**Dark Prospects, Haunted Suffolk Landscapes: Reading M. R. James, Visually**

In my lecture, I would like to forge a bridge between two unconnected anniversaries: the 150th anniversary of Ipswich Art Society and the 120th anniversary of the publication of M. R. James’ book of supernatural tales, his *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, or, more precisely, to use the former as a rationale for exploring the latter. That may seem at the outset a rather unlikely endeavour, one depending upon the coincidence generated by the fruit machine of history rather than any intrinsic commonality between the two anniversaries. But my labour this evening is to make that endeavour become sensible, compelling, and productive. Telegraphing my broader argument, I want to propose that James’ ghost stories demonstrate an ongoing deep fascination with landscape to such an extent that those stories consequently can be understood as amongst the most salient contributions to the artistic genre of landscape in the early twentieth century.

Already, the second part of that claim may engender some hesitancy or scepticism, especially insofar as James was a writer and very much not an artist. However, as I proceed, I want to argue that *as* a writer James was especially attuned to the visual, and that any distinction between landscape described in words and landscape depicted in drawing, painting, photography, or film will become porous. Said differently, there is much a visual artist can learn from James’ literary work. All that hopefully provides an overall sense of the direction my lecture will take. And to add to that preliminary sense, I will also mention that this lecture is split into two parts. In the first part, I will explore the presence of the visual in James’ writings by examining two of his stories included in the 1904 collection, while the second part will focus upon his engagement with landscape.

I

Reading through M. R. James’ ghost stories, it is striking how often visual references make an appearance, suggesting that the visual was central to his self-conception as a writer. For instance, in the preface to *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*,James informs the reader that inspiration for collecting these stories into a single volume came from James McBryde, an illustrator: “[McBryde] offered to illustrate, and it was agreed that, if he would do that, I would consider publishing them.” McBryde’s early death, however, meant that only four illustrations were completed. James then adds that, despite this incompletion, “Those who knew the artist will understand how much I wished to give a permanent form even to a fragment of the work . . . while the stories themselves do not make any very exalted claim.” Here James’ modesty places the visual above the textual, almost making the latter a supplement to the former, while also hinting that this collection of ghost stories is itself haunted by McBryde’s death.

As intriguing as they might be, McBryde’s illustrations are not the subject of my talk. Ultimately their status is one of parallelism to the written narrative they purportedly depict. Existing in a supplemental relation to the text, McBryde’s four images hardly instigate any especial reflection upon the visual in James’ writing other than to confirm that the visual was important to James. A fuller comprehension of that importance can be gleaned from a more encompassing trawl through James’ writings—not just the ghost stories, but also his non-fiction books and essays. But time is limited and hence it is necessary to take a short cut.

Of all the stories collected in 1904, “The Mezzotint” is the most obviously exemplary of the visual. The plot is straightforward: Williams, an academic based in Oxford, collects topographical drawings and engravings for the museum he works for. One February, Williams is sent a catalogue listing the current inventory of engravings and the such like by a London purveyor, and his attention is specifically directed to a particular item: an early nineteenth-century framed mezzotint picturing a manor house. Although the mezzotint is for sale at £2 2s, the purveyor—a man named Britnell—is willing to mail it to Williams so that he may inspect it first-hand and decide whether to purchase it for the museum’s holdings. Little is said about the mezzotint, beyond a few specifics, but it is adjudged to be “interesting.” Yet this is not what attracts Williams’ attention; for it is the high price accorded to the work that leads Williams to write Britnell and have the mezzotint posted to him.

The arrival of the mezzotint to his rooms proves, unfortunately, a disappointment to Williams. In a passage that bonds Williams’ own immediate negative response with that of the narrator’s subsequent retelling of that event, James writes:

It was a rather indifferent mezzotint, and an indifferent mezzotint is, perhaps, the worst form of engraving known. It presented a full-face view of a not very large manor-house of the last century, with three rows of plain sashed windows with rusticated masonry about them, a parapet with balls or vases at the angles, and a small portico in the centre. On either side were trees, and in front a considerable expanse of lawn. The legend “A. W. F. sculpsit” was engraved on the narrow margin; and there was no further inscription. The whole thing gave the impression that it was the work of an amateur.

In its transition from judgment to description and then terminating in summary judgment, James’ narrative parodies the attitude of the connoisseur. The mezzotint is regarded as “indifferent,” a mezzotint without qualities, and for this reason is considered of lesser value than one that is *overtly* terrible. Such indifference, though, is a consequence of stylistic anonymity as much as lack of skill, which partly accounts for the ardent dislike of the picture. Indeed, the connoisseur emerged as a figure in the nineteenth century as an art expert well-trained in noticing and divining the significance of small and easily overlooked visual details supposedly capable of revealing an artwork to be distinctly the work of *this* artist rather than *that* artist. In this way, late-nineteenth century connoisseurs such as Giovanni Morrelli established their prestigious reputations in microscopically examining the form of the painting, the manner in which it was painted, thereby disclosing the hidden authorial presence subtending the artwork and therefore its aesthetic and monetary values. Visual inspection, close looking, is the ground for knowing the artwork’s provenance.

The connoisseur’s skill, then, greatly depended upon their kinship with the visual. More precisely, their ability to read the visual as so many clues that will, sooner or later, testify some deeper truth. Connoisseurs were doubtlessly creatures of the age whereby a certain species of empiricism discovered its essential confirmation in the emergence of new optical technologies—photography foremost among them—that succeeded in revealing and recording manifold features customarily unavailable to the naked human eye. In this way, an assumed certainty was supposedly conferred upon the connoisseur that coincided with the widespread belief that vision was the core instrument of knowledge, that seeing is assuredly believing.

But there is little to see in the mezzotint forwarded to Williams, and therefore equally little either to excite the connoisseur or quicken speculation upon the epistemic powers of vision. And yet—of course—the initial nondescriptness of the mezzotint apt to bore the connoisseur belies its real and indeed haunting power. When shown to a friend, a hitherto unseen solitary figure to the side of the house is spotted, and the rendering of the moonlight strikes both of them as highly effective. Evidently, Williams assumes that both aspects were missed by him earlier that day. A simple failure of close looking, perhaps explained less by failed connoisseurship on his part than by feeling rather incensed towards Britnell’s high price tag. Everything indubitably alters later that day. After dinner, a visitor to Williams’ rooms is struck by an “impressive” though “rather too grotesque” figure. Williams initially pays little heed to his colleague’s comment. Fixing whisky and soda is uppermost in his mind, and, perhaps, we might imagine that he merely categorizes what his colleague says—“impressive,” “too grotesque”—as the kind of overstatement that a non-connoisseur might proffer while viewing a well-done but fairly ordinary picture.

In his stories, James often pulls the rug out from under the feet from experts and rationalistic modernity. The disenchantment of the Western mindset is often upturned as a false myth. We see the same process happening here: Williams, the connoisseur, is compelled to acknowledge the emergent horror in the mezzotint glimpsed by the non-connoisseur. But rationality is not entirely ousted. On the contrary, the mezzotint’s ability to change prompts Williams and friends towards scientific investigation of a sort: each current depictive state, they propose, ought to be photographed and accompanied by eye-witness written testimony. The empiricism of the connoisseur thus adjoins to the empiricism of late-nineteenth century positivism, with the camera serving as engine of facticity and the visual projected as handmaiden of knowledge.

Yet the paranormal and positivism are not ossified as opposites in this scientific approach taken by Williams and his friends. Positivism is called upon to *confirm* the paranormal rather than disprove it. Such an endeavour was common in late nineteenth century visual culture, with photographic mechanization seemingly establishing a distanced, objective, and apparently disenchanted mode of the visual while also making possible a glimpse into other realities imperceptible to the bare eye. As Marina Warner has written: “it is a profound paradox that the scientific revolution did not dispel spectres and phantoms, but delivered an array of devices to summon them to the senses.” It was, after all, a recognizable version of the scientific method deployed by the Society for Psychical Research, a conglomerate of intellectual figures—many of whom connected to the University of Cambridge—established in 1882 for the purpose of investigating ghosts, telepathy, and other paranormal phenomena. That Society makes its own appearance in “The Mezzotint” under the disguise of “the Phasmatological Society.” But, still, there are limits to this reliance upon the visual: the mezzotint changes only when it is unobserved.

“The Mezzotint” is a companion piece to “Canon Alberic’s Scrap-Book,” the first story included in *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*. James explicitly signals this kinship at the opening of “The Mezzotint”: we are informed that Williams is an Oxford-based counterpart to Dennistoun—the protagonist of “Canon Alberic’s Scrap-Book” who works for a museum in Cambridge. Dennistoun whilst holidaying in southwest France with two friends decides to spend some time alone photographically documenting a cathedral. James’ description of its interior discloses his actual first-hand experience—he had, in fact, went on a cycling holiday with two friends in 1892 and visited the cathedral—and can easily register as an early manifestation of the descriptions of the insides of churches and cathedrals that we find in later works by James, such as his 1930 book *Suffolk and Norfolk*.

The strongest point of correspondence between the two stories, though, comes down to the fundamental role played by a picture seen by the protagonist. While looking through the assortment of collected, or, more precisely, stolen medieval papers amassed in the scrapbook, Dennistoun is struck by a sepia drawing dating to the late seventeenth century. This most unusual drawing presents King Solomon who orders four soldiers to arrest a mysterious demon-like creature; a dead body upon the floor testifies to the demon’s murderous proclivities. My own summary description of the drawing gazed upon by Dennistoun is just that, summary; it stands in extreme contrast to James’ own ekphrases which runs to 450 words. And, in contradistinction to Williams in “The Mezzotint,” many of those who view this drawing respond with heightened discomfort. Indeed, the sheer power of this picture correlates with the brute persuasive force built into images of damnation and apocalypses intended for medieval audiences with lower literacy rates.

Dennistoun is initially more intrigued than affected by the drawing; with his camera and scholarly training, such a drawing enacts a distanced fascination at best. Earlier in the story, he is rather dismissive of the sacristan who sheds tears whilst beholding a painting of Saint Bertrand insofar as this emotional response to pigment upon surface seems overblown. Dennistoun, hailing from a Presbyterian background, takes the sacristan’s display of emotion as a hallmark of his belonging to an unreformed Christianity. But any pride and self-congratulation he may award himself for his imagined rationalism is undercut when confronted by the demon in the flesh. From this point onwards Dennistoun will observe and recognize the deep horror, previously invisible to himself, that subtends the drawing. It is not merely a representation but an encapsulation of the demon: “it was drawn from the life,” says one anonymous person in answer to a photographic reproduction of the drawing. Dennistoun would thus by the end of the story accept the power of images, symbols, and other forms of representation, as is confirmed by his iconoclastic decision to burn the drawing of Solomon and the demon.

While the two stories evince a shared interest in the power of images, they ultimately do so in different ways. The mezzotint possesses a mysterious power, one that animates it and discloses a murder. However, the drawing of Solomon and a demon, seemingly has no such autonomous power; *it* does not make the demon appear. James is customarily vague concerning what the purpose of the drawing is, but clues allow us to interpret the drawing as having been created by Canon Alberic as a talisman of sorts, a piece of attempted wish fulfilment in which the demon that haunts him is pictured as overcome by a religious leader. The painting of St Bertrand that brought tears to the eye of the sacristan presumably has much the same function. Power is thus invested in these visual forms, albeit a power that is earthly and redolent of pre-Reformation attitudes towards images and other religious artefacts. That’s not to contend that there are no magical or haunted images in “Canon Alberic’s Scrap-Book,” though. Again, with his deliberate vagueness, James does refer to another drawing in the story. This drawing has nothing like the descriptive detail accorded to Solomon and the demon, but instead is spoken as a mixture of “curious signs looking like astrological symbols, and a few Hebrew words, in the corners; and in the north-west angle of the cloister was a cross drawn in gold paint.” Much is left open for the reader’s inferences here, so my own is that Canon Alberic was a follower of the hermetic and cabalistic philosophies conjoined by the late fifteenth century thinker Giovanni Pico della Mirandola or, perhaps, such acolytes as Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa. The latter of the two might be the most pertinent insofar as Agrippa was associated with Faust and that Canon Alberic, in his employment of magic in the hunt for treasure, seems veritably as a Faustian figure. If one searches for a drawing imbued with dark magic, it is possibly to be found in those astrological symbols.

In this way, then, James refuses to perceive the visual as the foundation for rationalistic inquiry or empirically derived knowledge. And, by the same token, visual forms are uncategorizable as mere representations that we can take an epistemologically distanced standpoint in relation to. There is a dark power and affective potency to visuality, known to our ancestors and enshrined in pictorial and architectural forms, but either seemingly forgotten or repressed by modernity in general. James is ultimately less *interested* in images than *compelled* by them, and his ghost stories invite us towards a similar condition. While James as scholar and late Victorian academic was undeniably conservative in his everyday life, the manner in which he discloses this other, more unruly visuality, filled with grim forebodings and desublimatory power over the observer, perhaps nudges his ghost stories towards a darker, less utopian modernity and thereby rendering James closer to his contemporary Sigmund Freud than hitherto conceivable, or indeed Aby Warburg, who comprehended art history as so many ghost stories for grown-ups.

II

Let us return, once more, to James’ “The Mezzotint.” In his attempt to divine its worth and solve the mystery, Williams affixes upon *where* the depicted manor house resides rather than *who* made the depiction. With luck, the former will reveal the latter. The strategy is useful by dint of the fact that there is nothing within the mezzotint to disclose the artist—no recognizable style—and is vouchsafed by one supposition and one clue. First, the supposition: that the drawing of the house must depict an actual or once extant house standing in a real location; the house and location cannot be the product of imagination. And, second, the clue: on the mezzotint’s verso is a torn label reading “—ngley Hall, —ssex.” Of course, the clue legitimizes the supposition and serves to confirm it. At the story’s end we learn that the house is in Essex and, armed with this knowledge, Williams is told by another academic the events that happened there in the early nineteenth century which are obliquely animated in the mezzotint itself.

If “The Mezzotint” was the only M. R. James story we ever read, then the focus upon where the manor house geographically exists would probably not elicit any special accounting insofar as the situation neatly matches the direction of the plot. Read in the context of all of his stories, however, that emphasis upon place stands as a scrap of evidence remarkably consistent with others scattered throughout and defining his oeuvre. Put concisely, James is obsessed with landscape and the idea of place. This partly explains what some might feel to be the relative lightness of plot in his stories alongside the admittedly undeveloped characters; he is less interested in plot and characterization than in building atmosphere, and his chief way of doing that is through creating a sense of place and close attention to the landscape.

To that degree, then, James can be perceived as a beneficiary to the emergence of landscape as a genre in art during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here it might be helpful to take a detour. While we may typically imagine landscape as a persistent and longstanding concern for artists, it only succeeded in attaining that status in comparatively more recent times, around three hundred years ago. For the most part, prior to that moment, landscape had only the most subsidiary presence in European art. Its role within painting was to serve as backdrop or stage-setting for the narrative presented in pictorial form. We can see that status radically shifting in a painter such as Albrecht Altdorfer, especially in his *Saint George Slaying the Dragon*; at bottom, landscape’s function remains that of placing the action within a locale, but it strikingly exceeds that function. Both knight and dragon are easily missed and rendered miniscule by the tall trees that dominate virtually the entire pictorial space. His slightly later *Landscape with Footbridge* (1518) completely eschews direct human presence, almost giving us a painting of nothing in particular. This is, as Christopher Wood has argued, no longer landscape as scenography but as subject.

If Altdorfer was the forerunner of landscape painting, it was not until the second half of the seventeenth century that landscape truly became a genre that artists can practice, and even then it was adjudged to be strictly below other genres. The following century was when landscape succeeded in establishing itself as a major pictorial form, and it did so by inventing philosophical categories, the most prominent of these being the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque. Of these three, the third is probably the most pertinent for my purposes, insofar as the picturesque was coined in relation to landscapes displaying traces of time stamping itself upon architecture. Grand products of human architectural ingenuity, such as Tintern Abbey in the Wye Valley, fall into ruin and are gradually overtaken by nature, Painters such as J. M. W. Turner, of course, duplicated the notion of the picturesque within their own works. And we might propose that the picturesque, occasionally closely allied with the genre of the gothic, is the antecedent to an altogether more ghostly landscape.

The point of this historical detour is to underscore that landscape, as a category, developed in relation to a series of intellectual arguments fermenting within art theory alongside other modes of cultural inquiry. As such, landscape is, first and foremost, a product of cultural construction rather than strictly natural processes per se. This also entails that the category of landscape contains within itself extensive and often philosophical reflection into what landscape is and into its significance across a diverse spectrum of interests. That reflection is an ongoing activity, probably without end or closure, and it might be proffered that the most vital manifestations of landscape in art evince that reflection at its most sophisticated. But that is also to suggest—polemically, no doubt—that landscape in art will sometimes fail to maximalize its potential when it takes landscape as a mere given. Because of that, there are periods, perhaps even decades, where landscape appears to lie fallow due to the lack of reflection happening within the artistic genre.

But conceptual examination into landscape is hardly the purview of the visual arts alone, of course. Romanticism in Germany and England were predominantly literary endeavours, and landscape’s achievements in the visual arts need not necessarily synchronize with the genre’s achievements in the literary arts, though there frequently seems a correlation between the two. James’ ghost stories, therefore, belong to the literary wing into this exploration and, moreover, strike me as the most significant attempt to do so since the undoubtedly very different attempt made by Impressionism in France and, especially, the work of Paul Cezanne. James, in his time, almost stands alone in this tendency, but we can observe his own engagement with landscape refracted in later writers such as, on the one hand, Alan Garner or Susan Cooper, both authors fiction with a strong sense of placehood, or, on the other hand, writers such as Ronald Blythe, Richard Mabey, W. G. Sebald, or Robert MacFarlane, all of whom who have rethought nature, landscape, and place from distinctly revisionary literary perspectives.

How, then, does landscape make its presence felt in James’ ghost stories? In answering that question, we can immediately remark that his oeuvre receives its coherence in large part by operating according to a singular dictum: namely, more often than not, *places are haunted rather than people*. Those places are mostly rural in character, locations where the imprint of modernity is barely detectable, if it all, and frequently they are geographically proximate to us right now. While he occasionally wanders farther afield, East Anglian settings are especially recurrent in his stories, with places such as Maldon, Bury St Edmunds, Felixstowe, and Aldeburgh appearing either through direct mention or under pseudonyms that serve, nonetheless, only to delay identification. But crucially these locations are not convenient stage settings that can ultimately be swapped with other locations. Instead, James is deeply fascinated by the spirit of place, and therefore by the specificity of our East Anglian landscapes. In this respect, James strikes me as somebody roughly continuing in literary form a rethinking of landscape that was preceded by the painters Thomas Gainsborough and John Constable a century or so earlier. James’ East Anglian landscape, of course, is far less freighted with the social divisions that John Barrell once argued was fundamental to Gainsborough and Constable’s works, and instead perceives landscape as haunted. James’ Suffolk is very much conjoined with the county’s folklore of green children, wild men, witch executions, and demon dogs, all of which provide a basis for the addictive radio drama *The Lovecraft Investigations* and which also resonate with Mark Fisher’s influential theoretical writings on the Suffolk eerie.

Although it can only generate speculation, James’ final and posthumously published ghost story, “A Vignette,” might provide a clue. Here we are given the impression that James is writing in an autobiographical register, and we might even construe the story as the closest thing he wrote to auto-psychoanalysis. The story recounts a discomfiting occurrence that happened to the narrator as a boy in a wooded area he calls “the Plantation” neighbouring his home. That home and plantation strongly resembles James’ own childhood home in Great Livermere, which adds to the story’s autobiographical colouring. In a manner that he frequently does, he describes the plantation with tremendous verisimilitude as a prelude to the moment in which “the surroundings began to take on a threatening look.” Despite James’ endeavour to reassure us, or perhaps himself, when he proclaims “I must not give the impression that the whole of the Plantation was haunted ground,” the potency of his story nevertheless leads us to conclude that his home has become irredeemably unhomely—*unheimlich*, as Sigmund Freud would say in his celebrated essay “The Uncanny.” Of course, there is no telling whether “A Vignette” possess any autobiographical truth or if it is actually a pastiche of psychoanalytic method; nor does it really matter. But what is arguably important is that his *final* ghost story, with its Suffolk haunted environs in the narrative foreground, virtually purports to be the *origin* for the ghost stories he wrote beforehand, as if “A Vignette” is the *belated prefiguration* of, say, “Oh Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad” with its depiction of Parkins being stalked by a ghost on Felixstowe beach. To be clear, my point is twofold: firstly, there is the more obvious suggestion that “A Vignette” exemplifies James’ sense of haunted landscapes; and secondly, there is the probably more difficult thought suggesting a complex sense of time in which before and after, or then and now, interweave and become confused.

That second point will be returned to at the end. For now, I want to focus upon the first point about haunted landscapes. Arguably, James’ most sustained exploration of landscape can be found in the stories collected together in the 1925 book *A Warning to the Curious and Other Stories*. Three stories are especially fascinating and indicative in this regard: “A Neighbour’s Landmark,” “A View from a Hill,” and the title story “A Warning to the Curious.” Let’s turn towards that eponymous narrative. It is set in a fictitious seaside town named “Seaburgh,” which is closely modelled on Aldeburgh, a place that held special importance for James. Indeed, five years later, in his 1930 book *Suffolk and Norfolk*, James wrote that “Aldeburgh . . . has a special charm for those who, like myself, have known it from childhood; but I do not find it easy to put that charm into words.” James’ self-confessed difficulty in explaining that charm is made all the more apparent in the brief sentences that follow as he notes the moot hall, church, and the Martello Tower to the south. The brevity of the topographic description—amounting to a mere 126 words—sharply contrasts with the opening of “A Warning to the Curious” that spends 555 words describing Seaburgh. Although there is not enough time to quote the entire passage, some phrases stand out when he describes Aldeburgh as a place which “is not very different now from what I remember it to have been when I was a child.” He writes of “marshes intersected with dykes to the south, recalling the early chapters of *Great Expectations*,” “flat fields to the north,” “gorse inland,” “a long seafront and a street,” “a spacious church . . . and a peal of six bells . . . [which] rang with a flat clacking sort of sound on those hot days [of my childhood].” A second topographical paragraph invites us to “Walk away from the sea and the town, pass the station, and turn up the road on the right,” until eventually you reach a place where “And here you may sit on a hot spring day, very well content to look at blue sea, white windmills, red cottages bright green grass, church tower, and distant Martello Tower on the south.”

James thus opens his story with a description of place, what he wonderfully and with great justice calls a “word painting.” He permits himself to indulge in a more intense level of evocation compared to what we witness elsewhere in his non-fiction writings, intermixing topography, childhood memories, and even a suggested walk. Because of that, his description goes beyond the listing of topographical features seen in his non-fictional writings, and instead teems with literary references, sounds, and the sense of high summer. While it might be easily tempting to categorize these opening paragraphs as straightforward scene-setting on the part of the writer, the remainder of the story should steer us away from that temptation. Central to James’ tale is a legend concerning three crowns designating Saxon rule over Suffolk; the crowns are hidden, and in their hiding place they possess the power to protect Suffolk from outside invaders. But if all three crowns are discovered or lost, then the county’s borders come under great threat. In the story, according to Paxton, an amateur archaeologist, two of the crowns have already disappeared: one was lost to the rising seas at Dunwich, whilst another had been found in Rendlesham and subsequently melted down. Paxton deduces that the third crown is interred in a village close by and succeeds in excavating it from a barrow. His actions are punished by the crown’s ghostly guardian, and Paxton’s murdered body is found on the beach of Aldeburgh.

Allow me to refer to one final James story, “A View from a Hill,” also published in 1925, which has the virtue of tying together the two parts of this lecture. Fanshawe is the protagonist, and he is staying with a wealthy acquaintance, Squire Richards, on their estate. Wanting to know his environs better, Fanshawe is shown the sights and is lent an unusually heavy pair of binoculars. These possess a strange power, seemingly activated by blood: when peered through, they make visible aspects of the landscape that are no longer extant but once existed. When viewing a distant hill with the binoculars, Fanshawe surprises Richards by correctly stating that the hill is called “Gallows Hill” on account of a gibbet atop of it and the presence of a man being hanged. But when the binoculars are put down, the execution scene disappears and the location is covered by trees. It transpires that not only do the binoculars magnify remote places for the viewer, but they also bring the past into the present. Spatial as well as temporal distance is shrunken by the binoculars. At first, it might seem that the binoculars are the horrifying object rather than the landscape. But, in fact, they are doubly conjoined with the landscape. On the one hand, in an almost archaeological fashion, they cut through the landscape in its current state and reveal a traumatic historical underlayer (indeed, we learn that the binoculars were built by a man named Baxter, another of James’ amateur archaeologists). And, on the other hand, the story implies that Baxter made the darkly miraculous binoculars from the hanged people buried on Gallows Hill. We see, then, landscape through a dead man’s eyes; the binoculars frame a landscape of death. Finally, confirming the landscape theme of the tale, is Fanshawe’s outing to Gallows Hill itself. James, once again, describes the location with considerable detail. Trying to find the gibbet espied through the binoculars, Fanshawe haltingly clambers through a dense wood where he feels, or glimpses, “steps crackling over twigs behind me, indistinct people stepping behind trees in front of me, yes, and even a hand laid on my shoulder.” Stumbling, he finds three stone blocks arranged in a triangle with post holes incised into them, foundation stones for the gibbet that once stood there. Sensing the danger if he stood in the triangle’s middle, he departs quickly for the estate.

It is now time for me to finish. James’ stories, therefore, are characterized by the indissociable entwining of time and space, or put more exactingly, in the *being-here* of the landscape as interlaced with the *back-then* of the past. This therefore instantiates a peculiar but thought-provoking paradox in which *back-then* is simultaneously past and present. In a way, of course, this is essentially the logic underpinning nearly all ghost stories in which our customary assumption that the present always recedes into a past from which is can never return is unsettled by a revenant whose “presence” is a vestigial past in the present. Ghosts ruin linear temporal progression, sending time’s arrow into incessant ricochet. That pastness-in-the-present in the ghost story is comprehended as dangerous, perhaps even the source of danger. Little wonder, then, that Hamlet, shortly after meeting the ghost of his father, decries to Horatio that “Time is out of joint.” But James differs from many other ghost story writers with his conviction regarding the landscape as being haunted. Perhaps this means that James considers the landscape as a ghost, or, if we conclude that the ghost must be defined as a dead person, then we might need to construct some other category for his writings rather than “ghost story.” Either way, in a manner that anticipates and resonates with later examples, such as Emily Richardson’s film *Cobra Mist* or the ongoing research into Orford Ness by Jane Watt and SE Barnet, it seems to me that James’ eerie writings, his “word paintings,” constitute some of the most powerful explorations of the landscape genre in English art and particularly as it pertains to the remapping of our Suffolk landscapes.