Counter-Turning *The Turn of the Screw*

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Abstract

For over a century, critics have typically approached Henry James's The Turn of the Screw from the perspective of its young governess, whose obsession with her charges and the spectral figures that allegedly haunt them ultimately leads to disaster, the death of Miles. This article, however, offers a reading atypical of those previously accomplished. Analyzing the novella from a psychoanalytic and narratological perspective, it argues for a shift in point of view, contending that the locus of the novel, the manuscript ostensibly documenting the harrowing experiences of the young governess, is not penned by a woman but rather by a man, the principle reader of the thing itself, Douglas. Given the shift in point of view, it becomes wholly evident that it is Douglas's wildly erotic fantasy that becomes the substance of the manuscript, one culminating not in the death of a child but, rather, in the petite mort or the "little death" of sexual orgasm, the equivalent of a masturbatory episode on the child's part while in the passionate embrace of his governess. Read in this manner, the narrative coheres as a young man's romantic retrospective of desire, obsession and sexual initiation.

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> *I need scarcely add after this that [the story] is a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an amusette to catch those not easily caught (the 'fun' of the capture of the merely witless being ever but small), the jaded, the disillusioned, the fastidious.*
> *--Henry James, Novels and Tales, Turn of the Screw,*
> New York Edition Preface to Volume 12, 1908

In his 1908 Preface to Volume 12 of the New York Edition of *Novels and Tales,* Henry James lays down a gauntlet to readers of *The Turn of the Screw* that immediately challenges their ability to read the text as

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he has crafted it: "[as] an amusette to catch those not easily caught." Scores of scholars have since taken up that gauntlet and have approached James' ghost story from a multiplicity of critical approaches – thematic, allegoric, autobiographic, and, of course psychoanalytic, to name a few -- so as not to be "easily caught" by its haunting, romantic narrative. While many have logically treated the prologue or opening scene as the sextant by which to navigate James' story about a lonely governess whose neurotic pathology leads to disaster, only a few have chosen to look to the oblique riddle placed by a playful Jamesean wit in the 1908 Preface to the New York Edition to uncover the 'calculated' reading: If a story looks like a woman's narrative, reads like a woman's narrative and sounds like a woman's narrative, is it really a woman's narrative? If we answer in the affirmative, we allow ourselves to be counted among those "easily caught" by James' narrative strategies. If, however, we challenge James at his word, we unravel a different tale altogether, one that unfolds and documents a coming-of-age story on the part of one of its major characters, Douglas, the tale's second narrator, whose reading of the unnamed governess's manuscript comprises the whole of the novella. We find, in fact, that the manuscript, ostensibly authored by a woman, is actually that of a man, Douglas himself, whom I believe embodies the character of Miles in the story. What I argue here is that it is Douglas who commits to paper his own memories of that pubescent period in his life when his desire for his sister's (Flora) governess culminated not in death, as the manuscript alleges, but rather in an act of sexual initiation. Read in this light, the novella then becomes a chronicle of Douglas's journey from adolescence to adulthood, a chronicle of a young man's rite of passage.

Of the critics who have attempted to solve the riddle that comprises the very spine of novella through the Miles/Douglas association, who have held the "basic conviction that Miles and Douglas are one and the same,"[1] four in particular are most prominent: Carvel Collins, who was the first scholar to observe the similarities between both characters, namely, that they were "ten years younger than the governess" and that they met the governess during "summer vacation from school/college";[2] Gerald Willen, who argues that the governess, in love with Douglas, documents her experience in "a fiction" with Miles playing Douglas;[3] Louis Rubin, whose "Miles-Douglas identification" substantiates the object of the governess's desire as Douglas;[4] and Stanley Trachtenberg, who reads the story as "a confession of [Douglas'] childhood guilt."[5] A major critic of these readings, however, is Rolf Lundén, who finds them unconvincing as he believes they all take as a given the reality of the events at Bly and therefore prove "incorrect or inconclusive." Lundén asserts, "If one

chooses to apply to the novella the Miles/Douglas grid, a much more consistent explanation is at hand – that the governess's story is simply that – a story, a piece of fiction."[6] Contending the "events at Bly never took place," Lundén, sees the novella as an encoded "love letter to Douglas" in the *guise* of a ghost story. Kalliopi Nikolopoulou is also uneasy with the Miles/Douglas identification as argued by Rubin and the "conflation between James and the outside narrator"[7] as proposed by Susan Crowl.[8] According to Nikolopoulou, it matters not whether Douglas and Miles or James and the external narrator are one and the same; what matters, she argues, is that "the story of the governess attaches itself to Douglas' formative memories . . . Either way Douglas is written in her narrative, and in reading it, he also divulges his secrets, his fantasies, and his fears. " She therefore interprets the governess's manuscript "as the reenactment of a memory – of a traumatic memory, in particular."[9]

While my reading acknowledges the interpretative analyses of the novella offered by these critics, particularly the Miles/Douglas construct, it patently eschews the notion of the governess as author of the manuscript contained therein. It claims, rather, that the events documented in the manuscript are a product of Douglas' memories, which flow from *his* pen.

My study, in essence, begins at the novella's end, in the final chapter of the text, wherein Douglas, reading from the manuscript, reveals the governess's reaction to "seeing and facing"[10] the ghost of Peter Quint at the window. While initially horrified, she resolves to "keep the boy [Miles] himself unaware,"[11] and in so doing, gets "hold of him, drawing him close". Yet fear is quickly superseded by elation when she is distracted by Miles' voice, which, in that moment, proffers a confession confirming his pilferage of her tell-all letter to the Master, a confession she she had been pressing him for in the period before the spectral sighting:

> . . . with a moan of joy, I enfolded, I drew him close; and while I held him to my breast, where I could feel in the sudden fever of his little body the tremendous pulse of his little heart, I . . .saw it [the specter of Quint] move and shift its posture.[12]

In this critical passage, the governess draws on signifiers of mutual sexual stimulation to reconstruct the event -- her "moan of joy," Miles' "sudden fever" and his pulsating heart. Indeed, the text that follows, the exchange between the governess and Miles regarding the reason for his expulsion from school, is rift with such signifiers – she speaks of his "breathing hard and again with the air," his "beautiful fevered face," his 'panting,'[13] his

"convulsed supplication."[14] The passage builds climatically, fueled both by the governess's heightening passion to unlock Miles' innermost secrets and Miles' mounting agitation at the governess's relentless questions about the expulsion. When Quint reappears at the window, the governess again attempts to shield Miles from the apparition, enfolding him a bit too tightly within her arms:

> . . . he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall. I caught him, yes, I held him . . . and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped.[15]

The conventional reading of this passage suggests Miles dies in the arms of the governess, most likely from asphyxiation. My reading, however, is that the passage is 'artistically calculated' to catch Douglas' auditors (and James' readers) to believe the tale ends here. I contend the opposite – that it begins here. As noted, I believe that Douglas, as author of the manuscript, embodies the character of Miles, and it is through Miles that he memorializes his relationship with the governess, which is marked by nascent sexuality. Thus, what Miles/Douglas experiences in the wild embrace of his sister's governess at the story's end is not death but *la petite mort,* a masturbatory orgasm resulting from sexual stimuli that fuels his psychosexual fantasy about the governess while in her arms, which precipitates a veritable "fall" from innocence to experience. Clearly, the sexual signifiers of the preceding passage confirm this.

Neill Matheson, in his study of *The Turn of the Screw,* examines James's use of euphemisms, particularly those employed by James for depicting masturbation. Matheson suggests that the idea of the "unspeakable" – a term that characterizes the behavior for which Miles/Douglas is expelled from school -- is a euphemism for transgressive sexuality; thus, references in the text to the "unspeakable" with regard to that expulsion would be legible to many nineteenth-century readers as an encoded sign of "the contagion of masturbation."[16] It would follow, therefore, given Miles/Douglas' "unspeakable" masturbatory history at school, the heightening passion of governess during the Quint sighting, and the close proximity of their bodies at the time of the sighting, that Miles would be susceptive to sexual arousal, culminating in orgasm. For Douglas, this erotic moment serves as an entrée to and the beginning of manhood.

While one might argue that Miles/Douglas' exposure to and acts of autoeroticism in school effected a sexual initiation of sorts, one must

consider his experience with the governess as far more profound and markedly different from that of his former infantile sexual experiences. In essence, what sets apart Miles/Douglas' masturbatory experience with the governess from that of his school days is the presence of a female other or object. Sigmund Freud acknowledges this point in his research on the "transformations of puberty."[17] He asserts, "With the arrival of puberty, changes set in which are destined to give infantile sexual life its final, normal shape. . . . A normal sexual life is only assured by an exact convergence of the affectionate object and sexual aim. (The former, the affectionate current, comprises what remains over of the infantile efflorescence of sexuality)."[18] For Miles/Douglas, his "infantile, sexual life" culminates in his first masturbatory orgasm *cum femina,* an event indelibly etched in his psyche as the initiation of manhood. Given the language of his intimate encounter with the governess in the last chapter of the manuscript, then, it is abundantly clear that all sexual feelings and frustrations heretofore displaced by Douglas onto others in the fantasy (the governess, Miss Jessel and Peter Quint) are, in fact, his own.

Intriguingly, the sexual language of the novella's conclusion, replete with its "affectionate current," rhetorically brings us back to its beginning – back to the flight of memory upon which the tale rides. As with any initiation story, Douglas relies on the fiber of memory – the imagination – to relive and memorialize in writing a profound pubescent experience. He demonstrates this in the very first chapter of the manuscript, through the voice of the governess who, when recalling her first day at Bly, states:

> There had been a moment when I believed I recognized, faint and far, the cry of a child; there had been another when I found myself just consciously starting as at the passage, before my door, of a light footstep. But these fancies were not marked enough to be thrown off, and it is only in the light, or the gloom, I should rather say, of other and subsequent matters that they now come back to me.[19]

The "faint . . . far . . . cry of [the] child" startling the governess "consciously" as to what lies beyond her chamber threshold is actually the cry of the child within Douglas' 'unconscious,' that inner voice that impels him to traverse the threshold of memory, of imagination, to retrieve and relive that which haunts "the light, or the gloom" of adulthood – the "fancies" of youth that marked sexual initiation. Read from Douglas's perspective, the manuscript that comprises the central narrative of *The Turn of the Screw* coheres not as it *appears* – as

a young governess's account of perceived physical and metaphysical evil threatening her charges -- but as it *is* – as a young man's romantic retrospective of desire, obsession and sexual initiation.

In order to further substantiate the shift in point of view of the manuscript from that of the governess to Douglas, a slight detour into the novella's frame narrative structure is essential. Ostensibly, there are three narratives comprising *The Turn of the Screw*: that of the external frame spoken by the original, nameless narrator, that of Douglas and that of the governess. In reality, however, there is only one – that of the first narrator. It is he who predicates his rendering of Douglas's ghost story with his own imprimatur:

> It appeared that the narrative he [Douglas] had promised to read us really required for a proper intelligence a few words of prologue. Let me say here distinctly, to have done with it, that this narrative, from an exact transcript of my own made much later, is what I shall presently give. Poor Douglas, before his death – when it was in sight – committed to me the manuscript that reached him on the third of these days and that, on the same spot, with immense effect, he began to read to our hushed little circle on the night of the fourth.[20]

As transcriber of Douglas's oral prologue to the governess's manuscript and the manuscript itself, the external narrator directly addresses his reader in order to immediately and unequivocally vouch for the authenticity of his text, a strategy that attempts to gloss over the fact that the transcript he is about to read is "his own" and that it was "made much later" than those fateful Christmas holidays when Douglas first spoke it; in short, that it is the product of his memory and of his agency. Working vicariously through the external narrator, then, James aims to disarm his audience of any suspicion they may harbor with regard to the veracity of his text. He strategically silences the skeptical by closing the text before he opens it with the phrase "to have done with it," a bit of reverse psychology that, if undetected, successfully seduces his audience into buying into the story. In so doing, he virtually casts a wide net to "catch those not easily caught" with this "piece of ingenuity", this conflation of oral and written history. William Goetz, marking this strategy, characterizes it as one of "long novelistic tradition [that] does not seem to provide any special reason for questioning the authenticity of the text that Douglas will read"[21] (or the external narrator will document). To the

informed reader, however, the game James so deftly plays in the crafting of his story is at once afoot.

When viewed narratologically, then, particularly from a Formalist perspective, we find that the first narrator's temporal framework establishes the distance between the chronology of the story's events, *fabula,* and the written representational narrative of these events, *szujet.*[22] This narrative distance, *fabula* vs. *szujet,* logically calls into question the authenticity of the narrative overall since the original narrator depends not only on his own memory to recreate events of a distant past, but also on the collective memories of the narrators whose texts comprise the story – those of Douglas and the governess. Using the first person, the external narrator relates events of the past in real time: the action begins on Christmas Eve with a company of friends sharing ghost stories; on that same evening, one among them, Douglas, announces his possession of a manuscript whose tale is "beyond everything" heard that evening. Events then switch to the second day, when Douglas sends for the manuscript, to the third day when the manuscript arrives by post, and to the fourth, when Douglas provides his prologue and commences his reading of the governess's statement. While the external narrator recreates the events of that Christmas holiday in linear time, his allusion to the embedded history of the manuscript takes his audience out of the moment to a distant past; he states that the governess's "written statement took up the tale at a point after it had, in a manner, begun," that it had been locked in a drawer and had "not been out" for forty years, and that it was not "committed" to him until just "before [Douglas'] death,"[23] some years later. He again perforates real time when he shifts to the distant future, the "much later" during which time he completed the narrative *in toto*. In this misalignment of fictional with actual time, the original narrator not only distances himself from the story he tells in a temporal sense, but he also distances himself from Douglas, the character upon whom his entire narrative rests. The distancing thus renders the tale's origin suspect. Shoshana Felman aptly notes this in her study of the novella's frame. She states, "the story's origin is unassignable to any one voice that may assume responsibility for [it];"[24] origin can therefore only be assignable to the deferred action of voices that "re-produce previous voices." Felman concludes that the "story's origin is therefore situated . . . in a *forgetting* of its origin: to tell the story's origin is to tell the story of that origin's obliteration."[25] Thus, distancing aids and abets that "forgetting" by effectively deflecting the reader's focus from the concentric narrative circles of the external narrator and Douglas to the embedded narrative of

the governess, subliminally causing the unsuspecting reader to privilege the governess's text over the others.[26]

In addition to his narrative strategy, James also employs narrative techniques in the prologue to dupe "those not easily caught" by the riddle of the story via boldly encoded language placed within the prologue, which begs to be decoded. One major example of this linguistic dissemblance lies in the discourse between the external narrator and Douglas on the subject of storytelling. Assuring the "hushed little circle" awaiting Douglas' tale that it will answer all questions put to Douglas about plot and characters, including ghosts, the first narrator states, "The story will tell." Douglas warns, however, that "The story *won't* tell . . . not in any literal vulgar way."[27] In this interchange, James calls attention to the paradoxical properties of language itself, intimating that language constitutes experience as knowledge, which then leads to narrative as a particular in shaping language, thus making possible a kind of knowing. The tale is therefore shaped as an organized matrix of encoded language, an aporetic narrative containing patterns of saying things and not saying things, of knowing and not knowing. According to the manuscript, for instance, Miles (serving as surrogate for Douglas in the text), is expelled from school for 'saying things', the nature of which we know not.[28] Given the nascent sexuality of boys attending boarding schools and the cultural repression of infantile sexuality in the Victorian age, it is highly likely that Miles's expulsion was attributed to "saying things" about sex, specifically autoeroticism.[29] The governess, on the other hand, becomes more and more anxious over the circumstances of Miles' expulsion because she does 'not say things' – she does not confront him with her knowledge of his 'secret', his 'crime', until the story's end. In this tale, both saying things and not saying things are dangerous. Both are subject to interpretation.[30]

James provides another rather obvious clue in the prologue to decipher the tale, having to do with narrative object. The first narrator asks Douglas if "the record", "the thing" he took down, is his own, to which Douglas replies: "'Oh thank God, no! . . . Nothing but the impression. I took that *here* ' – he tapped his heart. 'I've never lost it.'" [31] This vital bit of information speaks to the illusory nature of "the record" and at once raises the question of authenticity on behalf of the owner of that narrative object. The interchange is skillfully placed within the prologue, for any question regarding the veracity of Douglas's "impression" – the illusion -- is immediately counterbalanced by the existence of the "manuscript" – the word. Thus, James warns us by this example to tread carefully through the narrative labyrinth he lays before us, to ask ourselves what is illusion

and what is word, what is known and what is not known, since, after all, the story will not "tell" itself.[32]

When Douglas states the "story won't tell", he is in essence speaking of a story that he will tell orally *as if* by a character in the story; yet, I argue, the story he is about to relate, in truth, is his own told *through* a character -- the governess. Douglas, in essence, "adopts the point of view" of the governess to tell his story in order to throw off his auditors (and James's readers) to the fact that the experience of the tale is his own and that it memorializes a childhood fantasy documented by him later in life. By relating the fantasy from the governess's perspective, it logically follows that Douglas would take Miles as his surrogate. Thus, narratologically, the story *shows* more than it *tells* since Douglas is completely unaware of the unconscious thoughts of the governess and cannot concretize those thoughts in the form of spoken or written words. What comprises the manuscript, then, is the product of Douglas's repressed memory as it is imposed upon and filtered through the perceived consciousness of governess, who figuratively serves as agent to the narrative. Thus, projections of self and other for Douglas –- Miles, the governess and the ghosts, respectively -- are manifestations of self and sexuality in the guise, in the persona of characters.

As noted previously, there are multiple textual clues within that vital prologue that draw the parallel between Douglas and Miles. Most overt is the distinguishing dynamic of their mutual body language. Douglas frequently speaks to the company standing with his back to his audience, both hands tucked in his pockets; the external narrator writes, "I can see Douglas there before the fire, to which he had got up to present his back . . . with his hands in his pockets."[33] Miles assumes the same physical attitude when speaking to the governess: the manuscript states, "Miles . . . stood a moment with his hands in his pockets . . . and Miles stood again with his hands in his little pockets and his back to me."[34] More compelling evidence of the Miles/Douglas doubling is found in the prologue within the background information Douglas provides the company on the governess:

> She was a most charming person, but she was ten years older than I. She was my sister's governess. . . I was at Trinity, and I found her at home on my coming down the second summer. . . we had, in her off-hours, some strolls and talks in the garden – talks in which she struck me as awfully clever and nice . . . I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she liked me too.

> If she had n't she would n't have told me. She had never told any one. It was n't simply that she said so, but that I knew she had n't.[35]

In unlocking his first memories of the governess, Douglas privileges her "charm" over her demographics; that she is ten years older is given in a qualifying sense. Miles is also ten years younger than the governess and aged ten[36] when he meets her for the first time, just days after she began service. While we don't know Douglas's age at that time, it would appear that he was an adolescent, since he did not act on his desire for the governess in word or deed but rather assumed that she fancied him as he did her. Douglas' statement, "I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she like me too. If she had n't she would n't have told me,"[37] serves as verbal acknowledgement of the governess's fondness for Douglas and therefore feeds his already concupiscent attraction toward her. Moreover, what the governess does not say is far more telling to Douglas as a sign of her mutual attraction; she does not tell "any one" of her feelings for him. He translates her silence into intimate knowledge -- he "knew" that she did not tell anyone. Thus, in this passage, Douglas establishes the framework of pubescent psychosexual fantasy and the very pattern of silent communication that shapes his relationship with the governess, a pattern mimicked in Miles's desire for and system of communication with his governess within the manuscript.

Therein, in fact, lies the heart of the novella – the issue of desire. Alluding to the first Freudian interpretation of *Turn of the Screw,* done by Edmund Wilson in 1948, Felman points out that the "Freudian critic's job . . . is but to pull the answer out of its hiding place – not so much to give an answer *to* the text as to answer *for* the text: to be *answerable* for it, to answer *in its place*, to replace the question with an answer."[38] If, indeed, we read the prologue to *The Turn of the Screw* as a riddle, and if we divine a solution to that riddle that is "*answerable"* for the text -- the notion that Douglas is the author of the manuscript, not the governess -- a rather different "Freudian reading" is exacted from the text overall.

At the outset of the manuscript, the governess ponders her surroundings at Bly within the context of romantic myth, stating "Wasn't it just a story-book over which I had fallen a-doze and a-dream?"[39] Using the terms, "a-doze" and "a-dream", the governess speaks not of the dream state but that of daydream or fantasy. Freud defines "phantasies" very much like daydreams:

> Like dreams, they are wish-fulfilments; like dreams, they are based to a great extent on impressions of infantile experiences; like dreams, they benefit by a certain degree of relaxation of censorship. If we examine their structure, we shall perceive the way in which the wishful purpose that is at work in their production has mixed up the material of which they are built, has re-arranged it and has formed it into a new whole.[40]

When reading the manuscript through a Freudian lens from Douglas's point of view, it becomes a "story-book" of sorts. This is not to say that the story itself is fantasized and therefore a fiction, as some critics maintain. The events that comprise the manuscript are quite real. Rather, within the context of a story, Douglas resurrects and chronicles fantasies of sexual "infantile experiences" and unfulfilled wishes causally related to his nascent feelings of desire for the governess, which inevitably culminate in a very real sexual response.

Douglas factors into the fantasy as the mysterious Miles, who at "scarce ten years old"[41] unabashedly sweeps into the life of the governess when he is sent home from school for an undisclosed transgression. Despite his expulsion, or perhaps in spite of it, she is immediately transfixed by Miles/Douglas' presence, a rather commanding one for such a young child,[42] which she sees as "something divine."[43] Arguably, the moment the governess acquiesces to the charm of precocious little Miles/Douglas, the moment she raises his authority to that of the 'divine', she relinquishes her "supreme authority"[44] over him. She virtually takes her place within the community of women at Bly -- Miles's sister, Flora, and Mrs. Grose – whose love for Miles/Douglas is tantamount to adoration. Miles/Douglas's authority is further enabled by the absence of the elusory "Master" of the house, the children's uncle. Several critics, including Felman, see him as "the condition of the unconscious . . . a form of Censorship."[45] Felman, in fact, argues that through the Master's "inaugural act of forwarding *unopened* to the governess the letter addressed to him from the Director of Miles' school, mastery determines itself as at once a *refusal of information* and a *desire for ignorance."* This 'inaugural act', coupled with the strict caveat that the governess tell him nothing about his niece and nephew, might indeed have rendered the Master "a form of Censorship" for the governess, but, I would argue, not for Miles/Douglas. By keeping the Master ignorant of any 'trouble' (the governess keeps silent the contents of the headmaster's letter and the apparitions), she becomes the sole agent of censorship on the erotic imagination. As such, she censors nothing, leaving wide open, unchecked,

the space within the imagination for eros to thrive. Without a censorial voice informing and shaping his adolescent psyche, Miles/Douglas acts purely on libidinous instincts toward the governess, who is, after all, the embodiment of eros for him. Fantasy, then, benefits from this "relaxation of censorship."

Evidence in the manuscript certainly confirms a lack of censorship on the part of the governess toward the children, giving rise to notion that Douglas' suspicions of a mutual attraction between herself and Miles/Douglas were founded. He expounds on the emotional and physical affection the young woman lavished upon Miles/Douglas and his sister, which is corroborated by the governess's manuscript. Reflecting upon her relationship with her charges, she comments, "They were at this period extravagantly and preternaturally fond of me; which . . . was no more than a graceful response in children perpetually bowed down over and hugged . . . We lived in a cloud of music and affection . . ."[46] It is noteworthy that the governess defines her relationship with Miles/Douglas within the language of music and affection – both are nonverbal language systems. Within the "not talking," the sexual relationship between the governess and Miles/Douglas operates and flourishes. Take, for example, her assessment of his musical sensibilities:

> The musical sense in each of the children was of the quickest, but the elder in especial had a marvelous knack of catching and repeating. . . . I had had brothers myself, and it was no revelation to me that little girls could be slavish idolaters of little boys. What surpassed everything was that there was a little boy in the world who could have for the inferior age, sex and intelligence so fine a consideration.[47]

One wonders why the second sentence in this passage dealing with the governess's knowledge of little girls as "slavish idolators of little boys" is wedged between the two-sentence valuation of Miles/Douglas's musical abilities. What has puerile idolatry to do with musical acumen? Clearly, the comment borders on Freudian parapraxis, a slip of the tongue, exposing the governess's own repressed, "slavish" idolatry of this precocious little boy.

More palpable displays of affection on the part of the governess towards Miles/Douglas are to be found in Chapter 17, where the governess expounds on her "endless obsession" with him. She stands outside of his

bedroom door one evening, "impelled to listen for . . . some betrayal of his not being at rest."[48] Once within the room, sitting on the edge of his bed, accepting Miles/Douglas's extended hand, she intimates, " . . . I felt as I held his hand and our eyes continued to meet that my silence had all the air of admitting his charge and that nothing in the whole world of reality was perhaps at that moment so fabulous as our actual relation."[49] During the verbal exchange that ensues, the governess learns that Miles/Douglas is intent upon leaving Bly for "a new field"; horrified that this new experience will propel him into an even more worldly state (with "still more dishonor"),[50] that he will become more corrupted by alleged carnal influences than those she perceives he encountered at his former school, she "threw [herself] upon him," intimating "I embraced him...My face was close to his, and he let me kiss him, simply taking it with indulgent good humour."[51] The moment culminates with Miles/Douglas's insistence, "To let [him] alone." If we suspend disbelief for a moment and accept the governess's overtures toward Miles/Douglas as real, then this act of affection, as remembered by Douglas, may be interpreted as a reciprocal act of desire on the part of the governess. However, his insistence upon being left "alone" just as the moment of possible consummation of that mutual desire presents itself suggests Miles/Douglas' fear and anxiety of such a consummation, despite his desire for it. Here fantasy and reality intersect. For, in reality, as the manuscript implies, Miles/Douglas associates consummation of an illicit sexual attraction with the figures of former servants, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, a union that is as forbidden as it is infamous.[52] In a sense, Miles/Douglas' manifestation of these lovers as phantasms in his narrative represents a very real displacement of his own self-destructive sexuality, most likely begun at school. This would align with Freud's observations on displacement: he notes, ". . . displacement usually results in a colourless and abstract expression in the dream-thought being exchanged for a pictorial and concrete one. . . . A thing that is pictorial is . . . *a thing that is capable of being represented* . . . "[53] For the Miles/Douglas figure, older than Flora and already pubertal, the ghosts not only represent erotic activity, as noted, but by extension, they further serve to metastasize the corruption of innocence that resulted in Miles/Douglas' expulsion from school. Ultimately, all of these preternatural sexual instincts intruding upon and plaguing Miles/Douglas's psyche culminate in the sexual act born of sexual fantasy in the final chapter of the novella – spontaneous orgasm in the arms of the object of desire – the governess.

While I offer yet another Freudian reading, I believe my argument yields

a psychoanalytic analysis atypical of those previously accomplished. For when considering the tale from Douglas' point of view, it becomes wholly evident that his adolescent, psychosexual fixation with the governess culminates not in the death of a child but, rather, in the *petite mort* or the "little death" of sexual orgasm, the equivalent of a masturbatory episode on the child's part while in the passionate embrace of his governess.

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Notes

1 Rolf Lundén, "Not in any literal, vulgar way: the Encoded Love Story of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw." American Studies in Scandinavia* 32.1 (2000): 30-44. http://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/assc/article/view/1484.

2 Qtd. in Parkinson.

3 Qtd. in Lundén, 31.

4 Ibid, 31.

5 Ibid, 31-32.

6 Ibid, 32-33.

7 Kalliopi Nikolopoulou,. "Autospectrography: On Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.1 (2004): 1-24. *Project MUSE*. Web. http://muse.jhu.edu/.

8 Crowl writes, "The form of the story, an introductory frame and tale within a tale, is similarly consistent and repetitive in the nested inversions of reality and story-book romance which are the governess' attempt at a perspective on her shifting experiences at Bly" (122). While Crowl attributes the tale's "nested inversions of reality and story-book romance" to the governess as a means of reconciling her experiences at Bly, the same could be said of Douglas, as author and auditor of the manuscript.

9 Nikolopoulou, 9-10.

10 Henry James, 81-82. *The Turn of the Screw*. Norton Critical Edition. Ed. Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999,

11 Ibid. 82

12 Ibid, 82.

13 Ibid, 83.

14 Ibid, 85.

15 Ibid, 82.

16Neill Matheson. "Talking horrors: James, euphemism, and the specter of wilde." *American Literature* 17:4 (1999): 735.

17 Sigmund Freud. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. The Freud Reader.* Ed. Peter

Gay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989: 239-291.
18 Ibid, 279.
19 James, 11.
20 James, Henry. 4.
21 Goetz, William R. "The 'Frame' of *The Turn of the Screw*: Framing the Reader In." *Studies in Short Fiction* 18:1 (1981), 72.
22 Qtd. in Genette, 168.
23 James, 2-4.
24 Shoshana Felman. "Turning the Screw of Interpretation." "The Turns of the Story's Frame: A Theory of Narrative." *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000.* Ed. Dorothy J. Hale. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 317.
25 Ibid, 317.
26 Goetz suggests that "we are so immersed . . . in the governess's voice that we have likely forgotten that any other voices preceded it" (73).
27 James, 5.
28 Ibid, 101.
29 Michel Faucault, in the chapter entitled "The Repressive Hyposthesis" of *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1,* discusses sexuality as the *discursive erethism* of the 19th century, an abnormal tendency on the part of modern society to 'speak' of sex "ad infinitum, while exploiting it as *the* secret" (37). According to Foucault, the discourse of sex is yet another societal power relation that plays off repression. In essence, discourses of sexuality that attempted to repress sexual behavior in effect produced them. One of the sexual categories to which the concept applied was infantile sexuality, particularly that of elite, English boys who attended boarding schools. Foucault argues that "the sex of the schoolboy became in the course of the eighteenth century -- and quite apart from that of adolescents in general -- a public problem" that was addressed, in part, by publishing "books of exhortation, full of moral and medical examples" (28). According to Foucault, "Around the schoolboy and his sex there proliferated a whole literature of precepts, opinions, observations, medical advice, clinical cases, outlines for reform, and plans for ideal institutions" (28). In essence, while the schoolboy was mandated by pedagogical authorities to repress sexuality, he was simultaneously drawn into its discourse by virtue of public exposition on the issue. Foucault also attributes the very construct of the boarding school itself as a contributor to the sexuality of its young residents: "one can have the impression that sex was hardly spoken of at all in these institutions. But one only has to glance over the architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole internal organization: the question of sex was a constant preoccupation. . . . What one might call the internal discourse of the institution – the one it employed to address itself, and which circulated among those who made it function -- was largely based on the assumption that this sexuality existed, that it was precocious, active, and ever present" (28).
30 Shosana Felman's seminal study on *Turn of the Screw,* "Turning the Screw of Interpretation", argues, in part, that James' tale "constitutes a trap for psychoanalytical interpretation to the extent that it constructs a trap, precisely, for suspicion. It has indeed

been said of psychoanalysis itself that it is a veritable "school of suspicion" (189). Thus, she suggests that the novelette begs psychoanalytic interpretation since the career of such interpretation is to be *not* "easily caught" by rhetoric and "the desire to be *non dupe,* to interpret . . . and avoid, the very traps of the unconscious" (187).
31 James, 2.
32 James' warning almost anticipates Gerard Genette's study on the complexity of narrative discourse, which argues that "no narrative can 'show' or 'imitate' the story it tells. It can [only] give more or less the *illusion of mimesis"* (164). Genette argues that when dealing with silence in a text (not words but "silent events and actions"), we can only "handle the narrative object so that it literally 'tells itself' . . . without anyone having to speak for it" (164) through "'showing'"—"a *way of telling* . . . [that] consists of both *saying about it* as much as one can, and *saying this 'much'* as little as possible" (166). *Showing, telling* – both work to instill within the reader a false sense of security in what is said and not said, and who is saying or not saying it.
33 James, 3.
34 Ibid, 94-95.
35 Ibid, 2.
36 Ibid, 11.
37 Ibid, 5.
38 Felman, 105.
39 James, 9.
40 Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Avon/Bard, 1998, 530.
41 James, 11.
42 Miles' speech acts are often marked by the language of impertinence; i.e. he calls the governess into his bedroom with the words, "I say, you there – come in . . . what are *you* up to? . . . You're like a troop of calvary!" (60).
43 Ibid, 13.
44 Ibid, 5.
45 Felman, 145.
46 James, 37-38.
47 James, 38.
48 Ibid, 60.
49 Ibid, 60.
50 Ibid, 62.
51 Ibid, 62.
52 As Felman points out, having been witnesses to the "presumed liaison between the two dead servants, the children, in the governess's eyes, are in possession of knowledge which is at once *knowledge of meaning* and *knowledge of sex*" (158).
53 Stanley Renner, in his study of the ghosts of the novella, also associates the ghosts with sexuality; he argues that the "story's spectral figures, colored by the governess's sexual fear and disgust, symbolize the adult sexuality just beginning to 'possess' Miles and Flora as

they hover on the brink of puberty" (224).