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# Strange Things Keep Happening to Me: Postcolonial Identity and Henry James's Ghosts

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STRANGE THINGS KEEP HAPPENING TO ME:  
POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY AND HENRY JAMES'S GHOSTS

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of English  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

By  
Conor James Scruton

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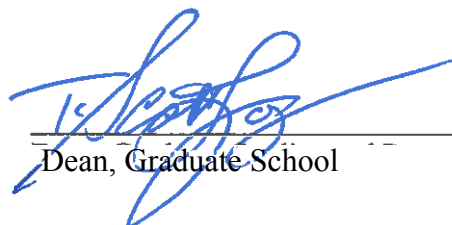
STRANGE THINGS KEEP HAPPENING TO ME:  
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While there have been many studies of Henry James's ghost stories, there has been surprisingly little scholarship written on postcolonial tensions in these works. In American literature, the figure of the Native American ghost is a common expression of Western settler guilt over native erasure and land seizure. In both his American and British ghost stories, though, James focuses more on the horror within the colonizer than the terrifying, ghostly other from the edge of the empire. As such, these ghost stories serve as a more significant critique of colonialism and imperialism than Gothic texts that merely demonstrate the colonizer's fear of the racial and ethnic other at the edges of the empire.

James's earliest ghost stories address to the legacy of American colonialism, staging narratives of indigenous erasure and land seizure by centering hauntings around property disputes. The later ghost stories—written after James had emigrated to Britain—engage in a critique of the imperial British military and colonial power structures that systematically oppress indigenous groups in the name of the empire. These ghost stories all focus on the figure of the Western settler-colonizer and his guilt in creating hauntings; James's living characters often realize they have been complicit in the wrongdoings that result in revenge-seeking ghosts, and this realization is more terrifying than the ghosts themselves. In this way, James's ghost stories present a means of questioning the validity

of colonizer identity, and thus a means of deconstructing the binary of the Western “self” and the indigenous “other.”

## Chapter One

### Introduction

It is popular among critics to label all Henry James's explorations of the supernatural as "psychological ghost stories," subsequently doing little to consider how ghosts may actually function in his work. The suggestion is often that James's ghosts serve only to highlight human dramas or bring out elements of characters' psyches that would have otherwise remained hidden. This opinion is shared by critics ranging from Virginia Woolf to contemporary scholars, but perhaps Julia Briggs presents the argument the most succinctly: "the ghost provides a dramatic expression of James's initial concept, but in itself carries little interest . . . [the ghosts'] moral function is so limited that they are scarcely at all frightening in themselves, and the reader may be uncertain how to respond to them" (*Night Visitors* 150). James also writes that his artistic interest in ghosts is generally related to the impressions and reactions he can depict in his living subjects. In the preface to volume seventeen of the New York Edition—the volume containing the most ghost stories—James writes that he best portrays "moving accidents and mighty mutations and strange encounters . . . by showing them almost exclusively the way they are felt, by recognizing as their main interest some impression strongly made by them and intensely received" (xix). Indeed, it is indisputable that the appearance of a ghost often catalyzes a conflict or realization among the living, fostering the social and psychological drama typical of James's work.



The goal of this study is not to combat this reading of James's ghost stories, but rather to examine some largely unexplored themes that are directly related to the ghosts themselves. Specifically, critical discussion often overlooks the postcolonial dimension of James's work. While this is true of James studies as a whole, his ghost stories are particularly rich texts for a postcolonial study. Here, I will argue that James's ghost stories offer a means of understanding colonizer identities. Though James generally focuses on Western figures as opposed to indigenous groups, his ghosts tend to force representatives of colonial power to face the horror within themselves and the reality that their identities are defined by those they oppress. James's stories are haunted by the shadowy, unspoken presence of colonized groups as much as actual ghosts.

Historical context certainly invites consideration of this dimension of James's ghost stories; in his lifetime, James saw the United States' expansion across the continent, the beginnings of American expansionism in the Pacific, and the era of late imperialism in Britain. James was clearly fascinated by the form of the ghost story early in his career, penning "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" in 1868 and "The Ghostly Rental" in 1876. After a fifteen-year break from writing on supernatural themes, James published "Sir Edmund Orme" in 1891, writing in the subsequent seventeen years fourteen of what Leon Edel calls ghostly tales: "not only stories in which there are materialized ghosts, but another kind he described as 'gruesome' and 'quasi-supernatural'" (ix).<sup>1</sup> As such, James's most fruitful period of ghost stories corresponds

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<sup>1</sup> Edel seems to have moved away from the term "ghostly tales" over time. Twenty years after 1950's *The Ghostly Tales of Henry James*, Edel rereleased the collection as *Henry James: Stories of the Supernatural*, also penning a new introduction for the 1970 volume. Even so, the distinction is important to note; this thesis will focus on stories of "materialized ghosts" rather than James's more generally supernatural tales.

with the significant imperialist periods referenced above. To this point, Graham McMaster presents a selection of James's letters from the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century to demonstrate that James was significantly invested in the colonial and imperial activities of this time (34-38). It seems significant that fourteen of James's eighteen ghostly tales were written during this period; even considering solely the tales explicitly concerning ghosts rather than curses, doubles, or other supernatural events, seven out of nine were written during Britain's late imperialist moment.

In addition to the historical and biographical context for James's ghost stories, a number of scholars in recent years have discussed gothic literature's capacity to express postcolonial anxieties on the part of both colonizer and colonized. There are many gothic themes that hold significant postcolonial implications, including the relationship between past and present, ancestral sin, and the source of horror being internal rather than external. Related to the internal/external binary, the theme most important to this study is the fear of a foreign other, as well as the collapse of boundaries between the self and this strange other. Tabish Khair and David Punter have written at length on the intersection of postcolonial and gothic literatures, the latter positing that the gothic is inherent in the postcolonial because of its concern with lost and hidden histories. Perhaps more relevant to an explanation of the postcoloniality of James's brand of gothic, though, is Gina Wisker's suggestion that "postcolonial gothic enriches the landscape of place, mind, and expression further by bodying forth the imaginary, the spiritual, imaginative, sensed, and felt, the internal landscapes of the mind, showing these as real, as the more frequently recorded historical, and richer because layered with meaning" (402). The postcolonial is necessarily gothic because it requires that the repressed horrors of a colonial past be

addressed, whether explicitly or implicitly. Similarly, James's ghosts often serve to remind those in positions of power of uncomfortable realities they would prefer to forget or ignore; visitants from the ghostly realm allow James to represent othered figures that have been banished from sight in histories endorsed (and created) by colonizing states.

This is not to paint James as an advocate for indigenous rights. James's attitudes towards colonialism and oppression at times seem progressive and pacifistic, but at other times disappointingly Eurocentric and narrow-minded. In the face of a good deal of biographical work painting James as a bookish pacifist, Eric Haralson notes that James in fact "supported England's incursion into Africa, its 'grabbing' in the goldfields of Transvaal, . . . and blamed Queen Victoria's demise on the Boers" (41). McMaster addresses this issue even more directly: "James's letters do show that he had some considerable emotional investment in empire, as well as in the leisure class" (34). At other times, James's views toward late colonialism might be described as comfortably ambivalent; he hated the Spanish-American War, and indeed most American expansionist projects at the turn of the century. Even so, James may have seen some cultural value or potential for cultural growth in America's imperialist activities. He expresses this sentiment in one letter:

It's strange the consciousness possible to an American here today, of being in a country in which the drift of desire—so far as it concerns itself with the matter—is that we *shall* swell and swell, and acquire and *require*, to the top of our opportunity. My own feeling, roughly stated, is that we have not been good enough for our opportunity—vulgar, in a manner, as that was and is; but that it may be the real message of the whole business to make us as much better as the

great grabbed-up British Empire has, unmistakably, made the English. But over these abysses—into them rather—I peer with averted eye. I fear I am too lost in the mere spectacle for any decent morality. (“To Charles Eliot Norton” 98)

This is a somewhat confusing passage, but it seems that James recognizes at some level the immoral implications of American and British imperial actions even when he is inclined to remain loyal to his countries.

To this point, Haralson does an excellent job bringing to light James’s occasional romanticization and authorization of war and soldiers when many biographers seem to ignore this set of beliefs. One of Haralson’s primary conclusions is that, while James had great distaste for war and its resultant physical and psychological carnage, his experience of watching family and friends return from battle in the Civil War (though of age, James managed to escape service with a sprained back) gave him a lifelong mixture of guilt and admiration for the battle-scarred heroes of war. A point that is implied but that Haralson does not state explicitly is that James seems to have ignored the horrors of war and colonialism when his close friends were the parties involved, such as Garnet Wolseley—who participated in imperial warfare in Ghana, Egypt, Ireland, and elsewhere—and Rupert Brooke. Certainly, James wished to glorify Britain and British ideals. Yet it is quite possible that even stronger than James’s loyalty to the nation was his loyalty to his friends, which may partially account for his occasional turning of a blind eye to the violent and immoral side of colonial warfare.

Certainly, many of James’s statements seem to authorize imperialism and hegemony. However, Haralson, Jonathan Arac, and Sara Blair, among many other critics, posit that James’s late fiction often betrays his apparent endorsement of imperialism.

Arac views James's response to imperialism at the turn of the century—especially the United States' efforts at Pacific expansion—as “world-historicizing” and showing “not just his resistance but also his imagination” (234). Blair makes a similar claim in her study of James's treatment of race, contradicting the critical position that James avoided racial and colonial tensions altogether in his writing. Blair suggests that even the performance of Western identities in James's work can draw attention to the othered groups whose presence is necessary to sustain Western imperial identity:

Rehearsing culturally specific idioms, James's strategic allegiances to British, American, Anglo-European, and other fluidly constituted cultural communities and icons register the discursive repertoires of whiteness, as well as the anxieties of national identity that attend its very mobility. With recourse to a broad range of symbolic gestures of racial identification, anxiety, fantasy, and restraint, James's texts work contextually both to preserve and to exploit the inherent instability of racial identity in the era of modernity. (5)

Since the white Westerner's identity depends on a racial, ethnic, and/or national other, every depiction of the former implies the presence, either overt or subtextual, of the latter.

Beyond mere subtext and implication, though, James's ghost stories directly draw attention to othered groups in a number of ways. One of the most consistent is the recurring theme of property ownership. This is the main focus of James's earliest ghost stories. Later in James's career, this theme is reflected in Owen Wingrave's refusal to participate in warfare that would bolster or expand the British Empire, as well as the governess's determination to wrest her wards from the ghostly control of Quint and

Jessel. Another connection among these texts is the fact that marriage is an incredibly destabilizing force, especially in terms of property. For comparison, Jeff Nunokawa notes that wives in Victorian fiction often “secure property by making possible its transmission through inheritance” and are “the most celebrated instance of stable possession” (29). In the face of this literary tradition, James deliberately denies his characters this domestic security, to use Nunokawa’s term. In “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” Perdita’s reason for ghostly revenge is that Viola wants to claim the inheritance of Perdita’s daughter. And in “The Ghostly Rental,” it is a marriage that catalyzes the Diamonds’ dispute and complicates the matter of the estate’s true owner. Owen Wingrave, too, meets his death on a dare from his potential fiancée, and many critics have read the governess’s anxiety in relation to her unfulfilled desire to marry the master. James’s consistent subversion of the marital norms of Victorian fiction implies a critique of the very idea of stable property ownership. Directly or indirectly, his ghosts appear to undermine the security of property. As such, these ghosts can represent an othered group whose presence destabilizes the colonizer’s attempts to legitimize property ownership; in James’s ghost stories, the “takers” must reckon with those they have attempted to dispossess, as well as the guilt that accompanies such a confrontation. While James’s early American ghost stories may provide insight into the author’s settler identity and the legacy of early colonialism in the United States, “The Jolly Corner” is the only ghost story set in America after “The Ghostly Rental,” and this story notably focuses on Spencer Brydon’s identity as an American who has spent decades overseas. The rest of James’s ghost stories are set in Britain. In conjunction with James’s increased investment

in British identity and colonial politics, a shift occurs in his ghost stories away from American settler anxieties and towards the moral implications of British imperialism.

Related to this point, the themes of intersubjectivity and an interrogation of British colonial identity become increasingly present in James's ghost stories at the end of the nineteenth century. This is evident by the point of view in "Owen Wingrave" and in later stories. Narrators in James's earlier ghostly tales maintain some distance from the central conflict. "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" is told from a third-person omniscient point of view, and the narrator of "The Ghostly Rental" records the Diamonds' conflict without truly participating; the latter point is highlighted by the fact that the narrator never directly observes the "real" ghost and is thus never truly haunted. "Owen Wingrave," though, is told from a third-person limited point of view following Owen's military crammer Spencer Coyle. The story begins with Coyle's incensed reaction to Owen's decision to reject his family occupation and forego the life of a soldier. The narrative then follows the pair to the Wingrave estate where Coyle observes Owen's family and friends pressuring him to reverse his decision. As a crammer, Coyle is both a spokesperson for the British military and the man responsible for cultivating individuals that will help expand and sustain the empire. Therefore, it is reasonable to read the character as representative of British imperialism itself. For this reason, the shift in perspective from James's earlier ghost stories is significant; Coyle actively participates in Owen's oppression (and thus, in the end, his haunting) and cannot displace blame onto his colonial ancestors.

By directly associating the British Empire with haunting and fatal oppression, "Owen Wingrave" provides a narrative of recognizing the horrors of the colonizer self

rather than ignoring them. I argue that the story depicts a colonizer coming to terms the atrocities in which he has been complicit, a theme that is as important to the tale as Owen's narrative of oppression. By virtue of his ancestry and situation, Owen also represents the British military, but Coyle is horrified at how quickly the Wingraves mark him as an ideological other and oppress him once he has ceased to endorse British militarism. Throughout the tale, Coyle begins to feel sympathy not only for Owen as a human being, but also for the young man's pacifistic philosophies. These two aspects of Coyle's transformation are related: bearing witness to Owen's victimization at the hands of the elder Wingraves leads Coyle to question the effectiveness of his formerly monodimensional worldview and the imperial endeavors in which he has participated. This questioning leads to Coyle's "crisis of self." By beginning to understand the plight of a victim of imperial militarism, Coyle must either return to the blissful ignorance of his nationalistic worldview or further question the morality of his occupation and British identity. "Owen Wingrave" ends without revealing Coyle's choice, but James seems to admit that no version of colonial or postcolonial history is accurate if the effect on the oppressed is not recognized as part of the colonizer's identity. Acknowledging the presence of the oppressed other does not efface the horrors of colonialism, but it is the first step towards resisting further oppression.

Whereas other protagonists in James's ghost stories may be read as representative of systems of colonial oppression, the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* directly enacts colonial power structures at Bly. One can reasonably read the governess as a colonial settler-ruler acting in the name of the remote power (the master) and attempting to establish her right to inhabit the colony by incorporating Bly's native inhabitants (Miles



and Flora) into her system of control. Because she enters Bly as an outsider, it makes sense that the governess is initially the stranger. Similarly, the ghosts are inherently strange, invading Bly from another realm of existence. It is especially interesting, though, that the text ends with an emphasis on the children's strangeness, considering that Miles and Flora ostensibly belong at Bly more than anyone else. Such a paradigm shift highlights the relativity of the concept of strangeness and the constructions of self and other. Thus, *The Turn of the Screw* depicts the governess's attempts to justify and reinforce her self-image as a colonizer and possessor. James's early American ghost stories confront the legacy of property stolen by European settlers, but *The Turn of the Screw* dramatizes an ongoing attempt at dispossession. After all, Quint and Jessel do not return to haunt those who took their property—as ghosts do in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” and “The Ghostly Rental”—but rather to demonstrate that they can possess the children, as well. The presence of other potential possessors of what the governess calls “our small colony” challenges the governess's system of control and therefore her colonizer identity (196).

The governess's fate perhaps represents the worst-case scenario of questioning the validity of one's own colonizer identity. Both *The Turn of the Screw* and “Owen Wingrave” end cataclysmically: Owen and Miles suffer similarly mysterious deaths that may have been caused by hauntings. Yet “Owen Wingrave” centers on imperial militarism and offers a critique from within this system. The villains are the figurative and literal ghosts of British militarism, and Coyle must recognize that the horrors come from within this system rather than from the other. By contrast, the shifting nature of strangeness is an ever present theme in *The Turn of the Screw* and serves to highlight the

falseness of colonial constructions of self and other; the governess's identity depends on both her ability to possess a colony and her conception of colonial subjects as other. The fact that a sense of strangeness can change throughout the narrative reminds the reader that terms like "self," "other," and "strange" are all a matter of perspective.

Unfortunately, the governess cannot question the validity of her colonizer identity or consider the situation from the other's perspective as Coyle can. Therefore, when her subject Miles dies, the governess's colonizer identity is unsustainable. Without an identifiable other, the governess loses her sense of self, highlighting how baseless her colonial identity had been all along.

Chapter Two examines James's first two ghost stories—"The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" and "The Ghostly Rental"—both set in America and centering on property struggles. These stories allude to the colonial era in different ways, but both dramatize settler anxieties of guilt over indigenous land seizure. The former depicts two sisters' struggle to possess the same English man as a husband, ending in a ghost's homicidal revenge against her dispossessor. In the latter, a daughter fakes her death and pretends to haunt her ancestral home so her father will forgive her for marrying a stranger; once the father dies, his real ghost appears in the house, and the property burns to the ground before the daughter can take possession of it. These early ghost stories establish a theme that continues in James's later ghost stories: to own is also to take from someone else. Only one sister at a time can marry Arthur in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," and Viola must take him from Perdita to gain possession of him. As family, the Diamonds in "The Ghostly Rental" might have been able to co-inhabit the home peacefully, but they refuse to do so, both losing the property as a result.

Chapter Three begins discussion of depictions of British imperialism with “Owen Wingrave,” one of the first ghost stories James wrote after his fifteen-year break from the genre. Something of an anti-war tract, “Owen Wingrave” also shows James’s advocacy for a multi-perspective worldview. In true impressionistic form, James’s late work often demonstrates a tendency towards the consideration of multiple perspectives in the interest of presenting a more accurate version of reality. In this chapter, I discuss James’s depiction of a representative of the imperial British military beginning to recognize the validity of a pacifist’s worldview, and in turn recognizing the physical, psychological, and ideological violence Britain commits against its colonial victims.

After discussing the ways “Owen Wingrave” specifically places the imperial military under the microscope, I conclude with a study of a text that more generally examines colonial power structures and the relationship between the colonizer self and the colonized other. Chapter Four focuses on *The Turn of the Screw* and what I term “the discourse of strangeness.” Since the reader receives the account of the hauntings at Bly directly from the governess, the novella demonstrates the same overall shift in point of view as James’s other ghost stories—the preface and frame narrative notwithstanding. In this way, the insularity of the text further invites examination of the self/other binary. Descriptions of who and what are “strange” in *The Turn of the Screw* shift over time to critique constructions of otherness at the most basic level. A lexical analysis of the text in terms of “strangeness” reveals that the novella’s depiction of who is strange—and thus other—moves from the governess and master to Quint and Jessel and finally to the children. Considering the geographical and national connotations of “strange,” the

novella's message is that the colonizer—the one who implements a system of control—is a more terrifying other than the colonized.

Perhaps the most consistent thread running through these ghost stories is James's resistance to providing easy or happy endings.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, characters who attempt to control or possess others are not easily forgiven. Of course, James also benefited from his privileged Anglo-American identity in a number of ways. However, this does not mean Britain and America could not find themselves in James's lens as he attempted to record the world from as many viewpoints as possible. If James cultivated some of his own willful ignorance in clinging to his Anglophilia and his soldier friends, he was also too savvy an artist to simply glorify imperialism and colonialism. Ghost stories may in fact be a significant way James attempted to process his own anxieties (and culpability) surrounding colonial and postcolonial reality. From critiquing the social construct of property ownership to revealing the oppressiveness of imperialist systems of control, James's ghost stories present a means of questioning the validity of colonizer identity, and thus a means of deconstructing the binary of the Western colonizing self and the indigenous other. James's ghosts seem to haunt his characters with the same unspoken question they ask of his Western readers: "Who is truly more horrifying: me or you?"

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<sup>2</sup> Though not addressed at length in this thesis, two of James's final ghost stories feature potentially happy endings: "The Third Person" and "The Jolly Corner."

## Chapter Two

“I guess it belongs to them that are in it”

### James’s American Ghosts and the Problem of “Rightful” Property Ownership

Critics are often eager to explore James’s complex and at times contradictory feelings for Britain and his native United States, but his earliest ghost stories are distinctly American in setting and even in genre. Two of James’s first four published ghostly tales are set in America<sup>3</sup>; even restricting the category of “ghost story” to a tale that features an actual ghost rather than merely supernatural elements, his first two published ghost stories are set in colonial or recently postcolonial New England towns that recall the work of Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne. That being said, after “The Ghostly Rental” was published in 1876—roughly a year after James left America—he did not write another ghost story for fifteen years, and he did not write a true ghost story set in America again until “The Jolly Corner,” which was published in 1908. Interestingly, both of the early ghost stories—“The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” and “The Ghostly Rental”—focus on disputes of property in addition to the more general themes of nationality and strangeness that permeate his later ghost stories,

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<sup>3</sup> As discussed earlier, since I am ultimately concerned with the function of ghosts in folkloric and literary contexts, it makes more sense to exclude the stories that explore the supernatural in the forms of curses, relics, and Modern Spiritualism rather than actual ghosts. Based on this distinction, within the time period discussed in this chapter, the stories that I exclude are “De Grey: A Romance” (1868) and “The Last of the Valerii” (1874), all concerned with curses or relics. A similar story that Edel excludes from his volumes of “ghostly tales” is “Adina” (1868).

Because I go on to explore differences in James’s American and English ghosts, it is worth noting that “Adina” and “The Last of the Valerii,” both set in Italy, fit into neither group.

most of which are, by contrast, set in the English countryside. Indeed, James's focus on property in his early American ghost stories draws the reader's attention to narratives of indigenous dispossession and erasure, as well as the inextricability of these narratives with American settler identity.

#### "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes"

Although the tale is overwrought in a way that is faithful to the genre of gothic romance, the story of "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" is simple. The Willoughbys are a well-to-do Massachusetts family in the mid-eighteenth-century who are presumably living off the inheritance left to them by their late father. The sisters Viola<sup>4</sup> and Perdita are inseparable until their brother, Bernard, brings home Arthur Lloyd, a friend from the university, and the pair must vie with each other for his affections. With some careful coaxing by Mrs. Willoughby, Arthur ultimately chooses to ask for the hand of Perdita, the younger sister, in marriage. Viola reluctantly gives Perdita her best wishes for the marriage, though she clings to her resentment all the same; after changing from her wedding dress into a riding dress, Perdita returns to her room just before leaving with Arthur and is horrified to find her older sister wearing her dress, as well as the pearls her husband had just given to her. Roughly two years later, Perdita falls terribly ill after childbirth while Arthur is visiting Viola, and the knowledge of this visit gives her

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<sup>4</sup> The text from which I quote in the body of this paper—unless otherwise noted—is the original 1868 version of "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" that was featured in *Atlantic Monthly*, though James reprinted the tale in the British collection *Stories Revived* in 1885. The most significant revisions he made for the second edition simply changed the names of the characters: the Willoughby family became the Wingraves (like the family of the 1892 ghost story "Owen Wingrave"), and for some reason, James opted with the heroine of a different Shakespearean comedy by changing Viola's name to Rosalind. Additionally, the 1868 text describes Viola's name as "romantic" and Perdita's as "more serious," while Perdita is not described as such in the 1885 text (297).

feelings of “mistrust” and “cold horror” towards her sister in the hour of her death (310). After a couple years spent as a widower, Arthur becomes interested in Viola and her devilish arts and quietly marries her. The second marriage is marred by bad luck, it seems; after three years, Viola has failed to get pregnant, and Arthur has lost a considerable sum of money. Finally, Viola insists she is entitled to anything her sister left behind and opens the chest containing Perdita’s wedding dress, which Arthur had promised on her deathbed never to give to anyone but their daughter. Upon doing so, Viola is killed by Perdita’s “vengeful ghostly hands” (319).

While I will later discuss the implications of James’s use of a ghost story as a vehicle for a statement on property and the problem of rightful ownership, some of the tale’s language bears noting. To an extent that is not apparent in James’s other early ghost stories, there is a distinct privileging of English culture and lineage in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes.” Though one could reasonably guess the Willoughbys’ English heritage based on their social standing and life situation, the narrator makes a point to state this explicitly: Bernard’s features “were the sign of genuine English blood” (297). It is also revealed over the course of the next two pages that his father was “a great reader of Shakespeare” (297)—hence the sisters’ names—and his last request in life is “an earnest entreaty that, at the proper age, his son should be sent out to England, to complete his education at the University of Oxford” (298). Later, it is an attractive Englishman that Bernard brings home. As Arthur and Perdita begin their life together, the narrator emphasizes the Englishness of the matter: they “spend the first days of their wedded life

at the country house of an English gentleman.”<sup>5</sup> And in fact, the phrase stating that the wedding ceremony “had been performed by an English parson” is not even grammatically incorporated into the sentence, but rather inserted between two em dashes (307). This highlights the fact that the detail is additional rather than vital, but also that the narrator feels it is relevant to include such information, nonetheless.

Perhaps the clearest passage in which English identity is presented as superior to American identity is the comparison between Arthur and the young men of New England:

Among the young men their friends and neighbors, the *belle jeunesse* of the Colony, there were many excellent fellows, several devoted swains, and some two or three who enjoyed the reputation of universal charmers and conquerors. But the home-bred arts and the somewhat boisterous gallantry of those honest young colonists were completely eclipsed by the good looks, the fine clothes, the punctilious courtesy, the perfect elegance, the immense information, of Mr Arthur Lloyd. (299-300)<sup>6</sup>

Among multiple characters and even the narrator, then, it seems clear that to be English in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” is to be superior to your American brothers.

This too signals the beginning of an understanding that America is not merely an English

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<sup>5</sup> Neither the 1868 nor the 1885 text is entirely clear on this matter, but the circumstances suggest that the couple honeymoon in America, not England, though the house is owned by an Englishman.

<sup>6</sup> An added sentence that closely follows this passage in the 1885 text illustrates this point even further: “There were a dozen reasons why Miss Wingrave and her sister should have thought their other male acquaintance made but a poor figure before such a perfect man of the world” (183).



colony but also has a national identity independent of England's, an identity that becomes complicated when one must acknowledge the presence of indigenous populations.

The text's privileging of English over American identities recalls Edward Said's ideas about how the white Westerner constructs a racial and colonial other. Said writes of the European sense of superiority that is reinforced by inventing the inferiority of the colonized other:

Thus representations of what lay beyond insular or metropolitan boundaries came, almost from the start, to *confirm* European power. There is an impressive circularity here: we are dominant because we have the power . . . and they don't, because of which they are *not* dominant; they are inferior, we are superior . . . [this worldview] will operate during the eighteenth century with opinions about white colonists in Australia and the Americas . . . At the margins of Western society, all the non-European regions . . . were made subservient to Europe, which in turn demonstrably continued to control what was not Europe, and represented the non-European in such a way as to sustain control. (106)

Especially in the early colonial period that provides the setting for "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," control—and thus possession—of the colonies depends on the European power establishing a "right" to the lands by constructing this sense of superiority over the colonies, including over the white settlers. Even though the story focuses on such white settlers, the passages of James's tale that address American identity reinforce stereotypes of primitivity or savageness that Western settlers have so often ascribed to indigenous peoples: despite being white and descending from English blood, Viola and Perdita are imbued with "a certain native-grown gentle *brusquerie* and

wildness” (298). From an Anglo- or Eurocentric perspective—a perspective represented here by Arthur—the girls’ slight rudeness and wildness are of course more sensually exotic than dangerous or undesirable in girls who can claim English heritage. Even so, they are clearly marked as other to the English. By emphasizing the importance of attending an English university over an American one, finding an English pastor for a wedding, and using an Englishman’s house for a honeymoon, “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” depicts the same kind of imperial positional superiority that Said outlines.

This superiority is clearly relevant to the sisters when chasing a potential husband, and their personal prioritization of Arthur over his American counterparts might even signify their attempt to forge a more legitimized colonial identity and thus “sustain control.” Pal Ahluwalia points out that settler colonies like America were constructed with the idea that the indigenous population would be eradicated over time, ultimately leaving only the white settlers. Though Australia is the primary focus of Ahluwalia’s study, the following statement on settler identity is relevant:

For the post-colonial white settler subjects, there is a dual burden—not only do they have to recover their own narratives but they must also recognise that they have blocked the narratives of the indigenous populations which they rendered invisible. It is this double inscription of resistance and authority which constitutes the settler subject. (508)

Viola and Perdita are in such a position: daughters of an Englishman, they are nonetheless considered “native-born” as Americans, hence their descriptions noted above. In fact, their competition to marry Arthur may represent an attempt to legitimize their identities as ruling Westerners rather than American colonists.

To further explore the sisters' courting of Arthur, English superiority in the tale is often inextricable from matters of romance and courting, which are repeatedly described in terms of conquest. As quoted in the passage above, it is the young men who are "conquerors" aiming to woo the colony's young women. Yet, interestingly, it is the women who become the conquerors before long. When the sisters compete for Arthur's attention, they begin to carefully select their clothes and jewelry "to devise such little implements of conquest" in the 1885 text (185).<sup>7</sup> And both texts seem to draw a connection between the tale's love triangle and the war over the colonies, the 1868 version being quoted here:

There had not been a particle of sentiment between [Arthur and Viola], and he had not the slightest suspicion that she coveted anything more than his fraternal regard. He was quite at ease; life promised so well, both domestically and financially. The Lurid clouds of revolution were as yet twenty years beneath the horizon, and that his connubial felicity should take a tragic turn it was absurd, it was blasphemous, to apprehend. (305-06)

Divorced from a reading of the text's colonial implications, this reference to the American Revolution actually makes little sense; the story's temporal indications are sometimes vague, but there is almost no way to assume the tale covers a timespan of more than ten years following this passage. Thus, Arthur's eventual financial troubles are seemingly not related to the revolution, which suggests that this passage deliberately

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<sup>7</sup> The original reads, "little implements of coquetry" (302). There is one other general difference between the texts that might be pertinent to a postcolonial reading, which is a change from terms like "country" to explicitly mention the "colony," but I assume the fact that *Stories Revived* was published in the U.K. rather than the U.S. largely accounts for such changes.

connects the sisters' competition with colonialism and the war fought over possession of the colonies.<sup>8</sup> In this vein, I would add that said romantic competition seems to center around possession of both a husband and more tangible property, especially considering the wedding dress's role as a crux of the narrative.

While one could interpret these themes in multiple ways, a sense of Anglo-European superiority and the theme of seizure of others' property in terms of "conquest" are interrelated and permeate James's tale; it is impossible to ignore property's importance in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," and thus it is impossible to ignore the colonial identity politics that underlie the primary property dispute. "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" certainly reverses traditions of Victorian fiction by depicting the women attempting to court the object of their desires. Such agency reveals the Willoughbys' recognition of various colonial identities, though; a marriage to a native Englishman would reinforce their roles as ruling settlers rather than American colonists under the control of the remote power. In light of this element of the love triangle, it is no wonder that Perdita is so concerned with the inheritance of her property, considering that colonial rule is a matter of both sustained possession and a construction of authority.

It may be inaccurate to call "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" an outright satire of melodrama or gothic romance, but it is worth noting that much of James's talk of Englishness is satirical rather than perfectly representative of his thoughts on England and America. Further, James is perhaps deliberately mimicking or recalling such attitudes between American settlers and the English to reinforce the tale's sense of setting. Even though in the study of literature it is sometimes taken as granted that works record

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<sup>8</sup> Notably, a conflict with which this timeframe corresponds is the Seven Years' War, which had significant implications for Britain's colonial actions on multiple continents.

elements of the thoughts and experiences of their time, James explicitly made this his literary mission. James famously wrote about his desire to record the realities around him, cultural or otherwise, “to leave a multitude of pictures of my time, projecting my small circular frame upon as many different spots as possible and going in for number as well as quality, so that the number may constitute a total having a certain value as observation and testimony” (“To Robert Louis Stevenson” 240). Though it may be pedantic to put all of James’s works under the microscope in light of this statement, the thought experiment is an interesting and potentially enlightening one: when Irving and Hawthorne, among others, had already done a good deal to construct an American myth and literature, what might James be “projecting his frame upon” by writing a pre-revolutionary ghost story?

My suggestion is that “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” at least in part, records Americans’ fear that they do not truly own the ground they walk on, as well as the fear that the rightful owner may return to reclaim it and possibly use violence to do so. As I have noted, property is central to the tale. Clair Hughes points out that, in addition to the dress and other material belongings, Arthur himself is made a piece of property in the sister’s battle; for Hughes, the competition is not motivated by the promise of personal gain or even triumph over the other party so much as “by a fierce desire for possession” of Arthur, even if there may be material gains associated with marriage (172). It is true that this may be a reflection of the debate over inheritance and laws of entail that lasted well into the nineteenth century, but in a theoretical sense, even this debate has postcolonial implications; as Holly Jackson notes, “By the mid-nineteenth century, a conception of hereditary property had emerged that heightened Americans’

obsession with ancestral identity while allowing them to distance themselves from the ‘artificial’ inherited distinctions of the old world” (271).

Here, it is difficult not to think of Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*. Given its colonial New England setting, focus on moral intrigue, and invocation of the supernatural to reinforce the themes of sin and morality, “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” certainly plays into such a tradition; a number of critics have noted connections between Hawthorne and James, but perhaps most pertinent to this study is Joseph Andriano’s observation regarding supernatural stories that “it was Nathaniel Hawthorne who . . . showed [James] how richly symbolic a tale of the Uncanny can be” (118). I read this connection as further reinforcing the postcolonial tensions of James’s tale, as American national identity and the presence (or non-presence) of Native Americans in New England are themes that haunt Hawthorne’s work. In particular, *The House of the Seven Gables* is a narrative in which a powerful social unit—Colonel Pyncheon—devises a way to dispossess a less powerful social unit—Matthew Maule—of property and land. As a result, the Maule ghosts haunt the Pyncheon family and estate until the descendants of both families can make amends for past wrongs. Renée Bergland’s *The National Uncanny* explores at length the ways in which nineteenth-century white writers, including Hawthorne, authorized or attempted to justify native erasure. But the way the modern-day Pyncheons are haunted by the ghosts of those who have a right to the land they inhabit suggests that Hawthorne was more receptive to American postcolonial tensions than might be assumed. Indeed, the same could be said of James’s early ghost stories.

The theme of American settler guilt over the ownership of the nation can be seen in another similarity between “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” and *The House of*

*the Seven Gables*: the dispossessed actively return to reclaim their birthright. Both narratives center on conflicts among white settlers, of course, but the theme of land seizure—as opposed to other forms of property disputes—makes it difficult to ignore the presence of the indigenous population in the white American unconscious. In light of this, it is also worth considering the internal or inactive role of many of James’s ghosts. Describing the American tradition of ghost stories James’s early tales follow, Pericles Lewis notes the psychological connection: “James’s stories owe something to the American tradition of Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe, which frequently suggests that ghosts are the imaginary products of deranged minds” (43). While this is accurate for many of James’s ghostly tales—in part because he is a realist writer who also penned many ghost stories, James’s work is not uncommonly presented as *the* example of the “psychological ghost story”—such a statement ignores the fact that, incredibly, Perdita’s ghost in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” is a real, physical force whose presence in the mortal world is entirely recordable; she leaves behind scratch marks and directly causes her sister’s death. This is notable because, in folklore, it is common for ghosts to simply make their presence known rather than actively doing anything.

Though viewing ghosts in purely psychological terms is a relatively new phenomenon, a similar conclusion could be drawn about ghost stories stretching back centuries: the revenge-seeking ghost is a manifestation of the living’s guilt, and when it causes a death, it is often because the guilty have driven *themselves* to their fate. As Lewis notes, in most of James’s work, whenever the text suggests that ghosts have caused a death, the information is not stated explicitly and is thus left ambiguous. This is

certainly true in his most famous ghost stories, including “Sir Edmund Orme,” “Owen Wingrave” and *The Turn of the Screw*; the ghosts in these tales are presented as real to varying degrees of arguability, but the deaths involved are just as likely to have been the result of gnawing personal guilt or an inexplicable, but natural, cause.<sup>9</sup> And though I would argue that the Maule ghosts and descendants have a certain ability to fight back and claim their property in *The House of the Seven Gables*, it is also characteristic of Hawthorne’s work to present both a natural and a supernatural option; after describing a parade of ghosts, the narrator comments on the events in this way: “The fantastic scene, just hinted at, must by no means be considered as forming an actual portion of our story. We were betrayed into this brief extravagance by moonbeams” (198). So there is ambiguity for most of James’s ghosts and for most ghosts in the literary tradition he follows in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes.” However, the tale’s ending could not speak more clearly to the contrary: “On [Viola’s] limbs was the stiffness of death, and on her face, in the fading light of the sun, the terror of something more than death. Her lips were parted in entreaty, in dismay, in agony; and on her bloodless brow and cheeks there glowed the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands” (318-19). It is possible that the tale, in the vein of Irving, is meant to comment on the folklore of ghost stories as much as it participates in the tradition. Even so, there is no other ending

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<sup>9</sup> Related to the point about the ambiguous reality of ghosts in Hawthorne and James, these deaths provide another connection between *The House of the Seven Gables* and James. The deaths I reference in James’s ghost stories could be natural, but have no immediately obvious cause; “Owen Wingrave” specifically uses the catchall medical term “fit.” In Hawthorne’s novel, many Pyncheons die of a sort of unexpected internal hemorrhaging, which could be entirely natural, congenital even, but is given the potential explanation of a ghostly curse from Matthew Maule.



of a ghostly tale in James's oeuvre that is stated in such clear terms. The ghost is real, and there is a significant real-world price to pay for having taken her property.

The fact that Perdita is so uncharacteristic of James's ghosts—and in large part uncharacteristic of the tradition James invokes—invites further exploration of how such a figure should affect readings of the tale. Fred Chappell notes that the function of Perdita's real ghost is in large part similar to the ghosts that may be construed as imagined by James's narrators; referencing Jamesian ghosts in general, Chappell writes, "For Henry James's purpose the apparitions do exist; that is, the question of their existence or non-existence serves the same purpose that the undeniable malevolent appearance of the ghosts would serve: to focus the conflicts of motives among the characters" (183). And concerning these motives, Masayuki Akiyama draws attention to revenge in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," also raising an important point:

[Perdita] dies with bitter regret because she is unable to make sure of her baby's upbringing. Because she worries about her elder sister, [Viola], she does not have a peaceful sleep in her grave. Then her soul returns to the world and kills her sister. Why doesn't Perdita take revenge on her husband, Lloyd, who broke his promise? (51).

Akiyama's conclusion is that, in some ghost stories, a woman is more likely to enact revenge against another woman than against a man. However, as the sisters' battle is presented, Arthur is never much of an agent. The marriages come down to his choice, to be sure, but the real conflict is between the sisters concerning who has rightful ownership of Arthur as a piece of property. Aside from the fact that the narrative seems to make an attempt to distance Arthur from culpability—giving Viola the key to Perdita's chest, he

declares, “I wash my hands of it! . . . God forgive me!”—whatever sins he may have committed are presented as tertiary to the real story of the sisters’ conflict (317). It seems Arthur himself is not the problem, but clearly ownership and control of property are important enough to Perdita to justify her returning to fatally defend what she feels is her own.

Property is all-important to the ghost’s purpose and function in the story. By giving Perdita a physical form—or at least a form with physical powers—James creates a narrative in which the dispossessed group is empowered to enact its revenge against the dispossessor. True, the sisters have an equal chance to win Arthur in the beginning; no one has a birthright to him. Yet the text states in no uncertain terms that Viola works to dispossess Perdita of her property once she has married and legally legitimized her claim to the property. In addition to the scene in which Viola dons her sister’s wedding dress, the narrator makes her role in Perdita’s death clear: as Perdita’s condition worsens, the narrator states, “She had not recovered from the shock which Arthur had given her by telling her that in the hour of her agony he had been with Viola” (310). Much like Colonel Pyncheon does to Matthew Maule in *The House of the Seven Gables*, Viola causes (however indirectly) her sister’s death, takes her property, and occupies what used to be Perdita’s home.

To allow a ghost to physically pursue its revenge seems even more an active choice on James’s part in light of Mary Hallab’s point that the folktale from which James seems to draw inspiration in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” features a ghost locked in a chest who does not directly attack, exactly, but rather “rises up to accuse the villain and drive him to suicide” (316). Furthermore, Jeff Nunokawa’s discussion of the

role of the marketplace in the Victorian novel presents another literary tradition from which James departs:

grave losses [of property] result less from accident or avarice than from laws of the marketplace situated beyond the province of human error . . . the economic imagination I will audit locates the origin of such losses in the nature of the market and of marketable property rather than in the will or weakness of individuals. (8)

By contract, dispossession in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” is not the result of a nebulous force like the marketplace, even if one considers the role of the marriage market in James’s tale. Rather, specific actors influence gain and loss, and there is little question of whom to blame. Though I do not think the narrative is necessarily a direct allegory for the theft of indigenous lands, the anxiety of a Westerner like James coming to terms with his occupation of a stranger’s stolen land—and thus with his own settler or post-settler identity—is certainly present.

#### “The Ghostly Rental”

I find similar themes and some additional postcolonial tensions worth exploring in James’s other early American ghost story, “The Ghostly Rental.” As the title suggests, this tale also focuses on property. The narrator of “The Ghostly Rental,” a young theology student, goes ambling in the New England woods and is deeply, inexplicably attracted to an old abandoned house, later learning that it is supposedly haunted. Spying on the house, he sees an old man enter and exit in the space of just a moment. Trying to discover what his errand might be, the narrator hears that the man, Captain Diamond, seemingly drove his daughter to her death by rejecting her husband in a wild rage. Since

then, her ghost has haunted the house and chased the captain from it, but she also provides quarterly rent to support him. The narrator eventually discovers that the haunting is a sham perpetuated by the daughter, who realized that Captain Diamond would only forgive her for the secret marriage if he thought her dead, explaining, “There have been things in my life he could not forgive” (85). She then witnesses Captain Diamond’s ghost at the moment of his death and faces her own guilt of perpetuating a façade for so long. The hauntings thus allow for a sort of reciprocal revenge, as Captain Diamond and his daughter encounter each other’s ghost—one possibly real and one certainly fake—and are both forced to face their guilt and past wrongs. The tale ends with the mansion burning to the ground and the narrator poking through the debris.

“The Ghostly Rental” shares the themes of rightful ownership and possession/dispossession with “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” but in addition to revenge, the later tale highlights the interrelated themes of strangeness and invasion, which are common characteristics of gothic literature and have significant colonial and postcolonial implications. Such tensions regarding boundaries between “inside” and “outside” are evident in both stories. When Perdita’s ghost appears, it is as a rightful inhabitant who has never left. There is almost no boundary between inner and outer in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” and true ownership of or power over Arthur seems to remain tenuous even during the first marriage. By contrast, characters in “The Ghostly Rental” consistently make strangers of each other. The origin of the conflict is that Captain Diamond’s daughter attempts to bring an unknown outsider into their family via marriage; notably, Captain Diamond supposedly discovers them *within his home* rather than elsewhere, locating the transgression symbolically within the family line

rather than without. When she elects to make a fake ghost of herself, the apparition's revenge is to simultaneously possess the house (in both the spectral and material senses of the word) and to make Captain Diamond a stranger to his own home: "'Leave the house to me!' it said; 'I have marked it for my own. Go off and live elsewhere'" (66). Conversely, when the apparently real ghost appears, it is Captain Diamond reentering the home that was formerly his, "In the hall, at the foot of the stairs" (84). This final meeting of father and daughter also causes the house's destruction: upon seeing her father's ghost, she drops her candle and, in her shock, forgets to attend to the flame.

In this way, like many works of gothic literature, "The Ghostly Rental" is concerned with the contact zones that appear when the boundary between different social units—especially those in which one group has othered another group—collapses. James makes this contact zone physical and geographical by centering the conflict on the house (and, by association, the land on which it rests) and who has the right to own and inhabit it. As Sheri Weinstein writes, "In 'The Ghostly Rental,' his characters open themselves and their homes up to possession, and then have to find a way to preserve their selves as they confront the consequences of such penetrations and infiltrations" (271). Here, adding the elements of strangeness and infiltration to the narrative of ownership complicates potential interpretations of who actually has a right to the property: the daughter's "ghost" invades and effectively occupies the house for decades but pays rent to Captain Diamond, thus legally legitimizing his ownership of the space. Upon his death, the rights to the house would theoretically be transferred to his sole descendent (or at least her husband, though there is a suggestion he is either no longer present or was never

her husband at all), but Captain Diamond's ghost enters the space even when he has become a "stranger" and seemingly relinquished his claim to the property.

The text also presents the house and its secrets as completely separate from the surrounding community; the narrator notes, "It is completely closed," and a local replies, "They [the ghosts] never come out, and no one ever goes in" (54). Also considering that the narrator is the only outsider who plays a part in the Diamonds' story—the local quoted above runs into her home and draws the blinds after discussing the haunted house—it would make sense to read the tale's focus as isolationist rather than depicting the invitation of foreign spirits. Andrew Smith reads this theme of isolation further, writing, "The emphasis on a counterfeit ghost also suggests the idea of an estrangement from history – one in which signs can no longer be trusted. What the narrator of 'The Ghostly Rental' pursues, however, is a version of experience in which signs properly signify" (123). I contest this reading in a number of ways. First, lost or misleading signification seems to have been found or corrected in the end: the fake ghost is unmasked, and the daughter provides an explanation for the "real" ghost as "the punishment of my long folly" (84). Second, regardless of the reality of the house's haunting(s), the events are the result of a real, painful family secret. Furthermore, actions have consequences; Captain Diamond's rejection of his daughter and potential son-in-law is repaid with her haunting, and her method of avoiding their conflict is repaid with her father's haunting. If anything, the narrative is especially receptive to the reverberations of history into the present, including the moment of reckoning with past sins. And as I will discuss later, there are significant implications for settler-colonizer identity in the gothic idea that horror and sin originate within the home rather than without.

To this point, the arena of the narrative—whether the setting is the house or, more symbolically, the Diamond family itself—is somewhat small. In true gothic form, the home is figured as the source of horror in “The Ghostly Rental” as in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes.” Even before he learns of the familial unrest underlying the “hauntings,” the narrator of “The Ghostly Rental” notices that the house has something of an otherworldly air. This recalls Sigmund Freud’s point that a “haunted” house is the only true English translation for an “uncanny” house, and that this uncanniness is often based on what is hidden, on “nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed” (148). Uncannily enough, the narrator’s description of the supposedly haunted house suggests such repressed familiarity: “There was no sign of life about it; it looked blank, bare and vacant, and yet, as I lingered near it, it seemed to have a *familiar* meaning” (52, emphasis mine). Just afterwards, the narrator also seems to directly suggest a repression of the past by describing another house “which is in no sense haunted—which has no sinister secrets” (53). Though it remains a pretty house, death and revenge permeate its atmosphere even to a passerby who is unaware of its true history.

Beyond the way in which the house itself represents the horror of the situation within—or more accurately, its horrible history and occasional pseudo-haunting—violence both literal and figurative is depicted solely within the confines of a family unit in “The Ghostly Rental”: the father hurts the daughter, the daughter hurts the father, and the cycle continues. The final act of violence, the burning down of the house, also comes (albeit unintentionally) as a result of the daughter’s interaction with Captain Diamond’s ghost. The narrator attempts to claim some culpability for the fire—“I had not accounted

for the other light, which she had carried into the hall and dropped”—but in the end as in the beginning, it is the house’s inhabitants who wrong each other and must at some point reckon with those wrongdoings (86). In both “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” and “The Ghostly Rental,” the central conflict is catalyzed by the introduction of a stranger into the family unit but this does not change the fact that in both cases, home is the source of haunting and one’s own family members are to blame for such horror.

These themes of strangeness, belonging, and the source of horror in “The Ghostly Rental” conflict with each other at times, as they sometimes do in other works of gothic literature. The horror of invasion and the horror that originates within the home are not incompatible, of course, but they would lead down different paths in a more allegorical reading. Yet it is not unreasonable to view this house as symbolic of a horrifying American past and all its complicated colonial and postcolonial relations. For one thing, the father-daughter conflict may suggest the inheritance of a tradition of guilt and brutalization even more than the sister-sister conflict of “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” recalling the Biblical theme from Horace Walpole’s originating gothic text *The Castle of Otranto* that “*the sins of the fathers are visited on their children,*” a theme Hawthorne also builds on in *The House of the Seven Gables* and that has clear implications for the inheritors of a settler colony (6). To take a more historical reading, as mentioned, James shows the influence of early American writers in “The Ghostly Rental” almost immediately after emigrating.

Indeed, the house itself seems to be instilled with characteristics that align it with America’s past. It is described as “that gray colonial dwelling”; its “solidity and stoutness of timber,” among other characteristics, lead the narrator to assume the house is a vestige



of the mid-eighteenth century, at the latest (52). W. R. Martin and Warren Ober suggest a reading of the tale “as a kind of elegy for a dead-and-gone period of American history”

(4). Martin and Ober also reference a relevant letter in which James touches on his feelings for both America and Europe:

I enjoy America with a poignancy that perpetually surprises me; and have become “reconciled” to it so many times . . . I know that if I ever go abroad for a long residence, I shall at best be haunted and wracked, whenever I hear an American sound, by the fantasy of thankless ignorance and neglect of my native land—and I wish in self defence to make up a little list of accomplished devotions and emotions, which may somewhat abbreviate that sentimental purgatory. (“To Grace Norton” 246)

It would seem that James’s thoughts on America are bittersweet. Martin and Ober also see the references to Andrew Jackson in the tale as representative of James’s nostalgia for a bygone era. My first argument against this reading is that, while James certainly held some confusing and contradictory feelings about soldiers and the Civil War, in particular, Jackson represented a recklessness and unbridled martial aggression that does not seem to fit with the brand of militarism that earned James’s reverence.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, James tends to reject the idea of a one-sided history that is necessary for such nostalgia, even rejecting the possibility of an objective history. Peter Rawlings writes:

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<sup>10</sup> Two especially useful studies of James’s relationship to soldiers and war are Eric Haralson’s “Iron Henry, or James Goes to War” and Daniel Hannah’s “Ornamental Pleasure: James and the British Soldier.” Hannah’s argument is particularly relevant to my point here, as he claims James’s attraction to soldiers was often based on the ornamental nature of the non-combatant British soldier, a figure entirely opposite to Andrew Jackson.

Historians, for James, shared with photographers a destructive urge for completion, for an overwhelming aggregation of detail . . . The commitment of the scientific school of history, for James, was to the sterilities of restoration. The pursuit of the past in the interests of retrieval and the struggle for an objectivity that can only be specious, together with all attempts at completion, or even utterance, have dire consequences for the imagination. (7)

In the tradition of Hawthorne, James is concerned with the ambiguity he sees as so crucial to the literary imagination. But he is also concerned with deconstructing the very idea of historical certainty; the past that comes back to haunt America is not the history that was written, but rather the version of history that has been repressed. The house's appearance reinforces the theme of the resurfacing of a repressed history: "All this had once been painted white, but the broad back of time, leaning against the doorposts for a hundred years, had laid bare the grain of the wood" (52). As made clear by the deterioration of this façade, James presents a house that on one hand hides all its secrets behind its paint and its closed blinds and on the other hand cannot help but reveal its original (and true) state, a conflict that plays out similarly among the characters.

To consider that history is never mono-dimensional for James also raises the question of exactly which part of America's past is being invoked or referenced in "The Ghostly Rental." As in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," I find it difficult to ignore the unspoken presence of Native Americans in the tale based on the theme of rightful ownership and the depiction of violent dispossession. Unlike the earlier tale, though, rightful ownership is more difficult to determine in "The Ghostly Rental"; Weinstein notes that the narrative highlights "the abstract and invisible nature of possession and the

fragile, malleable conditions of ownership” (274). In fact, Weinstein goes a step further to suggest that the tale questions the concepts of ownership and possession at a more basic level: “Possession remains an enigmatic matter . . . In ‘The Ghostly Rental,’ ownership and access are intangible, unpredictable elements which give way, ultimately, to an intricate and psychological penetrative power of individuals” (277). Whereas Perdita has a fairly incontestable claim to Arthur and her wedding dress, wrong follows wrong in “The Ghostly Rental” until it is unclear whose claim to the property is more valid. This quandary is evident in the fact that the house must burn to the ground for the narrative to achieve any sort of resolution; in the hands of either Captain Diamond or his daughter, ownership of the house is always so fragile that the story would not achieve thematic fulfillment if either party received the property. The message, perhaps, is that neither of the nineteenth-century inhabitants of the house can rightfully own the house because neither recognizes that the “colonial dwelling” of the American past is founded on stolen land and on a false sense of ownership.

### Property and Ownership

While examining the ways property struggles play out in human narratives, one must remember that property and ownership are abstract constructions, even though the concepts can refer to tangible assets; after all, one cannot steal something that no one had previously owned. Therefore, it will be useful to examine briefly the ways such concepts of ownership are constructed and sustained. Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann and Melanie Wiber describe property as concerning “the ways in which the relations between society’s members with respect to valuables are given form and significance” (14), also suggesting that these relationships comprise “social units” that can make a claim to

property, “the construction of valuables as property objects,” and the “rights and obligations” that come with ownership (15). Conceptions of property can shift over time—dependent on multiple factors and viewpoints that are not always consistent—especially considering that actual practices related to property do not always align with the practices that are sanctioned by a state or legitimizing body.

Thomas Sikor and Christian Lund make the point that in postcolonial societies, “property regimes are negotiable and fluid to some degree because of the multiplicity of institutions competing to sanction and validate (competing) claims in attempts to gain authority for themselves,” recalling the conflicts of both of James’s early American ghost stories (4). An important element of Sikor and Lund’s argument, too, is that a constructed and legitimized sense of authority is necessary for property ownership. “Legitimized” is a key word here; according to Sikor and Lund’s theory of the interrelatedness of authority and property ownership, power and authority are required for ownership, but it is equally necessary to convince one’s constituents (as a state or representative of the state) or neighbors (as a smaller, more local social unit) that a property claim is valid. Whether or not the argument is truly valid, the public perception that someone is a property’s rightful owner is vital to that person’s ability to possess that property.

In this vein, a good deal of colonial discourse focuses on the justification of land seizure; John Locke’s labor theory of original appropriation played an especially big role in the dispossession of Native Americans.<sup>11</sup> Aside from the many moral implications of

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<sup>11</sup> Such colonial discourse has been the subject of extensive discussion, so I will not repeat it here; a masterful summation of the role of Enlightenment philosophers in the justification and dissemination of colonialism is found in H. M. Bracken’s “Essence, accident and race.” Another interesting and particularly relevant article is John Douglas Bishop’s “Locke’s Theory of Original Appropriation and the Right of Settlement in

these attempts at justification—as well as the real-world results of such discourse—there is no escaping the cognitive dissonance between pro-colonial discourse of property and a more “common sense” conception of ownership; most children are taught something similar to the “first rights” theory of property, the lesson being that they should not take an object that someone else currently (and originally, for the purpose of argument) possesses. Though this theory of property is somewhat crude—and, it bears noting, rarely enacted in such straightforward terms by social or governmental bodies—it raises moral questions that are pertinent to an American of James’s generation: there were once Native Americans on this land, and now someone else owns and inhabits it.

This troubling recognition is one of the reasons Bergland reads Native Americans as somewhat ghostly figures in colonial and early postcolonial discourse: “Indians are figures of melancholy and loss, homelessness and death” (3). The construction of Native Americans as ghostly, departed figures may help banish them from white Americans’ conception of the present, as Bergland argues. Notably, Jodi Byrd also sees this discourse continuing throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: “indigenous peoples are located outside temporality and presence . . . indigenous peoples, especially in lands now occupied by the United States, continue to serve primarily as signposts and grave markers along the road to empire” (6). But for a writer inclined to view events from multiple perspectives—a mode of thought that returns in my discussion of “Owen Wingrave” in Chapter Three—there is always a life preceding the grave marker and a presence for the absence. Indeed, while Locke and others attempted to argue that Native Americans did

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Iroquois Territory,” in which Bishop argues that Locke’s own thoughts on property taken as a whole do not ultimately support European claims to American lands.

not in actuality “own” their land, such justifications likely ring hollow to an observer of history and social reality such as James.

Again, I by no means innovate by drawing attention to white guilt and attempted justification for colonial land seizure, but such themes are necessary to understand the troubled and perplexing role of property in James’s early American ghost stories. This is not to say that the theme of property is absent from James’s later work: for example, “The Jolly Corner” is in many ways about Spencer Brydon’s attachment to his family home in New York, and *The Turn of the Screw* can easily be read as a struggle over the estate at Bly as well as a struggle over the children, as I suggest in Chapter Four. This comes in addition to the dual spectral and proprietorial definitions of “possession,” as well as the fact that ghosts in Western folklore tend to haunt locations (especially houses) as often as they haunt people, if not more. I would also reiterate that property is a social construction in that it requires multiple social units’ recognition of an object or place and the perceived ownership of this possession; this is another way in which *The Turn of the Screw* could be considered a property struggle, since the governess and the ghosts compete for ownership or control of the children, or two “objects” of mutually recognized value. So, in some ways, it would seem that a ghost story is simply a form that James sees as useful to dramatize property struggles. However, there are two fundamental differences in James’s later narratives and his early American ghost stories: the early tales focus on real, legal property in addition to the more figurative dimensions of the concept and actively draw attention to the question of *rightful* ownership rather than simply portraying property struggles.

Though, as I have argued, Arthur can certainly be seen as the real piece of property over which Perdita and Viola fight, there is no question that such a struggle is represented by a physical object in the end: Perdita's wedding dress. Similarly, though the conflict in "The Ghostly Rental" is ultimately one of familial relations, this conflict is mediated through a monetary exchange that recognizes and legitimizes inhabitation of the house for one party and ownership for the other. Moreover, the titles of both of these stories refer to the objects rather than their owners. This seems especially significant considering that the titles of James's later ghost stories often refer to the characters, be they living or dead: this is true of "Sir Edmund Orme," "Owen Wingrave," "The Friends of Friends," and "The Third Person."<sup>12</sup>

This leads to the second difference: by drawing attention to the morality (or immorality) inherent in ownership, the function of property in these early tales is somewhat different from James's treatment of the theme in other, non-paranormal works. Perhaps the most obvious example of property struggles in James's work is *The Spoils of Poynton*, a novel about a woman attempting to keep her house and possessions from falling into her son's hands. A good deal of the scholarship on James and property rightly examines this novel. Sean O'Toole writes, "Intimacy in the novel is established through the material world of objects" (36), and Deborah Wynne notes ways in which James engages with Victorian politics and "foregrounds the issue of women's property rights" (142). Adrian Poole comes closest to aligning James's presentation of property with the abstract concept presented here, but he also only sees this theme beginning in 1897:

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<sup>12</sup> "The Jolly Corner" is of course an example of a title that refers to the site of a haunting rather than the characters involved, yet I find it interesting that "jolly corner" actually refers to the location of the house on the block rather than the actual property.

From this point onwards James's fictions conclude that *all* property is itself a fiction, down to the last nucleus of selfhood, but they also dramatise the massive resistance to this unsettling proposition. There are fictions and fictions after all, and some of the most stubborn are wound round the last bastions of personal identity. (91)

Poole's analysis may hold interesting implications for "The Jolly Corner," where Brydon must confront a ghostly double of himself, the confrontation paralleling his relationship with a property from which he has been absent for decades. But even in his earlier work, James seems to treat conceptions of property and ownership as intersubjective, just as he treats the psychological reality of his characters.

Despite Poole's more nuanced reading, I reference these studies of property in *The Spoils of Poynton* to point out that they focus on ways the text shows pragmatic or material concerns. In O'Toole's reading, personal property is largely a means of showing how characters interact; it is a means to James's end of realist fiction. And even Poole mentions the invented nature of property to refer, like Wynne, to the political aspects of the novel. Lee Clark Mitchell's reading of *The Spoils of Poynton* hints at themes relevant to my reading of property struggles in James's early ghost stories; Mitchell sees James's "abiding interest in the larger question of possession and possessions, of treating others as things even as things themselves are granted sovereign value" (20-21) in *The Spoils of Poynton*, also referring to the novel's "central ethical issue" as the question of "how do we possess one another" (35). But Mitchell, too, seems to ignore tales like "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" and "The Ghostly Rental" when he writes of "the vexed implications of possession James had earlier presented in relatively straightforward



terms” (21).<sup>13</sup> To the contrary, these early ghost stories function to interrogate the same implications of possession. To repeat a question I posed earlier: who really owns a ghost-infested rental house, the living or the dead? And is a dead wife—who has no use for a dress at present other than protecting her daughter’s inheritance—really more entitled to physical property than her living sister?

Since there is certainly a question of rightful or moral ownership in *The Spoils of Poynton*, I should further refine my argument regarding James’s early ghost stories: in forcing the reader to question the morality of ownership, these tales suggest that one cannot rightfully own anything without taking it from someone else.<sup>14</sup> This is, after all, basic property theory: the Benda-Beckmanns and Wiber prioritize the role of social units in conceptions of property because one cannot “own” anything if there is no possibility that someone else could make a claim to it. Even claiming first rights deprives someone else of the future use of that property. This is equally true of a wedding dress, a house, and a husband. To earn Arthur as her husband, Viola must not only woo him, but also deprive Perdita of this possession, and Perdita does the same to Viola by marrying him first. In “The Ghostly Rental,” the local’s suggestion that the house “belongs” to the ghosts who occupy it follows a similar logic: they have only earned ownership of the house by eradicating the living, by taking the property from somebody else (54).

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<sup>13</sup> Mitchell’s reading is more concerned with household material possessions—Mrs. Gereth’s “things”—than with home or land ownership, though both are certainly central to the novel.

<sup>14</sup> Though he is ultimately more concerned with the Victorian marketplace than land seizure at the edges of empire, Nunokawa expresses a similar idea in spectral terms when discussing property exchanges in Dickens’ *Little Dorrit*: “The specter that haunts Clennam’s inheritance is not simply the rumor that it is constituted in part by a particular kind of appropriation . . . but a more general apprehension that is expressed but not comprehended by his suspicion of a particular theft . . . This rule makes all acquired property as haunted as the house of Merdle” (22-23).

In a way, this reality is the most monstrous, terrifying specter in both of these early tales: American settlers and their descendants cannot own any property or occupy any land that has not already been taken from the indigenous population. Whereas *The Spoils of Poynton* depicts an ongoing property struggle, James's early tales show the aftermath of such a struggle in which the dispossessed have been written out of the narrative.<sup>15</sup> Yet James somewhat empowers the dispossessed: Perdita's ghost violently kills Viola to balance the scales of justice, and Captain Diamond's ghost chases his daughter from the house just as her false ghost had chased him out. The dispossessors are not allowed to rest easy because they are forced to confront the legacy—and the consequences—of their original act of taking possession. Rather than drawing attention to guilt, as many white writers' Native American ghosts do,<sup>16</sup> James's early ghosts pass a clear judgment on those who “take.”

It is also notable that James uses ghosts to dramatize such narratives and ideas. For comparison, *The Spoils of Poynton* ends about as cataclysmically as the tales discussed here: the house burns to the ground just as in “The Ghostly Rental.” Between living claimants, though, this mutual dispossession has fewer postcolonial implications. By dramatizing a similar theme with ghostly *revenants*—ghosts who also haunt American settings as opposed to the English setting of *Poynton*—James makes it clear that at least one party is already dispossessed. The real source of horror is not the ghosts

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<sup>15</sup> In contrast, during their discussion of British imperialism, Chapters Three and Four address James's depiction of ongoing property struggles and colonial endeavors.

<sup>16</sup> Chapter One of Bergland's *The National Uncanny* does fantastic work summing up such invocations of native ghosts in nineteenth-century literature. One interesting element of Bergland's argument that is relevant here is the suggestion that by constructing Native Americans as ghosts and locating them within the American imagination, white writers were able to more easily envision natives as eradicated from American lands, even if there was personal guilt associated with such ghosts.

themselves, but the potential for evil and violent dispossession that exists within those who take from others; the horror originates within the colonizer's metaphorical home. Though Martha Banta does not see this theme appearing until later works, perhaps James did indeed understand the epistemic or revelatory value of representing American narratives of ownership with ghosts: "the failure to know does not come because one is haunted, nor does the success of knowing come in spite of hauntedness; rather, awareness may be attained through the saving effects of 'the sacred terror'" (110). If James did not directly fight the mechanisms of colonialism and Native American erasure, he could certainly comment on the Westerner's hubris of assuming an entitlement to ownership of the New World.

## Chapter Three

“Ah we’re tainted all!”

Spencer Coyle and the Imperial British Military’s Crisis of Self in “Owen Wingrave”

Even though “Owen Wingrave” is not told from the titular character’s perspective, there are many reasons most critics assume he is the most important character in the story. The young man certainly represents both the center of conflict and the thread that runs through the tale; Owen is present from the first line and to the final line, the majority of the story takes place at the Wingrave family estate, and Owen must ultimately face a ghost to provide a narrative resolution. George Monteiro observes a detached quality of protagonists and narrators throughout James’s fiction, writing, “the narrator’s self-revelations are almost always overshadowed by the story he tells” (42). James also assumes Owen’s narrative is the main point of the story; he refers unambiguously to Owen as “my hero,” whose fate and situation represent the “only one question” of concern in the tale (“To Bernard Shaw” 514). And to read the text as an anti-war tract, as many critics do, is to find conflict ultimately serves “to demonstrate the inspirational value of Owen’s resistance,” in Eric Haralson’s words (49). In this way, it is safe to say that the pacifistic Owen, who would rather spend an afternoon with his nose in a volume of poetry than contribute to Britain’s imperial war project, might exist in the narrative entirely to communicate James’s own sentiments. In fact, even attacks on the story tend to emphasize the text’s focus on Owen at the expense of other characters and subplots. The story’s resolution has been viewed by many critics as unsatisfying, perhaps

echoing Virginia Woolf's early suggestion that the story's vividly presented secondary characters "all bear of course upon the question of Owen's temperament and situation," and that James fails to realize the full potential of these connections. Woolf asks, "Yet what use is made of them?" (52).

One of Woolf's primary criticisms is that the narrative is too short to adequately explore the characters other than Owen. Indeed, many of the characters in "Owen Wingrave" are painted beautifully but left surprisingly unexplored by James's standards. These characters are static—more *types* than characters, however colorfully described—and the story itself seems to stifle their personal growth just as Paramore suppresses Owen's. Yet this choice may be more deliberate than Woolf assumes, whether the tale is effective as a ghost story or not. It is certainly understandable that critics tend to focus on Owen, but to do so they must ignore the shifting opinions and perceptions of Owen's military crammer Spencer Coyle, perhaps the only truly dynamic character in the story. Though he has been the subject of little critical discussion of "Owen Wingrave," Coyle's thematic role in the narrative is especially significant considering the one-dimensional characters surrounding him, and such significance requires further study than the character has previously received. Coyle undergoes a transformation—a questioning of previously held suppositions—that represents the British military being forced to face the victims and consequences of its own imperial practices. Thus, "Owen Wingrave" interrogates the moral implications of Britain's claim to its colonies and the ongoing oppression of indigenous populations necessary to assert this claim.

The storyline of "Owen Wingrave" is straightforward, as are the text's connections with British imperialism. Owen is an astounding candidate for the military

and comes from a long line of distinguished soldiers. The story opens just after Owen announces he has decided to give up his military training, and Coyle expresses his disapproval of this change of heart in no uncertain terms: “I’m unspeakably disgusted. You’ve made me dreadfully ill” (269). Despite Coyle’s protests, Owen is more interested in the world of thought than the defense and support of the British Empire. He sits in a park and reads Goethe. He philosophizes on the reasoning and morality of war rather than blindly participating in the enterprise. There is some suggestion that the melodramatic reactions of Owen’s friends and family are related to a more general fear for the state of the empire; for instance, Coyle says to Owen’s friend Lechmere at one point, “He ought n’t to talk to *you* that way. It’s corrupting the youth of Athens. It’s sowing sedition” (275). But for the most part, it seems these characters are actually more concerned about the reputation of Owen and the Wingrave family. Concerned for his student’s future, Coyle reaches out to all of Owen’s acquaintances he can find in a desperate attempt to gain support for his cause and accordingly bring the young man to his senses. As a result, Coyle and his wife, along with Lechmere, go to the Wingrave family estate at Paramore in a final effort to talk some sense into Owen. These efforts are largely ineffectual, but Owen must defend his choices against more than just living assailants: it is presumed that a ghost haunts Paramore, somehow connected to Owen’s great-great-grandfather Colonel Wingrave, who beat his young son to death. After attempting to spend a night in Paramore’s haunted room—the text implies that he “stands up” to the specter in some way—Owen is found dead, his life presumably being the price for freedom from his martial ancestry.

Without a doubt, the themes of tradition, ancestry, and inheritance are the story's most apparent—and quite possibly most important—topics of discussion. Given the amount of gender and sexuality criticism in James studies, it is unsurprising that these themes in “Owen Wingrave” are often interpreted as being related to sexuality and the resistance of patriarchal gender roles, not uncommonly with overlap between the two.<sup>17</sup> Examining conceptions and presentations of the self in the story, Nicholas Harris finds, “The particular variety of Narcissism here concerns the man facing his patriarchal roots, the confrontation of a self as a product of a family that thrusts its patriarchal views upon its male members and forces them to question themselves in terms of those values” (199). In Harris's reading, “This patriarchal evil” (200) and “a false sense of masculinity” (203) effectively *are* the ghosts, since the ghost's existence is never quite proven but the oppressive gender expectations of Owen's family and friends are clear and ever present; he must either perform his masculine role of soldier or face ostracization.

Especially in light of recent work in James biography that theorizes James's role as a “gay author,” Owen's assertion of his identity and his family's resistance have also been read in terms of his sexuality. Although not a definitive statement of sexuality, Owen's initial (and sufficiently euphemistic) explanation of his decision not to become a soldier certainly seems to resemble coming out of the closet: “You're very angry with me and I expected it . . . Every one else will let me have it of course. I'm prepared for that—I'm prepared for everything. It's what has taken the time: to be sure I was prepared. I think it's your displeasure I feel most and regret most. But little by little you'll get over it” (270). Some critics have given queer readings directly to James's text, but it may be

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<sup>17</sup> Notably, a number of critics have identified the homonyms “Paramore” and “paramour” to reinforce such readings.

useful to note the greater body of critical discussion of the opera setting of “Owen Wingrave” by gay British composer Benjamin Britten. Studies in recent decades have suggested that Britten chose to adapt this James story, in particular, at the time of his “exploration of the possibility of coming out,” as Stephen McClatchie writes (61). Notably, McClatchie also refers to Philip Brett’s connection between gamelan-inspired musical figures in Britten’s operas and constructions of otherness discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. For McClatchie, the departure from this “strange” musical language during *Owen Wingrave*’s final scene represents “Owen’s closeting and death” and “Britten’s [homosexual] self-hatred” (74). Brett reads the same implications in Britten’s opera, calling Owen’s famous “Peace Aria” a “classic ‘coming out’ scene” and noting that the opera literalizes Owen’s ultimate closeting (“Pacifism, Political Action, and Artistic Endeavor” 183). Indeed, the idea that Owen’s death may be better for the Wingrave family’s reputation—it prevents word of Owen’s shameful new non-military temperament from spreading to other family acquaintances, after all—takes on an especially chilling quality in light of the James estate’s decades-long effort to conceal what Michael Anesko calls James’s “amative intensity when writing to younger men” (207).<sup>18</sup>

In both Brett and McClatchie’s readings, Owen confronts a system and lineage that attempt to dictate his sexuality and gender performativity; thus, both readings may also be analogous to the British citizen’s questioning of the colonial project in which he has previously participated. Hugh Stevens’ queer reading of spectrality in James also

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to the article cited here, Anesko’s subsequent book *Monopolizing the Master: Henry James and the Politics of Modern Literary Scholarship* is relevant, in particular Chapter 5: “The Legend of the Bastard.”



suggests these complicated identity politics of self and other; he writes of “spectral moments in which a troubled observer meets a seductive and destructive ghostly figure, . . . moments, almost invariably charged with homoerotic energies” related to several of James’s ghost stories, including “Owen Wingrave” (132). I do not necessarily agree with this assessment of homospectrality in “Owen Wingrave”—both the homoeroticism of Coyle and Owen’s relationship and the uncertain identity of Paramore’s ghost are addressed later in this chapter—but Stevens proposes an important point about spectral doubling in James’s ghost stories: ghosts in James’s work often represent the dark regions of the protagonist’s self as much as the horrifying other.

The themes of gender and sexuality always require consideration when discussing otherness in James’s work. However, it is just as likely that Owen is horrified by his participation in a brutal system of colonial war as by a patriarchy that ultimately harms him. Moreover, there is a distinct element of nationalism in Owen’s othering. James Ellis reads the sexual and national aspects of otherness as interrelated in Britten’s opera: “along with nations go subjectivities and . . . subjectivities respond to national allegories . . . An important element of this new mode of relationality . . . is a different relation to the male body” (292). In a similar line of thought, it is valid to read the othering nature of strangeness as national or ethnic as well as sexual in “Owen Wingrave,” considering the interrelationship of patriarchal militarism and colonial warfare that James’s story makes evident.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Tambling also offers a relevant study of sexuality in Britten’s opera in *Opera, Ideology and Film*, though he prefers to focus on the Oedipal implications of the text as a whole, as well as the sexual influences of violence as it is enacted within the Wingrave family.

To this point, the haunting itself has implications for sustaining both masculine gender roles and British imperialism. Indeed, the final confrontation is explicitly based on perceptions of masculinity but also takes on an imperial dimension. It is impossible to escape the influence of gender roles in the haunting, as it is the potential fiancée Miss Kate Julian who pushes Owen to enter the haunted room by suggesting he is more cowardly than Lechmere. When it is made clear that Owen's newfound pacifism has "brought up the question . . . of his pluck," he decides to spend the night in the room to prove his bravery and is subsequently found dead (OW 315). In this instance, Kate's desire is not merely personal; she wants Owen to comply with a broader set of societal gender norms. Durba Ghosh's assessment of studies on gender and colonialism points out the complexity of many white female characters in colonial and postcolonial narratives, making it all the more obvious that Kate fits the description a more conservative young Victorian woman "charged with the responsibilities of upholding the cultural and moral values of empire" (738). In this instance, Kate is the force that explains to Owen the correct behaviors of a British man, and a soon-to-be British soldier in particular. And as Haralson puts it, Owen chooses "dying like a man in order to redefine manly death" (51). But in this instance, Owen's navigation of masculine gender roles cannot be entirely separated from British society's expectation that a real man will work to sustain the empire, no matter the cost.

Indeed, readings of "Owen Wingrave" that focus on the oppressively patriarchal nature of Owen's lineage may actually serve to draw attention to postcolonial tensions in the text, as well: Wingrave family history is woven into British military history itself, but all the geographical markers in this history relate to Britain's Eastern efforts at

colonization. Owen is an orphan of colonial warfare, as “Owen Wingrave the elder had received his death-cut, in close quarters, from an Afghan sabre,” and “at that time in India,” his mother died in childbirth (278). Owen is also Kate’s potential suitor, and her uncle—who had been engaged to Owen’s Aunt Jane before she rejected him, thus sending him off to battle—“had fallen in the Indian Mutiny” (279). These distant British military conflicts are replicated back at home, particularly in the form of Owen’s guardians (an amusingly ill-fitting term here). Jane Wingrave’s “very presence” and “actions” (280) allude to her family’s past and her apparently congenital military prowess, and Coyle states explicitly, “she represents the traditions and the exploits, of the British army. She represents the expansive property of the English name” (274).<sup>20</sup> Sir Philip, too, is “a merciless old man of blood”; it is said that to guess at or to “glance back into his crowded Eastern past” would make him all the more terrifying (279).

Indeed, the excursion to Paramore is presented as a siege against Owen and his newfound pacifism. He is effectively attacked from all sides, as Jane summons his crammer, his personal friend, and a girl he may marry to the estate with his domineering grandfather, where Owen must also reckon with the ghosts of his ancestors. Moreover, as a military orphan, Owen is not a racial or ethnic other, but he is a victim of the Wingrave’s brand of colonial violence. Daniel Hannah suggests James’s use of the term “Oriental” to describe Kate illustrates an “exoticized allure” she holds for him (35).

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<sup>20</sup> In any reading, Jane Wingrave is a powerful, impressive woman. Haralson reads her martial proclivities even further with regards to her broken-off engagement with Kate’s uncle: “Jane is no novice at ‘straighten[ing] out’ young men, having once dispatched a lover to his horrible death in the ‘Indian Mutiny’” (50). I am not certain there is evidence in the text to suggest the action was quite as deliberately cruel as Haralson suggests, but he is right to point out that such a detail contributes to Jane’s overall demeanor of domination and self-assured power.

Hannah points out that Kate is Orientally marked as a child of colonialism, and particularly of colonial war. The same might be said for Owen, who is also potentially marked as other in additional ways; McMaster makes a relevant observation about the “Indian Orphan” stories of the Victorian age, suggesting that the presence of such a figure refers to “the likelihood that [imperial] conflict would erupt into violence, civil or international” (26). Owen is marked as other in such a way that signals to the colonizers the unsustainability of imperialism. Further, Owen’s struggle at Paramore replays narratives of victimization at the hands of the imperial British military, as argued later.

On the subject of the relationship between Owen and the British military tradition, one must remember that the story is not told from his perspective; rather, the point of view is third-person limited, following Coyle. In addition to Monteiro’s observation on James’s narrators that tend to remain distant from the story’s action, the texts in this study show it is not uncommon for James to present his ghost stories from a perspective other than the haunted victim’s: in “The Ghostly Rental,” we do not hear from Captain Diamond or his daughter (whoever we decide the victim is; in truth, both are victimized to an extent), but rather from a nameless narrator who describes their conflict as it plays out. While this is not always the case—Spencer Brydon in “The Jolly Corner” and George Withermore in “The Real Right Thing” seem notable exceptions, although these are both largely told from a third-person limited rather than first-person point of view—the same is true for many of James’s ghost stories, including “Sir Edmund Orme” and “The Friends of Friends,” as well.<sup>21</sup> What distinguishes Coyle from these other main

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<sup>21</sup> *The Turn of the Screw* presents another possible exception because the narrating governess is certainly haunted by Quint and Jessel. I exclude the governess from this list because she conceives of the children as the real victims. As I explore in Chapter Four,

characters is that he actively participates in the victimization of Owen before growing more sympathetic to his former student's plight. "Owen Wingrave," then, forces the reader to confront the same problem as Coyle: even if Owen's final stand is heroic, the Wingrave family, and thus the environment of late imperial British militarism, have created the need for resistance and thus created the victim.

Coyle's attempts to grapple with his cognitive dissonance throughout the narrative represent an incredibly significant element of "Owen Wingrave" that is often overlooked. I have already noted Coyle's initial disgust, as well as his perception of Owen's pacifism as an affront to the British army and to British identity.<sup>22</sup> Within the first few pages, Coyle speaks of changing Owen's mind in martial terms, and specifically in terms of allegiance against Owen: "I think his family can be trusted to come down on him, but every influence should be set in motion" (274). This is the side of Coyle the reader first sees, and the earliest suggestions of Coyle's potential for sympathizing with Owen seem to come more from personal sympathies than from ideological or pragmatic concerns. Even as he fights against Owen's decision in the beginning, Coyle's affections for the young man are clear, and the interest he develops in protecting Owen from his besieging friends and family seems like the concern of, at the least, a father figure or close friend: "I don't know when I've taken such an interest in a young man . . . I like him, I believe in him" (282). In addition to work in Britten and James studies viewing Owen as haunted by

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regardless of her failure, the governess attempts to control and possess the children. Though the ghosts may victimize the governess by challenging this system of control, the fact that she cannot see the supposed communions among the victimized children and ghosts aligns her with the "detached observer" group.

<sup>22</sup> I have introduced a number of quotations to illustrate both Coyle's general feelings and Jane Wingrave's persona; a longer passage especially pertinent to Coyle's initial position against Owen—and from which I pulled several of these quotations—is the crammer's first conversation with Lechmere (273-76).

his homosexual urges, Diane Long Hoeveler points out that Coyle “finds Owen perhaps too attractive for his comfort,” potentially committing his own transgression of militaristic, patriarchal gender roles (128). It is also notable that Gert Buelens, one of the few critics to discuss Coyle’s transformation throughout the narrative, draws attention to “the fraught nature of his relationship to Owen Wingrave, which is driven by more than just the responsibility of the coach for his trainee” (157).<sup>23</sup> It is clearly possible to explain Coyle’s interest in Owen as sexual, and indeed, many critics stop at such an assumption.

I do not think readings that identify Coyle’s homosexual desires are invalid, but to focus solely on Coyle’s sexual motivations is to ignore his steadily increasing interrogation of war and imperialism throughout the story. Although his internal struggle has an intensely personal component, Coyle starts to question the philosophies and justifications behind war, and thus the identity of the British military. At a certain point, when Coyle begins to succumb to the urge “to defend his ex-pupil rather than to give him away,” the matter seems to have become ideological more than simply personal (290). This begins subtly, yet clearly; whereas Coyle’s remarks initially encourage acceptance of military authority—the line about Owen’s remarks “sowing sedition” is again relevant—after a time, Coyle offers a critique of such blind loyalty to imperial authority (275). After listening to Owen’s reasons for giving up the military life, Lechmere returns to regurgitate them to Coyle, who is caught in a moment of either moral or ideological weakness: “‘I said [Owen’s ideas] were awful rot!’ Young Lechmere spoke with

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<sup>23</sup> While Buelens does not precisely go on to refute his own point, he ultimately suggests, “It cannot . . . be decided who exactly it is that Coyle is erotically attracted to” (160). Buelens is concerned, as I am, with Coyle’s crisis of self in “Owen Wingrave,” but he does not connect such a crisis to a broader statement on the legacy of British imperialism as I do in this chapter.

emphasis and was rightly surprised to hear Mr Coyle laugh, out of tune, at this just declaration, and then after a moment continue: ‘It’s all very curious—I dare say there’s something in it’” (286).

The conversation moves on without either party acknowledging Coyle’s brief questioning of the validity of militarism. Just afterwards, though, Coyle continues to side with both Owen and his reasoning, interjecting, “Ah he rather had you there!” as Lechmere recounts their argument (287). As this conversation draws to a close, Coyle is aligned even more explicitly with Owen’s new worldview. Lechmere says his response to Owen’s pacifistic reasoning was a plea to authority, which prompts this exchange:

“The military temperament, don’t you know? But do you know how he checked us on that?” young Lechmere went on.

“Damn the military temperament!” the crammer promptly replied.

Young Lechmere stared. Mr Coyle’s tone left him uncertain if he were attributing the phrase to Wingrave or uttering his own opinion, but he exclaimed:

“Those were exactly his words!” (287)

When Coyle then hastily agrees to Lechmere’s assertion of the superiority of the military temperament, the assent rings hollow to both the reader and Lechmere; Coyle has crossed an ideological line, and the antimilitaristic sentiments behind his statements cannot be unthought or unsaid.

After this conversation, the text only makes Coyle’s allegiance with Owen’s worldview more explicit. Once Coyle arrives at Paramore, it is said, “the brooding little coach knew still better, even while half-closing his eyes to it, that his own spirit had been caught up by a wave of reaction,” effectively bringing him to “poor Owen’s side” (292).

Coyle's personal attraction to Owen does not necessarily disappear once the crammer begins questioning the military temperament, and "spirit" here might be interpreted as the personal element of Coyle's feelings rather than the intellectual. That being said, the us-and-them binary constructed by Coyle's repeated use of the term "side" suggests his attempts to justify war and British militarism are suddenly proving ineffectual in the face of Owen's reason. War in "Owen Wingrave" is enacted in ideological and social battles rather than in physical violence—the potential spectral murder at the end being the one significant exception—and though Coyle's defection is subtle, it is clear which side he fights for by the end.

An interesting element of Coyle's ideological transformation is that he begins to question not only the ideologies behind war, but also violence and force at a more basic level. As James continues to use the language of warfare to describe the Wingraves' oppression and Owen's resistance, Coyle becomes increasingly distrustful of the effectiveness of martial tactics to improve the situation. The first time he discusses Owen with Jane, Coyle is ready for a battle. His phrase "the most powerful arguments at your command" reads like the discussion of an arsenal, and it is quickly followed by an even more explicit metaphor; referring to Jane's supposedly "powerful argument," Coyle "didn't know in the least what this engine might be, but he begged her to drag it without delay into the field" (283). It is only when Coyle is about to leave, though, that he questions the effectiveness of such crude martial tactics, "groaning inwardly: 'Oh she *is* a grenadier at bottom, and she'll have no tact . . . I'm only afraid she'll be stupid and make him worse'" (284). Coyle is initially a perfect, loyal representative of the British Empire's martial



power. At this point, however, he metaphorically presents a grenadier as an example of inevitable failure rather than success.

Later, Coyle tells his wife that Jane and Sir Philip have “cut off [Owen’s] supplies—they’re trying to starve him out”; he follows this by distancing himself from the conflict and tactic, saying, “That’s not what I meant,” and implying that an assault of force rather than reason cannot lead Owen to compliance (292). Though Coyle continues his attempts to reason with Jane and Sir Philip, the pair are unrelenting in their domestic war, as Jane still “took many things for granted, and most of all the rigour of discipline and the fate of the vanquished and the captive” (304). The statement is vague enough to suggest that anyone who surrenders or gives up—who shirks a Victorian conception of duty and propriety, presumably—earns Jane’s disdain. This note of Jane’s convictions draws attention to the interestingly paradoxical implications of the situation at Paramore: in a way, Owen has already fulfilled the role of the conquered surrenderer by dishonorably abandoning the service, but he would also fulfill this role if he succumbed to his family’s siege. Witnessing the catastrophic results of such a conflict first-hand, Coyle ultimately becomes disgusted with all participants, including Lechmere and Kate. These “soldiers,” Coyle seems to think, cannot consider anyone’s viewpoint but their own and are thus doomed to employ violence to achieve their ends. As such, their ineffectiveness comes as no surprise to Coyle.

As in other chapters, I resist the idea that “Owen Wingrave” is allegorical for a specific colonial conflict. Coyle’s interpretation of the Wingraves’ war against Owen, though, implies a questioning of the validity of Britain’s claim to its colonies and its violent suppression of indigenous populations. In this way, one may view Paramore as

symbolizing the state of imperialist Britain. I argue in Chapter Two that the estate at the center of “The Ghostly Rental” represents America’s past, specifically the horrors of the nation’s colonial past. Just as this home is described as “that *gray colonial dwelling*” (GR 52, emphasis mine), the mansion at Paramore is first described in terms of its connection to an era near the birth of British colonialism: “an *impoverished Jacobean house*, shabby and remarkably ‘creepy,’ but full of character still and full of felicity as a setting for the distinguished figure of the peaceful old soldier” (OW 278, emphasis mine). As is the case with the American estate, Paramore is a reminder of a bygone era, recalling both the honorable aspects of Britain’s past and a darker, more violent legacy; the “character” and “felicity” are overridden by the house’s uncanniness, and the reference to the peaceful veteran is ironic in light of Sir Philip’s mercilessness and bloody battles described later in the same paragraph.

The symbolic nature of Paramore is further underscored by the exchange that follows Coyle’s realization that Owen is neither afraid of fighting nor of being cut off from his relatives’ substantial inheritances:

Yes, he was n’t weak, and he was interesting; but there was clearly a point of view from which he was provoking. “What *is* it then that worries you?” Mr Coyle demanded.

“Oh the house—the very air and feeling of it. There are strange voices in it that seem to mutter at me—to say dreadful things as I pass. I mean the general consciousness and responsibility of what I’m doing . . . I’ve started up all the old ghosts. The very portraits glower at me on the walls. (296-97)

Owen is aware of the familial transgression he commits by abandoning tradition, but there is something unsettling about the house and its atmosphere that is more difficult for him to identify. One might say the uncanny realization is that the horrors of the British imperial project are more extensive than can be contained even in Paramore's lengthy past; the horrors extend to victims beyond the scope of Britain, though the results of these horrors have now come home to face their oppressors. This is perhaps the reason for the vague atmosphere of ghostly dread that permeates Paramore, especially for Owen; the estate holds a repressed past of violence, and the revelation of this past has disturbing results for anyone who acknowledges it.

The difference in James's American and British haunted houses is also significant, especially in light of David Punter's observations on literary ghosts in a postmodern world:

we live increasingly in a world of ghosts . . . in a world of "posts"—  
postmodernism, poststructuralism, and of course postcolonialism. These, as we  
are well aware, are all formulations of the "after," of what comes "after"; at the  
same time, however, they necessarily conjure up, make uncannily to appear  
before us, the very phenomena they have, in a different sense, surpassed, they  
prolong the life of their predecessors—unnaturally, some might say—giving them  
the status of spirits haunting the apparently purged landscape of the  
contemporary. (61-62)

Punter is of course concerned with the ghosts that arise in the *aftermath* of colonialism, but the principle is also relevant for James, whose late work tends to subvert Victorian subjects and themes even as the era draws to a close. The land of James's American

ghosts is already, in a colonial sense, “a world of ‘posts.’” Just as Bergland observes that Hawthorne tends to view Native Americans as long-since absent from New England, the narratives of possession and dispossession have violently concluded by the end of James’s early ghost stories; Perdita enacts her revenge on Viola, and the Diamonds’ ghostly rental home burns to the ground. But the greater narrative of “Owen Wingrave” extends beyond the story’s ending: there is a personal resolution in Owen’s final, fatal assertion of his agency, but there is no reason to believe this death will cause a revelation in Jane or Sir Philip that leads them to dismantle the Wingrave patriarchy or sever its ties to the military. In fact, it is not unlikely that the pair would prefer a dead young relative to one who dishonors them by rejecting a military life. Moreover, the narrative of Coyle’s questioning of imperial enterprises is left unresolved, so it is unclear how he will carry on from this point. Compared to James’s early American ghost stories, “Owen Wingrave” presents a conflict of possession and identity that is ongoing, just as Britain’s colonial projects were ongoing at the turn of the century.

The narrative’s presentation of Owen’s story largely from an outside perspective also suggests that Paramore and the Wingrave family will remain—as will the British army and the imperialist vision behind it—in spite of Owen’s sacrifice. Moreover, the story finds its resolution in the fact that Owen becomes a sort of soldier defending his own convictions, both embracing and rejecting militaristic conflict. The martial wording of the final line makes this theme clear: “He was all the young soldier on the gained field” (319). However, this resolution within the narrative does not necessarily imply a more global resolution. James allows it to remain unclear which party has gained the field, but it seems that Owen’s victory is individual—and merely a victory of principle or

ideology, if a victory at all—while the systems of oppressive tradition and imperialism against which he fights will leave the battlefield unscathed.

The recognition that the greater societal conflicts of “Owen Wingrave” are ultimately left unresolved further raises the question of what exactly Owen fights against by resisting his family. One interesting element of the narrative that tends to go unnoted is the fact that it is not entirely clear *whose* ghost haunts Owen. The implication is that Owen faces his great-great-grandfather, Colonel Wingrave, since “He’s the one who’s sometimes seen . . . In the room he was found dead in” (300). The family has accepted that Colonel Wingrave is responsible for Paramore’s hauntings, but it is unclear who (if anyone) among those at Paramore has actually observed the specter. Aside from the fact that there is no real proof that a ghost makes an appearance in “Owen Wingrave” at all—when there is less evidence presented to support an apparition’s reality than in *The Turn of the Screw*, a certain amount of skepticism is required of the reader—this assumption of the ghost’s identity is not the only valid explanation. To this point, it may be useful to revisit the haunting’s supposed backstory:

it was in George the Second’s time that Colonel Wingrave . . . struck in a fit of passion one of his children, a lad just growing up, a blow on the head of which the unhappy child died . . . The poor boy was laid out in one of those rooms on the other side of the house . . . The next morning, when the household assembled, Colonel Wingrave was missing . . . at last it occurred to someone that he might perhaps be in the room from which his child had been carried to burial. The seeker knocked without an answer—then opened the door. The poor man lay dead

on the floor, . . . without a mark, without anything in his appearance to indicate that he had either struggled or suffered. (300-01)

I do not mean to suggest that readings of the ghost as Colonel Wingrave are unreasonable. But whereas many typical haunting backstories are straightforward enough—a spirit remains because of unfinished business, a person wronged haunts a specific person or place, often out of vengeance<sup>24</sup>—the story behind Paramore’s haunted room and the identity of the ghost(s) resists easy explanation.

The most convincing textual evidence supporting the existence of a ghost is the fact that, possibly in another nod to the Pyncheon family line from *The House of the Seven Gables*, Owen and his great-great-grandfather die in the same spot in the same inexplicable way. The parallel between these two Wingrave deaths and their shared location should suggest that the actual ghost enacting revenge is the murdered boy. After all, if Colonel Wingrave does indeed haunt Owen, of what did he die, if not a haunting? At least as Coyle tells the story, there is evidence to preclude Colonel Wingrave’s natural death and lead to a more supernatural explanation: “He was a strong sound man—there was nothing to account for such a stroke” (301). One might suppose that Colonel Wingrave’s son haunted him to death and that the colonel haunts others in turn, but this explanation at least demonstrates that the “actual” haunting is more complicated than the Wingraves suggest. I draw attention to the lack of clarity surrounding Paramore’s haunting not in an attempt to literalize the ghost(s), but rather to suggest that the haunting

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<sup>24</sup> As I note in Chapter Two, ghostly revenge and the ways in which it is enacted are at times complicated in James’s ghost stories. That being said, his specters’ apparent motives for haunting are commonly as simple as I suggest here; in stories such as “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” “Sir Edmund Orme,” and “The Third Person,” there is little to no ambiguity surrounding *who* exactly the ghosts are, and their potential reasons for haunting the living are easy to guess.

acts just as symbolically as Paramore and the Wingrave family. As Buelens writes of the haunting backstory, “there is, at this point, no mention of the ghost. It is rather as if the room itself has now acted against the person who killed. The house, we could speculate, does not tolerate this particular form of internecine violence within its walls” (153). The complicated haunter-haunted relationships here further suggest a reading of the present-day fight at Paramore as representative of systemic societal conflicts rather than mere familial drama.

Buelens’ proposal is compelling: Owen fights the House of Wingrave—and all its patriarchal, martial, and imperial connections—more than any individual family member or force. But even in this reading, it is unclear of what the pacifistic Owen is guilty. Buelens goes on to suggest that Colonel Wingrave’s other descendants avoid domestic demise-by-ghost by directing their violence outward into militaristic pursuits rather than against members of their own house. One might consider, as T. J. Lustig does, that Owen’s resistance to his family is itself a form of violence, or at least a form of combat: “By fighting the traditions of his family, Owen inevitably perpetuates their martial history” (93). To view the primary conflict in “Owen Wingrave” as a pacifist fighting his militaristic family and all its ghosts makes it difficult to define the exact conditions and motives of the deadly haunting. However, as demonstrated, Owen’s resistance is not the only conflict in the narrative. Rather, his actions and fate demonstrate the immorality and horror embedded within the militaristic British colonizer in a way that Coyle cannot ignore.

To this point, the exact nature of Owen’s resistance bears further discussion. I have already noted that Coyle’s transformation is largely an ideological one, as the

crammer begins to question the effectiveness of the imperial British military, as well as its goals and mission. Yet Owen's philosophies are not vague intimations of pacifism; on the contrary, Owen expresses reasoned arguments that represent his ability to consider situations from multiple viewpoints rather than solely from the perspective of a colonizing power. Initially, the text presents Owen's anti-military temperament as artistic and, more specifically, Romantic: "He stretched his long legs and began to read . . . a volume of Goethe's poems . . . it was characteristic of him that this deliverance [from the past days' tension] should take the form of an intellectual pleasure" (272-73). Haralson focuses on the role of poetry and art here, suggesting that "what *makes* Owen unfit for the service is the stirring of a Jamesian artistic sensibility" (51).<sup>25</sup> Beyond this passing reference to Goethe, though, the Wingraves' problem with Owen's temperament seems more related to his affinity for logic and reason than to his love for poetry. Early on, when Coyle notes that Jane has a militaristic drive and singleness of purpose, he finds himself wishing "her nephew had more of her narrowness instead of being *almost cursed with the tendency to look at things in their relations*" (281, emphasis mine). In other words, Jane and the others view the world in warlike binaries of victory and defeat, or "his side" and "my side." Owen, though, has read enough—of both poetry and accounts of old military leaders and their campaigns—to understand the falsity of such a convenient, often self-justifying worldview.

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<sup>25</sup> One compelling element of Haralson's argument is the connection between Owen and James's criticisms of Napoleon, though I would add that James was an intellectual just as he was an artist, and the two roles are not mutually exclusive. Many scholars have noted James's attempts to address varying viewpoints and subjectivities in his fiction. Perhaps relevant to this theme in a study of James's ghost stories is Robert Andreach's suggestion that, based on a passing reference to Pascal, the narrator of "The Ghostly Rental" remains confused and disconnected from reality because "He cannot reconcile intuition and analysis, feeling and thinking," as Owen can and as the Wingrave family cannot (303).



It is curious, though, that Owen does not proselytize in the name of reason or peace. While he directly responds to his family and friends' pressure when he confronts the haunted room's ghost, Owen otherwise allows his family and friends their own viewpoints (hence my frequent use of the one-sided term of attack "siege"). Moreover, Owen's sentiments are made clear, but they are only briefly discussed in the story. The text does not highlight Owen's own philosophies nearly as much as it depicts those who are loyal to the British Empire encountering an ideological other, often refusing to even consider the validity of the other's positions—or perhaps, more accurately, not caring to consider any position contrary to their own. Indeed, Coyle's concern early in the narrative that Owen exhibits "a kind of intellectual independence" implies that independent thought on the part of British subjects is not only seditious, but also incongruous with the British imperial mission (283). In that way, merely presenting the possibility of another viewpoint represents a great part of Owen's resistance.

The term "independence" used above is especially important in "Owen Wingrave" because it draws attention to the ways Owen is othered by his family and society. If Owen is not clearly marked as an other by his parental connection with the Eastern reaches of the empire, he certainly becomes a spectral figure within the Wingrave family: somewhat absent, yet remaining at the edge of vision to highlight the decay of the ancestral line. In the most literal sense, Owen is depicted several times as being removed from his former roles within the family and its circle of acquaintances. It had always "been [Owen's] privilege at bedtime to conduct his grandfather ceremoniously to rest" though now the duty is fulfilled by a valet (311). Similarly, it is not merely Kate's accusation of cowardice that pushes Owen to spend the night in the haunted room, but

more specifically the possibility that Lechmere has replaced him as the object of her affections; speaking to Lechmere of the matter, she says, “Oh I dare say *you’d* risk it, but . . . that’s more than we can expect of a gentleman who has taken *his* extraordinary line” (315). Even though Owen is the center of the conflict in one sense, it is clear that his family and friends have removed him from his former positions, at least until he complies with their wishes.

There is also a significant connection between Owen and the most othered—and least mentioned—character in the text: Owen’s brother Philip. Philip is referenced in part to illustrate that Owen is the last chance for the family to continue its tradition of military distinction in the Wingrave name, but Philip’s description is incredibly enticing for the reader, considering he never actually appears in the story: “Poor Philip Wingrave, [Jane’s] late brother’s eldest son, was literally imbecile, and banished from view; deformed, unsocial, irretrievable, he had been relegated to a private asylum and had become among the friends of the family only a little hushed lugubrious legend” (277). In a sense, the grotesque, transgressive, and horrifying elements of the Wingrave family are literalized and displaced onto the hidden figure of Philip. Indeed, the text itself seems to mimic such banishment of the repressed, as Philip is never mentioned again after this passage.

The ways in which Philip represents a grotesque figure in the gothic tradition are self-evident enough to preclude further explanation, but Punter’s discussion of literature’s ability to uncover what has been “lost” at the edges of postcolonial society and discourse may prove useful:

I shall instead think of the literary as the uncanny, as the haunting and the haunted, as that which resists pinning down, that which will always squirm away and produce “other,” “unauthorized” meanings; as that which conjures phantoms, which banishes phantoms, and which always leaves us uncertain whether or not we are alone; as intimately connected with hallucination and dream; as constantly reflecting upon its own state of loss, . . . as infected at the heart with an ineradicable absence; . . . as the distorted mirroring, the per-version, of the worlds within it functions. (5-6)

The mirror analogy and simultaneous conjuring and banishing of phantoms are particularly useful ideas for understanding Philip’s role in the Wingrave family and function in the story. Much like a colonized group, Philip’s identity is both the product of a system of oppression and a reflection of what is grotesque in his oppressors, just as Owen is both the product of and a rebellion against the Wingraves’ patriarchal militarism. Philip and Owen act as doubles in other ways, too: they are brothers, and they are both disappointments to the family. Philip is also a literal, extreme example of a young Wingrave being banished to exist out of sight and out of mind, a fate that Owen likely would have met if he had lived. This similarity is especially interesting in light of Punter’s point that postcolonial literature can banish the other (in many senses of the term) from conscious recognition even as it depicts the return of such figures. One might view Philip and Owen as representative of two reactions to British imperialism: in confronting the specter of the colonial past, one either goes mad or sacrifices oneself in outright defiance. The paradoxical nature of Owen’s dilemma suggests that the Wingrave

brothers' fates do not represent reactions to oppression so much as they represent inevitable outcomes of British imperial rule.

Just as Philip and Owen are both participants in and victims of imperialism, though, they occupy a liminal, spectral role even while Owen comes face-to-face with a different kind of specter. The role of the Wingrave brothers as spectral figures further underscores the point that "Owen Wingrave" draws attention to the British colonizer's sense of self. Owen is a mostly static character, having already made his choice when the narrative begins. Owen's fate is deeply important to Coyle, though, who begins to change his mind in two significant ways: he suspects that the reasoning behind Owen's anti-war and anti-violence sentiments is sound and, related to my last point, observes firsthand the effects of British imperial oppression as enacted by the Wingrave family.

As a double for the reader, Coyle represents the British—both citizens and soldiers, as both can benefit from the spoils of colonial war—questioning the validity of their nation's military enterprises. As a non-combatant crammer operating from home in Britain, it is easy for Coyle to ignore the distant atrocities committed against indigenous populations for the good of the British Empire. However, witnessing the violence enacted on Owen by his family line relocates the site of this violence to Britain where Coyle can no longer ignore it so easily. Because he has been othered by his family and friends in various ways—all directly related to the sustainment of imperialism—Owen becomes a stand-in for the colonial other who is actually banished to the edge of the empire. And the narrative makes a point to show that the figurative specter within the house of the British imperial past is not this oppressed other, but rather the warmongers who have created him. To recognize the humanity of the oppressed other—as Coyle certainly does with

Owen—is to come face-to-face with the deeper implications of the imperial mission, as well as one’s own culpability. And indeed, the meeting is not a pleasant one.

Thus, Coyle also serves as a way for James to confront his own fond feelings for Britain even as he recognizes the horrors of imperial war. Hannah discusses at length James’s attempts to reconcile his attraction to the figure of the non-combatant British soldier with his hatred of war and carnage, and one of Hannah’s final conclusions is relevant to Coyle’s role of observer to the Wingraves’ conflict: “James’s detached attachment to the British soldier becomes a site for working through British attachments to a legacy of colonial violence over the rim and out of sight of the British countryside” (38). Indeed, Hannah implies a reading of Paramore as representative of the horrors of British imperialism, writing that the haunted room’s atmosphere “suggests the threat that imperial soldiership might conceal in its domesticated, ornamental guise” (36). James makes it clear that long-repressed horrors resurface if one takes a long, honest look at the imperial British military, a realization made all the more horrifying if some personal advantage or domestic security was gained as a result of the oppression of colonized groups.

This threat to the British imperial self is the real specter to be faced in “Owen Wingrave,” as it is made clear that those who participate in or benefit from Britain’s colonial enterprises are guilty of oppression even if they do not directly commit the atrocities. Coyle does not kill Owen, but he has spent his life and career dedicated to supporting an oppressive system that is responsible for Owen’s death. Because of his association with the British Empire, Coyle recognizes that the violence he observes the Wingraves commit against Owen derives from the same source as the colonial violence

he has participated in and endorsed. Even the non-combatant Coyle shares culpability for the victims of combat. Indeed, by filtering the revelation of the horrors within the British imperial legacy through Coyle, James illustrates that most of his readers are complicit in the continuation of these horrors. Coyle's recognition of the senselessness of the Wingrave family's oppression of Owen recalls a statement by Punter and Glennis Byron on the intersection of postcolonial and gothic literatures: "The cultures and histories of colonized nations are shadowed by the fantasized possibility of alternative histories, the sense of what might have been if the violence of colonization had not come to eradicate or pervert the traces of 'independent development'" (54). Despite James's postcolonial identity as an American settler, it is important to remember that he is writing this narrative from the seat of imperial power and not from a colony. Even so, James's depiction of Coyle witnessing a victim oppressed to the point that he cannot express his "intellectual independence" certainly reads like a colonizer suddenly becoming aware of the violence of colonization (OW 283).

In "Owen Wingrave," Coyle experiences a sort of inverse of this postcolonial fantasy of alternative histories; he has previously accepted the fantasy of working for the good of the British Empire but is now faced with reality and all its troubling implications for his own identity. From this point on in his career, James seems to remain immensely interested in the fantasy of alternative histories and the alternative self—especially in his ghostly tales. "Owen Wingrave" ends before Coyle can fully grapple with his identity and past choices, but he presages figures such as John Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle" and Spencer Brydon in "The Jolly Corner" who must mourn the versions of themselves that *could have been* if they had made different decisions. This focus on the horror of the

self is accompanied by a theme of reckoning with one's own past: the governess of *The Turn of the Screw* must look back at the evils of twenty years before to tell her story, and James's other protagonists must similarly grapple with their pasts at the same time as they confront their ghostly adversaries.

James's American ghosts have their revenge, but the conflicts of his ghost stories in the late British imperial moment are more complicated. These ghosts are not the dispossessed who take action to balance the scales of justice, but rather reflections of the most grotesque parts of the identities of the living. James's later ghosts often serve as horrifying reminders to British subjects that their sense of self has been forever tainted, either by the sins they directly committed or the atrocities committed in their name. After all, James could have chosen to haunt Paramore with an Afghan soldier who was felled by Owen Wingrave, Sr.'s sabre, for instance, if his desire had simply been to illustrate Britain's fear of colonized groups. However, this other at the edge of the empire is not the source of horror in "Owen Wingrave." The murderous ghost that is Owen's true enemy originates within his ancestral home and British family line. The horrifying specter represents not an other, but rather the legacy of imperial British militarism itself.

## Chapter Four

### People Are Strange When You're a Stranger:

#### Power, Colonial Identity, and Strangeness in *The Turn of the Screw*

Readers of *The Turn of the Screw* are generally aware that they should expect to be scared; indeed, the novella is James's only ghost story that receives Virginia Woolf's full seal of approval in its capacity for horrifying the audience. Even readers reluctant to suspend their disbelief know to expect the spooky, the macabre, and the uncanny rather than a typical nineteenth-century governess narrative. But there is something especially strange about the governess's story; after the Prologue's narrator warns that "a strange tale" is to follow, the manuscript itself is revealed to be shrouded in death—initially, those of both the governess and Douglas (147).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the account is apparently so important that Douglas must delay sharing it until he can read the governess's words exactly. This all sets the tone for a ghost story that transcends mere abnormality and enters the realm of the "strange," a foreignness or otherness that is more deeply unsettling and uncanny than a simple deviation from normalcy. I argue that reading the novella with special attention to James's usage of the "strange" can not only reveal the colonial implications of the power structures at Bly, but also the ways James highlights the falseness of colonizer identity.

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<sup>26</sup> All quotes from the novella in the body of this chapter come from the New York Edition. There is one note in which I address differences in James's usage of "strange" among the 1898 and 1908 texts, so three editions are found in the Works Cited.



First, as common as the word is, it will be useful to define “strange.” The word has more recently become synonymous with terms like “weird,” “odd,” or “queer,” meaning abnormal or out of the ordinary, but it might be more accurate to compare “strange” to the words with which it shares an Old French root: “stranger” and “estrangle.” The *OED* defines “strange” in all of the following ways before arriving at “uncommon”: “foreign, alien”; “Situated outside one’s own land”; “Belonging to some other place or neighborhood; . . . other than one’s own”; “not of one’s own kin or family”; “Added or introduced from outside, not belonging to the place or person where it is found”; “far removed”; and “Unknown” (*OED*). It is worth noting that the definition of “strange” as generally “uncommon” or “unusual” goes back almost as far as the other usages mentioned here: the word is used to mean “foreign” in 1297 at the latest, and “strange” in the sense of generally “abnormal” is first known to appear in 1330. But this does not change the fact that the *OED* first lists six definitions to the effect of “foreign” or “other,” including examples contemporary with James. The usages cited by the *OED* closest to the publication of *The Turn of the Screw* are “Unknown, unfamiliar” (1889) and “Belonging to some other place” (1894) (*OED*).

It is important to establish the foreignness inherent in “strange” because it illuminates some of the central conflicts of otherness in *The Turn of the Screw*. “Strange” and its derivative forms are only used thirty-six times in the novel—less than once every thousand words. Strangeness does not gain significance in the novella so much through repetition as through selective usage. It is worth noting that James uses terms like “queer”—“Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric”—and “odd”—“out of the ordinary” and

“solitary,” among other things (*OED*)<sup>27</sup>— combined almost as much as “strange” in *The Turn of the Screw*; the former appears fifteen times, the latter twelve. These terms are absolutely significant, and like “strange,” their meanings are predicated on a perceived normalcy from which someone or something can deviate. But they do not surround climactic moments in the same way strangeness does, nor do they seem to haunt the governess and creep into her language as she tries to understand her role and the roles of the ghosts and children at Bly. For this reason, the novella encourages a reading of James’s usage of “strange” as deliberately constructing a sense of otherness that is physical and geographical as well as psychological.

As previously suggested, it is not surprising that a ghost story is the form James uses to communicate such conflicts of otherness. Many scholars have addressed the inherent strangeness of ghosts, and the connection follows common sense: the beings that are literally from another realm—often described euphemistically in terms that contradict belonging, like “visitor” or “revenant”—must be strangers when they venture into the world of the living. In a sense, then, the reader recognizes Peter Quint and Miss Jessel as other even before encountering them. Briggs similarly focuses on the cultural role of ghost stories and their common depiction of a living-versus-dead conflict: exploring the Victorian trope of telling ghost stories on Christmas Eve—one that James, of course, employs in *The Turn of the Screw*—Briggs writes of “the family group huddled around the fireside at the very coldest and darkest time of the year, exchanging stories that ritually exorcised isolation and terror, that asserted the group’s solidarity while

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<sup>27</sup> The *OED* notes this usage of “odd” in referring to a place: “situated apart from the body of a larger place or thing,” the primary example being the phrase “the odd corner” (*OED*). While this definition is fascinatingly close to the geographical foreignness inherent in “strange,” James does not employ this usage in *The Turn of the Screw*.

recognising its vulnerability” (“The Ghost Story” 126). Even the most benign ghost is insidious and uncanny by virtue of its estrangement from the living, and the living’s “solidarity” in opposition. The terror of seeing a ghost is rarely connected to the threat of harmful action. Briggs notes that, in folklore, ghosts are often simply present as opposed to speaking or exercising any sort of physical force, and this certainly applies to Quint and Jessel. Rather, the fear of encountering a ghost is typically related to a recognition that the ghost does not belong in the space of the living.<sup>28</sup>

In James’s ghost stories, this pattern in the discourse of strangeness holds, for the most part: either the specters themselves are described as strange or, more generally, the impression given off by a haunted house, or a glint in the eye of a character who possesses more knowledge of the supernatural than the protagonist and reader. *The Turn of the Screw* is an exception, though: one of the most interesting aspects of the text that is revealed by an examination of the discourse of strangeness is that the term “strange” is applied almost solely to certain characters within certain sections of the novella. As such, I find the novella’s depiction of strangeness as shifting and subjective especially useful in understanding how it may interpret narratives of settler colonialism. The text depicts a progression of strangeness through three “stages”: first related to the governess (and, by proxy, the master), then Quint and Miss Jessel, and finally the children.

The entire situation at Bly, with the governess at its center, can recall such tensions between the settler and the indigenous population. Such tensions are especially relevant to James’s dual British-American identity, which is related to both the settler and the remote colonial power; indeed, James’s early American ghost stories focus on the end

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<sup>28</sup> The most significant exception to this rule among James’s ghost stories is “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” which I discuss in Chapter Two.

of settler narratives, and “Owen Wingrave” focuses on the imperialists in the seat of power, but *The Turn of the Screw* combines these narratives. Specifically, in her constant need for power and authority, the governess employs a system of control that aligns with those of a settler-driven colony. The settler-stranger’s need for power is typical for what Said calls “the conquering, surveying . . . outsider” who leaves her subjects only two options: “serve or be destroyed” (168). Indeed, the governess is a stranger who enters and imposes herself on the inhabitants of Bly, but she expects the compliance of her subjects even though she has yet to assimilate herself into their society—that is, to cease being a stranger. As is the case in many of James’s ghost stories, *The Turn of the Screw* often plays with the dual spectral and proprietorial meanings of possession, drawing attention to the similarities between the governess and the ghosts in their strangeness and their desire to own and control the children. Neither unit of strange invaders attempting to “colonize” Bly can rightfully own Miles and Flora, and the discourse of strangeness in the novella ultimately serves to suggest that colonialism is founded on a false perception of the settler-colonizer’s right to possess and inhabit others’ lands.

#### Governess and Master

Initially, strangeness supplies the background for the governess’s narrative. That the party is about to hear “a strange tale” is expected, but the word’s other usage in the Prologue is to describe the general situation at Bly: “These children were, by the strangest of chances for a man in [the master’s] position . . . very heavy on his hands” (153). In the sense of abnormality, of course, this is not strange at all; parents and grandparents sometimes die, and it only makes sense that care of the children would be passed on to their next of kin. So the situation is unfortunate and desperately unlucky for

the children, but also decidedly normal. It is also somewhat to be expected that a young bachelor would have difficulties handling being suddenly thrust into the role of parent—or, more accurately, distant guardian—so this is not especially odd, either. The reading of “strange” as “other” makes more sense, though. The master neither lives with the children nor deigns to communicate with them. In the sense of foreignness, the master is as “strange” as he could possibly be to Bly and the children’s lives. Similarly, the governess’s use of the word “strange” highlights how much of an outsider she is in stepping into her role. When she arrives and is immediately enamored of Flora, she points out that the girl stays briefly “with Mrs. Grose only as an effect of our consideration for my inevitable strangeness” (161). Here, “strangeness” explicitly means “alien,” and the governess’s good humor results from her assumption that Flora will come to see her as native or naturalized: someone who belongs at Bly. Even though both children do warm to the governess over time, she cannot quite shake her feeling of being an interloper: as she says at the end of the first chapter, “Well, I was strangely at the helm!” (164). As in the master’s case, to examine the situation logically is to recognize that nothing is entirely out of the ordinary: governesses were common in the nineteenth century, and she knowingly accepted the job. But this reading of the othered connotations of strangeness shows the governess’s continuing role as an outsider at Bly, even in her moments of self-confidence and ease.

The governess’s reflections in the first chapter—maybe nervous, maybe optimistic—are the first hints the reader receives that she has a desire or need for control over Bly and the children who inhabit the estate. Robert Martin notes, “Power is always indirect in *The Turn of the Screw*”; more specifically, it seems, the pecking order is

always determined by proximity to the master in the governess's eyes, which allows her to conceive of her position as that of a ruler (405). This is evident in the governess's refusal to let Mrs. Grose or any of the other servants communicate with the master:

[Governess:] "Then what am I to tell him?"

[Mrs. Grose:] "You need n't tell him anything. *I'll* tell him."

I measured this. "Do you mean you'll write—" . . .

"I tell the bailiff. *He* writes."

"And you should like him to write our story?"

My question had a sarcastic force that I had not fully intended, and it made her after a moment inconsequently break down. The tears were again in her eyes.

"Ah Miss, *you* write!" (261)

The governess does not seem to view herself as controlling or domineering in situations like these, but this is just one instance out of many in which she prods and questions Mrs. Grose until the servant cannot help but give in to her will.

Also like a colonial ruler—and specifically the leader of a settler-driven colony—who remains loyal to the distant seat of power, the governess's ultimate goal here and at most points in the novella is that the master should think highly of her. Considering how much critical work focuses on the passage where Quint first appears, it hardly bears restating that the governess feels "tranquil and justified" in the idea that the man "to whose pressure I had yielded" would approve of her work immediately before she sees the specter. Yet even in her daydreams, she recognizes that the master pays no attention—"if he ever thought of it!" (174). James separates Quint's appearance from the governess's thoughts about the master with half a paragraph in which the governess

speaks of a desire “to meet some one” before this fantasy becomes horrifyingly real (175). And to control fully those under her power at Bly, the governess must assimilate them into her framework of control; in a sense, she must colonize.<sup>29</sup>

Concerning the sexual politics of *The Turn of the Screw*, it is also important to note the physical and social distance between the governess and the master. Indeed, to draw attention to the governess’s imagined proximity to the master is also to draw attention to exactly how far from the truth this fantasy is, a reality that highlights her own strangeness. Indeed, the governess certainly does not feel at home operating in the master’s name. Even though the governess occupies a higher position than Mrs. Grose—and insists to the servant that all communication with the master come either from or through her personally—the governess’s social status does not even approach the master’s. To this point, Bruce Robbins notes the influence of governess narratives like

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<sup>29</sup> At this point, Benjamin Britten’s opera setting of *The Turn of the Screw* perhaps becomes even more relevant to a study of James than *Owen Wingrave*. Myfanwy Piper’s libretto is particularly important to the scene in which the governess first sees Quint, as Piper distills the governess’s somewhat implicit desires into the one explicit wish “that he could see how well I do his bidding” (51). A number of studies reading the othering nature of Britten’s use of gamelan-inspired celesta and glockenspiel figures—such as appears in this scene—as sexual. Christopher Palmer writes that Quint’s threat and ability to attract the children are in his “sinuous, seductive arabesques” matching the gamelan percussion’s “high sonorities” (111). More recently, though, critics have also begun to highlight the postcolonial implications of these strange musical figures. Brett, in particular, notes that Britten’s gamelan figures are not uncommonly placed in a postcolonial context, observing at various points in Britten’s operas “the male fantasy of the feminine, and the identification of the subject race that, according to the imperialist fantasy, is begging to be subjected” (“Eros and Orientalism in Britten’s Operas” 236). Thus, the fact that Britten associates Quint with gamelan-inspired figures could be read as both sexual and national othering, but I find it hard to ignore the colonial implications of choosing an Eastern musical tradition often heard as eerie by Western listeners to present even a generalized or duplicitous otherness. I would add that this figure first appears in *The Turn of the Screw* when the governess and Mrs. Grose read the letter from school and must confront the possibility that Miles is “bad,” serving to highlight the boy’s strangeness and his connection with the strange Quint.

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* on James's novella; the traditional governess narrative tells the story of "the servant or governess who is in love with a master far above her in wealth and rank, yet somehow manages to marry him in the end" (377). At some level, this is the aspiration of James's governess, but she is not allowed the luxury of playing the humble servant girl who looks up to the gallant master because she never sees him a second time.

Thus, the governess is a stranger even to the strangest man in the book. In Dan McCall's words, the governess's role as a stranger—especially coming from a rural, lower-class household—is clear in that "her repressive background and choked emotion force her to be decisive in a social arena she does not understand and is singularly ill-equipped to deal with," whether the arena is Bly or the governess's relationship with the master (125). McMaster notes that servants at English country manors in Victorian fiction often "occupy a mid-way position between the colonizers and the absent colonized; their 'inferiority' makes this possible" (26). As irrational as the governess's master fantasies are, though, they reflect reality in at least one way: she is indeed the closest living person to the master, as he grants "supreme authority" to "his visitor" before sending her off to Bly—the term "visitor" of course carrying its own strange, ghostly resonance (154). Even in an alternate version of events in which the governess remains on peacefully as the children's keeper, she would still be a stranger because she is a representative of the ever elusive master. As Martin puts it, the governess has a "power which can only operate in the name of the invisible other, not in the name of itself" (406). The governess cannot attempt to exercise her power—her "rigid control"



over others at Bly—without acting in the name of a shadowy figure physically removed from the situation (197).

This troubled mixture of loyalty to the remote ruling power and a need to establish one's own control is typical of settler colonialism, in particular. James Belich's categorization of early colonial missions may prove useful: "European expansion took three forms: *networks*, the establishment of ongoing systems of long-range interaction, usually for trade; *empire*, the control of other peoples, usually through conquest; and *settlement*, the reproduction of one's own society through long-range migration" (21). Belich also notes that the lines of demarcation among these categories are not entirely fixed: for instance, in *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess operates in the master's name and certainly demonstrates a desire to control Bly and its inhabitants in the vein of *empire*, but her migration to the estate and her stated mission of constructing a "small colony" for herself and the children seem to suggest she better fulfills the role of *settler* (196). And although she is theoretically subservient to the master's desires, in practice, the governess exercises a rule that is autonomous from the master's. This consideration also recalls Lorenzo Veracini's explanation of some of the differences between power structures of settler colonialism and a more generally defined colonialism: "As [settler colonialism] is premised on the domination of a majority that has become indigenous (settlers are made by conquest *and* by immigration), external domination exercised by a metropolitan core and a skewed demographic balance are less relevant definitory traits" (5). To view Bly as a settler colony, then, there is no need to take issue with an allegory in which the master does not directly rule the governess's "colony."

Further, though the governess represents the minority at Bly by any measure—whether she is in opposition to the children, the ghosts, the staff, or anyone else more established at Bly—she makes it a mission to recruit others to her side, in part to justify her own right to belong at the estate. She certainly is concerned with bringing Mrs. Grose into her confidence throughout the novella, and perhaps cares even more about the servant’s loyalty and devotion than Flora’s. This is evident soon after the governess first confides in Mrs. Grose, as she writes that the servant “believed me, I was sure, absolutely: if she had n’t I don’t know what would have become of me, for I could n’t have borne the strain alone” (230). In an even clearer instance, as the governess suggests exiling Flora from Bly to enact her “remedy” for the whole ghostly situation, Mrs. Grose asks, “And what *is* your remedy?” and the governess replies, “Your loyalty, to begin with. And then Miles’s” (287). The governess requires the subservience and allegiance of her subjects to maintain her rule of Bly. As Veracini points out, there is more than one way to make a settler, and the governess is not interested in assimilating into the existing culture of Bly, but rather producing her own system of power into which she attempts to incorporate the inhabitants. Though it is certainly possible for a colonizing minority to retain power over a majority, historically speaking, lasting rule of settler-driven colonies is often predicated on the eventual demographic shift that makes the indigenous population a minority group; the Americas and Australia are significant examples where this is the case.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the maritime metaphor of the governess being “at the helm” that runs loosely throughout the novella is fitting: she wants to be a member of the ship’s

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<sup>30</sup> James Belich offers a detailed synthesis of historical hypotheses concerning the various factors that contributed to European powers’ cultivation of what became majority-white colonies in *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939*, especially in Chapter 1, “Settling Societies.”

crew, but only if the rest of the crew agrees to answer to her authority.<sup>31</sup> In the beginning, it would seem that everything at Bly has been set up to the governess's liking. Enter ghosts.

#### Peter Quint and Miss Jessel

While the discourse of strangeness highlights or clarifies the governess's mission in a general sense, the ghosts' strangeness offers a structural complication to her system of control. It is not difficult to read the uncanniness of Quint and Jessel as directly related to imperialism; the ghosts return from a far-flung realm to haunt the colonizing power and reclaim what is "rightfully theirs." Many critics have discussed the intersection of colonial anxieties and gothic literature's ghostly and monstrous figures. Building on the idea that the gothic has long been a means of communicating transgression—in a general sense, but also in explicitly sociopolitical terms—Tabish Khair observes that early practitioners of the gothic seemed receptive to colonial tensions ahead of many writers who avoided the genre, writing, "gothic fiction shows a deep subterranean anxiety and awareness of a ghost that was already stalking England, but which mainstream novelists preferred to see mostly in the far-flung reaches of empire" (9). Quint and Jessel do not represent a *benevolent* marginalized force in *The Turn of the Screw*, but noting such elements of postcolonial gothic makes it clear that their haunting of Bly can be seen as a transgression against the official system of power—a transgression that retains its function in the narrative even if it is simply imagined by the governess.

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<sup>31</sup> The maritime metaphor may have even more resonance in a postcolonial reading, considering the sea travel required for almost all of Europe's—and especially Britain's—colonial endeavors.

The shifting nature of strangeness certainly upsets the native-settler binary in the novella, and again, the ghosts are not the only strangers at Bly. But, as is often the case in James's ghost stories, there is no question that the appearances of apparitions are the strangest events in *The Turn of the Screw*, lexically speaking. Forms of the word "strange" only appear four times before the governess first sees Quint—and only two of those come directly from the governess, the other two being written by the Prologue's narrator—yet she describes her initial encounter with the ghost at length in terms of strangeness:

The place moreover, in the strangest way in the world, had on the instant and by the very fact of its appearance become a solitude . . . But there was no other change in nature, unless indeed it were a change that I saw with a stranger sharpness . . . [The episode] lasted while this visitant, at all events—and there was a touch of the strange freedom, as I remember, in the sign of familiarity of his wearing no hat. (176-77)<sup>32</sup>

Miss Jessel's first appearance is similarly saturated with strangeness. The governess says, "The way this knowledge [of an interested spectator] gathered in me was the strangest thing in the world—the strangest, that is, except the very much *stranger* in which it quickly merged itself" (200). It is the biggest obstacle to the governess's implementation of her system of power: as soon as she feels somewhat at home among the native inhabitants and comfortable in her rule over them, she is accosted by nefarious specters,

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<sup>32</sup> Rather than catalogue every usage of the "strange" connected with Quint in the body of this chapter, I will include here those instances that closely follow this episode: "His face was close to the glass, yet the effect of this better view was, strangely, just to show me how intense the former had been" (184); Mrs. Grose: "Do you mean he's a stranger?" (188); "His eyes are sharp, strange" (191); "there had been matters in his life, strange passages and perils" (198).

and specters who seem to have a greater right than the governess to belong at Bly, no less.

Yet, in the first instance, the governess's real sense of strangeness comes not from Quint, but rather from the fact that she does not immediately know who he is when he appears. This is no mere instance of the shudder one can receive from the uncanny or the unfamiliar, either; it is a matter of power. Upon first seeing him, the governess tries to explain away the stranger's identity, racking her brain for any "person of whom I was in ignorance" at Bly, but dismisses the possibility that an element of Bly's workings could be outside of her control: "my office seemed to require that there should be no such ignorance and no such person" (177). The connections she makes later between the children and their former servants—however reasonable or unreasonable—are not yet present; ignorance is at the root of the governess's horror of the apparitions, and as argued later in this chapter, a lack of knowledge often amounts to a lack of power within her colonial system of control (Sanna 102). In fact, speculating on what "secret" Bly might hold, the governess initially rejects the idea that Mrs. Grose could hold more knowledge of the two, insisting the woman "knew nothing whatever that could bear upon the incident I had there ready for her" (*TS* 179). The governess's confusion and anxiety come in no small part from the realization that she is not as all-knowing and in control of Bly as she had previously allowed herself to assume.

Despite her relative ignorance of Bly's past and the ghosts' character, the governess insists both to herself and to Mrs. Grose that her knowledge of the ghosts is reliable, even privileged. For Kiyoon Jang, "the ghost of Peter Quint imposes on the governess a sense of being the 'medium,' which compels her to 'look for him' almost

dutifully and compulsorily” (17). The governess plays this role throughout the narrative, first calling her apparent abilities a “dreadful liability to impressions” (193). Later, the governess uses this privileged knowledge as an excuse to construct herself as a sort of martyr to the cause of protecting the children (and protecting her own power): “I’ve been living with the miserable truth, and now it has only too much closed round me” (282). Perhaps even more significant is the way in which she continues to undermine not only Mrs. Grose’s authority over the children, but also the servant’s knowledge of the situation; the governess insists, “the chain of my logic was ever too strong for her” when the pair is searching for Flora (275). The governess even takes Mrs. Grose’s unprivileged sight as proof that she herself is the only one whose knowledge of Quint and Miss Jessel is reliable:

[Mrs. Grose] looked, just as I did, and gave me, with her deep groan of negation, repulsion, compassion . . . a sense, touching to me even then, that she would have backed me up if she had been able . . . this hard blow of the proof that her eyes were hopelessly sealed I felt my own situation horribly crumble, I felt—I *saw*—my livid predecessor press, from her position, on my defeat. (280)

The governess does not merely use this knowledge to assert her power over Mrs. Grose, though; Antonio Sanna notes that, after supposedly interrogating the locals, “She uses the knowledge obtained through the questioning of the villagers in order to justify her creation of the villain ghost. It is such knowledge of Quint as obtained by the villagers which authorizes and legitimates the exercising of her power as *governess*” (107).

Notably, the language in the passage to which Sanna refers serves both to withhold information and authority from Mrs. Grose and to solidify the governess’s own

sense of complete power and knowledge. Mrs. Grose asks, “Then nobody about the place? Nobody about the village?” (*TS* 188), to which the governess replies, “Nobody—nobody. I *did n’t tell you*, but I *made sure*” (189, emphasis mine). In this instance, whether or not the governess has truly searched the village for information on the apparition, her mere assertion that she made sure of the matter demonstrates an attempt to establish confidence in her own knowledge and power, recalling Sikor and Lund’s observations on the interrelatedness of power and authority referenced in Chapter Two. There are many such examples in *The Turn of the Screw*, but the double standard in the governess’s assumptions of knowledge and sight—Mrs. Grose’s sight is unreliable, the governess’s unfailing—highlights the falsity underlying her own tenuous sense of power.

Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to think that the governess’s attempts to outwardly demonstrate her control over people and situations serves as much to convince *herself* of her power as Mrs. Grose. The governess is made uncomfortable by her lack of control over the situation, a discomfort she represses with a Victorian will to keep the children safe and pure. In fact, this discomfort is transformed into a sort of self-aggrandizement: the governess describes her mission to save the children as an “extraordinary flight of heroism” and “a service admirable and difficult,” worthy of her own applause years later (199). These are also terms of military service, recalling the presentation of the Wingraves’ oppression of Owen with the language of violent conquest. In both cases, the fear is that those who are supposed to serve under the colonizer no longer agree to do so. The less control the colonizer has over the enemy and her own colonial subjects, it seems, the more difficult the fight is and the greater potential

she has to gloriously “succeed where many another girl might have failed” (199). In reality, though, the spirits are too influential for the governess to overcome.

Yet as her narrative shows, she can certainly make an effort to overcome them. It is unsurprising from a Foucaultian perspective that the governess thus returns to a faith in her own knowledge and sense data in an attempt to reassure herself of her power and control over Bly. Furthermore, knowledge—and thus, power—is primarily what frightens the governess about Quint and Jessel. Again, the ghosts’ power comes not from direct action but rather from a return to Bly with more knowledge of the past (and presumably of Miles and Flora) than the governess has. After all, it is the appearance of the ghosts that first reveals how little the governess knows about Bly. When Mrs. Grose questions the governess about the presence of “An extraordinary man,” the latter responds to various questions with “I have n’t the least idea” and “I know still less” (188). Power acts in *The Turn of the Screw*, as Foucault suggests, “as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain” (“Two Lectures” 98). As noted previously, the exchanges of power are initially hierarchical but move in one direction and are easy for the governess to understand; she uses her proximity to the master, as well as her role as the ruler of the “colony,” to justify and reinforce her own power and control over Bly. Quint and Jessel, though, as former employees of the master, represent not just an outside influence, but also a link in this chain of power that potentially separates the governess from the master. In this way, the shifting power dynamics of Bly also hint at a shifting conception of strangeness, putting into question who is native, who is an invader, and who is simply a strange *revenant*.



Quint especially poses a threat of estranging the governess from the subjects at Bly not only because he seems to possess a power over Miles that she does not, but also because, in life, he seems to have possessed more power in general than the governess has during the events of her narrative. Mrs. Grose reveals that Quint was the master's "own man . . . when he was here" (191). Aside from being present at Bly at the same time as the master, Quint was in charge of Miss Jessel, as well. In a sense, then, he held a higher position in Bly's hierarchy of power than the governess does. The reappearance of Quint casts doubt on the governess's relative control over the children while also redefining her limits. In a space where she was dominant before, suddenly the governess is being dominated. Though Miss Jessel's threat to the governess is one of an equal as opposed to a superior, the passage in which the former appears in the classroom is especially useful to illustrate the governess's estrangement by the ghosts:

Seated at my own table in the clear noonday light I saw a person . . . her attitude strangely persisted . . . she had looked at me long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers. While these instants lasted indeed I had the extraordinary chill of a feeling that it was I who was the intruder. (256-57)

This episode is significant in part because this haunting is the last straw for the governess: she "knows" that Quint and Jessel want the children, and she eventually resolves to take action by writing to the master. But what is particularly illuminating is that this breaking point comes only when Miss Jessel violates the governess's "own" personal space. Also worth noting in a Foucaultian reading is the fact that the governess's

adversary here occupies the schoolroom, a place representative of knowledge and therefore of power.

Two things are fascinating about this scene: first, the governess, upon being dominated by the visitors, immediately attempts to reassert her role as dominator. When Miss Jessel's intrusion suggests a limitation to the governess's power, the governess in turn moves to control both the children's psychological and geographical boundaries by arranging for their remove to London. Second, although the governess certainly feels dominated, Miss Jessel does not exactly attempt to exercise power *over* her here—at least as the governess remembers it. In true ghostly fashion, Miss Jessel merely demonstrates her ability to occupy the same space. In spite of the aforementioned fact that ghosts typically *do* fairly little in folklore, the governess assumes Quint and Jessel possess a great deal of agency and power, and the former governess's complacency comes as a shock to her in this scene. To assume, as the governess does, that Quint and Jessel are allied with the children and actively working to undermine her authority would be to read this complacency as indicative of the ghosts' triumph, a knowledge of victory that makes real action unnecessary. (Such a fear of foregone defeat also helps to justify the governess's heightening mania towards the end of the narrative; as established in the discussion of property theory in Chapter Two, she could not feel unsure in her possession of the children if the ghosts had no chance to possess them.) Whether this is the case or not, the governess has still recognized that she herself is a stranger, an "intruder," by the end of the encounter (257). It is clear that the governess's own strangeness is exacerbated by the presence of the apparitions; real or merely perceived, the ghosts recast the governess's conceptions of space and boundary at Bly and can dominate her as a result.

*The Turn of the Screw* represents a significant departure from the vengeance-seeking ghosts of “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” and “The Ghostly Rental”: though the ghosts may try to reclaim the children from the governess, the governess did not cause Quint and Jessel’s deaths or dispossess them of Miles and Flora. One might say the ghosts highlight the governess’s own guilt; there are, of course, a great number of critical readings taking the position that the ghosts are merely symptomatic of the governess’s strained psychological condition, more specifically the repression of sexual desires.<sup>33</sup> From a folkloric perspective, though, this suggested guilt over one’s own sexuality is different from the kind of guilt that tends to invite hauntings. A wrong directly committed against the ghost in life, whether by the haunted or their ancestors, is a more common cause, as is true in James’s other ghost stories. There is no indication in the text that the governess did Quint or Jessel any wrong while they were alive; indeed, given the description of their respective pasts, it is hard to conceive of a way in which such an offence would have been possible. As such, the text potentially invites readers to consider the governess’s rule at Bly or her attempts to possess the children as the real wrongs she commits.

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<sup>33</sup> A number of critics in the early twentieth century proposed that Quint and Jessel are merely the governess’s hallucinations. Edna Kenton is often considered to be the first to propose this reading in “Henry James to the Ruminant Reader: *The Turn of the Screw*” in 1924. As Kenton puts it, “the ghosts . . . are only dramatizations of her little personal mystery, figures for the ebb and flow of troubled thought within her mind” (255). Perhaps because of his fame as a scholar and critic, though, Edmund Wilson is generally considered the originator of the “non-apparitionist” argument. Wilson also focused on the governess’s repressed desires, which made his essay a popular object for mid-century psychoanalytic critics. In his 1934 essay “The Ambiguity of Henry James,” Wilson argues that “the governess who is made to tell the story is a neurotic case of sex repression, and that the ghosts are not real ghosts but hallucinations of the governess” (115).

Like Perdita and Captain Diamond, though, the governess's ghostly assailants do not dissipate into the landscape as a generalized guilt, but rather face her in an actual effort to retake their positions as rulers of the land, as well as control of their subjects. They are other, but they are also "native" to such an extent that they cannot be divorced from the land even in death. The governess's attempts to control the children may be to blame for Miles's death, and such a reading might suggest that Quint and Jessel are more traditional folkloric ghosts whose mere presence leads the haunted to their fate via personal guilt. But to follow this reading would not change the fact that the ghosts pose a threat to possess the children and a challenge to the governess's rule as she understands the situation; she does not feel such guilt and reacts to the ghosts' perceived designs rather than simply self-destructing. An intruder could be dangerous, but uncanny, invading *revenants* who know more than the governess about the children are uncontrollable and ineradicable, and thus unbeatable.

#### Miles and Flora

Perhaps most important to my claim that the perception of strangeness is shifting and multiplicitous in *The Turn of the Screw* is the fact that strangeness does not disappear from the governess's narrative once she has accepted that the ghosts are real—that is, when they become a part of what the governess considers normal (or at least expected) at Bly and should thus theoretically be exempted from queerness or oddness. Indeed, it is when the governess is most aware of the possibility that the ghosts may appear that she ceases to see them for a number of weeks, a period in which the governess's own

obsession, rather than the ghosts, is described in terms of strangeness (244).<sup>34</sup> The governess's initial encounters with the ghosts take place across six chapters and are described as "strange" ten times. Although Quint and Jessel, as ghosts, are the most obvious strangers in the narrative, after they are introduced, the governess's sense of strangeness is almost entirely transferred to the children. Initially, this strangeness is expressed primarily in terms of the governess's thoughts about the children, as in this pivotal and unsettling passage:

I used to wonder how my little charges could help guessing that I thought strange things about them; and the circumstance that these things only made them more interesting was not by itself a direct aid to keeping them in the dark. I trembled lest they should see that they *were* so immensely more interesting. (217)

To interpret "strange" as indicative of a social or national other, the text provides a significant clue halfway through that the governess is already estranged from the children.

This is mirrored in another instance in which the governess attempts to impose herself on and assimilate herself into the children's world, notably using first-person plural pronouns to refer to "the strangeness of our fate, where we are and what it means"

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<sup>34</sup> The first two stages discussed in this chapter are uniform in the sense of who or what is presented as "strange." There are, however, a few instances of strangeness related to the ghosts and two related more directly to the governess once the term begins to be applied primarily to the children. As these seem to be the exceptions rather than the rule, I will note them here: "Stranger than I can express, certainly was the effort to struggle against my new lights," although this comes immediately before the governess admits she thought "strange things about" the children (217); "[The ghosts are] seen only across, as it were, and beyond—in strange places" (238); "How can I retrace to-day the strange steps of my obsession?" (244); as noted earlier in this chapter, Miss Jessel's "attitude strangely persisted" (257); "I remember, strangely, as the first feeling now produced in me, my thrill of joy at having brought on a proof" (278).

(226). Moreover, the governess describes her relationship with the children as “this strange relation” (241) and calls silences in their conversations “the strange dizzy lift or swim . . . into a stillness” (245-46). Towards the end of the novella, strangeness becomes less a way that the governess conceives of her relationship with the children and more a way that she explicitly describes them and their actions: after the governess terrifies (and alienates) Flora, she describes the girl’s impression as “the very strangest of all” (285). Even more often, the governess speaks of Miles’s strangeness, referring to “his small strange genius” (299) and noting, “He gave me . . . the longest and strangest look” (305).

There are a number of ways to interpret the children’s strangeness. Most literally, the children were raised in India and are thus foreign to the British governess. Paul Sharrad reads Miles and Flora as “free spirits from the Indian frontier who resent being hemmed in by the social controls of civilised England,” a system of control enacted directly by the governess (4). Even if the children are not responding to these cultural differences and the authority figure who represents an imperialistic cultural system, they certainly represent subjects the governess cannot totally rule or control. The governess is terrified that Quint and Jessel will undermine her authority and wrench the children from her possession, but the shift in strangeness suggests that the children always had the capacity to be estranged from their governess, with or without spectral influence. More accurately, perhaps, the children who are native to Bly—or at least have a legal claim to the land and belong there—could not be divorced from their identities by a controlling settler’s influence. The ghosts may well be catalysts in this process, but the governess spends most of her time focused on the actions of the children, the native inhabitants of her “small colony” (*TS* 196).

As noted above, in terms of strangeness, the governess pays special attention to Miles, who—second to the ghosts, perhaps—poses the biggest threat to her power and authority. This is made clear in the strangeness of Miles’s attempts to assert his independence; the best example comes just before Miles asks about the possibility of returning to school—that is, escaping Bly and the governess’s control:

I was like a gaoler with an eye to possible surprises and escapes . . . Miles’s whole title to independence, the rights of his sex and situation, were so stamped upon him that if he had suddenly struck for freedom I should have had nothing to say. I was by the strangest of chances wondering how I should meet him when the revolution unmistakably occurred. (248)

As well-meaning as the governess may be—or, to view the situation more harshly, as much as she may try to justify her actions—the language of this passage seems to betray the underlying insidiousness of her mission. The governess is a “jailer” trying to keep Miles under her control where he belongs. Here, his independence is not necessarily his right as a human quickly approaching adulthood, but rather representative of a “revolution,” a term that implies disruption of systems of power even more than the attainment of personal freedom.

Miles does even more than speak of his “strange” independence, though: he goes a step further and exercises a degree of control over the governess, whether he intends to or not. When Miles asks the governess to leave him alone, his request has “a strange little dignity in it, something that made me release him” (266).<sup>35</sup> Just after, when Miles sits

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<sup>35</sup> When analyzing James’s lexical choices, one must of course be aware of the differences among various editions of the text. There are three usages of the word “strange” that differ among the 1908 the New York Edition, and 1898 American book

down to play piano, the governess says, “at the end of a time that *under his influence* I had quite ceased to measure I started up with a strange sense of having literally slept at my post” (269). While the governess fights with all her might against the ghosts, she seems to bend to Miles’s influence. In fact, Miles is not only a threat to the governess’s sense of control because he wants to escape; he is also the most likely to replace the governess as the ruler of Bly. Although John Carlos Rowe recognizes that the master seems to employ the governess as a way of keeping possession of the estate while he remains in the city, Rowe also cites legal precedent to suggest “Miles . . . might begin to establish such a claim [of possession of Bly] on the basis of residency in the ancestral home” (*Theoretical Dimensions* 133). In addition to this role as a potential heir, Sharrad argues that Miles’s ability to interact with adults at all levels of Bly’s power structure—from the ruling governess or valet to the servants—“makes him a potential master and a danger to the social codes protecting mastery” (6). Flora does not directly challenge the governess’s right to rule, so she feels free to exile Flora when the girl defies her authority; in a colonial sense, the girl must be removed if she will not submit to the governess’s rule. But Miles’s defiance presents a bigger threat that the governess must face if she is to retain control of Bly, and his right to the land cannot be ignored as easily.

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text, and the edition serialized in *Collier’s Weekly* from 1898 to 1899. The passage quoted above is the only place James added a “strange” for the New York Edition; the line reads “a beautiful little dignity” in the serialized version (*Collier’s Weekly* 141) and “a singular little dignity” in the 1898 American release (*Complete Tales* 104). The instances where James removed the word “strange” are: a passage that discusses Miss Jessel’s “very strange manner” (*CW* 60) with Flora that became “a most strange manner” (*CT* 64) and then “a very high manner” (*NY* 212); and the governess’s response to Flora’s language with a “laugh that was doubtless strange enough” (*CW* 132), which became “doubtless significant enough” (*NY* 290) in subsequent editions.



As noted earlier, focusing on the ghosts' power and strangeness can reveal the governess's ultimate lack of control over Bly, but this conflict becomes even clearer as the children become increasingly strange to the governess. The narrative repeatedly demonstrates what Kalliopi Nikolopoulou calls "the children's recalcitrance to reveal their past at the governess's request, . . . [and] the latter's eagerness to speak autobiographically" (4). As such, if knowledge is also power at Bly, then the children certainly hold some power over the governess. Especially in a text so concerned with literal and figurative sight, it is difficult not to think of Foucault's elaboration of Bentham's Panopticon vision of absolute control:

Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. (*Discipline and Punish* 200)

The children, though, know far more of the governess's past than she knows of theirs. One example of this difference noted by Nikolopoulou and others is the pivotal passage in which the governess realizes that Miles has "nothing to call even an infinitesimal history" (*TS* 182) and "never spoke of his school, never mentioned a comrade or a master" (183).

Perhaps an even clearer demonstration of the children's rejection of their roles as the objects within a panoptical system comes later, when their knowledge of the governess is expressed in the controlling terms of sight and possession:

They had an endless appetite for passages in my own history to which I had again and again treated them; they were in possession of everything that had ever

happened to me . . . and nothing else perhaps, when I thought of such occasions afterwards, gave me so the suspicion of being watched from under cover. It was in any case over *my* life, *my* past, and *my* friends alone that we could take anything like our ease. (242)

Viewing this passage in light of “Panopticism,” the governess’s power has been significantly undermined. The children have made the governess the object of vision and information when she desires to be the subject. Indeed, the governess states in the next paragraph that she “had seen nothing . . . that one had better not have seen” (243) in a good while and is troubled by the knowledge that “whatever I had seen, Miles and Flora saw *more*—things terrible and unguessable and that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past” (246). Throughout the novella, the less the governess sees and knows, the more she believes those around her to see, thus illustrating her increasingly tenuous hold on power.

The ghosts similarly highlight the governess’s role as an object within such a system of control and surveillance by staring back at her. The governess is not invisible as the Panopticon’s subject would be. Moreover, it is Quint rather than the governess who watches from the battlement, a construction of martial power and a sort of real-life Panopticon in its purposes.<sup>36</sup> This also recalls Derrida’s statement on the ways the specter (literal or metaphorical) of the other visually confronts the Westerner in a postcolonial

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<sup>36</sup> There has been a great deal of work—especially in feminist criticism—focusing on the “gaze” in James’s work. One particularly notable article is Beth Newman’s “Getting Fixed: Feminine Identity and Scopic Crisis in *The Turn of the Screw*,” which questions the assumption made by many critics that to see or survey is necessarily a negative exercise of power. While I still believe the undermining of the governess’s control is represented by the gaze of the ghosts and children, Newman argues the dynamics of seeing and being seen are the governess’s way of attempting to understand her own social and psychological identity.

world: “The perspective has to be reversed, once again: ghost or *revenant*, . . . visible-invisible, the specter first of all sees *us*. . . . it looks at us even before we see *it* or even before we see period. We feel ourselves observed, sometimes under surveillance by it even before any apparition” (101). In this way, one might say an encounter with the other is always a ghostly one.

Though they are not actual ghosts, the children play a similar spectral role for the governess as Owen Wingrave plays for his pro-imperialist family; Miles and Flora represent an other whose gaze forces the governess to question her power and her role as ruler, try as she might to avoid such a reckoning. This specter-like gaze indeed also aligns the children with the ghosts. The children escape their roles as objects in the Panopticon even further by interacting both with one another and potentially with the ghosts, who the governess is convinced “were known and were welcome” by this point (244). This is, ultimately, what most horrifies the governess: that those under her rule may work together to defy her more effectively, “that the child may keep [communication] up . . . without my knowing it” (205). If those under the governess’s rule all work together to undermine her authority, she cannot pretend to boast any sort of possession of Bly or its inhabitants; she is no longer the ruler, but rather the ruled, and she cannot deny her settler strangeness in someone else’s realm.

The governess’s perception of the children as increasingly strange throughout her narrative is especially important in light of the text’s focus on possession. “Possess” carries ghostly connotations, of course, as illustrated by the famous polysemy of the term “dispossess” in *The Turn of the Screw*’s final line. Especially relevant to this study, though, is the fact that one of the definitions of “strange” is distinctly proprietorial in nature:

“*Belonging to some other place . . . other than one’s own*” (*OED*, emphasis mine). And indeed, the governess speaks of possession quite often. For example, the scene that gives the governess such a strange feeling about Flora features the language of ownership extensively: “The wretched child had spoken exactly as if she had got from some outside source each of her stabbing little words . . . ‘Of course I’ve lost you’” (282). Peter Beidler notes that this reference to an outside source likely refers to spiritual possession (103), but Mrs. Grose is described a moment later as “possessed of the little girl,” the implication being that Flora is subject to possession by a living entity, as well (*TS* 282). In the final scene, too, when Miles asks, “Is she *here*?” the governess is staggered by the idea that someone else—her strange predecessor, no less—could have gained control of the boy or earned his allegiance, referring to this pronoun as “his strange ‘she’” (308). Whereas the governess accepts losing possession of Flora (to either the ghosts or Mrs. Grose, or both), she refuses to give Miles up to anyone: “What does he matter now, my own?—what will he *ever* matter? *I* have you . . . but he has lost you for ever!” (309).<sup>37</sup> She continues to utilize terms of possession, but the term “loss” becomes victorious when the governess is convinced she has defeated the ghosts in the battle of possession and control, speaking of “the loss I was so proud of.” Such a victory is not to be, of course. Under the controlling influence of the governess—and possibly the ghosts—Miles has “his little heart, dispossessed” (309).

### The Strangeness of Colonizer Identity

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<sup>37</sup> In the interest of making James’s original emphasis clear, I have not emphasized the governess’s addressing of Miles as “my own” in this passage, but the potentially innocuous term of endearment takes on a chilling quality in light of the governess’s fixation on possession, especially in the final pages.

Reading *The Turn of the Screw* as staging or replaying narratives of colonialism from the perspective of the settler attempting to establish rule, it is clear the governess's "colony" is ultimately unsuccessful. One might say that James opts to criticize colonial rule with the governess's ultimate inability to control either her native subjects or the ghostly invaders. To this point, Rowe describes "the political legacy of British imperialism" that lurks at the edges of countryside estates in James's work:

James knew well enough how the English countryside, however charmingly rural, still hid the secrets of a violent past in which theft, murder, invasion, and brigandry structured its landscape . . . The growth of the metropolitan center of London as the contact zone linking the British Empire with the countryside is a subject of considerable interest to James. ("Henry James and Globalization" 293-94)

To view the ghosts folklorically, this generally "violent past" may be the governess's guilt or wrongdoing for which she is haunted; if she is not exactly culpable for her fathers' sins, she certainly participates in and reenacts systems of control that allowed Britain to prosper domestically by brutalizing foreign peoples. As is typical of James, though, the text is more ambiguous and multiplicitous than would allow for such an easy reading: after all, unlike the American ghosts of "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" and "The Ghostly Rental," the dispossessed are not empowered to achieve a straightforward, clear revenge. The governess "loses" the battle against the ghosts, but Miles and Flora certainly do not win, either, and it is not entirely clear what a true victory for the ghosts might mean. The settler-colonizer loses, but so too do all the natives. If

there is an explicit critique of colonial rule in *The Turn of the Screw*, it may be a stretch to suggest the victims of such rule are in any way empowered by the text.

This is just one way in which a direct allegory of Bly for a settler-driven colony falls apart. Creating a direct allegory in this way was never the purpose of this reading, but the appearance of the ghosts and the fact that even the “native” children were not born at Bly are other significant factors that complicate such an allegory. By writing a strange governess who attempts to utilize techniques of colonial power to enforce her rule, James can draw attention to the confusing identity politics of colonialism, as well as the ultimate baselessness of the colonizer’s identity.

To this point, it is worth noting that the ghosts’ domination of the governess takes the form of mimicry or doubling: Miss Jessel sits in the governess’s seat, and Quint stands on a battlement and gazes out from a position of power the governess previously had (or imagined she had), to name just two examples. Homi Bhabha suggests the threat of mimicry in a colonial context “comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory ‘identity effects’ in the play of a power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no ‘itself.’ And that form of *resemblance* is the most terrifying thing to behold” (270). It may also be useful to remember Bhabha’s definition of colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as *a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (266). Though this work specifically refers to racial and ethnic difference, Bhabha’s theories can also be applied to the situation at Bly. Bhabha’s definition, with its echoes of Freud’s “uncanny,” can serve in part to underscore the general postcolonial implications of ghosts and other monstrous figures of gothic literature. In James’s novella specifically, the uncanny horror of Quint

and Jessel requires that they be almost human, but ultimately set apart from the governess and children by markers of difference, whether those markers be class distinctions or the boundary between the living and the dead. Indeed, the governess directly states that she is horrified by Quint because she perceives him as an evil other but recognizes how little difference there is between him the living: “the thing was as human and hideous as a real interview: hideous just because it *was* human, as human as to have met alone, in the small hours, in a sleeping house, some enemy, some adventurer, some criminal” (223). The governess assumes the ghosts’ malevolence, and is thus deeply disturbed by the lack of difference between her and the specter—the implication being that she, too, may represent a malevolent force.

Given the children’s association with the ghosts and the governess’s acute awareness of them as other to her, one can also reasonably argue that her control of Miles and Flora is founded on the creation and recognition of a difference of power between governess and ward. Especially interesting here is Bhabha’s point that mimicry in colonial discourse often signifies the essence-less self of the colonizer. The governess’s self-perceived identity as the rightful ruler of her colony is so false that it can be easily reproduced by shadowy figures that may or may not exist. Moreover, Quint and Jessel help tip the scales of strangeness to complicate who is actually other and who, as a ruling power, is allowed to decide “difference” based on personal vision and identity. In this vein, Lisa G. Chinitz reads the final scene’s significance as representative of the governess’s “loss of self,” noting that the ghosts “enter the house from the inside, taking over the body of the possessed child and making it clear that the real threat to the integrity of the self comes not from the storm without but from within” (276). Chinitz’s

reading implies a common gothic theme that occurs in many of James's ghost stories: the source of horror being the home or the self rather than the foreign other. I agree with this reading at several levels, further proposing that the governess's sense of self is built on her role of power, and thus requires the existence of a subservient, inferior other to recognize and legitimize the self.

It is certainly valid to suggest that the real evil force exists within the governess rather than—or in addition to—the ghosts, but such a reading ignores the importance the governess's perception of her relationship with the children. As Freud and Kristeva have noted, the discomfort of encountering a stranger often comes from the recognition that some boundary between the self and the other has collapsed, or perhaps never existed. More so than any purely internal conflict, it is this encounter that challenges and endangers the governess's sense of self. *The Turn of the Screw* depicts a colonizer attempting to come to terms with her own identity, the identities she has constructed for those she views as other, and the very idea that she can be granted the right to rule other people at all. And indeed, the ending may imply the danger of the colonizer who fails to recognize the baselessness of this power and colonial identity. Ever unsure if she is in control or being controlled, the governess's loss lies in her fruitless attempts to impose her identity and system of rule on the inhabitants of Bly. To occupy any healthy middle ground, the governess would need to accept her own identity as a stranger. Unable to do so, her colonizing self dissolves, as is evident in the fact that her othered colonial subject dies, destroying the governess's paradigm of positional superiority and therefore her construction of her own identity. As is the case in "Owen Wingrave," to recognize the



independence of the othered subject is to recognize the falseness of the colonizer's identity.

Beyond her ultimate "loss" in a more general sense, it is the governess's failure to gain possession of Miles in the final scene that highlights the dilemma of strangeness that she can never resolve. Strangeness is predicated on the boundary between native and foreign, between inside and outside. If the boundary holds, then the governess never ceases to be a stranger to the children; she continues indefinitely "strangely at the helm" without ever being accepted as a native, her strangeness also preventing her from keeping true control of Bly (164). If the boundary collapses, the children become a part of the governess's system of rule and she has the potential to exercise the utmost control over them—physical possession—but retains little power to prevent other strange beings from invading, as well. In a sense, to eliminate the boundary between native and foreign is to recognize that any other being could cross that line just as the governess can, but she insists on taking complete control and possession of Bly for herself. That the reader receives the story in the form of a first-person narrative—especially one that is privately circulated—increases the sense of intimacy with the governess, so it can be easy to overlook exactly how alien she really is in *The Turn of the Screw*. This is likely why people, things, and thoughts can remain strange after the governess has accepted the ghosts as real. Try as she might to assimilate herself, the governess must always be a stranger at Bly.

The shifting nature of strangeness within the text invites an exploration of what constitutes strangeness and belonging and how these concepts have been constructed in colonial and postcolonial contexts. This may lead to C. Namwali Serpell's suggestion that

the constant tension and oscillation between opposite forces and possibilities in the novella “can point us toward an ethics that complicates the apparent mutual exclusion between the self and the other” (232). Even so, *The Turn of the Screw* still raises a question related to the complicated power and identity politics of colonization; who is the strangest: the oppressed indigenous population made strange in its own homeland, the former rulers who return to claim their old colony (their old property, in a sense), or the ruler newly introduced from the outside? The text presents this question even though James knows there is no real answer. James seems to recognize that the idea of the “strange native” has been *necessary* for the Western settler’s construction of his own identity throughout colonial history. There can be no stranger if there is no native, nor an other without a conception of the self. As Ahluwalia and Bhabha note, it is the creation and perception of *difference* that allows settling colonizers to believe in their own superiority—and with time, their own nativity—at the expense of the indigenous population. The governess is always a stranger because her colonizer identity requires her to conceive of her wards as inferior to her, and thus other. This difference creates a construction of those under her rule as strangers, which by extension makes the governess a stranger to them, as well. Although the governess wants to be accepted, she will be estranged from her subjects for as long as she insists on the difference between the self and the other rather than attempting to understand the other. And in losing those who she attempts to colonize, the governess pays the price for participating in the construction of a native/settler binary: she loses something of herself.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

I have presented an arc of James's ghost stories that depicts a developing understanding and recognition of the colonized other. This arc reaches its apex in *The Turn of the Screw*, depicting the violent loss of colonizer self and of the falseness of Anglo-American superiority. The term "culminates" may be inaccurate, though, in its suggestion of a clear ending. The phrase "loss of self" is also abstract to the point that its results may be unclear. After all, a good deal of critical discussion of *The Turn of the Screw* addresses the apparent tranquility of the governess's life after leaving Bly. One must wonder, then, if there is any observable consequence or aftermath to the colonizer facing the horrors within himself in James's ghost stories. There is certainly a moment of terror, but less certain is whether or not the ghostly episode results in an increased sense of empathy with the oppressed other.

It may be useful to look to the six ghostly tales James wrote following *The Turn of the Screw*. As mentioned in Chapter Three, a thread running through these final stories is the presence of alternative selves and histories. These alternatives are by turns positive or negative—or a dangerously enticing combination of the two—but in both cases James tends to highlight their falseness and unreality. In "The Great Good Place," George Dane convinces a young man to trade places with him and take over his professional obligations so he can escape to a more tranquil existence, the depressing realization being that "any other [time]'s only a dream. We really know none but our own" (244). In "The

Real Right Thing,” George Withermore attempts to write the biography of the recently deceased writer Ashton Doyne, only to be steered away from the project by Doyne’s spirit—the ghost-writer presumably objecting to the invasive project’s effect on his reputation. “Maud-Evelyn” centers on a family’s shared delusion that allows them to preserve a dead girl in the realm of the living. “The Third Person” follows a common ghost story structure and features two women attempting to discover their ancestor’s crime and make amends so he can finally pass on to “the other side.” And “The Beast in the Jungle” and “The Jolly Corner” both focus on the inaccessibility of a reality in which past mistakes have been erased. A subtext of many of these stories of alternative lives is the question that permeates postcolonial literatures: “What if events could have played out differently?” Even as characters in these stories engage with alternative histories and selves, though, they highlight the unreality of those histories and the folly of dwelling on them. When the alternate version of one’s self or situation is positive, it often dissolves as a dream or delusion in James’s late fiction. And when the alternative is more sinister or horrifying, it is directly reflective of reality and the horrors that already exist within the self. As ever, James does not allow his characters easy forgiveness.

The story among these that is the most nuanced and complicated and thus may require further examination is “The Jolly Corner,” in large part because many read the ending as positive. Spencer Brydon’s double is especially relevant to a postcolonial study, given how he was affected by his participation in burgeoning American capitalism: although “He has a million a year,” “He has been unhappy, he has been ravaged . . . he’s grim, he’s worn—and things have happened to him” (485). This ghostly shade of Brydon has achieved great personal success, but at the expense of the victims of capitalism and

imperialism. James's final American ghost story implies a similar moral dilemma of property ownership to the one I observe in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" and "The Ghostly Rental" because all that Brydon's alter ego gains has been taken from someone else, in a sense. This alter ego is horrifying in part because he simply reveals horrors that already exist in Anglo-American imperial reality; Brydon does not directly participate in this imperialist system in the same way Spencer Coyle and the governess do, but he recognizes that the avoidance of this fate was circumstantial rather than inevitable. Moreover, as an inheritor of American settlers' land, Brydon is still complicit in the atrocities that made colonial land seizure possible. What is horrifying about Brydon's alter ego is also horrifying about his own postcolonial identity.

As demonstrated earlier, such meetings with the other (who is not so other) often end catastrophically or ambiguously in James's ghost stories. Viola dies for her inability to respect her sister's property, and the Diamond estate burns to the ground because Captain Diamond pays his daughter back for her years of "haunting." Coyle is forced to confront the horrors of his own identity, but his narrative ends before it is revealed whether this confrontation leads to a true realization of postcolonial reality or a return to blissful ignorance. And the governess's inability to truly face the horrors within herself causes the collapse of her sense of a superior colonial identity. However, "The Jolly Corner"—notably, James's last ghost story—perhaps presents a more constructive narrative for postcolonial relations and identity politics. Horrified as he is, Brydon actively confronts not only his alter ego, but also the implications this other holds for his conscious self. Reading the alter ego as Brydon's shadow in the Jungian sense, Sandra Hughes sees both Alice Staverton and Brydon's final acceptance of the specter as

representative of “a liaison between the shadow and the conscious persona as Brydon works toward complete integration” (para. 25). In both the literal and figurative senses, Brydon can only achieve self-actualization through the recognition and acceptance of the dark, repressed regions of his self. In this vein, it seems the only way forward for the white Westerner is not to reject a colonial past and present, but rather to recognize that the legacy of colonialism is inextricable from colonizer identity. Indeed, this recognition is the ultimate goal of James’s depiction of contact zones between those in positions of power or authority and the other. Facing the colonized is only a horrifying experience for the colonizer because the meeting is a reminder of his culpability for the associated horror.

A haunting can communicate more than is implied by the direct interaction between a ghost and its living victim, though. As Briggs and others have noted, ghosts have always been a shared cultural experience, found in the stories told around a fire. In addition to the social value of telling ghost stories, Avery Gordon writes about the shared cultural understanding of ghosts themselves: “haunting is a shared structure of feeling, a shared possession, a specific type of sociality” (201). Humanity has a shared interest in ghosts and haunting not only because we all have at least some amount of curiosity about life after death, but also because we have to function with each other in society, even when witching hour has passed and the ghosts have dissipated in the morning light. Gordon also makes the point that ghosts reveal “the unavoidability of reckoning with the structure of feeling of a haunting, of reckoning with the fundamentally animistic mode by which worldly power is making itself felt in our lives, even if that feeling is vague, even if we feel nothing” (202). In a solely American context, Gordon uses this point to discuss

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*; slavery permeates all of American history and culture, and thus *Beloved*'s haunting, in some ways the literalized specter of slavery, strikes a nerve for Americans. Similarly, James and his compatriots lived in an imperial, postcolonial world even if they did not acknowledge this reality in their day-to-day lives. Although James's treatment of postcolonial themes is often implicit rather than explicit, the very fact that ghosts return so frequently to haunt his fiction suggests that this reality is simultaneously recognized and repressed.

Among James's messages is that what haunts one person haunts everyone in some way. This extends beyond the social value of ghost stories. Haunting is a function of not just our own actions, but also how we treat others, and how we receive—or perhaps expect to receive—treatment in response. It might be said that haunting is a social mechanism that ensures we can still feel guilt, and thus empathy. After all, ghosts are not too scary by themselves. Indeed, ghosts can be exorcised, and monsters can be vanquished; humans can dismiss all manner of hauntings with a moment of bravery and a little candlelight. But our own past is more elusive and harder to escape. When all the other shadows have been dispelled, the specters that still hover just past the edge of vision—never approaching, but never completely out of sight—are those we created ourselves. And perhaps in the late hours, when we are all alone, a part of us knows this by instinct. They are out there either way, in all the little human miseries we leave in our wake. All we have to do to meet them is await their return. And, of course, turning out the lights doesn't hurt.

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