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Place, Space, and the Affordances Thereof: Bly Manor as Depicted in Three Adaptations of *The Turn of the Screw*

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Abstract: This paper looks at the representation of Bly Manor across different adaptations of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). The focus is on adaptations that emphasize Bly as an intricate space that limits the possibilities of actions that the main characters have. The theory of affordance states that places "afford" different uses of the space. Locked inside a place with uneasily determined affordances and clearly established rules, the main characters of these adaptations experience how different intersections of identities are afforded differently within the stately home. The paper traces the intertextual conversation through adaptations such as Jack Clayton's film *The Innocents* (1961), the readaptation of James's premise in Ruth Ware's novel *The Turn of the Key* (2019), before ending with the intertextual and temporal dimensions of haunted space in Mike Flanagan's streaming miniseries *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020). These iterations of the story showcase the voyeuristic elements of Bly as the characters are repeatedly watched by those who have come before them. At the same time, they show the ongoing appeal of James's story as its legacy continues into the twenty-first century.

Keywords: gothic; adaptation; affordance; *The Innocents*; haunting; space

1. Introduction

For 124 years, Bly Manor, the primary setting for Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (James [1898] 2021), has fascinated readers. It is a place that emerges from James's understanding of the impact that spaces could have on the mind; yet, its reality remains ambiguous. Is the manor merely an extension of the Governess's imagination or a structure that controls reality? In this, his perhaps most famous novella, James encapsulates his explorations of space as a signifier for inner turmoil.¹ An unnamed Governess comes to an isolated country house in search of a place to belong, but she is instead ostracized from her surroundings by the history she finds there in the form of two ghosts.² Bly affords the Governess many things at first, from control over the household to the adoration of the children, but these are gradually restricted over the course of her stay there. *Screw* can symbolize many things—queer repression and identity, lost childhood, or a prison for women in domesticity—and it is perhaps this multiplicity of meaning that has made it one of James's most adapted works. Among these adaptations, the 1961 film *The Innocents* has created significant academic discourse on its own in particular. Yet, when talking about *Screw*'s adaptations, few to none have looked at the manor itself as a consistent contributor to the terror. I argue that we can understand James's use of place by looking at how Bly Manor is portrayed in his adaptations.

Through a comparative framework borrowed from psychology, we can see how space manifests itself differently within adaptations of James's building. My approach thus engages with adaptation studies while also reaching for a larger interdisciplinary approach. Adaptation is a form of interpretation between artists, so differences in representation highlight the different ways artists may be read a story.³ I draw on an architectural theory seldom used in literary studies—the theory of affordance—to better highlight how the same building can be understood in multiple different ways across different media forms. Affordance theory understands animal–environment relations as any location affording



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specific uses to the person or creature using the space. When applied to fiction, it gives us a language to discuss the power inherent within spaces.

For this article, I have chosen three adaptations that foreground their location as a key element in their presentation: Jack Clayton's film *The Innocents* (1961), Ruth Ware's novel *The Turn of the Key* (2019), and Mike Flanagan's miniseries *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020). While Clayton's film has been much discussed as an adaptation of James, the latter two have not received as much attention due to their recency. Yet, all three adapt James's work through an emphasis on the mansion they take place in, be it in the form of oppressing scenery (*The Innocents*), restrictive layout (*Key*), and stasis through time (*Bly*). By focusing on adaptations of the same source material, it becomes easier to highlight the different ways affordance helps us understand the role that space plays since all start from the same point but then vary widely in how they understand Bly's roles in the story.

In more recent years, different fields have embraced affordance theory to synthesize how a space enables, or disables, the possibility of action. Developed by psychologist James Gibson (1979), the theory outlines that any use of a space is something the environment "affords" the animal/human. Such affordances can be anything from (broadly) shelter to (specifically) cooking or sleeping (p. 127). The theory has spread into a variety of fields such as design, architecture, and neuroscience. Donald Norman (1990) for instance argues that designers may influence the actions of their users by making the affordance an object is meant to provide immediately apparent (e.g., a door that needs a sign saying "push" is a failure of design) (p. 87). In architecture, Jonathan Maier et al. (2009) propose three different uses for affordance: as a theory governing "the relationship between built environments and humans over time"; as a shared language between architects and engineers; and as a way of understanding "the connection between the initial intentions or objectives of the design with how the artifact is actually used" (p. 394).⁴ Affordance theory in architecture is thus aspirational in that it aims to make the interaction between user and building smoother. However, when applied to unnerving architecture, the focus shifts from what affordances are present to what affordances ought to be there but are ultimately denied. Michael Jawer et al. (2020) argue that an explanation for why certain places feel "haunted" is because they deny basic affordances of clarity and enjoyment to the human user. These places may be overburdening or depriving sensory input, or they may come with overwhelming dread due to cultural and historical associations with the location (pp. 69–75). Such an observation makes itself useful in understanding how fictional space may operate in gothic horror where culturally significant buildings such as castles, suburban homes, and country estates become sites of violence and oppression.

While architecture theory may seem far distanced from literary criticism, it is the aim of literature to portray sensations drawn from the material world. That sensations of lost affordances should appear in gothic horror is only natural; yet, interpretations of the haunted house have traditionally tended to be highly metaphorical. Edmund Wilson's (1934, p. 202) seminal interpretation of the Governess suffering a neurosis of sexual repression is still present in the discourse. For example, George Haggerty (2006) asserts that the Governess is turning Bly into a gothic fairytale for her own queer desires for her employer and his family (pp. 134–35). Likewise, Harold Goddard's (1957, pp. 6–7) interpretation of the Governess as an unreliable narrator is still often used. Ellis Hanson (2003) in particular, proposes that this unreliability pushes the reader to consider the children's sexuality (p. 371). The unknowability of the events that have and are transpiring is also central in John Tibbetts's (2002) analysis of Bly in both novella and film form as a place "terrorized by haunters and haunted alike" (p. 144). The most common reading remains that Bly Manor stands as a representation of the Governess's fractured psyche. *Screw* is after all a story nested within multiple narrators lending their own subjectivity to the tale.⁵ Yet, the critical conversation has branched out somewhat with Guy Davidson (2011) reading the story as a metaphor for James's own "homelessness" as a citizen of the world (p. 455). At the same time, there have been increasing calls for scholarship that addresses the more tangible elements of place within fiction. Manuel Aguirre (2008)

makes such a call while analyzing gothic fiction through geometry to understand “the tangibility of place” (p. 1), while Roger Luckhurst (2018) attempts to “push beyond the generalized topography of psychic projection of built space” (p. 296) in his discussion of the corridor in fiction. Such a reading, which is also close to my own, happens in Brenda Ayres’s “The Thing About Haunted Houses” (Ayres 2022), which considers Bly in both *Screw* and *The Innocents* through Hegelian terms as a thing and essence unto itself: “the house [. . .] being literally haunted by the people of the present and past that have etched their own nightmares and anxieties upon the house itself before the house can be seen to haunt others” (p. 140). While these are scholars who draw on research from other fields (philosophy and anthropology for Aguirre and Ayres; psychology and architectural feature for Luckhurst) they do not understand human–architecture interaction through a specific architectural theory. I am addressing both the classical metaphorical treatment of space and the increasing calls for a different form of analysis by using affordance theory to anchor my reading in a human–architecture understanding.

I argue that affordance theory allows literary scholars to think about the space as an actor within the ghost story through what it allows—and more importantly disallows—characters. This is a somewhat new use of the theory within literature and media studies. While Andrew Cutting (2012) uses Gibson’s theory to discuss the possibility of adapting *The Turn of the Screw*’s Bly Manor into a video game (p. 180), the most influential use in literature studies has been Caroline Levine’s *Forms* (Levine 2015) on the affordance of forms both abstract and concrete.⁶ To Levine, affordances are extensions of the forms/organizing principles they are found within. Consequently, they are also extensions of power: “A panoptic arrangement of space, wherever it takes shape, will always afford a certain kind of disciplinary power; a hierarchy will always afford inequality” (p. 7). Within literature, affordances manifest themselves in different forms of narrative and literary devices. These bring their own sets of affordances that may be combined with other forms to produce other affordances in kind. Levine’s understanding of affordances is a little removed from Gibson’s environmental perception theory. Drawing on Levine’s understanding of affordance, Gerard Gibson (2023) talks about the different opportunities film and literature bring to the table in film adaptations of cosmic horror: “Film, as an audio-visual medium, cannot convey the same non-representational narratives that literature can, just as literature cannot convey the breadth of visual impact or almost haptic physical dynamism . . . available to film” (p. 140). While they do not directly engage with adaptation scholars, Levine and Gibson’s view of the affordances of form plays into the act of adaptation. Linda Hutcheon (2013) describes one of the ways of understanding adaptation as “an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works” (pp. 7–8), which includes a shift in medium or context. While I too consider the affordance of media forms, I use the theory somewhat closer to its original intent as an examination of the power within environmental relations.

I consider the removal of affordances from where they ought to be a hallmark of the gothic haunted house. Gothic houses may not only afford shelter and home but also imprisonment and exposure to the other residents. James Gibson reminds us that “The organism depends on its environment for its life, but the environment does not depend on the organism for its existence” (p. 129). This observation carries with it unnerving implications when applied to human-designed environments. Michel de Certeau (1984) explains that spaces form from the practice of geographic places. In such a practice, the rules of the place are made manifest in the practice and are hard to overcome by any perceived outsider trying to embed themselves there (pp. 117–18). The space forms from the topographical rules made by the architect and the continued practice of those who live there. Designed places also elicit expectations for what they should afford due to the cultural norms associated with them (e.g., a house should afford sleep, cooking, home, etc.). Yet, these expectations may be thwarted by the mix of factors between inhabitant and designer. George Haggerty (2006) observes that the Governess “sees herself as queer because she has lost her footing in this bizarre world. She is not sure of the values that

are implicit there, nor is she ready to interpret the goings-on in any way that criticizes her charges" (p. 135). The Governess arrives at Bly with a set of expectations for what she will find there. She is at first frightened at her prospects but quickly turns the place into a gothic romance wherein she is the protagonist. But this romance cannot last, for Bly is a fully practiced place filled with strange values stemming from its past. Her behavior there is characterized by Tibbetts (2002) as "increasingly possessive, even hysterical", which is contrasted against "the consistent, placid sweetness of the children" (p. 103). The Governess's reactions are of course not invalid for she occupies a place that becomes constrictive over time as it locks her into set pathways from which she cannot easily escape. The Governess becomes an outsider because she is stepping into a story that she is not fully privy to, nor can ever fully grasp. Locked inside a place with uneasily determined affordances and clearly established rules, she experiences how different intersections of identities are afforded differently within the stately home.

2. Adapting the Great Drifting Ship

The most discussed adaptation of *Screw* is undoubtedly its first feature film adaptation, Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (Clayton 1961). The film uses hostile and oppressive architecture to create a sense of James's unwelcoming and fully practiced space. *The Innocents* does not stray too far from the plotting of its source material but adds to the story's layers by utilizing the film's strengths as a visual medium. What new motifs the film introduces continue in later adaptations such as the Governess meeting Flora for the first time at the lake and her finding the photographs of Miss Jessel and Quint. However, most of the embellishments made by screenwriter Truman Capote highlight the governess Miss Giddens's (Deborah Kerr) repressed sexuality.⁷ While some reviewers praised Kerr's performance for its nuance, others criticized her for being older than the novella's main character.⁸ However, while Giddens is not the young governess depicted in James's novel, she is encountering the same hostile space that refuses to afford her.

The Innocents fully embraces the notion that the environment influences Giddens. Director Jack Clayton himself pointed to the environment as a way of understanding the story: "You could always take the story two ways. You could, for instance, say that any sensitive person who enters a strange house may have disturbing intuitions that arise in part from the environment, in part from the depths of his own character" (quoted in Palmer 1977, p. 199). This strangeness of the house is on full display in *The Innocents*. Shot in black and white, the film utilizes the frame to generate a sense of dense emptiness that does not afford Giddens the belonging she seeks. Bly is introduced as a large and sprawling mansion that becomes increasingly smaller and more claustrophobic over time. The exterior gardens are large and often filmed with Sheffield Park House looming on the horizon. But once it changes to the interior, something is always obstructing the image. The rooms are filled with furniture, paintings, curtains, or tapestries that darken the lighting even during daylight. Additionally, the camera is usually placed waist high for a medium shot, which allows objects on tables to obstruct parts of the image, giving a sensation of the actors being boxed in and immobile. The result is that Giddens appears to be swallowed by the house—this is a space that does not easily afford her any movement or clarity. Speaking in terms of affordance, Bly is denying her and the audience simple uses such as the ability to properly see and survey the scene justly. Consequently, Giddens can never truly understand her surroundings just as she may never know the truth around Miles and Flora's condition.

Additionally, Giddens is separated from her fellow humans through dividing lines and furnishings placed in the way of visual or discursive clarity. Anthony Mazzella (2002, pp. 15–16) argues that the use of negative space in *The Innocents* highlights Giddens's desire to fill in meaning to the story of Bly. This negative space often separates her from the others. Whenever Giddens attempts to converse with Mrs. Grose (Megs Jenkins), the scene usually ends with the actors blocked in such a way that a pillar, bedrest, or flowerpot is placed between them, making them appear separated and fueling their miscommunications.

Giddens occupies a separate place from the others, a notion that is only exacerbated by the night scenes where she will at times be the only thing visible on screen. *The Innocents* uses special lenses that add darkness and blurring to the edges of the frame around the focal point (Francis 2013, p. 98). The effect is that the background is artificially darkened with the central part of the lens remaining clear and in focus. The film's aesthetic language conveys that Bly consists of an impenetrable darkness that makes Giddens look isolated from her surroundings as her white-clad figure wanders the passageways exposed against the backdrop—an effect that makes her seem highly visible and vulnerable.

Vulnerable is exactly what she is, for Giddens is influenced by subtle reminders of the house's past. The lingering memory of Quint (Peter Wyngarde) and Miss Jessel (Clytie Jessop) is a central aspect of *Screw*, and *The Innocents* takes this notion a step further into the audio-visual realm. Giddens finds a locket with their photographs in the attic. In other scenes, Clayton places bodies and faces in the background that look as though they are observing the actions happening in the foreground. There are images and statues of couples throughout the manor: a dove and a buck in a quilt on a staircase behind Giddens and Grose; a man and a woman with a falcon in the sofa pattern behind Giddens while she is disturbed by Miles (Martin Stephens) reciting a poem; and numerous naked statues depicting romantic embraces are scattered around Bly. The memory of Quint and Jessel is on full display in these scenes as the memory of their practice is shown to still be in effect within Bly. As a result, any attempt on the part of Giddens to enact some form of order or clarity upon the situation is undone by the forms of her predecessors. There are always subtle reminders of their existence wherever one turns.

In a pivotal scene late in the film, the voices of Quint and Jessel fill the Manor to the brim in a crescendo of memory and violence that also shows the zenith of Giddens's paranoia and confusion. Giddens begins hearing voices at night and rises to investigate. Her light makes little impression on her surroundings, making her appear to float in a dark void partially surrounded by faintly visible objects. The sounds, we learn, stem from a time when Miles and Flora caught Jessel and Quint having sex as they scream "KNOCK BEFORE YOU ENTER" and Miss Giddens runs to her bedroom. There she discovers Flora at the window, observing Miles walking in the garden next to two statues in a passionate embrace. The five-minute-long sequence incorporates all the elements the film uses to convey its haunted space through blurred and darkened backgrounds, dislocated sounds and voices, and framing that emphasizes the repeated influence of Quint and Jessel. Yet, it is a scene that is never confirmed as anything but Giddens's imagination. She is left devoid of confirmation and never knows more of the space than what few traces that linger. Bly affords little to Giddens's desire to embrace this home. Instead, the very substance of her medium works against her.

There has been a steady interest in James's novella since *The Innocents* premiere with repeated attempts at bringing the story yet again to life.⁹ Part of the reason may be the film's alluring portrayal of space with several adaptations following suit in their focus on the setting as a frame for the Governess's inner turmoil. Yet, this is hard to do, for *The Innocents* is a film that takes James's slowly eroding affordances and puts them on the screen for all to see. As Giddens's social space narrows due to the pushback from the children and the increasing appearances from Quint and Jessel, she is progressively restricted by objects and darkness filling the screen. With her options for movement and action being restricted, she is left with few options but to soldier on toward what proves to be a dreadful outcome. By the end, she confronts Miles by the statues in the garden to acknowledge his continued influence under Quint. The scene escalates until, finally, Quint appears in lieu of a statue upon which Miles falls into Giddens's arms as if dead. The scene, as in James's novella, is left highly ambiguous, with Giddens kissing Miles before it fades to black and so it seems neither Giddens nor the audience are afforded a conclusive ending. In the end, it is Giddens's constant attempts at molding the space to her own use that undoes it. The space boxes her in and denies her the ability to connect. Instead, she is left with the only thing visible on the screen before her head tilts out of frame, leaving nothing but the darkness.

3. Bly in the Twenty-First Century

The most newfound adaptation since *The Innocents* is perhaps Ruth Ware's *The Turn of the Key* (2019), which takes the central premise of a babysitter in an isolated location and stages it in a twenty-first-century smart house.¹⁰ Ware's novel resurrects the form of James's narrative for her own purposes by revealing that the modern house continues a patriarchal history that affords little to the women within its walls. Although Ware does not consider the novel a direct adaptation, she does acknowledge its debt to James (Forshaw 2019). In this, the novel conforms somewhat with Hutcheon's (2013) definition of adaptation as "An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (p. 8). *Key* follows Rowan, a young woman who is hired by Bill and Sandra Elincourt to babysit their four children at their home Heatherbrae in Scotland. Heatherbrae is a large Victorian mansion that has received considerable technological updates. Yet, the central tension within the house is sadly grounded. All previous nannies at Heatherbrae have absconded under unclear circumstances, and there is a history of a child who died there in the 1970s. However, the reason for the babysitters leaving is not the haunting of past Victorian inhabitants or dead children, but because Bill, the father of the house, sexually harasses them. The hauntings Rowan experiences at Heatherbrae are caused by the children she is minding, who fear that she will steal their father away from them. Rowan, whose real name is Rachel, is herself one of Bill's former extramarital children and has taken the job to be near him and her siblings without any of them knowing. Ready to reveal the truth to her family, Rachel discovers that Maddie, the middle child, has fallen to her death out of her bedroom window, and the police suspect Rachel did it. The twenty-first-century home remains a place hostile to women, with Bly now replaced by the equally controlling Heatherbrae.

Key literalizes many of James's surveillance themes and the semiotics of Bly as an incomplete ruin that continually limits the actions of its inhabitants. Heatherbrae is a home that does not hide its polar influences and so literalizes James's description of Bly as "a big ugly antique but convenient house, embodying a few features of a building still older, half-displaced and half-utilized" (p. 13). Ware often emphasizes the vastness of the mansion along with its disjointed aesthetic where a Victorian skeleton has been 'upgraded' with elements of glass and metal:

There was something disconcerting about the way the old and new combined in this house. It wasn't like most homes, where modern additions rubbed up alongside original features and somehow combined into a friendly, eclectic whole. Here there was a strange impression of oil and water—everything was either self-consciously original or glaringly modern, with no attempt to integrate the two. (p. 68)

It is this incoherence among other things that influences Rachel's view of the place she inhabits. She experiences some of the cultural and historical associations described by Jawer et al. (2020) as explanations for modern hauntings. The blending of the old and the new creates a mismatch of expectations as to what the house can and should afford both in terms of history and concrete use. Consequently, she keeps imagining herself embedded in the Victorian haunted house story while also confronting the ghost in the machine of the modern smart home. The form of the haunted house thus affords Heatherbrae to hide the transgressions that have and will be committed by Bill.

The eclectic nature of the house extends to the people who live there. The Elincourt family is as disjointed at its core as the home they have built for themselves. While they appear to be modern, they are really continuing a legacy of violence. Heatherbrae is constructed around a patriarchal ideology that polices women and forces them to perform domestic roles. As explained earlier, Norman (1990) argues that a well-designed object or space makes the intended use the most obvious affordance that can be gained. This philosophy presupposes that the user's intention for the object is the same as the designer. Bill has designed his house for *his* use with little to no regard for his staff or family. The building is outfitted with cameras and sensors that ensure Rachel always has to mind her behavior on the offset that she is watched at that moment. Bill has thus made a house similar

to Michel Foucault's ([1975] 1995) panopticon, which serves to make the institutionalized always feel observed, thus making them conform their behavior to the institution's laws even when they are not observed (p. 134). The possibility of surveillance baked into the very foundations of the house limits the possible actions that Rachel may take. She must always perform "Rowan the Perfect Nanny" (a mantra mentioned throughout the novel) with little to no room for error. If she appears to be negligent or unmaternal, she may immediately be chastised.¹¹ At times, a disembodied voice will call out from the speakers asking her questions; at other times, there will be a phone call in response to something she did. Only in her own room is she away from the cameras, but even there, she hears the footsteps of someone walking above her keeping her on edge.

The limitation of actions extends beyond Rachel's performance of maternity and into all aspects of living at Heatherbrae. The design philosophy at Heatherbrae spits in the face of Norman's (1990) philosophy for intuitive affordance. Most simple processes from coffee makers to showers are automatized and controlled through an app called "Happy". The official purpose of the app is to give Rachel and the children control over their surroundings, but in reality, they are only given the levels of control that Happy affords them (p. 112). The result is that Rachel must sometimes live like the women who were there before her. When she first uses the shower, she ends up having to use the setting preferred by Holly, a former nanny since there is no profile for her yet (p. 61). Maddie, the middle child, has also stolen her mother's old phone and is using her access to Happy to torment Rachel and her predecessors (p. 335). Happy is a form of gatekeeping put in place by Bill and utilized by others to limit what actions Rachel is afforded. What control she does have is obscured even further by the app's "confusing configuration of icons and squares" (pp. 40–41). The space of Heatherbrae alienates Rachel and leaves her inactive due to her poor understanding of what affordances she does have. Rachel thus struggles to understand what forms of control she is afforded just as she struggles to decode the mysteries of Heatherbrae's past.

The conditions of the place and space afford Rachel little and force her to adopt a form of paranoid perfectionism that is impossible for her to maintain. As the pressure mounts, the mask slowly fades, and she begins to give in to the children and herself resulting in the death of one of them. Like *Screw* and *The Innocents* before it, *Key* highlights that the end result of the erosion of affordance is the undoing of those the building is not designed to protect. Rachel is increasingly limited in her actions as the choices made before her arrival increasingly constrict her. We learn that the modern home affords the live-in nanny little, and she has good reason to be suspicious. Rachel's actions are mandated by an elaborate system consisting of technology both digital (the smart house) and analog (patriarchal violence). This way, the legacy of Bly carries on in the equally constrictive Heatherbrae.

4. The Invisible Menagerie

Whereas Ware explores James's setting through a modern lens enduring patriarchy and modern surveillance, Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (Flanagan 2020) explores haunted space as a controlling force. Flanagan's miniseries is distinctly modern while set in 1980s Britain. American au pair Dani Clayton (Victoria Pedretti) takes up a job as a nanny for Miles (Benjamin Evan Ainsworth) and Flora (Amelie Bea Smith) at Bly Manor in the English countryside. There, she befriends the rest of the staff: gardener Jamie (Amelia Eve), housekeeper Hannah Grose (T'Nia Miller), and cook Owen (Rahul Koli). While initially following the plot of *Screw*, the series quickly goes into a larger story featuring many other stories and characters of Henry James embedded within the plot of *Screw*. Bly's past is still influencing the present in ways unknown to the living until it is too late. Not only Quint (Oliver Jackson-Cohen) and Jessel (Tahirah Sharif) are after the children, so is the oldest ghost on the grounds Viola (Kate Segel). As with previous iterations, *Bly Manor's* estate at first seems inviting and comforting, but it soon reveals itself to be a controlling force with specific affordances. Rather than constricting space, Flanagan's Bly is an expansion of time where tenants are afforded an afterlife, albeit one with rules they do not understand. For Dani, Bly initially appears as a queer space where

she can finally explore her sexuality without judgment with Jamie. Yet, this is only a temporary affordance that the manor quickly removes.

Questions of control over one's movement in space and time are central to understanding Bly in this miniseries. James Gibson (1979) confirms that places are indifferent to the will of the animal using them (p. 129). This relationship gets more complicated with human-influenced places, as de Certeau (1984) writes that the design of places is a way for those in power to control the movement of those they rule (p. xix). Bly operates along a similar ground wherein the characters have little control over the rules that govern them because it entrenches its dwellers in an ongoing story of haunting that funnels them toward a predestined end. To live in Bly is to be under the influence of a history that they are not fully privy to. The manor is dominated by the practice of several layers of precursors. While this is in line with Avery Gordon's (2008, p. 7) observations that haunting is a constituent part of modern life, *Bly* literalizes this notion through its domineering ghosts. The ghost of Viola is walking the grounds searching for her daughter. In her rage and sorrow, she has become a "gravity well" that binds all who die there to the place. Most scenes set in Bly Manor contain one of Viola's ghostly prisoners in the background. These ghosts will sometimes influence the scene, but for the most part, they stand still as if frozen in time and watch Dani and the rest go about their business. Dani will on some occasions stare directly at one of them without noticing. She may not know it, but she is continually observed by those whose fate she will soon share.

Life and death are interchangeable from the point of view of Bly, where the living and the dead walk along predetermined paths. Time, from the perspective of the recently deceased, is non-sequential where they reenact scenes from their lives, some good and some bad. This unpredictable repetition encapsulates the traumatic lingering that Bly affords them. They continue living, yes, but in a menagerie, they can barely influence. Flora's dollhouse works as a metaphor for the entrapment the people at Bly experience. Her dolls represent the residents dead or alive and are moved around the dollhouse to show everyone's location. Whether the person the dolls represent is alive or dead does not matter as they are moved regardless. The setup raises questions as to whether the movement of the residents moves the dolls or if they themselves are moved. Like the dolls, the dead are truly trapped within the limited affordance Bly offers to those who have passed. They do not disappear completely but rather slowly fade until they are husks going around without purpose or aim. In life, Dani may relish in her newfound connections to her fellow staff members, but in death, she is trapped in a structure she cannot control. After escaping the clutches of Viola, Dani becomes convinced that she is on a predetermined path to dying at Bly. She begins to see Viola's reflection in water surfaces and becomes increasingly catatonic despite her happiness with Jamie. In the end, she returns to Bly to drown herself in the lake that Viola attempted to drag her to, thus fulfilling the pattern she was set upon. The ghosts are all locked into a repeating pattern of time jumps they have little control over. The manor may appear to be an inviting sanctuary to the living, but as they stay there, they come to be locked into patterns mimicking the experiences of the ghosts.

Bly tells a story that stretches across time and utilizes the affordances of new technology to do so. In their account of the affordances streaming platforms provide the consumer, Evens et al. (2023, p. 5) cite agency as one of its biggest draws. The viewer can quickly pause and rewind the story to be able to pick up hidden images while also watching the series at their own pace.¹² Flanagan's *Bly Manor* is visually less "overstuffed" than its depiction in *The Innocents*, and unlike *Heatherbrae*, it stays remarkably static through different time periods. The rooms usually have large sections of floor clearly emphasized by the camera's positioning, and objects seldom obscure the view and so provide the viewer the ability to see and survey the scene. Scenes are often shot with little to no shadows to make them legible regardless of television quality. Because of its consistency, the outline of *Bly* becomes largely familiar as the series progresses, which makes scenes where the story time jumps easier to place. However, *Bly Manor* tells a story that is more intricate and visually layered than television series have been able to in the past. Each episode is

centered around time jumps that tell the story of a central character. Consequently, the audience is subjected to the same non-linear time experiences as the people trapped on the manor grounds.

5. Conclusions

No one is safe from the menagerie at Bly, for they are all controlled by invisible forces that limit their actions. The theory of affordance provides a way to conceptualize the different ways creators engage with James's haunted space. While the three adaptations each utilize a different medium, they depict the manor house as a space that restricts the actions of its inhabitants. This restriction comes in different flavors, from the engulfing darkness and hidden images in *The Innocents* to *The Turn of the Key's* revelation that the modern technological home is a reinforcement of patriarchal dominance, to *The Haunting of Bly Manor's* dictation of movement through time. The twentieth- and twenty-first-century governess, we learn, has good reason to be nervous, for she is truly watched at any minute by statues, cameras, and hidden ghosts. Such controlling surveillance throws into question their right to privacy and practiced identity. Yet, all three protagonists came there with the hope of finding a place to belong: Giddens yearned for the children's uncle, Rachel to be a part of her true family, and Dani to find a place that lets her be who she is. Unfortunately, Bly ultimately denies these affordances to its inhabitants, especially if they expected them to be there.

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Notes

- ¹ In other stories such as "The Great Good Place" (1900) and "The Jolly Corner" (1908), spaces take on an almost ethereal quality wherein identity may be found and confronted.
- ² It has been the convention for the longest time to refer to the main narrator of *The Turn of the Screw* as "the governess." I use the capital "G" to distinguish her as a character.
- ³ See the work of Robert Stam (2000), who informs us that questions of fidelity and truthfulness to the source material are fraught and should instead be understood as a conversation between artists (p. 55).
- ⁴ For more concrete use, see the use of affordance theory in the work of Tim Townshend and Roberts (2013), who talk about designing community spaces that protect and afford young people space to develop. And most recently, Fiona Young and Cleveland (2022) have conducted a study on creating learning environments using affordance theory.
- ⁵ Ellis Hanson (2003) provides this summary: "The novella presents us with James's account of the narrator's account of Douglas's account of the governess's account of the ghosts" (p. 370).
- ⁶ In Henry James studies, Jane F. Thrailkill (2019) examines the role of affordance in James's depictions of children playing. Here, affordances "can be seen as invitations to do something, an implicit, material call to (inter)action" with the environment (p. 213), (Variety 1961).
- ⁷ For a good overview of the narrative additions made by Capote, see Dennis Tredy (2007).
- ⁸ Variety praised Kerr for handling a difficult role, while New York Times Bosley Crowther criticized Kerr for "especially do we fear they will be let down by the lucent performance of Deborah Kerr as the supposedly morbid young woman who is the focal figure in the tale" (Crowther 1961).
- ⁹ The Brazilian production *Através da sombra* (Lima 2015), directed by Walter Lima, Jr., set the story on a nineteenth-century coffee plantation, while the Argentinian film *La tutora* (Noel 2016), directed by Iván Noel, presents the children as nearly feral and living in an old house in the countryside. A more recent film adaptation, Flória Sigismundi's (2020) *The Turning*, sets the story in a manor filled with dolls' heads and with a confusing labyrinthian layout. Indeed, as time has passed, *Screw* and its manor have become archetypes in their own right. This has sparked many comparisons between James's novella and stories that, while not official adaptations, seem to have taken a great deal of inspiration from its setting. Alejandro Amenábar's (2001) *The Others* is

perhaps the most famous of these examples due to its focus on similar themes of a woman caring for two peculiar children in an isolated location (Layne 2020).

¹⁰ Ware (2019). All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

¹¹ See also Judith Butler's (1999) writings on gender and performance.

¹² The series also feeds into an online industry pointing out the hidden ghosts: Guillaume, Jenna. "All The Hidden 'The Haunting Of Bly Manor' Ghosts You Might Have Missed". BuzzFeed. Accessed 4 April 2021. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/jennaguillaume/haunting-of-bly-manor-hidden-ghosts>; (accessed on 4 April 2021) Shaw-Williams, Hannah. "Every Hidden Ghost You Missed In The Haunting Of Bly Manor". ScreenRant, 9 October 2020. <https://screenrant.com/haunting-bly-manor-netflix-every-hidden-ghost/> (accessed on April 4 2021).

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