission than he is troubled by various sexualized images of an unspecified nature. There is some vague description of dark and dank undergrowth and a strategically placed "bush thing" under the library window.<sup>652</sup>

The organic demon of the story, when it finally appears, is brought forth from another symbol of disturbing female sexuality, the vagina dentata (the column inside the globe), from which the wasp-like wraith appears:

Here was a feature which need not be repeated on the copy – an ugly black spot about the size of a shilling. Ink? No. It resembled a hole, but how should a hole be there? He stared at it with tired eyes: the work of tracing had been very laborious, and he was drowsy and oppressed ...But surely this was a very odd hole. It seemed to go not only through the paper, but through the table on which it lay. Yes, and through the floor below that, down, and still down, even into infinite depths.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>649</sup>Fielding, 'Reading Rooms': M. R. James and the Library of Modernity", in Riquelme, *Gothic and Modernism*, p.12.

<sup>650</sup> Fielding, 'Reading Rooms', p.764.

<sup>651</sup> Fielding, p.769.

<sup>652</sup>Fielding, 'Reading Rooms', p.165.

<sup>653</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.196.

As Andrew Smith notes, in gothic modernism writers such as T. S. Eliot and James Joyce liked to situate their characters in the 'everyday', but play with these conventions, enveloping their characters in a world where the realities of the world soften and become porous, and time becomes out of focus and realities and boundaries blur.<sup>654</sup> James increasingly situated his characters in an increasingly alienated world as his literary oeuvre grew. In the story "The Malice of Inanimate Objects" (1933), as with Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* there is the sense that the character has become increasingly divorced from reality; everything is newly different, and he is locked into a world where even the objects he depended on, like his razor or collar studs, are possessed by forces outside his control.<sup>655</sup>

In the lives of all of us, short or long, there have been days, dreadful days, on which we have had to acknowledge with gloomy resignation that our world has turned against us. I do not mean the human world of our relations and friends: to enlarge on that is the provenance of nearly every modern novelist. In their books it is called 'Life' and an odd enough hash it is as they portray it. No, it is the world of things that do not speak or work or hold congresses and conferences. It includes such beings as the collar stud, the inkstand, the fire, the razor...<sup>656</sup>

Interestingly, the events of the story are plotted take place in a single day; a departure from James's more formal plotting in earlier stories:

... James's stories – particularly his later ones – show a marked disregard for any kind of conventional plotting. Many stories are oddly shaped, containing large sections of description only related to the plot by proximity...<sup>657</sup>

This would seem to confirm the 'play' that James was exercising in the form of the story, as noted by Smith.<sup>658</sup> As with the chronology of Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, the story is a mosaic or collage that pieces together disparate parts of the two protagonists' back-stories in a short time-frame. In James's story, the reader is invited to follow Mr Manners and Mr Burton through their day, filling in

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<sup>654</sup> Smith and Wallace, *Gothic Modernisms*, p.1.

<sup>655</sup> Fielding, 'Reading Rooms', p.288.

<sup>656</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.288.

<sup>657</sup> Fielding, 'Reading Rooms', p.750.

<sup>658</sup> Smith, *The Ghost Story*, p.181.

the gaps as they go. Nothing much happens in this small story, apart from a series of escalating accidents that pursue Mr Burton through the narrative. The reader is meant to piece together why these accidents are happening, who Mr Burton is, why he is visiting Mr Manners and why he has annoyed a certain Mr George Wilkins.

The story starts with an allusion to the Grimm Brothers' *Children's and Household Tales* (original edition 1812-1814) and a gesture towards the presumed crimes of the squire:<sup>659</sup>

'Truly', in the concluding words of the story, 'this Squire Korbes must have been either a very wicked or a very unfortunate man'. It is the latter alternative which I incline to accept. There is nothing in the preliminaries to show that any slur rested on his name, or that his visitors had any injury to avenge. And will not this narrative serve as a striking example of that malice of which I have taken upon me to treat?<sup>660</sup>

The allusions to the innocence of the protagonist in the Grimm's tale hint to the reader that this story is also a mystery that might need their attention and assistance to solve, rather like an old-fashioned detective novel. This embedding of a mystery narrative in amongst the more prosaic events of the protagonist's day reflects the experimental form of a multi-stranded narrative that other authors were engaging with, as such as H. G Wells in *The Invisible Man*. In both this tale and Wells' novel, the revenant animating the objects of the tale is similar to and cannot be apprehended by the protagonists, but the sense of boundaries blurred and the form of the non-human is still very apparent to the reader.<sup>661</sup>

We are then introduced to the protagonists, sitting in a beautiful sunny garden. Mr Burton however has a sticking plaster on his face and is looking unhappy.<sup>662</sup> His day has started with a cut during shaving and his tooth powder spilt. The idyllic setting is jarringly contrasted with the unreality of the invisible antagonist

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<sup>659</sup>Jacob Grimm, *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2019), p.1.

<sup>660</sup>Ibid, p.9.

<sup>661</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2016).

<sup>662</sup>James, *Casting the Runes*, p.289.

who is using these everyday objects against Mr Burton. It is distinctly modernist; where gothic writing would have used the old agents of horror, as Norman notes:

[t]he skull-headed lady, the vampire gentleman, the whole troop of monks and monsters who once froze and terrified us now gibber in some dark cupboard of the servants' hall. In our day we flatter ourselves the effect is produced by subtler means. It is at the ghosts within us that we shudder, and not at the decaying bodies of barons or the subterranean activities of ghouls.<sup>663</sup>

The terror is now within society. In this story, it is notable that the antagonist cannot be seen, so it must be asked whether it represents a manifestation of Burton's guilt over the undescribed death of the un-named corpse with the inscription "Geo.Feci"? The inscription suggests that George (Wilkins) did this, so we have a character who is not only invisible but also a murderer. This fear of the murderer and/or guilt over the deceased may be part of Mr Burton's interrupted individuation process, and it may be that he is now projecting his psyche's newly-freed shadow. The ghosts of modernism, especially gothic modernism, are the interrupted fractured self or consciousness, which is newly free to cause havoc in our lives. Where older tropes of the gothic, or even the previous revenants that James used in his stories, were very physical, in this story Mr Burton's assailant cannot be apprehended by anyone:

Classic Gothic monsters and supernatural figures, therefore, are now repressed and take the form of ghosts and "the ghosts within," as Sigmund Freud and others began to explore the recesses of the internal landscapes of the psyche. Thus...both a subtlety and a movement inward, away from the external monstrous characters that inhabit the classic Gothic, toward the internal that are envisioned as more terrifying than the "skull-headed lady, the vampire gentleman, the whole troop of monks and monsters" who only make the less superstitious inhabitants of modernity "laugh".<sup>664</sup>

His companion notes that a man with whom Mr Burton had been 'having trouble' is now dead. Whilst sympathy for the dead man is expressed by both protagonists, Mr Burton continues to have various accidents involving inanimate objects:

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<sup>663</sup> Norman, 'Gothic Modernism'.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

He was perhaps reluctant to give the inanimate objects of the district a chance of getting at him. If so, he was right. He just escaped a nasty purl over the scraper at the top of the steps: a thorny branch swept off his hat and scratched his fingers, and as they climbed a grassy slope he fairly leapt into the air with a cry and came down flat on his face.<sup>665</sup>

It is clear in this part of the story that Mr Burton's fractured psyche is continuing to haunt him and the story is taking on an air of the uncanny. As we follow the two protagonists on this walk, we also start to wonder why these inanimate objects are attacking Mr Burton, especially given the warning of Burton's assumed innocence at the start of this story, together with the allusion to the unfortunate squire. It is also foreboding in that the reader starts to understand that time, being measured in hours by James may be running out for our protagonist.

Fielding sums up this tale as a provocation by James, that demonstrates an at least partially modernist approach in his alienation from the idea of progress, depicted in the story through the objects. James references the aeroplane, motorcycle and telephone as agents of disruption and objects of horror:

[...] the story provocatively fails to establish a connection between the various annoying but trivial objects of Burton's day including the kite, and the supposed ghost of "Geo.W.Feci", who never turns up in person. This uneasy relationship between objects and their ordering in the cause-and-effect narration of the ghost story characterises James, and it is this relationship, rather than the nature of the objects themselves, that helps us to understand his position in Gothic modernism.<sup>666</sup>

It is the march of progress and the objects of modernity that are newly alienating to the protagonist in a modernist tale, especially when it features characters who are suffering fractured psyches and interrupted individuation processes because of the march of progress. This can have the effect of alienating these protagonists. In this story, a protagonist (his guilty conscience or a resulting shadow projection) wears

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<sup>665</sup>James, *Casting the Runes*, p.290.

<sup>666</sup>Fielding, 'Reading Rooms', pp.749-771.

down Mr Burton constantly. Norman found that the fractured consciousness of the individual is rendered powerless by the newly technological in gothic modernism:

The city's landscape, with its fleeting social interactions, myriad images and stimuli, and mechanization of time arouse shock for its inhabitants. Because of these conditions, modernity itself becomes Gothic. Consciousness contains these overwhelming stimuli by assigning them to a specific moment in time—to time on the clock. The sensation of fright occurs when consciousness fails to defend the individual from this shock. Gothic Modernism thus mirrors the defence mechanisms of consciousness by utilizing subtler means that avoid a direct and explicit confrontation with the explicit conventions and language of the classic Gothic.<sup>667</sup>

The antiquarian past breaks through, alienating this view of comfortable modern life.

As noted above, in Sullivan's comparison of James's antiquarians' lives to a wasteland, this creates a vacuum where the evil intrudes. The supernatural in his stories has a way of materializing out of this void in his characters' subjectivity:

There is thus an implicit "Waste Land" ambiance to these stories. The characters are antiquaries, not merely because the past enthralls them, but because the present is a near vacuum. They surround themselves with rarefied paraphernalia from the past – engravings, rare books, altars, tombs, coins, and even such things as doll's houses and ancient whistles – seemingly because they cannot connect with anything in the present. The endless process of collecting and arranging gives the characters an illusory sense of order and stability, illusory because it is precisely this process which evokes the demon or the vampire...<sup>668</sup>

Sullivan's comparison of James's fiction to this modernist poem reveals that his fiction truly is a bridge from the Victorian to the modern. As previously stated, the chronological regularity of James's stories over a forty-three year period resulted in a stylistic progression. Whether James was conscious of this or not, each differs in content and literary technique. Sullivan argues that the ghostly tale in itself is often seen as a reaction to the progress of the time, and the discovery and promotion of science and rational fact over organised religion.<sup>669</sup> Incomers from the country

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<sup>667</sup>Norman, 'Gothic Modernism'.

<sup>668</sup>Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares*, p.75.

<sup>669</sup> Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares*, p.75.

swelled the industrial revolution and the population of the towns at this time.<sup>670</sup>

People felt newly alienated by the familiar becoming newly unfamiliar. In the new science of the unconscious, Freud designated this, the *Unheimlich* or uncanny.<sup>671</sup>

In James's story "Rats" written in 1929, the feeling of *Unheimlich* reaches its apex, as his revenant is protected and housed by two of the characters. Both the living and un-living are amongst the other lodgers in an inn. Mr Thomson, the young academic from Cambridge, lets his curiosity get the better of him and decides to investigate what has been making a noise in the supposedly empty room next door.

...as noiselessly as possible he stole to the door and opened it. The shattering of the illusion! He almost laughed aloud. Propped, or you might say sitting, on the edge of the bed was – nothing in the round world but a scarecrow! A scarecrow out of the garden, of course, dumped into the deserted room...Yes; but here amusement ceased. Have scarecrows bare bony feet? Do their heads loll onto their shoulders? Have they iron collars and links of chain about their necks? Can they get up and move, if never so stiffly, across a floor, with wagging head and arms close at their sides? <sup>672</sup>

Thomson watches the scarecrow moving towards him, and as it does, the reader becomes incredulous. Is there really a reanimated corpse staying at the inn? We may also question Thomson's state of mind at this point. The story has definitely taken on a very modernist turn as the living have been alienated completely. Who belongs here? Who has the right to occupy this space? James has used an older agent of the gothic (the zombie) to question the position of the self in a newly fractured world. This world is, on the surface, the same as ever: a seaside inn and an academic down from Cambridge to take the sea air. However, the academic has arrived on the train, and James was writing this story from the perspective of 1926, after the carnage of the First World War, and in a period of increasing modernisation.

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<sup>670</sup>Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn*.

<sup>671</sup>Royle, *The Uncanny*, p.3.

<sup>672</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.335.

This story is complete in its uncanny feeling of near-complete madness in which nothing is as it seems. The alienation of the living by the dead has taken a new twist and they occupy the same space. As MacCulloch notes, the positions of reanimated corpse as burglar, and the living as householder have now been reversed. James seems to be manipulating the conventions of the ghost story here, giving an insight into the anxieties of the modern age: our position in the universe is not guaranteed, and this is as bleak a depiction as any modernist wasteland.<sup>673</sup>

Thomson, in the style of most of James's protagonists, runs out of the room and faints. He comes to with the landlords standing over him, and reproaching him for disturbing their "guest"; "[y]ou shouldn't a done so, sir, really you shouldn't. It ain't a kind way to act by persons a done the best they could for you" ...<sup>674</sup> The Betts have been keeping their guest in his room since they had bought the inn from the previous landlords. The scarecrow or revenant was previously landlord of the house, but he had been hung on a gibbet and left to die near the inn for the crime of associating with highwaymen and profiting from their activities. The Betts have thus been living with their supernatural lodger for some time:

Yes, we 'ad the account from the people that 'ad the 'ouse before we come. "You keep that room shut up," they says, "but don't move the bed out, and you'll find there won't be no trouble." And no more there 'as been; not once he haven't come out into the 'ouse, though what he may do now there ain't no sayin".<sup>675</sup>

The conventions of the ghost story have been completely reworked by James for this story. The revenant has been civilly living amongst the other occupants of the inn for many years before he was disturbed by the living. In fact, it is the ghost of the story who has had his space encroached upon. The positions of 'haunter' and haunted have been reversed. It is a very clever use of positioning and narration, leaving the

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<sup>673</sup>MacCulloch, 'The Toad in the Study', p.76.

<sup>674</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.335.

<sup>675</sup>Ibid, p.336.

reader questioning the nature of the threat in this plotline: certainly not the Betts who have grown used to their unusual occupant, or Mr Thomson, also unthreatened by the “ghost” once he has recovered from his encounter. The reader finishes the story uncertain of their place in the world; the story works therefore on many levels and definitely has the feel of a modernist story. The questioning of this world is done through an antagonist with all the hallmarks of the older gothic, but placed in a story in which its physical reality is impossibility. As Smith sums up James’s later tales,

The past is a dangerous place in his tales...this is related to a response to modernism that relocates its apparent amorality within the seemingly urbane narratorial voices...<sup>676</sup>

The past in these later stories acts as a touchstone to an earlier way of life, where the protagonists cannot be sure of everyday objects. The zombie may be living in time-out-of-place, but it is the protagonist Mr Thomson who is alienated.

In this particular story, the past is no longer where it should be. It has been completely reversed, placing it suddenly in the present. There is also the question of how the “ghost” should be categorised now it has been given a place in the inn. Could it even be thought of as an intruder anymore? Again, the reader is left questioning whether the narrator is insane, or simply throwing open these questions to debate. We are spectators throughout the story. That the narrator is speaking directly to the reader to pose these questions is also a new departure for James and a technique that he also used in his final story, “A Vignette”.

A *vignette* is ‘a brief evocative small illustration or portrait photograph which fades into its background without a definite border’.<sup>677</sup> This is indicative of an unstable, alienated world in which, as with the objects in “The Malice of Inanimate Objects” or the succession of wastelands felt by James’s characters, is a world that

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<sup>676</sup> Smith, *The Ghost Story*, p.169.

<sup>677</sup> Catherine Soanes (ed), *The Oxford Compact English Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.1289.

has been increasingly altered by the unstoppable march of time and the fractured idea of self that it brings in its wake. The first object that troubles James in this story is the old 'plantation' gate that operates as a boundary to his childhood home's gardens. A gate again is a barrier to a threshold, dividing one part of the garden from the rest of the grounds. The words chosen by James are also interesting, in that the idea of a plantation harks back to an older, ante-bellum world of an economic model of pre-industrial slavery practiced by James's ancestors in the old British colonies of the Caribbean and the Americas.<sup>678</sup> This object, however, acts as a model of displacement for James, in that he associates it not with its designated role as boundary-keeper, but as an object of malice.

I should be puzzled to fix the date at which any sort of misgiving about the Plantation gate first visited me. Possibly, it was in the years just before I went to school, possibly on one later summer afternoon of which I have a faint memory, when I was coming back after solitary roaming in the park, or, as I bethink me, from tea at the Hall...<sup>679</sup>

James continues this first person narrative with musings on how his childhood settings continue to haunt him. The effect is interesting because this was not intended as a memoir, but as a story. It was published as such in 1936, in the *London Mercury* and included later in *Casting the Runes*.

The effect of his musings on dreams, and the trees surrounding the garden of the rectory where he lived, again give the impression of transgressive interruptions into the ordinary world of the daylight. In the night-time of James as a boy gazing out into the dark, he feels the presence of 'hooded' beings.<sup>680</sup> James evokes a sense of the past interrupting, spilling over into the present, and the feeling of strangeness only increases when we are suddenly taken, two pages into the story, into James's adult consciousness. He describes the dreams that persist with this interruption of

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<sup>678</sup>Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, p.2.

<sup>679</sup>James, *Casting the Runes*, p.294.

<sup>680</sup>Ibid.

strangeness, where he is suddenly thrust into a terrifying situation when he steps through another boundary between the dimensions, the bedroom door from a private domain into a public space, that of a railway platform:

[...] while I am drying myself after a bath, I open the bedroom door and step out on to a populous railway platform and have to invent rapid and flimsy excuses for the deplorable *deshabille*.<sup>681</sup>

The sense is that the narrator/author is losing his place in the normal everyday order of things, as if his sense of self is becoming (as Dennis Brown has noted) 'fragmented'. This vignette apparently was meant to be a simple first-person narrative about musings on a childhood experience, which ends up as a case study in displacement and the constant harking back by James to earlier times of when he was a boy, in a fragmented ego and the protagonist's fragmented self.

James's musings about gates and railway platforms take a sinister turn at this juncture, with the sudden intrusion into the story of another time displacement. We move into a garden (usually a domestic or bucolic setting) which begins to take on an air of a setting out of place:

Now, too was the moment near when the surroundings began to take on a threatening look; that the sunlight lost power and a quality of light replaced it which, though I did not know it at the time. My memory years after told me was the lifeless pallor of an eclipse. The effect of all this was to intensify the foreboding that had begun to possess me, and to make me look anxiously about, dreading that in some quarter my fear would take a visible shape.<sup>682</sup>

The reader is are unsure what to make of this sudden intensification of a fear evoked by the narrator's memories. One minute we are in the garden with James and the gardener, Ellis; next we find that this is a dream setting, and we are with James in his childhood bedroom, waiting for a hand at the handle of the door, another boundary transgression. The sense of self slipping away and the alienation that this setting brings is a personification of the solipsistic nature of this story. Even the

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<sup>681</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.295.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*

villagers that James brings into the tale at this point are plot devices to personify the anxiety, and fear that mysterious, unidentifiable forces have transgressed this setting that. There is no villain at this point, just a fear of *something* pursuing the narrator and the reader.

It is almost as if the idea of a quaint setting has become newly haunted by its genius loci. A place that should be reassuring has now turned against its inhabitants, just as the everyday objects of “The Malice of Inanimate Objects” turn against their owner, or “The Mezzotint” turns out to show a kidnapping and “The Haunted Dolls’ House” depicts a murder in miniature. These are all interruptions and transgressions of evil into normal life, as well as interruptions into lives and selves that have, as Sullivan noted, become wastelands.<sup>683</sup> As both Sullivan and Dennis Brown have found, it was the interruption of the First World War and the ongoing march of technology that caused the fragmentation of many lives reflected in the modernist movement. James’s academic characters respond to this fractured self by withdrawing into safe, cloistered lives of obsessive cataloguing and collecting, usually of objects (books, dolls houses, mezzotints). These objects, however, became newly haunted, and were the catalyst for Reza Negarestani’s inorganic demon to manifest itself and haunt the protagonist of James’s stories.<sup>684</sup> At the end of “A Vignette”, even the plantation gate has become a boundary transgressed by an evil, malicious threshold dweller, a face that stares at the narrator through the square hole in the gate, as if it is accusing him – but of what?

Things were, alas! Worse than I had feared; through that hole a face was looking my way. It was not monstrous, not pale, fleshless, spectral. Malevolent I thought and think it was; at any rate the eyes were large and

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<sup>683</sup> Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares*, p.75.

<sup>684</sup> Brown, *The Modernist Self*; Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Alresford, Hants: Zero Books, 2014), p.19.

open and fixed. It was pink and, I thought, hot, and just above the eyes the border of a white linen drapery hung down from the brows.<sup>685</sup>

The threshold dweller has fixed James in his sights, but for what purpose? What is it meant to personify? We cannot even be sure at this point if James is dreaming; if this setting is the past or the present; if it is a memory or a psychotic episode. Certainly, James is again playing with plot form, and indicating a break of the self as well as a break in his writing style, in this small but clever story.

James's fictional oeuvre changed dramatically from his work in the Victorian era and developed, as we would expect over his long career. They bring the Victorian age alive for us, as well as identifying the anxieties of our own age, because of this signposting of each of a range of very modern neuroses, from hellish Darwinian revenants to post traumatic stress and Freudian anxieties. The interlinked stories provide a small potted history of English literature and cultural evolution.

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<sup>685</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.297.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has sought to show that James is much more than a writer of remarkable ghost stories. As I have shown, he was very much a writer of his time, a fin de siècle author whose work is particularly notable for the fact that it reflects many of the concerns of the era. He gives us insight into society's anxieties about organised religion and the occult, as I demonstrated in 'James and the Unseen: the Divided Reading in his Ghost Stories', about human degeneration, as I showed in 'M. R. James and the Darwinian Gothic', around gender and sexuality, as I argued in 'Gender and Sexuality – the Cloistered World of M. R. James', and about the pace of modernity, as I discussed in 'The Bridge from the Victorian to the Modern – the Evolution of James's Fiction'. In this conclusion I will discuss James's legacy in contemporary ghost stories across different media forms, and consider the avenues for future research that the thesis has opened up. The thesis's key contribution is the development of a new direction in Jamesian studies. It has demonstrated for the first time that Jungian theory can open up new and very significant interpretations of James's work, such as revealing that the Jungian unindividuated personality is key to understanding both James and his stories as it reveals unspoken but powerful ambivalence. It has also shown that combining a Jungian and historical approach allows a fuller interpretation of the man and the work.

Indeed, a Jungian and historical reading allows us to understand the true significance of one of the most striking things about James's ghost stories, the dramatic manner in which he wrote them. He dashed them off in a state of 'fever heat'; at the very last minute before he was due to deliver them to a large and eager

audience.<sup>686</sup> Indeed, the circumstances of the composition of the stories resemble something from the stories themselves, as Steve Duffy notes:

...a visibly sweating James would emerge from his bedroom, “having scribbled the last few sentences of his tale only minutes beforehand”, candles would be extinguished, all bar one at his shoulder, and he would begin reading.<sup>687</sup>

Duffy also notes that James’s attitude towards the publication of these stories was strangely casual: the manuscripts he presented to his publishers were never proofread, and always bore the marks of scratchings out.<sup>688</sup> Duffy wonders if this reveals more than a scholarly disregard for the lowly ghost story:

It did seem just a little curious— even significant, maybe— that James hadn’t seen fit to present the publishers with a corrected, properly legible manuscript. Again that question of self-depreciation came up: could it really have been the case that these stories were considered too trifling to take up any more of the Provost’s time than was absolutely necessary? It was at least a tenable hypothesis.<sup>689</sup>

James’s statements on the ghost stories also illustrate an apparent lack of respect for the genre, as we see in the preface to his first book, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*:

I wrote these stories at long intervals, and most of them were read to patient friends, usually at the season of Christmas...The stories themselves do not make any exalted claim. If any of them succeed in causing their readers to feel pleasantly uncomfortable when walking along a solitary road at nightfall, or sitting over a dying fire in the small hours, my purpose in writing them will have been attained.<sup>690</sup>

As Duffy continues, there is a paradox here; while James researched the background of his stories with his usual scholarly care, he invariably dismissed the results as trivial.<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>686</sup> Steve Duffy, Introduction, in M. R. James, *A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2000), p. xxiii.

<sup>687</sup> Duffy, Introduction, p.xvi.

<sup>688</sup> Duffy, Introduction, p. xviii.

<sup>689</sup> Duffy, Introduction, p. xviii.

<sup>690</sup> M. R. James, Preface to *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1904), quoted in M. R. James, *A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2000), p.2.

<sup>691</sup> Duffy, Introduction, p. xxiii.

I would contend that James's clear ambivalence is manifest in the way he utilised his fiction to provide the catharsis that his overburdened and un-individuated psyche needed in order to function in the scholarly world he inhabited, a world where certain taboos of privilege and sexuality could not be transgressed.<sup>692</sup> This thesis, the first full-length doctoral study of James's ghost stories, uses Jung's theory of individuation to shed entirely original light on James's stories as manifestations of his profound ambivalence about his sexuality, established religion, and the development of new ways of seeing the world as new scientific discoveries troubled old established narratives.

As I explained in my chapter on the Jungian reading of James's ghost stories, Jung's work on individuation of the personality evolved through differing theories. This thesis focuses on the process of individuation in relation to Jung's theory of the shadow, or the dark aspect of the human personality.<sup>693</sup> Jung argued that when the shadow is not assimilated successfully, it can become dominant and may be projected forth as either a split personality, or as a psychological projection. My thesis illustrates that the procession of "ghosts" that haunt James's protagonists can also be read as shadow projections of un-individuated personalities.

This phenomenon will be very familiar to Victorianists: there are many manifestations of this shadow figure in culture of the period, such as the doppelganger. It can be seen in novels such as *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*, where Stevenson's doctor unsuccessfully battled the dark half of his personality. The character of Jekyll in this novel is even given a free reign to exist as an individual presence in his own right which ends in Dr Jekyll's death. In *The Picture of Dorian*

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<sup>692</sup> Michael Cox, *M.R. James: An Informal Portrait* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.165.

<sup>693</sup> Carl Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 563.

Gray, Wilde's protagonist's shadow finds life in a portrait, which absorbs Gray's sins, which frees Gray to live a life of debauchery, seemingly without consequences.

The action of sublimation is the key to James's stories; it was not just the actions of the revenants that were used to contain the sexuality of the characters. James also used his fiction to soothe his own often over-burdened scholarly mind. To utilise a Jungian term, in the action of writing his fiction at such break-neck speed, with such apparent lack of care, James demonstrates that he suffers from a uniquely Jungian malaise, an un-individuated or split personality, which could not successfully reconcile differing areas of his life.

His sexuality, his decision to not undertake ordination into the church, and his reaction to the then new science of Darwinism, were all problematic for James the scholar and the fiction author. His ghost stories were the product of his un-individuated personality possessing the page as a cathartic reaction to these problems. The pages were the stage on which James's animalistic, devolved revenants pursue his unlucky scapegoats, the sacrificial victims: learned men who had committed sins the author was actually guilty of (such as sublimating his sex drive into the interior of his life, in favour of his academic pursuits). We can see this clearly in "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook" where the academic Dennistoun spends the first part of the story totally immersed in never-ending cataloguing and photography of the interior of a French provincial church. Even James, as the narrator, has already told the reader that he thinks that there is nothing of particular interest in this little church.<sup>694</sup> The narrator can be felt standing back and detachedly observing Dennistoun in his fixation, totally obsessed in this act. He is immersed in an erectional urge to possess the interior of this church, to capture every inch of it.

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<sup>694</sup> M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), p.1.

As I have already noted, often in James's stories there is a single male academic as protagonist, who lives purely for his work. In "The Diary of Mr Poynter", the protagonist of the story, James Denton, lives with his aunt and prefers books to people:

Mr Denton was able to face the task of building a new and considerably more convenient dwelling for him and his aunt who constituted his whole ménage. Being in London, with time on his hands, and not far from the salesroom...he thought that he would spend an hour there on the chance of finding ...something bearing upon the history or topography of ...Warwickshire<sup>695</sup>

He has all but sublimated his life to this pursuit and there is no mention of any significant "other", male or female. His aunt, Miss Denton, runs his life, organising tennis matches and "drives out". Her friends are his friends and he mostly leaves his life to her. As above, his life lacks sexual satisfaction and indeed intimacy of any kind. As I said in my chapter on gender and sexuality, James often avoided friendships deepening into an intimate standing, preferring to engage in his favourite sport of "ragging", where he would engage in childish "fights" with many of his friends that often involved touching in the guise of wrestling. James needed this outlet, troubled as he was by many of the *fin de siècle* and later developments intruding on his cosy cloistered world.

Darwin's theories also had the (unintended) effect of making many question religion and its place in society. Just as the industrial revolution increased the flow of migrants to the cities and alienated many from their original homes, churches subsequently saw their congregations dwindle and science seemed to be the cause that further split man from the godhead. James's father Herbert admonished his son to keep to his faith and aim for ordination like his brother. James, however, could not reconcile himself to devoting his life to the church. Many critics have debated reasons for this, and there can never be a definitive answer. However, even though James tried to try to keep to the Christian faith, it simply did not have the place in his

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<sup>695</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.217.

life to the extent it had for his father and his older brother. While they found solace in religion and the church James knew that, for his generation, religion was not a question of unthinking faith and observance but that, due to the very real concerns in his age of materialism, religion was, in its worst form, a system of hypocrisy. This anxiety found expression in his stories with his focus on the guardians of the faith. His country clergy and highbrow bishops were shown to be murderers, as in the case of Dr Haynes in “The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral”, or taking in troubled children for financial gain, as in “The Residence at Whitminster.”<sup>696</sup> In short, they were not the self-sacrificing Christians that they should have been, but rather the worst kind of hypocrites.

The figure of the ghost has often been seen as a representation of the marginalised figure; the poor and destitute, the homosexual or the ignored servant class.<sup>697</sup> James’s ghosts usually, however, were representations of another marginalised figure, the antiquarian. As a figure, he stands for an inability to move away from an idealised past or, according to the theories of Nordau, a degenerate figure.<sup>698</sup> The influence of Nordau’s theories is also writ large in the stories with the antiquarian representing the preservation of the Victorian present by the neglect of the past. Delving too deep into the past can bring a re-visitation of the hellish figures of anthropomorphic horror to frighten the protagonist to the point of psychosis, bringing the protagonist face-to-face with an abject horror of his own making.

In deviating from the standard type of ghosts dreamt up in the narratives of romantic stories, James’s ghosts represent the walking corpse or revenant or, as already stated, the nykamorphic monster.<sup>699</sup> James’s monsters have also influenced

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<sup>696</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.146 and 198.

<sup>697</sup> Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840-1920 A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2010), p.13.

<sup>698</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Connecticut: Martino Fine Books, 2014).

<sup>699</sup> Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots* (London: Continuum, 2007), p.451.

a very current area of scholarship, that of the animated monster to gracing the comic book or graphic novel, particularly Japanese Anime. These monsters resemble many of the zombie and hairy monstrosities with talons found in James's stories, particularly the monsters that pursue the protagonists for revenge. For example, the Jamesian monster in "The Mezzotint" that creeps slowly towards across the lawn and the hapless baby, or the motif of the well in "A School Story" which houses the bodies of Mr Sampson and the wraith seen climbing in at his window.<sup>700</sup>

Culturally, these demonstrate that James's themes of revenge and pursuit are relevant to our modern psyches. It is interesting that Japanese cinema and anime repeat these monsters on something of a constant loop, as a way of expunging an internalised horror. It is as if the fear that is facing the (mostly now teenage) consumers of this zeitgeist, who have no way of facing their own un-individuated personalities, because of their own cultural setting: an ageing Japanese population, and an economic environment that has seen Japan remain in recession since the 1990s.<sup>701</sup> As this generation have no way of escaping this situation, which has kept them, as Arai has noted, locked into childhood for so much longer, they face their psyches in story, anime and cinema, just as James faced his fears by writing his fiction.<sup>702</sup>

This is another area in which James's fiction has returned, with new relevance, in this now post-modern world. Mieville suggests that the influence of James is to be found precisely in this new area in

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<sup>700</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.20 and 98.

<sup>701</sup> Andrea Arai, *The Strange Child* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), p.4.

<sup>702</sup> Arai, *Child*, p.4.

...[a]n accelerating circuit of teratogenesis, new monsters endlessly produced and consumed and exemplified in commodity form by the innumerable RPG and video-game bestiaries...<sup>703</sup>

The monsters in these games are replete with claws and tentacles, slime and all of the regressed signifiers of the Jamesian Darwinian monsters to be found in James's fiction. Their defeat and reappearance in playing the video games are similar to a prolonged reading of his ghost stories. This is another way in which James and his monsters have undergone an evolution or metamorphosis of their own in contributing to this post-modern, post-structuralist world. His stories, on each reading, can be interpreted in a dozen different ways and he is as relevant to this age as his own. He has very much been worth reappraisal, as have his ghost stories. As a previously unjustly neglected author, he deserves this place in the canon of classical literature, in his own era and the present.

This thesis has set out to record the areas in Jamesian scholarship that shine a light on an under-researched area of the canon. As Christopher and Barbara Roden have said, 'Jamesian scholarship is a work in progress. Inevitably, new material will come to hand tomorrow and in the future'.<sup>704</sup> Certainly, if I was not burdened with a word limit, I would like to have undertaken further research on the Jamesian influence on the William Gibson genre of Steampunk, particularly with reference to some of the protagonists in James's stories, utilising original inventions from the author's mind to terrorise, or to benefit from their scientific applications. For example, in "Casting the Runes" Mr Karswell uses 'A Magic Lantern Slide', to 'frighten the village children out of their wits'.<sup>705</sup> In "A View from a Hill", the heavy binoculars are a device by which the characters see into the past, almost like a time

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<sup>703</sup>China Mieville, *M. R. James and the Quantum Vampire: Collapse IV*, ed. R. McKay, Falmouth, Urbanomic, May 2008. <http://www.urbanomic.com>

<sup>704</sup> Christopher and Barbara Roden, Preface to M. R. James, *A Pleasing Terror* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Ash-Tree Press, 2000), p.xvii.

<sup>705</sup>James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.130.

machine in the hand. We could imagine these inventions in the best of William Gibson's novels.<sup>706</sup> There are other areas of James's ghost stories that are reflected in Gibson's work, such as the occult mage in "Lost Hearts", Uncle Abney and his room of paraphernalia, and "The Mezzotint" being able to broadcast scenes from other worlds.<sup>707</sup>

The colonial influence on James's ghost stories is a niche area that would be interesting to review, especially the idea of how many characters came to have wealth in the first place. The characters in "The Ash Tree" own a large hall, as do many of James's protagonists.<sup>708</sup> The background to this wealth, especially in the eighteenth century, points to trade, such as slavery or the ivory market, which would complement the dark and horrific narration in the pages of James's stories. Eco-criticism would also be a rich seam to mine, as James is a master of what Peter Ackroyd termed 'the Genius Loci' or the English Holy Ghost, the spirit of small pastoral settings.<sup>709</sup> As the pastoral is one of the quintessential areas of eco-criticism, influenced by Raymond Williams's seminal 1973 book *The Country and the City*, James's stories, which often evoke the quiet countryside as the basis for much of his horror, would be an interesting area in which to apply this theory.<sup>710</sup>

This thesis grew from my interest in the sharp division between James the public man of letters and James the writer of psychologically chilling, nightmare-inducing ghost stories. Despite the way he seems to have seen it, James's fictional oeuvre is as important – perhaps more important, as a cultural record – as his scholarly fiction, even if as S. T. Joshi said,

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<sup>706</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.291.

<sup>707</sup>For instance see, William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (Hammersmith, London: Voyager classics, 2001); James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, pp.11 and 20.

<sup>708</sup> James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, p.30.

<sup>709</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002).

<sup>710</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985).

[a]t times it seems as if Montague Rhodes James (1862-1936) led not one life, but a multitude. That the same man could have described all the mediaeval manuscripts at the various colleges of Cambridge University, prepared an edition of the *Apocryphal New Testament* and other works of biblical scholarship, and, almost incidentally, produced four landmark volumes of ghost stories in the course of a fifty-year professional career that also saw him as dean and Provost of King's College, Cambridge, director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, and Provost of Eton – all this makes one admire anew the native talents of one whose unassuming modesty would have shrugged off these attainments as all in a day's work.<sup>711</sup>

James's modesty about his fiction was the result of his un-individuated personality. This thesis has uncovered the underpinnings in the stories of a Jungian sublimation of powerful emotions. These emotions result in the fiction being used to a cathartic end: the constant pursuit of the luckless antiquarian scapegoat figures by a succession of devolved revenants. These revenants bear the hallmarks of the Darwinian and Nordauan gothic monster replete with talons, hair and slime, which also point to the signifiers of Kristevan abjection. This abjection could be seen in the reactions of the luckless antiquarians: the shutting down of their nervous systems over and over in the pages of James's stories led to the inevitable catharsis in their deaths or nervous breakdowns. This action was repeated too often in James's stories to be just a feature of his style, but is rather the action of an author who needed this constant cathartic end. In placing James in his historical context, his sexuality, his decision to avoid ordination into the church, and his dismissal of his fiction were all the signifiers of an intellectual who could not reconcile his inner life with his outer life, all the hallmarks of an un-individuated personality. The stories provided him with a cathartic end, but to many of his readers today, they might be just snap-shots of a world that has ceased to exist, with their small seaside towns, dusty libraries and men with time to pursue niche hobbies. However, to view them as such, as this thesis has proved, would be very wrong.

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<sup>711</sup> S. T. Joshi, Introduction in *Warnings to the Curious: A Sheaf of Criticism on M.R.James*, ed S. T. Joshi & Rosemary Pardoe (New York, NY: Hippocampus Press, 2007), p.7.

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