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Material Turns of the Screw: The Collier’s Weekly Serialization of The Turn of the Screw (1898)

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This essay takes as its object of study Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw,* as serialized in *Collier’s Weekly* from 27 January to 16 April 1898,¹ a period that coincided with a transition in the magazine’s development and of James’s own writing career, which saw him, as Melanie Dawson notes, “reinventing his work and his audience” (230). It approaches the serial version of James’s tale from a materialist and sociological perspective, using the contexts of the magazine and contemporary literary culture together with an analysis of relevant “periodical codes”² to address the following questions: first, what did this story mean, in a broad sense, for a new, young editor attempting to reinvent a struggling magazine and how did it contribute to creating a new meaning for Collier’s? Second, what did this story mean to James at this point in his career and in its Collier’s manifestation? Finally, how might Collier’s readers have understood the tale, taking into account their understanding of the contemporary literary and periodical scene, James’s place in it, and the manner in which the story was presented in Collier’s? In considering these questions, this essay engages with existing

¹Issues of Collier’s for this period are very scarce and most often available only in microfilm. For this essay, I have consulted physical copies in my possession (27 Jan–2 Apr.) and holdings at the Beinecke Library at Yale (9 and 16 Apr.). A published edition of the serial text and its illustrations by Peter G. Beidler exists for those wanting a more accessible version of the tale in this form.

²Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker’s concept of “periodical codes,” as outlined in their introduction to the Oxford critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines (5–9), derives from the Jerome McGann (The Textual Condition) and George Bornstein’s “bibliographic codes” (Material Modernism), which comprise both physical and material aspects of a magazine (paper, layout, typeface, size, illustrations, price) but also broader intertextual, paratextual, sociological, and contextual features (including advertisements, type of content, manifestoes, networks of distribution and sales, editorial arrangements, etc).
scholarship on the Collier’s serialization but also with issues raised in the wider field of study on James and periodicals, and with broader controversies about The Turn of the Screw itself. Specifically, it redresses oversimplified accounts of Collier’s in this period and assumptions that the magazine serial form produces unsophisticated readings of the story.

The Collier’s Turn and The Turn of the Screw

“The illustrations were by John LaFarge, and I have never yet discovered what either the story or the pictures were about.” —Robert Collier (qtd. in Gould 22)

Robert J. Collier’s 1916 recollections about his early days as editor are often cited as evidence of the uncomfortable fit between the highbrow James and the magazine’s middlebrow readership (Cole 198; Dawson 231; Sonstegard, “Merely Pictorial” 63), with Jean Lee Cole insisting that “one would not expect James’s prolix, ruminative tales to appeal either to Collier’s editors or to its readers” (193). For Collier, however, and the

3 The most significant studies of the tale in its Collier’s manifestation are Cole; Sigler; Sonstegard, “Merely Pictorial”; and Nemerov. Other work on James in a periodical context includes Dawson; Diebel; Evans; Hochman; Horne; Ihara, ““Rather Rude Jolts””; Johanningsmeier; “Henry James’s Dalliance” and “How Real American Readers”; Lowenstein; Lund, “Henry James’s Two-Part Magazine Stories”; Nordloh; Sonstegard, “Singularly Like a Bad Illustration”; and Tucker.

4 A key controversy that has divided critics through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the question of whether the ghosts are real (a position supported by “apparitionists”) or a product of the governess’s hysterical imagination (a position supported by “non-apparitionists”). Since the popularization of Freudian analysis, non-apparitionist views have tended to dominate, representing apparitionist accounts as unsophisticated. The non-apparitionist bias against reading the tale as a ghost story has influenced perspectives on the magazine version of the tale, which, as Adam Sonstegard has argued, privileges an apparitionist account (“Merely Pictorial”). The critical disregard for the story in its magazine version also has a wider context that relates to James’s own feelings about magazines and his work in serial form as well as to a broader cultural and scholarly distaste for the form. As Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund note, “the serial has traditionally been viewed … as an inferior artistic form that fractures or impedes unified plots driving toward endings that confer meaning on entire novels” and, in a more recent critical context, as “an expression of capitalist practices” that function to commodify literature (“Textual/Sexual” 144).
magazine, the story had a much more practical and, at the same time, more abstract, significance. Specifically, Collier planned to shape a new identity for a struggling magazine, one that would appeal to a rapidly transforming middle-class reading public that emerged with the rise of the professional-managerial class. The magazine’s difficulties were part of the broader volatile and transitional moment in the history of periodicals that has been described as the “magazine revolution” and that witnessed the emergence of cheap mass-market monthly magazines, including Munsey’s and McClure’s. Rather than relying on subscription and newsstand sales as their key source of revenue, these magazines exploited an advertising-based system that enabled them to lower the cost of a general monthly from twenty-five or thirty-five cents to just ten. These magazines provided short, snappy, and timely content and, as a consequence of the development of new technologies, offered plentiful illustration. In the middle-class market, they challenged the dominance of existing, expensive monthlies such as Harper’s, Century, and the Atlantic Monthly, magazines that were genteel in tone and whose editors regarded themselves as “custodians” of culture (Schneirov 46).

The emergence of mass-market monthlies had implications for other types of periodicals as well. In their combination of timely, newsy, and topical commentary with fiction, poetry, plentiful illustration, and coverage of the arts and literature, they usurped the terrain of weeklies like Collier’s (Mott 57). Weeklies were also besieged by developments in newspapers, many of which offered a similar combination of material in Sunday issues or supplements, though the quality of illustration was poor (Mott 8, 10). In addition, relevant to the changing dynamics of the field was the emergence of an upmarket newcomer—the “little magazine”—that established a niche between mass-
market and genteel publications. Little magazines, noted for their artistic appearance and modern content, were styled as prestigious publications of distinction, foregrounding the new and/or avant-garde in literature and the arts. They sought to usurp the cultural high ground occupied by genteel magazines, establishing themselves as arbiters of high culture, but, with their cheap price of ten cents, they aligned themselves also with new, popular magazine forms (MacLeod). These periodicals were all competing, with differing strategies, for the attention of a growing middle-class magazine readership.

While there were certainly perceived hierarchies within the periodical field, cultural distinctions between types of periodicals often were, and are, exaggerated. High cultural subject matter, typically associated by Americans in this period with European arts and letters, was of interest not only in “genteel” and “little” magazines that writers like James preferred to publish in, but also in the new cheap mass-market magazines and in urban and regional newspapers. It was not unusual, for example, to come across writings by, or features and commentary on, highbrow figures alongside those on popular, mainstream writers in periodicals of all types. Matthew Schneirov, for example, notes that the new mass-market magazines featured articles on prominent American and European artists alongside more sensationalistic and faddish features on celebrities and personalities (95). The era’s little magazines, too, though most noted for their decadent and avant-garde content, also attended to more popular contemporary literary and artistic fads and fashions. James himself, though widely regarded as caviar to the general, received coverage across the range of avant-garde and quality magazines, mass-market monthlies, general weeklies, and newspapers.

Understanding these nuances of the periodical field helps to illuminate the
significance of James’s contribution for Collier’s and why, contrary to Cole’s view, James’s “prolix, ruminative” story might well appeal in this context. Melanie Dawson and Amanda Sigler also relegate Collier’s rather too hastily to a low-to-middlebrow status without due consideration to its position in this period. Collier’s was one of the ten-cent weeklies being challenged by competition from the new mass-market monthlies, on the one hand, and newspapers, on the other. Under an earlier title, Once a Week, and with a fiction focus, it had been one of the most successful magazines in America, reaching a peak circulation of 250,000 in 1892 (Hinnant and Hudson 115). Circulation subsequently declined, however, with failed attempts to make it a “breezier and lighter Harper’s Weekly” by bringing a stronger news- and public-affairs orientation to it (Mott 454). It was at this point that Robert J. Collier, the twenty-two-year-old son of the magazine’s founder, stepped in as editor to save the struggling magazine. Collier changed the format—making it larger, with larger type, and replacing a three-column layout with a more readable two-column one (Notice in McCook Tribune 8). More notably, however, Collier’s reminiscences about his early editorship suggest that, recognizing the magazine’s failure to achieve success with a news-oriented formula, he was considering re-emphasizing its literary orientation. In so doing, he was looking to literary and, indeed, little magazines, for inspiration:

I had just come down from Harvard with the idea that popular journalism needed a literary flavour. I showed my judgement of the public taste by ordering a serial story by Henry James…. It was at that time, when I had been fitting myself to become the editor of the Athenaeum or the Yellow

5 The day of issue was also changed from the 5 February number from Thursday to Saturday, the more usual day for the appearance of a weekly magazine. OKAY?
Book, that the Maine blew up and Jimmy Hare blew in … turn[ing] me from the quiet paths of a literary career into association with war correspondents, politicians, muckrakers, and advertising men. (qtd. in Mott 455)

While Collier’s points of reference—the Athenaeum and the Yellow Book—are British, he was undoubtedly thinking, too, of an American publication, The Chap-Book, that was associated with these British counterparts. It began life as a little magazine in 1894, when it was widely regarded as an American Yellow Book. In 1897, however, The Chap-Book announced its intention to grow up and, in so doing, styled itself after the Athenaeum and other quality literary periodicals (“Announcements” xxi). Quite apart from its notoriety, Collier is likely to have been familiar with The Chap-Book because its founders, like himself, were young Harvard men, contemporaries, one of whom, like Collier, was the son of a newspaper magnate. He would have watched The Chap-Book’s development with interest, noting, especially, its serialization of James’s What Maisie Knew through 1897, which coincided with The Chap-Book’s own efforts to transform itself into a quality literary journal.6 The serialization of Maisie ended in August 1897, and Collier secured a contribution from James for Collier’s at some point between then and November 1897, when James is said to have begun working on The Turn of the Screw.7

By his own account, then, Collier had imagined himself as the editor of a very different kind of magazine than Collier’s would become, before the “turns of the screw

6James had made an earlier contribution to The Chap-Book, “The Way It Came,” which appeared in a single issue in May 1895.
7There has been debate about when, precisely, James began work on the tale. The most recent evidence, provided by Christopher Moran, suggests that it was as late as November 1898.
represented by the Cuba crisis and the addition of photojournalist Jimmy Hare to the staff plotted a different course. Indeed, Collier already had suitable staff to draw on in re-orienting the magazine in a more literary direction. This regular staff included the “cogen[t]” and “charm[ing]” Mayo W. Hazeltine (Collier’s Weekly 21); the “always readable” Edgar Fawcett; the “sparkling” and wit[ty]” Edgar Saltus; and the “grave” and “incise” Julian Hawthorne (“Collier’s Weekly” 5). These journalists were respected men of letters whose columns brought a literary flair and a cosmopolitan and urbane tone to the magazine’s coverage of current social and cultural events. To this mix, Collier added Blanche Willis Howard, a novelist famous for her examinations of cultured European life, whose column debuted in January 1898. The contributions of this staff, including Hazeltine’s news editorials, were often focused on the European scene and/or on situating American culture in this context. Fawcett and Howard were particularly well-placed in this respect as they, like James, were expatriate Americans living abroad, Fawcett submitting his column from London and Howard from Paris. Saltus, meanwhile, though based in America, knew Europe well, and his column treated largely of its culture. James was acquainted and on friendly terms with these journalists, especially Fawcett and Hawthorne, and both he and Fawcett specialized in fiction focused on the upper classes. Saltus, meanwhile, like James, cultivated a highly precious style and was an ardent admirer of the man he called “the great master of English prose” in his Collier’s column in December 1897 (qtd. in Hubbell and Berkove 215). Hazeltine, too, had been an early admirer of James, writing a glowing account of him in the New York Sun as early as 1881. James may have been a cut above these contributors (but in what publication would he not have been?), but he shared with them many literary, cultural, and aesthetic
interests. Though a contribution from James was certainly a coup in terms of cultural capital for the magazine, the profiles of its feature staff indicate that it was not as strikingly anomalous as Cole, Dawson, and Adam Sonstegard (“Merely Pictorial”) have suggested. James’s involvement served to consolidate and develop already-existing concerns of the magazine’s content.

What Collier did not count on, however, as he envisaged himself at the helm of a weekly with a strong “literary flavour” was how contemporary events would alter his plans. As tensions heated up between America and Spain over Cuba, the magazine’s attention turned increasingly to the political situation. In addition to direct coverage of events, reported, in part, through Hare’s photojournalism, the political situation spilled over into other content. Saltus’s “Our Notebook” column, for example, included critical commentary on Spain alongside its features on culture and the arts. Hawthorne, meanwhile, was sent to Cuba to report on events for his “Vitascope” column (5 March). Topical literary content appeared, in the way, for example, of a poem by Edith M. Thomas, “One Woman’s Voice Against War” (19 March). Besides Hare’s photographic contributions, Collier’s house artists provided imaginative reconstructions of important events, including a large double-page spread depicting the destruction of the USS Maine (26 February). It was neither James’s story, then, nor Collier’s ambitions to bring a high literary flavor to the magazine that would establish it as a leading national weekly but, rather, its coverage of the crisis in Cuba (Mott 236–37). This fate was just as well given that Collier’s likely model for his ambitions, The Chap-Book, failed in 1898, whereas the circulation of Collier’s, by contrast, doubled in this year (Rune Hassner qtd. in Becker 151n10). While James and his story may not have been the star
attraction in 1898, they did serve as an important form of cultural capital for the struggling magazine in a period of transition.

James and the Turn Against the Serial

So much for the meaning and significance of James and his tale for Collier’s; but what of the meaning of Collier’s and the broader magazine context for him and his work? The 1890s were, famously, an unsettled period for James. Notably, he had tried and failed to achieve success as a dramatist, and demand for his work from magazines was decreasing. He felt unwanted, “utterly out of it,” as he confided to friend and fellow novelist William Dean Howells, expressing his disdain, particularly, for magazines: “I have always hated the magazine form, magazine conditions, manners, much of the magazine company. I hate the horrid little subordinate part that one plays in the catchpenny picture book—the negation of all literature that the insolence of the picture book imposes” (22 January 1895, 298). By 1897, however, James needed the money that magazines provided and was anxiously seeking publication opportunities in America. With the Chap-Book, he found a venue that shared his distaste for the “picture-book style” of mass-market magazines, and his tales appeared unadorned in its pages. Further, his association with this provocative new little magazine brought him prestige and exposure to a self-styled intellectual and aspirational readership. What it did not bring him was much money.

Whereas The Chap-Book publishers paid him only $150 for serial and book rights to Maisie (Kramer 270–72), Collier’s paid about $900 for The Turn of the Screw—for the serial alone (Anesko, Friction 193). In moving from The Chap-Book to Collier’s, however, James was removed from a rarefied realm and thrust into the “catchpenny picture book” of the general illustrated weekly magazine with its miscellany of content.
Though Collier had plans to bring the magazine upmarket, James, it seems, was not aware of them. While Collier and his readers understood James’s story as highbrow fare in the weekly magazine, this context, for James, caused him to regard his story, as he told Howells, as “the most abject, down-on-all-fours pot-boiler, pure and simple, that a proud man brought low ever perpetrated” (4 May 1898, 309).

Such, at any rate, was James’s understanding of the story in its magazine form. By 1908, however, this view had changed when *The Turn of the Screw* was issued in a new “form” and under new “conditions” with different “manners” and “company” as part of the twenty-three-volume New York Edition of his works, chosen and re-framed with lengthy prefaces by the author and accompanied by artistic frontispieces by Alvin Langdon Coburn, over which James had control. No longer jostling for attention with news, topical commentary, competing fictional content, and advertising, the story appeared in the context of James’s chosen company of tales in volume twelve. Here, his once shameful potboiler becomes, as he states in the preface, “a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation,” and “a fairy-tale pure and simple” (xviii, xvi). James’s about-face regarding the story is interesting, particularly as he made few changes to it. So why, exactly, did he feel so differently about the story? Certainly, of course, he was pleased, as he always was, to see it in book form, and the preface makes only passing reference to its magazine origins. He was also no doubt relieved to have it presented as a unified whole rather than broken up into serial parts. James despised the serial form as “an odious way” of reading, associating it with those he deems “simple folk” (James to

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Critics, of course, have scrutinized these changes, notably in terms of thinking about James’s intentions regarding the reliability of the narrator. Beidler’s edition of *Collier’s* *The Turn of the Screw* provides a cogent summary and addition to the controversy (179–94) to support his view that the serialization provides a more cogent and consistent story.
Howells, 2 January 1888, 265) and urging his friends to put off reading his work until its book publication. In the case of *The Turn of the Screw*, for example, he “beseech[ed]” Howells “not, by any accident, to glance at a small serial from my pen that has just begun to run in *Collier’s Weekly*... It ... can give out but little air of ingenuity save as a total” (28 January 1898, 306).  

Although James baulked against the serial form, he had been well schooled in it, adapting his work through much of his career to its demands. That structures of serialization were internalized by him and, in some sense, intrinsic to his process is revealed, in typically oblique fashion, in his New York Edition preface, in which he accounts for the success of his “fairy-tale” in mediating perfectly between the “short and sharp and single” unified effect of the *Cinderella* or *Bluebeard* type story and the improvisational looseness of *The Arabian Nights* mode (xvi):

> To improvise with extreme freedom and yet at the same time without the possibility of ravage, without the hint of a flood; to keep the stream, in a word, on something like ideal terms with itself: that was here my definite business. The thing was to aim at absolute singleness, clearness and roundness, and yet to depend on an imagination working freely, working (call it) with extravagance. (xvii)

Given his distaste for the serial form, it is ironic that James should locate his inspiration

*Rachel* Ihara cites numerous examples of such pleas to readers and notes that many critics of the period also asserted that James’s style was unsuited to the serial format (*Novels* 94–99). Interestingly, there is relatively little work on James’s expertise in and careful exploitation of the serial form. Ihara lays much of the groundwork on this subject (*Novels* and “Rather Rude Jolts”), while Adam Seth Lowenstein develops a rich and complex theoretical understanding of James’s aesthetic of serialization throughout his career (Serial Art of Henry James; “‘Surprises’”; “‘My Genius’”). Ihara finds it curious that, while James privately censured the serial, he did not do so in public forums in which he did, by contrast, attack pictorial illustrations (“Rather Rude Jolts” 198).
in its ancient manifestation and that he should be seemingly oblivious to the connection. Scheherazade, after all, is the original spinner of serial yarns, dependent for her life on her skill at tale-telling much in the way that nineteenth-century authors were dependent for a living on producing serials, even while the short story began to take on greater importance as a magazine form. While admiring the improvisation for which open forms such as The Arabian Nights allow, he also strives for literary unity, which to his mind is undermined by a story’s being chopped up into serial parts.

While James’s distaste for the serial was prevalent among the literary establishment, this view, gendered and classist in its assumptions about reading practices, was by no means universally held. Debates about readers and reading were particularly fraught in the late nineteenth century with anxieties about the rise of an undiscriminating and improperly educated mass readership. The leisure time to read in a sustained and careful way was a luxury of the privileged, not of the busy wife and mother, nor the working man or woman—nor, increasingly, the industrious business or professional person. It is noteworthy, then, in this context, to consider Howells’s account, as told to James, of his household’s engagement with The Turn of the Screw, which demonstrates a reversal of the elitist understandings about reading practices. Howells, interestingly, paid no heed to James’s plea not to read the story in its serial form. He and his daughter avidly followed it in Collier’s, while his wife, by contrast, waited patiently to read it as a complete whole. In describing their experiences to James, however, Howells’s choice of language is telling: he and his daughter are described in delicate terms as “sip[ping]” the story, while his wife is associated with gluttonous “gulp[ing]” (Howells 307). The suggestion that serial reading might be a refined way of experiencing
a text is outlined more fully, and with a similar gustatory metaphor, by editor and literary critic Charlotte Porter in 1885:

The flavour of the component parts of the novel is more distinctly appreciated when it is served up in a series of judiciously related courses.

The hungry curiosity to follow the events, discover the plot, and swallow the book whole, which belonged to the world’s younger days and long nights of novel-reading, is turned into the discriminating attention of a patient public, whose interest in the story does not preclude the study of underlying problems presented in a lifelike and artistic way.…

Occurrences of the slightest every-day nature are important enough to build up or disintegrate moral power, and … the excitement of following events is superficial dreariness compared with the excitement of following the meaning of events. (812)

Porter further argues that the serial form is particularly amenable to the development of complex female characterization—of exploring “the life within” women—and uses James’s Isabel Archer as an example of this trend (812, 813). By Porter’s account, then, and contrary to James’s, serialization allows for a more thoughtful engagement with the text, one likely to lead to deeper analysis, encouraging readers to focus on meaning rather than plot.

The Reader’s Turn with *The Turn of the Screw*

While a Jamesian rather than Porterian view of serial reading has been most influential in literary criticism throughout much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a developing body of scholarship has emphasized the importance of attending to the
particular qualities of serialization and their effects on reading and interpretation, including such issues as temporality; the different narrative structure imposed by the beginnings and endings of serial parts; the serial’s connection to real-world events; serial reading as social and socialized reading; and the serial’s relationship to other content in the periodical, to content in contemporaneous periodicals, and to broader happenings in the literary field (Lund, *America’s Continuing Story*; Hughes and Lund, *Victorian Serial*; Law; Okker). In light of a more nuanced representation of Collier’s in this period as well as Porter’s and more recent critical conceptions of serial reading, how, now, might we speculate about what *The Turn of the Screw* meant to and how it was read by the magazine’s readers? Existing materialist approaches to the text have focused on two main features: how the illustrations by Eric Pape and John La Farge that appeared in the serial version shaped particular readings of the text and/or how the Cuba crisis, covered so thoroughly in the magazine at this time, might have influenced interpretations (Sonstegard, “‘Merely Pictorial’”; Sigler; Nemerov; Cole). This work contributes to the long-standing apparitionist/non-apparitionist controversy and to questions of the sophistication or naïveté of the story’s original magazine readership. In this section, I engage with and extend these materialist considerations of the tale. While recognizing the impossibility of knowing exactly how historical readers might have understood this text or how they might have consumed and navigated a weekly magazine, my analysis considers the kinds of readings available to an attentive and engaged reader immersed in a particular periodical and literary context and confronted with specific kinds of periodical codes.

As I have suggested in my consideration of the Collier’s context, the magazine’s
content and formula suggest a middle-class and professional-managerial-class readership that strove to be abreast of contemporary events and to maintain a cultured and internationalist perspective. These readers had their own rich context for reading James’s contribution, one that involved a familiarity with the contemporary literary scene; an awareness of the popular ghost story and Gothic genres invoked by James; and a sense of James’s reputation and status, including, possibly, a knowledge of his wider oeuvre. The typical American reader of the period was an extensive reader, following a number of stories serially across various monthly, weekly, and daily publications, and reading fiction in book form as well. The market in this period was dominated by historical and exotic adventure romances. Certainly, in this context, James’s tale would have stood out as distinctive. Nevertheless, readers would have had a context for understanding the work in relation to the tradition and contemporaneous manifestations of ghost stories and Gothic romances, which were also extremely popular at this time and had been, according to Sigler, a dominant feature of Collier’s in the year preceding James’s contribution (81). Neither these contexts nor the story’s serial format preclude complex readings of the story. If such fiction took a less sophisticated aesthetic form than James’s, it nevertheless often dealt with controversial and provocative social topics. Catherine A. Lundie, for example, argues that the ghost story of this period, in the hands of women writers, engaged with marital infidelity, abuse, incompatibility, marriages of

10In the first months of 1898, for example, serials running alongside The Turn of the Screw in some of the leading periodicals were by such popular bestselling novelists of these genres as Stanley Weyman (Munsey’s, McClure’s), F. Marion Crawford (Munsey’s), Henry Seton Merriman (Harper’s Monthly), Thomas Nelson Page (Scribner’s), and S.R. Crockett (Harper’s Weekly), as well as lesser-known writers of this ilk, including R.D. Chetwode, Max Pemberton, and Charles Edward Barnes (all publishing in Argosy), and Frederick S. Burton and Frances Swann Williams (both publishing in Leslie’s Weekly).
convenience, motherhood, sexuality, female illness and madness, widowhood, and spinsterhood (1–24). The same themes, of course, also populated Gothic romance, and James’s own treatment of some of these in *The Turn of the Screw* indicates that such topics could equally be taken up in men’s writing.11 A reader versed in James’s oeuvre would have yet another important immediate context—the serial and recent book publication of *What Maisie Knew*—a story that shares with *The Turn of the Screw* the theme of children’s exposure to corrupt adult forces and that might well have served as a lens for their reading of it.12

There were contexts, therefore, for understanding James’s stories in ways that recent scholarship has accounted “sophisticated.” But even if some *Collier’s* readers did not bother to read the story, both it and James could still have possessed meaning for them. James, after all, had symbolic value. Discussed in popular venues, he was widely regarded as a difficult writer. A large feature on him in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1895, for example, noted that James “writes for the select few” but “is an author whom one cannot afford to neglect” (Fitch 4). His presence in *Collier’s* helped shaped the magazine’s readers’ sense of themselves and of the magazine as part of sophisticated modern culture. For those who did choose to engage, they might well have put in the extra effort that he demanded, practicing reading that, in Porter’s terms, focused less on

11 T. J. Lustig and Peter G. Beidler (*Ghosts*) provide the most thorough accounts of James’s tale in relation to contemporary ghost stories and, in Beidler’s case, broader controversies about ghosts in the period.

12 Reviews of the book version of *Maisie* were appearing at the same time as *The Turn of the Screw* was being serialized in, for example, the *Nation* (17 February) and *National Magazine* (January). Meanwhile, in November 1898, a review in *Literary World* of *The Two Magics* (the volume in which *The Turn of the Screw* first appeared in book form) invited a comparison between the two texts: “If we can call ‘What Maisie Knew’ a picture of purity in the midst of pollution, so we might call this story of poor little Miles and his sister Flora a picture of corruption in the midst of rare loveliness” (368).
“events” than on “the meaning of events” (812).

Indeed, the prologue that frames the tale in the first instalment (27 January) models precisely this approach, opening in a setting of country-house holiday-gatherers around a fire sharing ghost stories. This setting reflects the social manner in which fiction was often consumed in this period, and the holiday-gatherers are, indeed, likened to magazine readers when the initial discussion of the tale about to be told is said to be like “the mere opening of a serial” (22). As Sigler and Sonstegard note, this analogy gains far greater significance when encountered in the pages of a magazine than in those of a book (Sigler 81; Sonstegard, “‘Merely Pictorial!’” 64). This first instalment also strikingly captures the anticipation, excitement, and impatience of the serial reading experience that arise from enforced breaks. The holiday-gatherers in the tale’s frame “can’t wait for the story!” (20) and speculate wildly as to the way it will unfold, only to have their curiosity alternately tantalized and checked by its teller, Douglas. While Douglas hints at sensational content, referring to a tale of “general uncanny horror and ugliness and pain” with a love and seduction element to boot (20), he thwarts his hearers’ anticipations that draw on the clichéd conventions of these genres. “The story won’t tell … not in any literal, vulgar way” (20), he says, disappointing one of the listeners who admits to only understanding such narratives, and he urges his readers not to “anticipate” (22). While Sonstegard characterizes this scene rightly as a dig at the mass readership of magazines (“‘Merely Pictorial!’” 65), it serves equally as a steer for how to read James’s tale. At the same time, it belies James’s apparent distaste for the form, demonstrating a masterful awareness of the serial’s power to hold a readership in thrall, a power that is exploited throughout. After all, James, like Douglas, repeatedly invokes generic conventions of the
Gothic romance, fairy tale, and ghost story as a means of tantalizing readers and playing on generic expectations, only to subvert them.

The serial format functions importantly in this strategy because, to a considerable extent, the clever play between generic expectations and form is achieved through the structuring of the parts. Generic conventions are invoked in particular instalments, serving as a frame for the reader’s imaginative working through of the story in the week-long break before it resumes. The second instalment (5 February), for example, which marks the beginning of the governess’s own narrative, plays up the love-story elements hinted at in the prologue, with a shadow of mystery but little sense, yet, of the horror promised. It draws upon tropes of the fairy tale and the Jane Eyre-style Gothic romance, as the governess characterizes Bly as a “castle of romance” (21); confesses to the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, to being “carried away” by the master (20); imagines herself as mistress of the house (20); and, at the end of the instalment, learns something about her predecessor, Miss Jessel, who has died under mysterious circumstances (21). In the week between this and the next instalment, the reader has much to “work freely” and “with extravagance” with, to use James’s own phrase (Preface xvii), indulging, like the governess, in the anticipation of a cross-class tale of romance in a Gothic and/or fairy-tale vein.

This romantic aspect is, indeed, developed in the third instalment (12 February),

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13James appears not to have had control over the magazine’s structuring of the instalments. When writing the text, he may have thought, as Beidler suggests, that the story would run over five instalments, and, indeed, he broke the story’s twenty-four chapters into five parts for the serial, which he did not retain for the book versions (Introduction xxxv). A letter written by James to George P. Brett close to the time of publication suggests that he believed it would run “for about ten weeks” (66). It ran for twelve. The editor, however, respected the integrity of James’s chapters and sections, never breaking in the middle of either.
as the governess reveals that, in her leisure time, she fantasizes about the master: “it would be charming as a charming story suddenly to meet” him (20). This fantasy seems, initially, to be endorsed by a dominant full-page illustration for that week, depicting the governess viewing a figure atop the tower of something that looks very much like “a castle of romance,” with the caption: “He did stand there!—But high up, beyond the lawn and at the very top of the tower” (21). The size of the illustration (12¼ by 8½ inches) and its placement on the right page draw immediate attention to it (see fig. 1). An association of the figure in the image with the master is reinforced by the letterpress on the opposite page (see fig. 1 insert), which takes readers up to the point when the governess is imagining the “kind light” of the master’s “handsome face” (20). It is only upon turning the page that readers are forced to realign their understanding of the illustration on the previous page, as the “charming story” and what might have been a “charming” picture are rendered ominous. “He,” it turns out, is not the master, but “an unknown man in a lonely place,” which, as readers schooled in Gothic conventions know well (and as the governess herself reminds them in self-consciously literary language), is a “permitted object of fear to a young woman privately bred” (22). Still very much in the realm of the Gothic romance at this point, readers might well be asking themselves in the intervening week precisely what the governess does at the opening of the next instalment (February 19): “Was there a ‘secret’ at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement?” (20). James’s continual invocation of the vulgar trappings of generic conventions throughout the narrative is, however, a trap itself. The story, as his fictional counterpart declares, “won’t tell” (20), not in that way. His tactics of deferral and delay, innuendos, and false leads, while not the clichéd cliff-
hangers so often associated with the serial, function, nevertheless, as a serial aesthetic.\textsuperscript{14} As one reviewer of the tale in its serial form put it, “he has the art to make you believe that he is just about to tell you something that will make it worth your while to stay awake” (Rev. of \textit{The Turn of the Screw} 2).

While references to the Gothic-romance and fairy-tale tropes continue as the serial progresses, the happenings in, and endings of, parts begin to open up darker, more disruptive possibilities in later instalments, especially with respect to governess’s state of mind. Though H.G. Wells found James’s characterization of the governess to be “impersonal,” lacking insight into her subjectivity (James, Letter to Wells 86), the tale provides plenty of suggestive material through which to understand what Porter called the woman’s “life within” in ways that encourage readers to focus on the “meaning of events,” not just events themselves (812). Indeed, rather than militate against the so-called sophisticated readings of the text that understand the governess as psychologically disturbed or mad, the serial form creates the conditions for considering the governess’s obsession with the master and her transference of it to Miles. If unlikely to have generated the Freudian readings later applied to the text, readers might easily engage with such readings in light of existing cultural anxieties about governesses as potential bringers of corruption into the home, through entanglements with their married masters or the sons of the family.\textsuperscript{15}

This \textit{romantic} aspect of the tale is drawn out through a series of tête-à-têtes between Miles and the governess, two of them nocturnal. One of these occurs in the

\textsuperscript{14}Hughes and Lund suggest that such features \textit{form} part of what makes the serial a particularly feminine mode (“Textual/Sexual Pleasure and Serial Publication”).

\textsuperscript{15}In \textit{The Victorian Governess}, Kathryn Hughes provides a cultural history of the governess in which she documents these perceptions.
seventh instalment (12 March), in which, after Miles asks to be thought of as “bad,” he kisses her and they embrace (17). In the eighth instalment (19 March), Miles asserts “the rights of his sex and situation” in a way that leaves the governess feeling that there has been a change in their relationship (10), an episode accompanied by a large double-page illustration (18½ by 12½ inches), in which the governess is depicted somewhat mysteriously wearing a gold band on her left ring finger (12–13) (see fig. 2 and insert).16

In the ninth instalment (26 March), in which, in Miles’s bedroom, she tries to get him to divulge the reason for his expulsion from school, they are left in the dark when he blows out the candle. What happens between this moment and the next morning is left blank as a gap—a chapter, rather than an instalment gap—intervenes.

While these events can be read innocently, the possibility of understanding them in more unsettling ways, especially upon retrospection, is raised by the endings of the tenth and eleventh instalments (2, 9 April). After a traumatizing encounter with her female charge, Flora, the governess sits in the dark in the drawing room by the fire, where Miles joins her in silence, leading her to conclude, at the end of the instalment, that “he wanted, I felt, to be with me” (2 April, 18). The potential erotic overtones are heightened at the end of the penultimate instalment (9 April), in which, again, the governess and Miles are alone after dining together in the evening, she seated, Miles standing and looking out the window, and she says: The governess remarks: “[w]e continued silent while the maid was with us—as silent, it whimsically occurred to me, as

16This detail has not been noticed by other scholars who have analyzed the illustrations. It appears very clearly in the print version, but may not be as easily viewable on microfilm copies. It is difficult to know what to make of it, as there is no reference to it in the story itself and will have been part of the artist, Eric Pape’s, imaginative contribution. Might the reader infer that the governess has been rummaging through personal belongings in the house and wears it as part of her fantasy of union with the master?
some young couple who, on their wedding-journey, at the inn, feel shy in the presence of the waiter. He turned round only when the maid had left us. ‘Well—so we’re alone!’ (Concluded next week)” (22). While this classic “drawing of the curtain” ending raises suggestive possibilities in any context, the enforced week-long break allowed readers’ imaginations to run rampant along forbidden lines, especially in light of previous events and depictions.¹⁷ Eroticized interpretations were further reinforced for those readers who proceeded immediately from this instalment ending to the next item in the magazine—

“The girl who had dominated his boyhood’s dreams” and who offers him the innocent joys of youthful love (22). As he moves towards her, however, he is confronted first by one rival woman from his past, then another. Both are associated with carnal love, the kind of “love,” one of these women tells him, that “comes after knowledge” (23). A rival woman appears in her place, one associated with passion and knowledge: “[H]e felt the touch of a flower against his cheek, the breath of a rose in his face…. Her lips were red as the curled petals [sic] of a rose…. Behind her the white lilies communed together” (23).

¹⁷This kind of interpretation is in keeping with those formulated by Hughes and Lund in their compelling argument that gaps and deferrals in serial narratives “may lead to erotic intensification in a feminine economy of desire” (“Textual/Sexual” 158). That this serial ending posits a sexual encounter between a twenty-year-old woman and a ten-year-old boy is part of the larger manner in which the narrative, in James’s terms, forces the reader to “think the evil … think it for himself [sic]” (Preface xxi).
The man’s plight is analogous to Miles’s own passage from innocence to experience. However, Miles and the governess come to no such sexual communion in the final instalment (16 April), in which, though she finally “catche[s] and holds him, possessing him “with what a passion,” she finds a Miles whose “little heart, dispossessed, had stopped” (18).

Conclusion: A “Mere” Serial?

The Collier people appear to think that the little work in question—for their purposes at any rate—much of a hit. —James to George P. Brett, 22 Dec, 1897

This account of the serialization of James’s *The Turn of the Screw* and its broader contexts tells what the subsequent book versions “won’t tell”—indeed, can’t tell: first, the tale’s meaning, in symbolic terms, for a magazine in a state of transition and responding to particular social and cultural events and to changing conditions in the periodical field;

second, the very different meaning it had in this context for its author, who was ashamed of what he considered its “abject” appearance in magazine and serial form, a view that transformed radically when he considered it in book dress;

finally, its meanings for middle-class readers, in both symbolic and narrative terms. In symbolic terms, of course, it was a text that represented cultural capital. In narrative and structural terms in its serial form, it was a story capable, despite James’s feelings to the contrary, of being read in complex ways: “freely” and “with extravagance,” after a Jamesian ideal (Preface xvii), or as a mean of contemplating the “meaning of events” (Porter 813; emphasis added). The “little work in question,” then, was a “hit” on many counts. James would go on to publish three more stories with *Collier’s* between 1898 and 1900; the writing of *The Turn of Screw* would be instrumental in his transition to his “late style”; and the story would go-
on to become one of his most critically acclaimed and popular works.

Works Cited


