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Reason, Conflict, and Psychological Haunting:

Considering *The Turn of the Screw* as an

Adaptation of *Wieland*

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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Recent decades have seen heightened interest in Charles Brockden Brown and his contribution to American literature. Scholars have worked to reclaim Brown from the margins of literary history, but he remains on the outskirts of literature classrooms and conversations. In an effort to further map Brown's influence and significance in the American literary tradition, I discuss his most famous novel, *Wieland*, in relation to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. Brown has not previously been linked to James or *The Turn of the Screw* in any significant way, but the similarities between the texts provide plenty of room for discussion. I use current trends in adaptation theory to make the link from *Wieland* to *The Turn of the Screw*, with particular emphasis on issues of intertextuality in adaptation rather than fidelity to an origin text. I argue that adaptation study is a way of looking at texts rather than the examination of a certain kind of text. With this foundation, I assert that *The Turn of the Screw* functions as an adaptation of *Wieland* insofar as both explore reason, conflict, and psychological haunting in the context of late eighteenth-century Enlightenment and late nineteenth-century almost-Modernist America. The juxtaposition of these texts allows for a new reading of *The Turn of the Screw*, one that explores the often discussed ambiguity and instability of the text as a symbolic critique of America and, more specifically, of democracy.

Keywords: Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*, Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, adaptation

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Introduction

Charles Brockden Brown published *Wieland*, one of the first American novels, in 1798. Scholars have traditionally downplayed the literary significance of Brown's writing, acknowledging his place in the American literary tradition while criticizing his style and talent. Brown scholarship in the past 30 years, though, has shifted the discussion about his work. In *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic*, Philip Barnard, Mark L. Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro argue for Brown's talent and influence, seeking to discount his traditional status as a historically important yet "flawed writer" (ix). They say, "Brown is no longer viewed as a marginal figure at all" (x). While this is certainly true in some circles, Brown is still largely overlooked in literature classrooms and anthologies. A recent trip to my campus bookstore revealed that the last copy of *Wieland* was sold over ten years ago without any requests to order more. It would seem, then, that there is still important critical work to be done in bringing Brown in from the margins of American literature.

Steven Watts describes Brown's role in the development of an American literary tradition, saying "that Brown...became an exemplary and pivotal figure in the articulation of an American 'culture' in the early years of nationhood" (xviii). Peter Kafer is another scholar interested in viewing Brown as a deeply significant figure in American literary history. Kafer's *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic* describes *Wieland*—the first American Gothic novel—as an anomaly considering the culture of post-Revolutionary America. Kafer explains, "And then in 1798 appeared *Wieland*, with its oddness, its fierceness, its perversity, its patently uncertain morality. It was, to borrow a phrase from Melville, a 'hell-fired book'—the American republic's first in what would be a long, characteristic line. Where had it come from?" (xvi). Brown's influence on fellow Gothics like Edgar Allan Poe is readily

acknowledged.¹ Kafer even links Brown to Stephen King. I, however, am interested in using *Wieland* to consider Brown's cultural relevance to Henry James, an author to whom Brown has not previously been linked in a significant way.

Unlike *Wieland*, Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* has never fallen out of fashion with scholars and students of literature. Indeed, *The Turn of the Screw* has daunting critical baggage. It seems almost impossible to say something new about this text. *The Turn of the Screw*, however, has never been discussed in relation to *Wieland* despite the uncanny similarities between the two texts. Brown's most famous novel is not listed in Leon Edel and Adeline R. Tintner's *The Library of Henry James* and it is possible that James never read it, but the links between *Wieland* and *The Turn of the Screw* that I will discuss in this paper suggest that perhaps James did read Brown and was influenced by him. This thesis will explore the similarities between these texts in an effort both to further ground *Wieland* in the American literary tradition and to provide a new lens through which to interpret *The Turn of the Screw*.

Scholarship, Adaptation, and Origins

One of the only prior scholarly discussions of Brown and James together is found in *Redefining the American Gothic from Wieland to Day of the Dead*. Louis S. Gross devotes his first chapter to a discussion of Brown and James. In his introduction, Gross argues the prominence of the Gothic genre in American literature and explains its basic tenets. He writes, "The American Gothic narrative is primarily concerned with exploring personal identity through the roles played in both family and national history...[The result is] a kind of demonic history text, an alternative vision of American experience" (2). Gross explains that the American Gothic differs from the European in that European Gothic writers are interested in the past, while Americans tended to operate in the present. Gross argues that Americans do this as a way of

separating themselves from European literature and creating a unique, national genre. This suggests the cultural role that he believes the Gothic plays in American literature. By exploring present domestic fears and concerns, the American Gothic created and simultaneously dissected the American experience. To illustrate, Gross discusses *Wieland* in conjunction with James's short story, "The Jolly Corner." Gross argues, as I do, that the American Gothic in general and James's and Brown's writing in specific deal with issues of epistemology. He says, "The need to analyze what one 'knows' is an urgent one in the Gothic world" (5). The conflict between what is real and what is imagined or fantasized that pervades these texts represents this urgent need to *know*, understand, and make sense of one's experience. Gross argues that, through the dysfunctional family in *Wieland* and the search for personal and national identity embodied in *Wieland* and *Turn*, both texts represent a distinctly American Gothic. He writes, "For Charles Brockden Brown at the beginning of our narrative history to Henry James and beyond, the possibilities of the New World call up dark visions of accelerated change and unrestrained aggression that mark Gothic fiction in America as a consideration of the land itself as the locus of terror" (21). I am interested in furthering the link that Gross makes between Brown and James by focusing on the function of ghosts and haunting in both *Wieland* and *The Turn of the Screw*.

For the past century *The Turn of the Screw* scholarship has been dominated by the ambiguous haunting in the text. Scholars have debated the governess's sanity and the validity of her ghostly visions. Some say that she did not see ghosts and was simply insane. Others say she *did* see ghosts and was perfectly sane. Still others claim that she was mad *and* haunted by ghosts. Peter G. Beidler, editor of the 2004 Bedford edition of *The Turn of the Screw*, provides a critical history of the text. He explains that most of James's contemporaries read *Turn* as a ghost story; psychoanalytic readings of the text and questions of the governess's sanity began early, though,

with Henry A. Beers in 1919 (192). In 1924, “Edna Kenton got the ‘mad governess’ theory moving” (193). One of the most influential articles arguing the governess’s insanity was “The Ambiguity of Henry James” written by Edmund Wilson in 1934. 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” (qtd. in Beidler 193). Wilson’s analysis was largely dependent on Freud. In 1965, a book-length, Freud-inspired psychoanalytic criticism of *The Turn of the Screw* was published by Thomas M. Cranfill and Robert L. Clark, Jr. Leon Edel, James’s biographer and one of the foremost interpreters of his life and writing, writes that “it is not the ghosts but ‘the governess herself who haunts the children’” (qtd. in Beidler 194).

Other scholars view the ghosts in *Turn* as, well, actual ghosts. Beidler cites Glenn A. Reed, Oliver Evans, Charles G. Hoffman, Alexander E. Jones, Dorothea Krook, John J. Allen, and Charles K. Wolfe as significant voices in this debate. According to Beidler, these critics ask,

Why, for example, if the governess is so neurotically unreliable and insane, does she go on to become the respected and much-loved governess of other small children?...Why, since James wrote some half-dozen other stories about ghosts, must we read *this* one alone as a hallucination story?...Why, if the ghosts are imaginary, does James in his letters to others who asked him about the story insist that he was much more interested in the ghosts and the children than in the governess who tells their story? (195)

J.A. Waldock identifies a particular scene to prove that the governess really was seeing ghosts. After an encounter with Peter Quint’s ghost, the governess describes him to Mrs. Grose in such detail that Mrs. Grose can identify who the ghost is. Waldock argues that the governess must

have really seen a ghost. In fact, after reading Waldock's argument, "Wilson retracted his thesis—for a time" (196).

Still other scholars claim that, while the governess is in fact crazy, she also sees ghosts. While some early scholars took this approach, it became more prominent in "the late 1970s, when several scholars brought to bear the influence of the structuralist Tzvetan Todorov and the psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan" (197). With a structuralist approach both readings of *Turn* could work simultaneously; one did not have to choose an either-or interpretation. Beidler reports that "three studies form the foundation for the postmodern 'we-can-have-it-both-ways' view" of *The Turn of the Screw* (197). The first is "The Squirm of the True" by Christine Brooke-Rose. Brooke-Rose "tries to 'preserve the total ambiguity' of the story" (197). The second foundational study is Shlmoith Rimmon's 1977 article that identifies the "double-directedness" of James's story that makes it impossible to choose one interpretation over the other (197). The third foundational study is Shoshana Felman's "Turning the Screw of Interpretation." Felman argues the validity of multiple—even contradictory—readings of *Turn*, emphasizing the journey of the reader over the interpreting of the text.

Viewing *Turn* in relation to *Wieland* provides a new angle on the long-running debate about the governess's sanity and James's ambiguous ghosts. Both Brown and James seemingly use ghost stories for epistemological purposes, and both of these stories serve as metaphors for the way we think about thinking. Hazel Hutchinson addresses James's use of ghost stories as metaphors, something that I argue links him to Brown. She says, "James uses the genre of the ghost story to explore profound questions of perception and epistemological inquiry" (xiv). The ways that both Brown and James deal with haunting in *Wieland* and *The Turn of the Screw* represent the epistemological shift from Enlightenment rationality to almost-Modernist

ambiguity. While the characters in *Wieland* are largely reliant on reason to interpret their paranormal experiences, and while most seemingly supernatural encounters in the text are explained away by the end of the text, *Turn* is characterized by a relentless uncertainty and a lack of answers. To better understand the significance of these divergences in two fundamentally similar ghost stories, and to adequately interpret the critical points of convergence within *Wieland* and *The Turn of the Screw*, it is useful to explore how *The Turn of the Screw* functions as an adaptation of *Wieland*.

To adequately discuss *The Turn of the Screw* as an adaptation of *Wieland* it is first important to establish the current trends in adaptation theory. In the Introduction to *New Beginnings for Adaptation Studies*, Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins explain that adaptation scholars have traditionally focused “on the issue of ‘fidelity’ to a precursor text as a means to understand an adaptation’s scope and worth” (12). They suggest that this is problematic and argue instead for a broadening of adaptation studies and a redefinition of the word “adaptation” itself. Rather than simply exploring one text’s “fidelity” to another, adaptation theorists have begun to focus on questions of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva explains intertextuality in “Word, Dialogue and Novel” by expanding an idea introduced by Bakhtin. She writes, “[A]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (37). Kristeva identifies this absorption and transformation as “the notion of *intertextuality*,” a concept at the heart of contemporary adaptation studies (37). Cutchins and Albrecht-Crane continue, “Adaptation studies can offer exciting new insights into the way texts shape each other and interact with cultural forces” (13). Adaptation study, then, becomes *a way of looking at texts*, rather than the examination of a certain kind of text, an “adaptation.” Thomas Leitch also argues for a refocusing of adaptation studies. He says that we

must “see adaptation as incessant and unavoidable” (14). Contemporary authors seem to agree with theorists on this point. In an interview with *The New York Times*, American writer Cormac McCarthy comments on the incessant nature of adaptation and the ubiquity of intertextuality, saying, “The...fact is books are made out of books. The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written” (Woodward). This vision of adaptation makes my comparative analysis of James and Brown possible; James does not have to be trying to rewrite *Wieland* for the two to work together. While James’s intentionality in crafting *The Turn of the Screw* as an adaptation of *Wieland* is uncertain, there are pivotal points of convergence within the texts that suggest at least a degree of intentionality. And regardless of this, the texts are so closely connected in theme and narrative structure that an examination of *Turn*’s “absorption and transformation” of *Wieland* is useful within a framework of adaptation studies. Adaptation studies, in short, offers a new tool for scholars seeking to trace Brown’s literary influence, and it suggests a new way to view an already well-examined text, James’s *The Turn of the Screw*.

The origins of *Wieland* and *The Turn of the Screw* certainly link Brown and James’s work together: both texts are adaptations of supposedly true ghost stories. The 2002 Modern Library edition of *Wieland* includes “An Account of a Murder Committed by Mr. J[ames] Y[ates], upon His Family, in December, A.D. 1781.” This narrative, which was sent to the editors of *New York Weekly Magazine* in 1796, is considered the true account that inspired Brown to write *Wieland*. One evening while reading the Bible with his wife, James Yates says he saw two spirits. He explains that one of the spirits “bade me to destroy all my *idols*, and begin by casting the Bible into the flames” (362). Yates did what was asked. He continues, “The good angel whom I had obeyed stood by me and bade me go on, ‘You have more idols, (said he) look at your wife and children.’ I hesitated not a moment” (362). The story gruesomely recounts the

murder of Yates's wife and four children and his feelings of exhilaration and then fear of being misunderstood and called a murderer. He considers covering up the murders or blaming them on the Indians but decides against the plan because he could not "tell a horrible lie" (364). He instead goes to his sister's home nearby. She invites him inside but he replies, "I will not...for I have committed the unpardonable sin—I have burnt the Bible" (364). The sister quickly pieces things together after seeing that her brother is covered in blood, and Yates eventually is convicted and, after escaping from an institution twice, is locked in a dungeon for the rest of his life.

This account provided fascinating American material for Brown to explore in his novel. Prior to the publication of *Wieland*, the Gothic was considered to be a European genre. Caleb Grain explains that prior to *Wieland* "[the Gothic] depended on the conflict of utopian ideals with ancient fears, and Americans were too practical for either—or so the national myth would have it" (xi). Brown, however, did not shy away from this Gothic conflict. He was certainly aware of the potential pitfalls of the post-revolutionary American experiment and tried to shake this newborn national myth. Brown and his family were Quakers and pacifists. During the revolutionary war, several prominent Quakers—including Brown's father—were arrested by Revolutionaries because of their unwillingness to pledge allegiance to the cause. Thus, at a time when Enlightenment rhetoric emphasized equal rights and abundant freedom, Brown's family experienced persecution for their beliefs. Inspired by the account of James Yates and by his own experiences during the Revolution, Brown wrote *Wieland* in an attempt to explore the new democracy's greatest fear: democracy itself. Grain explains, "Brown discovered how to unnerve the bold new nation...He turned to something domestic and plain: the human voice, the vessel of a person's identity and authority. In a representative democracy, the citizen's voice is the source

of power. But how secure is a voice? How do you know you are listening to the right one?" (xi-xii). The Wieland family grapples with these very questions in a very literal way.

The political leanings of Brown and the analogy he wished to draw through *Wieland* become clear when it is discovered that he sent a copy of his novel to Thomas Jefferson (Kafer xiv). The wildly unpopular Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 stirred fear and chaos among the American people. The same government which had granted freedom of expression to its citizens had, in a few short years, made it illegal to speak out against it. The Federalist party was sinking fast, and Brown wondered if America might be a failed experiment. Thomas Jefferson was the Democratic-Republican candidate expected to oppose the Federalists in the 1800 presidential election. So how was *Wieland* relevant to Jefferson's political position in 1798? As Jay Fliegelman describes in *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, "Brown's novel of authority misrepresented and authority imagined is a terrifying post-French Revolutionary account of the fallibility of the human mind and, by extension, of democracy itself" (239). Perhaps Brown sent him a copy of *Wieland* in an effort to warn Jefferson of the fallibility of reason and the human voice.

Plot summaries of *Wieland* and, subsequently, of *The Turn of the Screw* are intended to clarify the similarities between the two texts for readers perhaps unfamiliar with one text or unsure of their compatibility. *Wieland* begins with Clara's description of her father's spiritual enlightenment, his subsequent immigration to America to spread religion to the indigenous people there, and his mysterious death. Because Wieland never fulfilled his calling as a missionary, he felt certain that God would punish him. One night, while alone in the temple erected on the family estate, Wieland is somehow fatally wounded by some kind of supernatural force. He dies shortly thereafter, and his wife quickly follows him in death. Clara and Theodore Wieland are thereby orphaned, but are raised by relatives in happy circumstances. Theodore

eventually marries Catherine, has children, and lives on the family estate. Clara has a home on the estate grounds, and Catherine's brother Henry Pleyel comes from Europe and lives with them. It is during this tranquil period that the family begins to hear voices. One night, while walking alone toward his father's temple, Theodore hears what he thinks is his wife's voice warning him to turn around and return home. When he does, he finds that his wife has not left the room. Another incident occurs when Theodore and Pleyel hear a voice telling them that the Baroness, whom Pleyel loves, is dead. A letter from Europe several weeks later confirms this. One night, Clara hears voices in her bedroom plotting to kill her. She runs to her brother's home and collapses outside. The family is awakened by a voice warning them that someone is at the door and needs their help. While Clara and Pleyel are certain that the voice everyone is hearing is a result of their senses being deceived, Theodore is convinced that the voice is divine in origin.

Shortly after the incident in Clara's bedroom, she meets Carwin, an intriguing stranger with a strikingly beautiful voice. In one strange scene, Carwin is found hiding in Clara's closet. Pleyel, whom Clara loves, thinks he overhears a conversation between Clara and Carwin that leads him to believe she is impure and to subsequently reject her. In the strangest plot twist of all, a voice leads Theodore to murder Catherine and their children and to come after Clara and Henry. He is imprisoned, though, before he can kill them. Seeking answers, Clara questions Carwin's involvement. He admits to being a bilquist² capable of throwing his voice, acknowledging his deception in the conversation Pleyel thought he overheard and in the previous incidents in the Wieland family. He insists that he did not, however, tell Theodore to murder his family. When Theodore later escapes from prison and comes to murder Clara, Carwin haunts Theodore one last time, telling him he's made a mistake. Theodore realizes he's been deceived

and commits suicide. Eventually Clara moves to Europe, marries Pleyel, and, after a few years of recovery, ostensibly writes the haunted tale of *Wieland*.

At a time when the collective voice of the people was given ultimate credence, Brown used a tale of haunting and mysterious voices to force his readers to question the reliability of any narrator, even the reliability of an individual to narrate his or her own life and make sense of his or her own experiences, imaginings, sensations, or (maybe) paranormal encounters. Marilyn Michaud discusses the relevance of *Wieland* in American cultural history; she draws a direct connection between the birth of the American republic and the unreliable voices in Brown's novel. In *Republicanism and the American Gothic*, she writes, "[*Wieland*] explores the concepts of causality and deception in a culture undergoing transformation from one that assumed stable relations between appearance and reality to one confronted with deceptive appearances, mixed motives and the growing discrepancy between thoughts and actions, words and deeds" (122). Such deceptions and discrepancies are inherent risks in a democratic society, risks that Brown's America was just learning to face.

A hundred years later, James dealt with similar issues when adapting a supposedly real-life ghost story to write *The Turn of the Screw*. In 1895, James wrote the play *Guy Domville* as a final effort to make it in the theater. On opening night, his play was violently heckled and dismissed, and he felt misunderstood (Edel 425). After suffering this professional and artistic setback, a discouraged Henry James paid a visit to his friend, the Archbishop of Canterbury. As the friends talked, the subject turned to ghost stories. In *Henry James: A Life*, Leon Edel describes the exchange:

The Archbishop spoke of an incident he had heard long ago, of a couple of small children in some out-of-the-way place to whom the spirits of certain "bad"

servants were believed to have appeared; they had seemed to beckon, invite, solicit across dangerous places, so that the children might destroy themselves. The Archbishop was vague—but the ghostliness, the mystery, the terror in the anecdote touched a raw nerve at this moment in the life of the novelist. (427)

Though James would not actually write *The Turn of the Screw* until three years later, the Archbishop's retelling of this account left him fascinated. Immediately after their discussion, James recorded the idea for a story (427). Although the causes were quite different, James and Brown were in similar states of disillusionment at the time they conceived of their respective texts. The public reaction to James's failed theater production led him to question not only himself but also his audience. How reliable, really, was the voice of the people in this case?

Along with this artistic disappointment, James wrote *Turn* during a time of nationalistic disillusionment. James spent the last forty years of his life in Europe, choosing to leave America and settle abroad. James's literary contemporaries were undoubtedly influential in their criticism of America. Edith Wharton and other friends of James chose to live as expatriates for various social and political reasons. Matthew Arnold famously toured the United States a few years before James started formulating the story of *Turn*. Arnold's largely critical *Civilization in the United States: First and Last Impressions of America* expressed common sentiments of his day. He notes that America was composed mostly of an uneducated and unrefined middle class and that "civilization suffer[ed]" because of this (104). Arnold also criticizes the American misconception of its own grandness, saying, "What really dissatisfies in American civilization is the want of the interesting, a want due chiefly to the want of those two great elements of the interesting, which are elevation and beauty. And the want of these elements is increased and prolonged by the Americans being assured that they have them when they have them not" (190).

Not only were Americans unrefined, according to Arnold, but they did not even realize it! This problem of perception is evident throughout *The Turn of the Screw* and perhaps James Americanizes the text in a way that is not commonly considered. James's own reflection on traveling in America, published in 1907 as *The American Scene*, was similarly critical of his home country. In a chapter on New York City, for example, James describes the "waste" of New York and what he terms the "foredoomed grope of wealth," the grasping to understand "what civilization really is" (164). According to both James and Arnold, Americans lacked a fundamental understanding of virtue and truth and did not perceive their own lack.

In response to his experience with *Guy Domville* and perhaps influenced by the writings of Arnold and others, James wrote a story haunted not only by ghosts, but, like *Wieland*, by potentially unreliable voices. *The Turn of the Screw* is a story within a story, a man's retelling of a governess's experience.³ There is ambiguity surrounding the man's connection to the story as well as the governess's sanity. As readers, we are left wondering what of the tale is true and what is imagination or madness. Similar to Brown, James expresses his frustration with the voice of the people by crafting a story in which the voice inside the governess's head is (perhaps) dangerously misleading. Even as the text ends, the reader is left to wonder if *The Turn of the Screw* is a story about madness, haunting, or something even more elusive.

The Turn of the Screw begins with an unnamed narrator describing a group sharing sensational stories at Christmastime. Douglas offers to relate a tale written by a governess, and later produces a manuscript. From there the narration transitions to her voice. The young governess, daughter of a country parson, is commissioned by a dashing man to travel to the country and care for his orphaned niece and nephew. Eager to please the uncle, the governess agrees. Upon her arrival at Bly, the governess meets and befriends Mrs. Grose and Flora, the

niece. She is also delighted by Miles upon his return from school, despite her worry when she finds that he has been expelled. Her charges are beautiful and good and kind; still, the governess has a sense of foreboding. One afternoon, while walking the grounds, the governess sees a mysterious man in a tower. Soon thereafter she sees the same man standing outside of a window. She describes the man to Mrs. Grose, and Mrs. Grose identifies him as Peter Quint, a former servant at Bly who is now dead. The governess feels certain, though she cannot explain why, that Quint came looking for Miles. The governess then sees Miss Jessel, the former governess, also dead. Mrs. Grose hints that she was involved in an inappropriate relationship with Quint. Miss Jessel, the governess soon feels, is after Flora. The governess also becomes increasingly certain that Flora and Miles see Quint and Miss Jessel as plainly as she does, but that they're not admitting it. At times she is sure that the children are communicating with the ghosts and fears that they are being led away by what haunts them. In one pivotal scene in the schoolroom, the governess has what she considers a conversation with Miss Jessel. She explains, "She 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...It was I who was the intruder" (88). After Miss Jessel appears at the lake and the governess insists that Mrs. Grose and Flora can see her, Flora accuses the governess of cruelty and demands to be removed from her presence. She and Mrs. Grose eventually leave Bly. The governess and Miles, who has threatened the governess with bad behavior if she doesn't enroll him in another school, are left alone. Miles acknowledges, though, that they are not wholly alone, that there are "others" (113). In the final scene of *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess sees Quint one last time and holds Miles in her arms as he dies.

Psychological Haunting and Epistemology

Beyond the biographical and contextual links between Brown and James, there are pivotal points of convergence within the texts themselves. Both *Wieland* and *The Turn of the Screw* rely on young, potentially unreliable female narrators (although James's text has several other levels of narration). Both texts follow the lives of two orphaned siblings, a brother and a sister. In both stories, the male sibling dies. Both narrators allege paranormal activity that is never satisfactorily confirmed or denied. In both texts, violence is enacted because of these paranormal suspicions. While the issues of haunting, madness, and epistemology that link that two texts together have been previously explored in scholarship on *Wieland* and *Turn*, the texts and issues have never been considered together. The following close readings do just that, juxtaposing the similarities and divergences in these novels to allow for a reading of *The Turn of the Screw* that is perhaps more American-focused than previous readings. It is interesting to consider the governess as a symbolic American, especially in the context of Arnold's observations and James's subsequent travelogue. The governess functions as a representative figure—she is identified throughout the text by a title rather than a name. She is given power to govern by the uncle even though she is not an aristocrat, but part of the middle class that Arnold disparaged. Most telling, though, is the governess's overconfidence in her own abilities and perceptions. She certainly views herself as superior to Mrs. Grose and a leader of the children, though her actions reveal her lack of qualifications. In this way she is the quintessential Arnoldian American: terribly simple and unrefined and entirely unaware of the fact. Though set in a distant country, the circumstances and characters in *Turn* that are so similar to those in *Wieland* are perhaps a symbolic commentary on the pitfalls of the American experiment.

Examining these texts side-by-side allows us to clearly view the evolution of an American epistemology.

It is difficult to trust either Clara Wieland or James's governess as their stories unfold. Early in *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess confesses to Mrs. Grose, "I'm rather easily carried away," and the reader wonders if the suspense and haunting in *Turn* are merely a result of the governess's tendency to get swept up (31). Clara, on the other hand, is so insistent about her own rationality that it is nearly impossible to trust her either. Upon hearing murderous voices in her closet, she narrates, "I was habitually indifferent to all the causes of fear, by which the majority are afflicted. I entertained no apprehension of either ghosts or robbers" (54). Both Clara's and the governess's points of view are skewed because they see the world in binaries. For the governess, if she really is seeing ghosts, then they must be after the children. If the children deny her theory, they *must* be possessed. She is unwilling to consider any other explanation. For Clara, if she is hearing voices in her closet, it must be the maid or the wind or her own imagination. There *must* be some rational explanation, or else her senses have been deceived. One narrator is "swept up" by the supernatural and the other completely unwilling to acknowledge it; each single-minded approach, though opposite, is detrimental and offers the reader a limited view of the narrative. It is perhaps important to note that both Clara and the governess are telling their stories retrospectively, with plenty of time and distance to spin the narratives in a particular way. This along with the governess's indiscriminant, blind acceptance of all experience—whether real or imagined—and Clara's unwillingness to view the world beyond the confines of her own perception, creates a sense of distrust between the reader and each of the narrators. We cannot trust the character's interpretation of her own experience, we cannot trust the narrator's depiction of this interpretation, and we cannot trust our own understanding of what we're reading.

There seems to be a level of intentionality behind Brown's establishment of such a shaky narrative foundation. In "Fictional Feeling: Philosophy, Cognitive Science, and the American Gothic," James Dawes explains that the unreliable narrator in *Weiland* is meant to represent us as the reader. Dawes writes, "*Wieland*...offers up a series of characters whose inability to disbelieve mockingly models Brown's image of our own readerly credulity...The 'readers' in this tale universally and immediately obey all instructions to accept and to emote, consequently losing their ability to distinguish between reality and illusion" (448). It is this inability "to distinguish between reality and illusion," this inability to disbelieve what appears to be reality that underlies Brown's entire purpose. The reader becomes frustrated with Clara's inability to understand her brother's behavior or to differentiate between hallucinations, specters, and religious experiences. This frustration, perhaps, is meant to translate to the reader's own life, to cause him to reflect on his own relationship with what is imagined and what is real. "As Brown recounted of his own life, the 'barrier' separating us from the world of illusion and the touch of nonentities is frail" (Dawes 445). Brown exploits this fine line, putting the readers both within the text and outside of it, in a position where it is almost impossible to determine what exactly is going on.

This haunting ambiguity is established early in both *Wieland* and *The Turn of the Screw*. The initial set-up of each text serves to warn the reader not to trust what's ahead. Before the narrative even begins, Brown provides a disclaimer. He writes, "It is hoped that intelligent readers will not disapprove of the manner in which appearances are solved, but that the solution will be found to correspond with the known principles of human nature" (5). We are assured from the beginning that what we are about to experience is real and true, or at least trustworthy. In fact, trusting the reality Clara creates in the narrative is linked to the reader's own intelligence.

If we are smart, Brown seems to say, we will believe what we read. It would seem, however, that Brown actually means to communicate quite the opposite of what he says here. The intelligent reader should not trust a single word of the text. They should not, in fact, rely on another's senses to form their own understanding of reality. This is the great downfall of the Wieland family, and we are warned against it. As Clara begins to relate the story of her family, she prefaces, "If it be communicated to the world, it will inculcate the duty of avoiding deceit. It will exemplify the force of early impressions, and show the immeasurable evils that flow from erroneous or imperfect discipline" (7). Again, it would seem that we're being protected from a false reality through our trusty narrator, Clara. And again, the reassurance provides further evidence for the reader to be on their guard. If the Wieland family crumbled because of an inability to avoid deceit and check their first impressions, we must not do as they have done.

Like Brown, James destabilizes his text from the very beginning, before the governess's narrative has even begun. As the group gathers around to hear the scary tale, the narrator mentions that the Governess was in love. One of the listener's asks:

"Who was it she was in love with?"

"The story will tell," I took upon myself to reply.

"Oh I can't wait for the story!"

"The story *won't* tell," said Douglas; "not in any literal vulgar way." (25)

Through this dialogue, James warns us not to expect to find concrete, "literal" answers within the text. And if we spend our reading looking for answers—Did the governess really see a ghost? Are spirits really possessing the children—and take what we find too literally, we are doing exactly what the governess did. In "The Genius of the Unconscious: Psychoanalytic Criticism," Julie Rivkin writes, "The reader who attempts to master the tale with psychoanalytic

certainty...becomes like the governess he diagnoses, a reader who projects the ghosts and madness he reads in others” (62). As Brown had done, James puts the reader in the position of having to judge what is happening in a situation without reliable information. Again and again, readers are forced to watch as the governess relies on a reality of her own making, just as they must interpret and construct their own reality from what they read.

This already shaky narrative ground is the perfect setting for both Brown and James to introduce a ghost or two. These ghosts serve to further the authors’ aforementioned purpose: they show the audience the instability of their own perceptions. The first account of haunting in *Wieland* comes early in the text as Clara provides information about her father’s mysterious death. A fanatically religious man, Wieland is riddled with guilt for not fulfilling what he sees as his duty to God. He becomes more and more depressed as he gets older, certain that God will punish him for his shortcomings. Clara explains, “He was likewise haunted by the belief that the kind of death that awaited him was strange and terrible. His anticipations were thus far vague and indefinite, but they sufficed to poison every moment of his being, and devote him to ceaseless anguish” (14). One night, while in the temple he built on the family grounds, his expectations are realized. Wieland is visited by what he sees as some kind of heavenly force or spirit. The supernatural force whose arrival had haunted Wieland for so long was finally upon him. From the house, his family sees a flash of light and hears a loud noise, as though the temple is on fire. Later they find Wieland severely wounded, his body naked and bruised. Soon thereafter, Wieland dies.

The cause of Wieland’s death is never clearly established in the novel. Was he really struck down by some supernatural being or force? Or did he simply anticipate his own destruction so obsessively that he perhaps brought it upon himself? A fairly common reading of

the cause of Wieland's death (and a reason some criticize the believability of Brown's writing) is spontaneous combustion. Did a ghostly encounter cause Wieland's body to fail, or did years of stress and guilt and worry and dreadful anticipation inevitably lead to his downfall? Clara and her brother are clearly affected by the events surrounding their father's death, and it is interesting to compare Clara and Theodore with Flora and Miles. Both sets of siblings have lost their parents (in assumedly tragic ways, though we do not know the particulars in *Turn* as well as we do in *Wieland*). The stories in each text are supported by this common back story, yet neither text explicitly links the haunting or tragedy or death they describe to the orphan experience. As readers, though, perhaps we ought to. Still, we do know that Clara and Theodore avoid the scene of their father's death, and Clara wonders of his passing, "Was this the penalty of disobedience? this the stroke of a vindictive and invisible hand?" (20). Wieland's own interpretation of his experiences influenced the way his children viewed the world. Their father's strange and unexplained death prepares them to accept—perhaps all too readily—strange, paranormal events later in life.

Like Brown, James uses ambiguous haunting scenes to destabilize the narrative and intentionally confuse the audience. In *Death in Henry James*, Andrew Cutting explains, "The Jamesian ghostly avoids generic trappings, such as overtly supernatural manifestations, in favour of carefully controlled uncertainty and suggestive blurring of conceptual borders" (1). This blurring certainly occurs in the governess's first encounter with the ghost of Peter Quint. While walking the grounds of Bly and entertaining romantic possibilities of happening upon a man, the governess *sees* a man in a tower. She says, "What arrested me on the spot—and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for—was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real. He did stand there!" (39). Just as it is unclear whether Wieland convinced himself

that God would punish him or whether God really *did* punish him, James deliberately creates a similar lack of clarity. Is the governess's imagination running away with her, or is Quint really in the tower?

After this first encounter with the ghost of Quint, the governess says that "the man who looked at me over the battlements was as definite as a picture in a frame" (40). This, of course, is an odd comparison. A picture in a frame can be deceiving, and may not necessarily reflect a reliable reality. Pictures do not always provide context; they provide us a small glimpse of an entire world. A picture of a person, for instance, does not truly convey anything about that person. They may be smiling, but we cannot know if they are happy or miserable, kind or wicked. They may be well-dressed, but we cannot know if they are rich or poor. The nature of a painting or a photograph—or of any representation of reality—is that it provides an incomplete view of something. The governess's metaphor, "a picture in a frame," suggests that she is relying on inherently unreliable sources. As she continues to describe her encounter with the haunting vision, the governess explains, "So I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page" (41). Again, as Douglas indicated, words on the page can be deceptive and do not necessarily contain the answers we seek. Moreover, the words on the page were *her own* creation, and yet she uses them as proof. These *representations* become the governess's reality, and her reliance on such representations warrant our healthy readerly skepticism.

It is clear, in any case, that she was haunted, perhaps by visions, and certainly, as I argue, by her inability to interpret her own reality. Andrew Cutting introduces another possible source of the governess's haunting, though, one that links her as a narrator to the troubled narration of Clara Wieland. In reference to "The Jolly Corner" Cutting says, "Many of [James's] characters are haunted by the lives they fail to live, whether through choice, wounds, repression, or missed

opportunity. Biographically, James himself seems to have been haunted by the Civil War in which he did not fight and the virile, American self he might have become had he not settled in England” (1-2).

Cutting’s analysis of “The Jolly Corner” and James’s biography are certainly applicable to a reading of *The Turn of the Screw*. There are moments during which the governess laments her situation and hints at her previous life that leave the reader curious about her past as well as her mental stability. When she first receives the charge to move to Bly, for instance, the “prospect struck [the governess] as slightly grim. She was young, untried, nervous: it was a vision of serious duties and little company, of really great loneliness” (28). This response seems perfectly natural on the precipice of major change; what is unusual is how the governess reports feeling when she does arrive at Bly. She says, “It was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature” (38). What must her life have been like prior to Bly? If she had never known space and freedom and air before, what had been oppressing her? Because of this new feeling of freedom, she says, “I was off my guard” (38). Again, this implies that she had previously been *on* her guard, expecting bad things to happen, perhaps. Reflecting on this placid time when she was “off [her] guard,” the governess says, “I used to speculate...as to how the rough future (for all futures are rough!) would handle them [Miles and Flora] and might bruise them...[W]hat suddenly broke into this gives the previous time a charm of stillness—that hush in which something gathers or crouches. The change was actually like the spring of a beast” (38). A disturbing pessimism underlies this comment. In the governess’s experience, *all* futures are rough, and times of peace are simply the calm before a horrible, horrible storm. As Cutting implies, the governess is haunted by

something behind the scenes, something to which we as readers are not privy. As previously mentioned, Cutting connects this haunting to James's dissatisfaction with his own life (2).

Clara and her family are also haunted by lives they do not live. Wieland, guilt-ridden for failing in his missionary duties, is a clear example of this. And we know that both Clara and Theodore are certainly haunted by the life they could have lived if their parents had not died. This is evidenced by their avoidance of the temple at night and by their unwillingness to ever go there alone. Pleyel, likewise, is haunted by the life he could have lived in Europe with the Baroness. And Clara is haunted by her unrequited love for Pleyel and worry for her brother, who she sees heading down the same path as her father. In fact, early in the text she says, "There was an obvious resemblance between [Theodore] and my father" (24). After Clara, Theodore, and Pleyel have encountered voices and Clara has met Carwin, she describes feelings similar to the foreboding the governess sensed before encountering ghosts at Bly. Clara says, "Why was my mind absorbed in thoughts ominous and dreary?...My soul fondly dwelt upon the images and my brother and his children, yet they only increased the mournfulness of my contemplations...Something whispered that the happiness we at present enjoyed was set on mutable foundations" (53). Brown, like James, foreshadows the haunting (and possibly the madness) that awaits his cast of characters. But what is the source of this foreboding? What is the cause of this haunting?

The Evolving American Conflict

Shoshana Felman, a psychoanalytic critic and Henry James scholar, discusses ghost stories as metaphors for social conflict in "Foucault/Derrida: The Madness of the Thinking/Speaking Subject." Her analysis provides a useful lens through which to view the ghostly conflicts addressed by Brown and James. Felman explains haunting in terms of madness,

equating ghostly visions with insanity. There is a logical explanation for these sorts of visions, she says. In fact, the cause of haunting/madness *is* logic and reason. Felman identifies thought—the crux of reason and logic—as the source of madness. In reference to Weiland she writes, “[M]adness is essentially a phenomenon of thought, of thought that claims to denounce, in another’s thought, the Other of thought: that which thought is not. Madness can only occur within a world in conflict, within a conflict of thoughts” (51). Feldman seems to suggest, in other words, that the rejection of the Other of thought, that is, the closing of the mind to another possibility or explanation of thought, is the ultimate source of madness. Theodore Wieland was *certain*, for instance, that the voice instructing him to kill his family was divine in origin. He denounced even the possibility that he was being deceived. This single-mindedness eventually becomes his madness. The governess, even if she really was seeing ghosts, convinced herself that they were after the children and subsequently acted with madness. Like Wieland, her denouncement of any other possible explanation is her psychological downfall.

This single-minded madness is particularly evident in the governess’s and Wieland’s *insistence* that their interpretation of reality is correct, even when this insistence becomes dangerous. Even after being imprisoned for the murder of his wife and children, Theodore Wieland escapes from jail to finish what he started and murder his sister and Pleyel. The loss of loved ones and incarceration does not distract his focus. The only force that can stop him is the same thing that apparently caused his madness: his reliance on the “divine” voice. The governess, too, demonstrates a crazed reliance on her interpretation of reality. When the governess sees Miss Jessel’s ghost while out by the lake with Mrs. Grose and Flora, she remembers the “thrill of joy at having brought on a proof. She was there, so I was justified; she was there, so I was neither cruel nor mad” (101). Not long after the governess entertains this

thought, however, Flora accuses her of both cruelty *and* madness. Nevertheless, the governess is sure that she is right, and is undeterred. In the final scene, right before the governess and Miles are confronted by Quint one final time, the governess says, “Within a minute there had come to me out of my very pity the appalling alarm of his [Miles]being perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding and bottomless, for if he *were* innocent, what then on earth was I?” (119). This moment of doubt is the heart of the novella. It would seem the governess is more concerned with being correct (and thereby sane) than with Miles’s well-being. So long as he is possessed, *she* is not a monster. It is this overreliance on one thought, this rejection of the Other of thought, this conflict of thought that Felman equates with madness.

Both Brown and James explore issues of haunting and madness in the context of reason and logic; Brown wrote in late-Enlightenment era America and James a hundred years later, during the age of realism. But both authors use ghost stories to explore cultural conflict, the type of conflict that Felman identifies as the precursor to madness. What haunts the governess, then, is what haunts the reader, and that is a disconnect between our thoughts and reasoning and our own experience. When there is conflict present in the realm of thought, madness often follows. Clara identifies this phenomenon explicitly in the early chapters of *Wieland*, after her brother has had his first paranormal experience. She writes, “The will is the tool of the understanding, which must fashion its conclusions on the notices of sense. If the senses be depraved, it is impossible to calculate the evils that may flow from the consequent deductions of the understanding” (35). If our senses are tricked or haunted, madness is the inevitable result because we *have no way of knowing* that we’ve been tricked. It is nearly impossible to separate what we sense and experience from what we perceive to be true because it *is* true for us.

This, then, is the true horror of haunting: one can be haunted and never know it. If these ghostly visions and haunting voices are metaphors, as I've argued, for the democratic voice (or the voice of the people) then at least one purpose of Brown and James becomes clearer. What if the voices that the American settlers relied on to fuel their revolution were unreliable voices? What if they were being misled? Or what if the collective voice of disapproval for James's art was inspired by a false sense of what "good" theater really is? What if that voice was wrong?⁴ These texts become a means of catharsis for two writers who had been disillusioned by the voice of the people, the voice that haunted them.

While Felman identified conflict as the sources of madness, Peter Kafer identifies the source of Brown's conflict as a seeming *lack* of conflict, the worst possible setting for the Gothic hero/villain who thrives on conflict. Kafer writes, "In the America of Charles Brockden Brown...[Gothic hero/villains] didn't exist...Instead, a generalized Protestant moralism seemingly encompassed high, low, and middling alike...Where was extremity, *intensity* in this world?...Where was the weight, the guilt, of history? How could such a place...give birth to and nurture the Gothic imagination?" (xv-xvi). Brown confronted this supposed American placidity by retelling a gruesome and unsolvable story of madness. If, as Kafer argues, the Gothic genre is all about the crushing weight of history and discovering skeletons in the closet, Brown did his best to unearth some skeletons. If Brown's readers felt secure with their "generalized Protestant moralism," Theodore Wieland's sincere religious fervor turned murderous madness would certainly problematize things.

One major difference between the account of Yates's spirit-inspired murders and Wieland's is Carwin the ventriloquist. Because Carwin can throw his voice, Clara comes to suspect that he is the one who filled Theodore's head with thoughts of murdering his own family.

Carwin denies involvement in Theodore's murders, but there is the possibility that he's lying and that a reasonable explanation exists for all of the mad behavior and supposed haunting in the text. Carwin explains the entire sequence of events to Clara, asserting that it is Wieland's own (religion-inspired) madness that motivates his actions. This explanation is fitting considering the pervading ideology of Brown's day, that of Enlightenment rationality and reason. This seems to confirm Felman's assertion that haunting is equated with madness and madness is caused by conflict—in this case, the kind of madness-conflict that might move someone to kill their family (or, perhaps, start a revolution).

If Brown's haunting arose from a supposed lack of conflict that Kafer identifies, James's ghosts arose from an overabundance of conflict. The myth of practicality mentioned by Grain that made Gothic literature seem initially un-American had by James's day given way to a myth of haunted-ness; by the end of the nineteenth century, American literature and culture had plenty of ghosts. In this way, perhaps, *The Turn of the Screw* functions as a reaction to *Wieland*. Hutchison explains the issues that haunted James, saying,

James lived through the nineteenth-century crisis of belief. He turned sixteen in 1859, the year that Darwin published *The Origin of Species*. His father, Henry James Senior, was a theologian...His brother William was an eminent philosopher and psychologist with a specialist interest in religious experience. James himself moved among influential skeptics and clerics. His friends included prominent doubters...as well as famous faithful...Given this context, one would think that James's views on the subject of belief would be easy to trace—apparently not. (xiii)

James himself was conflicted. An environment of religious skepticism, psychological experimentation, and even ghost hunting—an endeavor of his brother William—make it impossible to label and dismiss the governess's experience in *The Turn of the Screw*. In *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death*, Deborah Blum discusses William James's famous "ghost hunt," an effort he embarked on with friends to scientifically prove the existence of ghosts. Blum explains the motivation that James and his companions had for their efforts. She says, "All of them believed that they were working toward an understanding of life that could help bridge the chasms between science and faith, between what people see and what they imagine" (6). Henry James was undoubtedly influenced by the philosophical, theological, and psychological expertise of his immediate family. William's scientific search for ghosts and Henry's literary discussion of them seem to reflect the shifting public perception of ghosts/an afterlife. As Beidler explains, "It is important to remember, then, that James launched *The Turn of the Screw* into a world that seriously investigated ghostly phenomena" (19).

This cultural context complicates the way we view the governess's experience with the supernatural. While Wieland was likely haunted by the voice inside his own head and therefore fit Felman's model of the haunted madman, the governess's situation is less certain. Perhaps she was mad and her ghostly visions were imagined. However, it is just as likely that her ghostly visions were real. Perhaps she was haunted by her surroundings, by the tragedy of the children's past, by her own loneliness, or by countless other possibilities. Perhaps her ghostly visions were real *and* she was mad, thereby complicating her haunted situation even further. The point of James's tale is that *we do not know*. Whereas the early American ghost story provided a potential explanation, the ghosts haunting James's American literature were much harder to pin down. The

development of these ghost metaphors from the semi-resolution of Brown to the absolute ambiguity of James represented an important cultural shift from the reason-driven age of Enlightenment to an era of literary realism that was highly prescient of modernism.

While there is no significant mention of Brown or *Wieland* in James's literary criticism or letters, Brown's contribution to the establishment of the Gothic genre in America is increasingly apparent. We can draw a clear link from Brown to Poe and Hawthorne, and from Poe and Hawthorne to the Gothic writing of Henry James, particularly *The Turn of the Screw*. In *Henry James and The Turn of the Screw*, E.A. Sheppard acknowledges this link, describing James's place in a continuum of ghost stories. Sheppard writes, "Henry James is not, after all, an isolated phenomenon of literature...He was, consciously, a writer in a tradition...In the early New England communities ghost stories flourished...It is that tradition which James invokes, quite deliberately, at the beginning of *The Turn of the Screw*...He gives us a circle of people at Christmas time, exchanging stories by the fireside" (3). Brown was undoubtedly an American precursor in this tradition. Still, adaptation is not about establishing a literary lineage. Instead, the purpose is to explore the interplay between texts, to seek meaning in the similarities as well as divergences, to perhaps discover how the evolution of a ghost story might represent the evolution of American thought and culture. Identifying this evolution serves several purposes: first, it furthers the claim of Barnard, Kamrath, and Shapiro that Brown is not, in fact, a marginal figure in American literature; second, it provides a new angle for discussing Henry James and *The Turn of the Screw*, two subjects with significant literary baggage; and third, it furthers the efforts of contemporary adaptation theorists in redefining adaptation studies and arguing its relevance in the critical conversation about texts like *Wieland* and *The Turn of the Screw*.

Notes

¹ There is an indirect link between Brown and James through literary scholarship. Kafer and other Brown scholars often link Brown to Edgar Allan Poe, citing Brown's influence on Poe's Gothic style and themes. Dennis Perry and Carl Sederholm's *Poe, "The House of Usher," And the American Gothic* includes a chapter titled, "Realistic 'Usher': Narrative Imagination and James's *The Turn of the Screw*." This chapter discusses *The Turn of the Screw* in relation to "The Fall of the House of Usher." Ultimately Perry and Sederholm conclude, "[B]oth *Turn of the Screw* and "Fall of the House of Usher" develop the theme of haunting as a means of reading the self in the other, plunging into the shadowy unconscious, and projecting onto the blank screen of reality" (61). Their analysis of "Usher" and *Turn* and the link they forge between Poe and James provides a useful (though certainly indirect) picture of Brown's influence on James as well.

² A bilquist is someone who can speak in two different voices.

³ The narration of James himself as an author is complicated by the fact that he didn't technically *write* the text at all. In "Biographical and Historical Contexts," Peter G. Beidler says:

[S]trictly speaking, James did not 'write' *The Turn of the Screw* at all. By his mid-fifties James's lifetime of writing with a pen had all but ruined his wrist. We could now call this painful phenomenon carpal tunnel syndrome. To continue to ply his trade James had to buy a typewriter—a recent invention in the 1890s. He never learned to type, but he hired others to type for him. As you read *The Turn of the Screw*, do not imagine Henry James writing the story longhand but imagine him, rather, dictating to his secretary, William MacAlpine, who typed as James spoke. Initially, then, the story of the governess and Miles and Flora was an oral

tale told very much in the tradition of the ghost story recounted in front of the fire of a Christmas evening. (19)

⁴ Henry James was disillusioned with the American experience early in life. After touring Europe, James returned to Boston and told a friend of his “newly-quicken sense of the aridity of American life” (Edel 161). His brother William gave James advice about pursuing a writing career in America: “[I]n America, more than elsewhere at the time, to be a writer was to accept the way of loneliness and isolation; and William had said that writing was an ‘abnormality,’ that is, not quite an active, manly, healthy way of existence. Summing up, William told Henry that if he was not prepared to face a three-year ‘slough of despond’ he would do well to remain abroad” (162). James ultimately chose to return to Europe.

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