

SUNY College Cortland

## Digital Commons @ Cortland

---

Master's Theses

---

11-2015

### "carried away": Love, bly, and secrecy in Henry James' The Turn of the Screw

Natalie G. El-Eid

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/theses>



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), [Fiction Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

El-Eid, Natalie G., "'carried away": Love, bly, and secrecy in Henry James' The Turn of the Screw" (2015). *Master's Theses*. 11.

<https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/theses/11>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Cortland. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Cortland. For more information, please contact [DigitalCommonsSubmissions@cortland.edu](mailto:DigitalCommonsSubmissions@cortland.edu).

“carried away”: Love, Bly, and Secrecy in Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*

by

Natalie G. El-Eid

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Master of Arts in English

Department of English, School of Arts and Sciences

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
COLLEGE AT CORTLAND

November 2015

The function of the prologue in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* is decidedly ambiguous, as the characters in the prologue, much like the uncle of the main text, are seemingly never seen again. For this reason, the purpose of this prologue is much debated.<sup>1</sup> As Rolf Lundén states in his article “‘Not in any literal, vulgar way’: The Encoded Love Story of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*,” “The openness of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* has invited more analytical attempts, and more critical controversy, than most literary texts” (30). Lundén summarizes four schools of thought regarding the interpretation of James' novella (30). The first is a metaphysical reading of the text, in which critics see the text as an actual ghost story. The second is a psychoanalytical interpretation of the novella, in which the Quint and Jessel function as a result of the governess' sexually hysteric mind. A third, less popular, analysis of the text claims that Mrs. Grose is sabotaging the governess in order to take the governess' position at Bly. The fourth reading of the text, according to Lundén, contends that Miles lives, and Douglas and Miles are in fact the same person.

I will argue that the prologue of *The Turn of the Screw* also seems to serve as an epilogue, an explanation of what happens after the conclusion of the main text. Douglas, the holder of the governess' written story, is the only character who knows or comes into contact with the governess after Miles' ambiguous death scene. However, Douglas, though he has read a text that implicates the governess as a potential murderer, describes her as “the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position; she'd have been worthy of any whatever” (24). This seeming confession to murder, in which “his [Miles'] little heart, dispossessed, had stopped” (120), thus does not appear to have any negative

impact on Douglas' opinion of the governess, engendering speculation as to what places the governess in his high regard. Douglas claims his association with the governess occurred over approximately one year, and "it was a beautiful one" (24). In this year, the two had, as Douglas casually puts it, "some strolls and talks in the garden—talks in which she struck me as awfully clever and nice" (24). These "some" talks and walks, as described, do not seem intimate enough to provide the governess with enough comfort to tell Douglas a story "she had never told anyone" (24), placing Douglas' reliability as a narrator into suspicion.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it seems there must be more to the intimacy of the pair that is not shared with Douglas' audience.

This unrevealed closeness is further suggested in Douglas' declaration of assurance that the governess had indeed never told this story to someone else; "I knew she hadn't, I was sure; I could see" (24). Douglas' ability to know the truth just by glancing upon the governess' face thus provides even more evidence of the great amount of intimacy implicit between the two. It is also important to note neither the first nor last name of the governess is ever given in the narrative or by Douglas. Secrecy regarding her identity is thus seemingly of the utmost importance; her name must remain concealed even after her death. Furthermore, as Douglas reveals, he even carries the key to the locked drawer which contains the narrative with him at all times; "I shall have to send to town...I could write to my man and enclose the key; he could send down the packet as he finds it" (23). His strong desire to protect the governess' name and story is highly indicative of their suggested intimacy. Also, though Douglas himself did not write the narrative, he reveals that he does take the impression of it; "I took that *here*"—he

tapped his heart. “I’ve never lost it” (26). The seemingly permanent effect of this story on his heart highly suggests a personal involvement in it.

The other characters of the prologue also speculate upon the relationship between Douglas and the governess. After insinuations of romance are made, one character claims, “She was ten years older,” to which another responds “*Raison de plus*” (25). Mrs. Griffin builds upon this idea, stating, “Well if I don’t know who she was in love with I know who *he* was” (25), for the reason the prologue’s narrator deduces why the governess had not told anyone this story is not because it implicates her as a murderer, but, rather, because “she was in love” (24). The major question by the end of the text thus remains: who was the governess in love with? Since she shares this story with Douglas, leaving him its written narrative, it seems as the governess is in love with Douglas. However, though the conclusion of *The Turn of the Screw* is as ambiguous as its prologue, what seems apparent is a romantic love that exists between the governess and her charge, Miles. In paralleling the seemingly reciprocated love that Douglas has for the governess with the governess’ love for Miles, I will argue that Douglas and Miles are the same person.

### **Occupation of Spaces: Ghost Story or Love Story?**

As noted, Douglas does not share the written narrative until twenty years after the governess’ death not because it implicates the governess as a murderer, nor “Because the thing had been such a scare” (24). The story was kept a secret because the governess was in love (24). This statement suggests the governess’ narrative is not a ghost story, but a love story, made beyond basic understanding because of the extraordinariness of

romantic adult love for a child, as the tale will not reveal “in any literal vulgar way” (25). Before an analysis of the way the text operates as a love story can be addressed, an understanding of how Peter Quint and Miss Jessel thus function in the novella must first be undertaken.

As Lundén summarizes, critics have previously argued that the ghosts in this text are projections of the governess’ own sexual hysteria.<sup>3</sup> One of these scholars is Stanley Renner, who in his article “Sexual Hysteria, Physiognomical Bogeymen, and the “Ghosts” in *The Turn of the Screw*” claims, “It would be hard to imagine a more classic manifestation of its [the profile of a typical sexual hysteric’s] symptomology than James’s governess” (179). To thus explain how the governess manages to successfully describe the person of Peter Quint to Mrs. Grose if the “ghost” was simply a hallucination, Renner argues, “The answer is that there existed in the culture a widely recognized stereotype of the predatory sexual male, a set of typical features and characteristics that such a figure would be presupposed to manifest” (181).

In support of the argument that the governess is indeed hallucinating these “ghosts” as a result of her yet unfilled sexual desires, there is, however, another point Renner has failed to note. The governess claims the second time she sees Quint, “it was as if I had been looking at him for years and had known him *always*” (my emphasis 44). There is thus a familiarity with her “ghost,” a sense that he is already a part of her heart and mind. This idea is further supported by occupations of space in the novella. It seems no small coincidence that the “ghosts” often occupy a space that the governess has just left herself or is about to enter. The second time the governess sees Quint, for example,

he is at the window, to which she promptly rushes. The governess claims she does this “instinctively,” yet “It was confusedly present to me *that I ought to place myself where he had stood*. I did so; I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he had looked, into the room” (my emphasis 45). The experience the governess has just had with Quint is then exactly replicated by the governess and Mrs. Grose; the governess stands at the window to see “exactly what his range had been,” as Mrs. Grose, “as I had done for himself,” comes in from the hall.

The governess declares she had “the full repetition of what had already occurred. She [Mrs. Grose] saw me as I had seen my own visitant; she pulled up short as I had done; I gave her something of the shock that I had received” (45). In this passage, the governess thus becomes the literal embodiment of Peter Quint, an incident too exact to be accidental, in turn, revealing their inseparability, he as a figure of her. Furthermore, the governess also occupies Quint’s previous space as the one “in charge” at Bly.

This shared occupation of space is not limited to the governess’ visions of Peter Quint, but of Miss Jessel as well. The most obvious evidence of this is that the governess literally occupies the previous governess’ former space, in occupation, boarding, etc.; this claim is reinforced by the governess’ continual reference to Miss Jessel as my “predecessor” (56, 58, 88). In another example, the governess sees Miss Jessel outside at the lake standing “before us on the opposite bank exactly as she had stood the other time” (101), revealing a repetition in occupied spaces that is often quite exact to be coincidental. The governess also once sees Miss Jessel on the steps “where I had last met

Quint” (70). Therefore, these spaces are revolved between the governess and her two hallucinations, and only between the three.

Furthermore, in a different instance, after a passionate discussion with Miles, the governess returns home “Tormented” (87), collapsing onto the stairs. She then recalls this space was “*exactly* where, more than a month before, in the darkness of night and just so bowed with evil things, I had seen the spectre of the most horrible of women” (87). Realizing this, the governess hurries upstairs where she sees Miss Jessel “Seated at my own table.” According to the governess, the hallucination of Miss Jessel then “says,” with her eyes, “that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers.” The roles of Miss Jessel and the governess are thus reversed, as the governess gets “the extraordinary chill of a feeling that it was I who was the intruder” (88).

There are two things to be noted in this passage. The first is stated interchangeability of the roles and spaces of the two women, where one can and does easily become the other, though no physical transformation is made. It only occurs in the governess’ mind. The second is the seeming ability of the governess to read Miss Jessel’s mind, which, in turn, reveals the psychological and hallucinatory relationship between the two. Later, when describing the incident to Mrs. Grose, the governess claims she had ““a talk with Miss Jessel.”” To this, Mrs. Grose replies, ““A talk! Do you mean she spoke,”” to which the governess says ““It came to that.”” Furthermore, when Mrs. Grose asks the governess what Miss Jessel said, the governess emphatically claims ““That she suffers the torments—”” (89-90). Though she insinuates differently, the governess never literally speaks to Miss Jessel; this too only occurs in the governess’ head. It is also important to



note that the emotion the governess pins on Miss Jessel, torment, is the exact same emotion the governess describes herself as feeling when she first occupies Miss Jessel's space on the stairs.

When considering these shared spaces, emotions, and relationships, it becomes easier to see the many ways in which Quint and Jessel are reflected in the governess, and vice versa. What this substantial textual evidence of the governess' hallucinations of Quint and Jessel thus reveals is what the prologue directly says: this is indeed not a ghost story, for the ghosts do not seem to exist outside the space of the governess' mind. Therefore, *The Turn of the Screw* seems rather to be a story about the governess' literally undeclared love, which, much the governess herself, cannot be explicitly named.

### **The Fanciful Object of her Affection**

Critics have speculated that the object of the governess' affection referred to in the novella's prologue is the children's uncle. In her article, "The Author of Our Woe: Virtue Recorded in *The Turn of the Screw*," Linda Kauffman argues "The author has only one reader in mind when she composes her narrative: her entire literary effort stems from unrequited love for her employer" (176). Kauffman goes on to argue "He [the uncle] is the absent beloved, the embodiment of her romantic desire" (177). However, what seems apparent in analysis of the governess' encounter with the uncle is that she has not been swept away with the man himself, but rather her fantasy of a gentleman.

The governess's lack of name forces a constant reification of her status every time she is to be addressed. What thus becomes clear as the reader is exposed the thoughts and fantasies of the governess is her persistent longing to be with a man of a higher status, a

gentleman. On Harley Street, the governess first meets the uncle, who is described as “a gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life, such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel” (26). Immediately, the uncle is linked to dream and fantasy. Meeting him only twice, the governess can have no true measure of the uncle’s character, and makes assumptions based on this fantasy; “She *figured* him as rich, but as fearfully extravagant – saw him all in a glow of high fashion, of good looks, of expensive habits, of charming ways with women” (my emphasis 26). The “glow” depicted in this line further engenders the discourse of fantasy, and, even more, temporality; for the uncle has one condition: the governess must “let him alone” (28). Indeed “She promised to do this” and never saw him again (28-9). The job was thus by no means taken as a way to get closer to the uncle; rather, it was a confirmation and agreement “That she should never trouble him—but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything; only meet with all questions herself, receive all moneys from his solicitor, take the whole thing over and let him alone” (28). The uncle as a man is thus to be forgotten, yet the fantasy of the gentleman remains.

This fantasy of a gentleman constructed by the governess, and her strong desire for him, is made most apparent as she takes her strolls around the grounds after the children have been put to sleep. The setting of these strolls is undeniably romantic, as the governess describes two large towers “from a romantic revival that was already a respectable past,” and how she had “had *fancies* about them” (my emphasis, 39). During these walks, the governess daydreams about “the figure I had so often invoked,” a man that “would stand before me and smile and approve...I only asked that he should *know*;

and the only way to be sure he knew would be to see it, and the kind light of it, in his handsome face” (39).

There are three things to be noted in these lines. The first, is that this fantasy parallels Douglas’ description of his relationship with the governess years later, in which they would take “in her off-hours, some strolls and talks,” reaching a level of intimacy so deep that the truth can be seen in the face; as Douglas confirms in the prologue “I knew...I was sure; I could see” (24). This declaration thus reveals Douglas’ ability to “know,” and its reinforcement of their suggested intimacy. The governess’ fantasy here thus provides further evidence that Douglas is the object of her affection mentioned in the prologue. Secondly, the governess distinctly states she wants this dream-man to “approve” of her, an odd desire, which again suggests it is a man who is above her status that the governess longs for.

The third thing it is important to note in this passage is the fact that soon after these thoughts are entertained the governess’ wish comes true; “This was exactly present to me—by which I mean the face was...What arrested me on the spot—and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for—was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turn real. He did stand there” (39). However, this wish-come-true soon turns to terror as the governess realizes “the man who met my eyes was not the person I had precipitately supposed” (39). The question must then be asked: what was it about this man that the governess found so terrifying? As noted, the governess finds her fantasy “exactly present” in the man’s face, which she later tells Mrs. Grose is remarkably

handsome (48). It is thus made evident that it is not this man's face that alarms the governess.

What specifically instigates this violent fear within the governess thus becomes even clearer in her second encounter with the strange man. As the governess describes the encounter to Mrs. Grose, Mrs. Grose asks:

“Was he a gentleman?”

I found I had no need to think. “No.” She gazed in deeper wonder. “No.”

“Then nobody about the place? Nobody from the village?”

“Nobody—nobody. I didn't tell you, but I made sure.”

She breathed a vague relief: this was, oddly, so much to the good. It only went indeed a little way. “But if he isn't a gentleman—”

“What *is* he? He's a horror.” (46-47)

The instantaneous response to Mrs. Grose's question of whether or not the man was a gentleman reveals how much the idea that he is not terrifies the governess. This terror is further made evident in the governess's response to Mrs. Grose that if the man was not a gentleman, than he was a horror. It is also important to note the strange relief that Mrs. Grose feels when she is informed that the man was most certainly not anyone from the village. This relief makes Mrs. Grose's fear that the man was a villager apparent.

It would, logically, be a relief if the man had been seen in the village, giving him an identity and solving the mystery of the unknown. However, paradoxically, Mrs. Grose is slightly pacified by the fact that the man is not from the village, which suggests her relief stems from the fact that the strange man still eludes an absolute determination of

his status as a commoner. This pacification, however, is only short-lived as Mrs. Grose soon remembers the governess has indeed already informed her that the man is not a gentleman.

The man's lower-class status, and the fear this engenders, is made further evident by the governess' constant focus on the man's lack of a hat.<sup>4</sup> In her first two encounters with the man, the governess makes a point of the fact that the man is not wearing a hat. In the first encounter, the governess notes "a sign of familiarity of his wearing no hat" that seems to contribute in offending her own class status; "I just bridled a little with the sense of how my office seemed to require that there should be no such ignorance and no such person" (40). This declaration suggests that it is not only the fact that the governess does not know the identity of the man that makes her so uncomfortable, but, more so, his apparent lower-class status. After her second encounter with the man, the governess tells Mrs. Grose:

"I've been dying to tell you. But he's like nobody."

"Nobody?" She echoed.

"He has no hat." Then seeing in her face that she already, in this, with a deeper dismay, found a touch of picture, I quickly added stroke to stroke. (48)

Many people at this time surely did not have hats, and, in her travels after leaving the vicarage, the governess would have most likely seen at least one who did not. Therefore, it seems that "nobody" in these lines does not mean no one like the governess has ever seen, rather it seems to signify no one of importance; this signification is asserted by the governess' declaration "He has no hat." Indeed, once Mrs. Grose is told the man was

without hat, her dismay deepens, and she finds “a touch of picture.” This painted picture, added to “stroke by stroke” is quite terrifying; for the man, as the governess cries, is “never—no, never!—a gentleman” (48).

What petrifies the governess thus seems to be not the unknown, but the known: his class status. The man’s handsome face fits exactly into the governess’ fantasy, so physical attraction is not an issue. Had the man been identified from the village, little relief would have been granted to the women, which reveals that though he would have been identified, any association with a village-man is disturbing to the women. Furthermore, the figure’s lack of hat as a symbol of lower-class is greatly emphasized. It therefore seems to be made quite evident that it is the idea of an association with a lower class man that is so terrifying to the governess, and a fantasy of an upper-class man that is so appealing.

### **A Forbidden Love: The Governess and Miles**

Elton E. Smith, in “Pedophiles amidst Looming Portentousness: Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*,” speculates about the excessive adoration the governess quite obviously has for the children in her charge. Smith argues, “Of course all this particular reverence floats on the broad stream of English class consciousness. The parsonage-reared governess reflects middle- and lower-class reverence of British aristocracy” (125). As argued above, it seems to be the fantasy of falling in love with a gentleman that appeals to the governess more than anything else. In his own analysis, Smith poses some interesting questions that also reveal the importance of class in this novella. Smith wonders:

Would the governess's father, a clergyman, have tolerated the extraordinary self-centeredness of the uncle had he been a poor member of his rural flock? Would the governess have easily pardoned a purloiner of letters, a purveyor of oral smut, a nine-year old boy precociously expelled from a great academy, if he had been her younger brother? Would Henry James have found Miles and Flora so fascinating and important if their last names were Jones and if they were the neglected waifs of tenant farmers? To both author and heroine narrator, the children are "a pair of little grandees, of princes of the blood" (chap 3). Clearly beauty and blood, brightness and charm make all misbehavior acceptable and even strangely attractive. (Smith 125-6)

The importance of class is thus also emphasized in Smith's analysis, which goes on to contend that homophobic relationships between Miles/Quint and Flora/Jessel are apparent in the text, a point that will be addressed below.

The governess' fantasy and strong desire to meet and fall in love with a gentleman is thus made quite evident in the text, as is how well Miles fits the role of gentleman. As Mrs. Grose informs the governess, "You *will* be carried away by the little gentleman" (31). Not only is an emphasis placed on "will" as guaranteeing its certainty, but Miles is immediately deemed a gentleman. To this, the governess responds:

"Well, that, I think, is what I came for—to be carried away. I'm afraid, however," I remember feeling the impulse to add, "I'm rather easily carried away. I was carried away in London!"

I can still see Mrs. Grose's broad face as she took this in. "In Harley Street?"

“In Harley Street.”

In these lines, we find out that the reason the governess comes to Bly is to be “carried away,” as she was in London. Furthermore, we are informed that the governess is easily swayed in her passions; the attraction she felt for the gentleman in Harley Street, the uncle, could “easily” be felt for another gentleman, in this case, Miles.

As some critics have argued that the uncle is the love referred to in the prologue, others have speculated a romantic relationship evident between the governess and Miles, as I will argue in this section.<sup>5</sup> In “The Romance of Henry James’s Female Pedophile,” Jenn McCollum declares “*The Turn of the Screw* is the first literary romance of the female pedophile of its kind” (47). McCollum argues that Douglas is Miles, the unnamed narrator of the prologue is the governess, and that the two of them are married. She sees Miles’ death at the end of the main narrative as figurative and sexual, a rite of passage after the consummation of their sexual relationship. McCollum cites the “playful, flirtatious conversation between Douglas and the narrator” as evidence, claiming they use “the same kind of ambiguous language that Miles and the governess use in the governess’ story; they excite their listeners with the promise of scandal in a similar fashion” (47).

However, this evidence does not appear sufficient enough to argue that the prologue’s narrator is indeed the governess. There would be no justifiable reason for the governess and Douglas to share the narrative with this crowd, especially after so many years had passed. Furthermore, following the details of the text, the governess must have written the narrative sometime after she was twenty years old, and the narrative is said to be forty years old, which would mean the governess was at least sixty years old at the



time of the prologue. The average life expectancy for a white woman in the late nineteenth century was forty-nine<sup>6</sup>. This statistic thus casts some doubt as to whether or not the governess even still alive at this time, let alone able to survive Douglas, receive the narrative from him, and make a transcript of her own “much later” (26).

There is an intimacy that becomes evident in the prologue between Douglas and the narrator, and a suggestion that the relationship, whether friendly or romantic, continues; “Poor Douglas, before his death—when it was in sight—committed to me the manuscript that reached him on the third of these days” (26). To pass on the manuscript that had been kept secret so long to the narrator indicates a definite closeness. However, a close relationship between Douglas and the narrator could have developed after the conversation they shared that night. Furthermore, it seems more plausible to argue that the narrator of the prologue is Flora, which would also explain their closeness, their ability to talk freely, her survival of Douglas, and Douglas’ passing of the governess’ narrative to her. However, there does not seem to be enough evidence to substantially and convincingly make either claim.

There does, on the other hand, seem to be quite a bit of evidence to suggest a romantic relationship between the governess and Miles. The romance between the governess and Douglas insinuated in the prologue, as discussed above, shows a willingness and participation on the governess’ part in a romance with a younger man. In the first line of the main narrative, the governess says, “I remember the whole beginning as a succession of flights and drops, a little see-saw of the right *throbs* and the wrong” (my emphasis 29). Thus, from the very beginning, the reader is both exposed to sexual

discourse and informed of the governess' fluctuating responses to right and wrong. As the governess later tellingly states, "It was all the romance of the nursery and the poetry of the schoolroom. I don't mean by this of course that we studied only fiction and verse; I mean that I can express no otherwise the sort of interest my companions inspired" (42). The governess therefore distinctly states feelings of romance are engendered by her time with the children, and these feelings have nothing to do with the classroom.

It is also essential to note the time period in which *The Turn of the Screw* was published was bursting with the new notions of child sexuality and sexual hysteria. In his article "*The Turn of the Screw* and the Locus of Psychoanalytic Criticism," Alan Williamson describes this revolutionary era:

In a certain sense, the whole last half of the nineteenth century can be seen as a prologue to Freud. *The Turn of the Screw* was in fact published three years after *Studies on Hysteria*, and two years before *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The issues those books would force into public consideration are the same ones that lie at the core of James's story. Are children sexual beings? How common, indeed how thinkable, in a "civilized" world, is the sexual abuse of children? Is there an unconscious mind? If so, what does it know about our deepest nature that the rational mind does not know, and how does it make that knowledge manifest? Looking at the book in the light of the surrounding culture's denials and incipient discoveries, it is easy to understand *The Turn of the Screw's* immediate fascination for its first readers. (330)

However, this fascination, as made obvious by the numerous critics and fans James' novella has engaged, is more present than ever today. The ambiguity of this text cries for an analysis that can somewhat resolve its tensions, and the historical context surrounding the novella is yet another piece of evidence these tensions are sexual in nature.

Williamson claims "No age offers us so many idealized images of children in its art and literature as the Victorian; no age numbers so many pedophiles among its important writers" (328). The citation of this line is not meant imply that James himself was a pedophile<sup>7</sup>, only to construct the historical context to which this novella speaks, an age in which pedophilia and the ideal child could be and were presented together. The image of the "ideal child" is produced time and time again in the governess' descriptions of Miles and Flora. The governess, for instance, says in description of Miles:

He was incredibly beautiful, and Mrs. Grose had put her finger on it: everything but a sort of passion of tenderness for him was swept away by his presence. What I then and there took him to my heart for was something divine that I have never found to the same degree in any child—his indescribable little air of knowing nothing in the world but love. (37)

In these lines, pedophilia and the ideal image of the child seem subtly and skillfully intertwined. The love, or "passion," the governess feels for Miles has everything to do with his idyllic beauty and purity, which she has yet to have seen in another. As Elton E. Smith says of this passage, "Here the word "divine" makes the act of worship implicit" (125). The governess' fondness of Miles does indeed seem to reach a level of worship that is quite incongruous with a typical governess/charge relationship. Her assertion of

Miles' knowledge of love also seems to suggest her longing to experience this love. However, before arguing in favor of an evident romantic relationship between the governess and Miles, Miles's apparent sexual history, including his implicit sexual relationship with Peter Quint, must be discussed.

In analyses of *The Turn of the Screw*, various critics have argued in favor of an apparent romantic relationship between Miles and Peter Quint that is inferred throughout the text.<sup>8</sup> Williamson points out four pieces of textual evidence that seem inarguable:

1. Miles was expelled from school.
2. Since he was expelled for things he said, the context was probably sexual; since he only said them to those he liked, it may have been homosexual.
3. Peter Quint was a loose-living man, and Miles was his constant companion; therefore it is probable that Miles's precocious sexual information came from Quint.
4. Flora's command of foul language, when she turns against the Governess, suggests she too received instruction, whether from Miss Jessel, Quint, her brother, or all three. (323)

To begin analysis of the implicit sexual relationship between Peter Quint and Miles, I will first look the first time in the narrative the two are mentioned in relation to one another; the governess wonders why Miles has never spoken of Quint, though they were ““great friends,”” to which Mrs. Grose replies:

“Oh it wasn’t *him!*” Mrs. Grose with emphasis declared. “It was Quint’s own fancy. To play with him, I mean—to spoil him.” She paused a moment; then she added: “Quint was much too free.”

This gave me, straight from my vision of his face—*such* a face!—a sudden sickness of disgust. “Too free with *my* boy?”

“Too free with every one!” (51)

These lines, though seemingly ambiguous, can quite easily be put into the context of a sexual relationship between Quint and Miles. First to note is Mrs. Grose’s correction of the word “play” to describe Quint’s “fancy,” which immediately implies its negative connotation. There is also a distinct hesitation noted before Mrs. Grose reveals Quint’s apparent freedom with Miles and “everyone else,” which would include Miss Jessel, who is later suggested to have had romantic relations with Quint, and to be pregnant with his baby at the time of her death. This “freedom” Quint partakes in thus seems to be a sexual one. Furthermore, the governess then becomes jealous of this “freedom,” and undoubtedly possessive of Miles, which is highly stressed by the emphasis on “my.”

Moreover, whenever Peter Quint is discussed in the narrative, a reference to improper behavior that is never explicitly stated is made. For example, Mrs. Grose also calls Quint a “hound” who “did what he wished,” reiterating that Quint’s inappropriate behavior was not just in regards to Miss Jessel, but with them all (58). This impropriety is, of course, all done with the permission of Miss Jessel, for it was what “*she* wished” as well (59). Miss Jessel, according to Mrs. Grose “pays” for acquiescing to the desires of Peter Quint by becoming pregnant. The children, it is suggested, pay for their own

participation by a corruption of their innocence; as the governess reveals in her exclamation, “It’s far worse than I dreamed. They’re lost” (59).

Throughout the text, more and more small pieces of information about the relationship between Miles and Peter Quint are revealed. It becomes known that “Quint and the boy had been perpetually together,” a fact that engenders Mrs. Grose’s concern and questioning; “It was indeed the very appropriate item of evidence of her having ventures to criticize the propriety, to hint at the incongruity, of so close an alliance, and even go so far on the subject as a frank overture to Miss Jessel would take her” (61). It would seemingly take a high level of inappropriateness for Mrs. Grose to confront Miss Jessel about this concern, for Mrs. Grose’s subservient behavior in regards to her superiors is well-established throughout the text. Mrs. Grose does not explicitly reveal what exactly Quint does that she finds so concerning; she only hints that it has something to do with Miles’ own “badness.”

As noted, Miles’ sexual history is also suggested in Miles’ dismissal from school. In the governess and Mrs. Grose’s discussion of Miles’ innocence, the governess says:

“I take what you said to me at noon as a declaration that *you’ve* never known him to be bad.”

... “Oh never known him—I don’t pretend *that*.”

I was upset again. “Then you *have* known him—?”

“Yes indeed, Miss, thank God!”

On reflexion I accepted this. “You mean that a boy who never is—?”

“Is no boy for *me!*” (35)

In these lines, what is as important as what is being said is what is not being said. Any reference to Miles' "badness" is silenced, unable to be put into words, even amongst friends, which suggests badness of an immense, and, very possibly, sexual, nature. Yet, Mrs. Grose reveals that she has indeed known a less innocent side of Miles, and even thanks God that Miles can be bad. Why would Mrs. Grose be grateful that Miles can be bad? How is this beneficial, making Miles a boy for *her*? The sexual nature of Miles' badness is again implied in lines that immediately follow. The governess says:

I held her tighter. "You like them with the spirit to be naughty?" Then, keeping in pace with her answer, "So do I!" I eagerly brought out. "But not to the degree to contaminate—"

"To contaminate?"—my big word left her at a loss.

I explained it. "To corrupt."

She stared, taking my meaning in; but it produced in her an odd laugh. "Are you afraid he'll corrupt *you*?" (35).

The governess never replies, which suggests the answer to this question is yes. The idea that Mrs. Grose likes little boys with the spirit to be "naughty" causes the governess to hold Mrs. Grose tighter. The governess becomes undoubtedly excited and "eager", to the point where she cannot wait for an answer before she exclaims her consensus with Mrs. Grose's affinity for bad boys. The naughtiness of Miles is again depicted here as pleasurable, even exhilarating, to the women. This parallel between pleasure and a naughtiness that cannot be named in these lines is thus highly suggestive of Miles' sexual

history. The idea that Mrs. Grose has known Miles to be “bad” is good news for both her and the governess, as long as Miles is not so bad as to “corrupt” the governess.

The “corruption” discussed in these lines has an ambiguous meaning. This corruption could be sexual as the governess, daughter of a parson, is seemingly a virgin. However, the passage implies that the idea of sexual corruption is exactly what excites the governess. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides another definition of corruption in the late nineteenth century: “4.a. To destroy or pervert the integrity or fidelity of (a person) in the discharge of his duty; to induce dishonestly or unfaithfully; to make venal; to bribe.” Therefore, the governess may fear that Miles will destroy her reputation when she is no longer his governess if they sexually consummate their relationship, or bribe her.

The text thus suggests that the governess is excited about the idea of Miles’ badness, as she likes little boys with the spirit to be “naughty.” Vital to this idea is that Miles himself is eager for the governess to see him as bad. After Miles sneaks out of the house and goes into the yard one night, the governess asks him why he would do such a thing, to which he responds:

“Well,” he said at last, “just exactly in order that you should do this.”

“Do what?”

“Think me—for a change—bad!” I shall never forget the sweetness and gaiety with which he brought out the word, nor how, on top of it, he bent forward to kiss me. It was practically the end of everything. I met his kiss and I had to make,



while I folded him for a minute in my arms, the most stupendous effort not to cry.  
(75)

This scene is loaded with sexual tension and attraction. Evident first is Miles' strong desire for the governess to see him as bad, which draws an immense happiness from the governess, so much so she is almost brought to tears. Furthermore, after his confession, Miles leans in for what is suggested to be an intimate kiss, which is wholeheartedly met by the governess, as she embraces him for a minute. Particularly interesting in this passage is the governess' declaration that, after Miles kisses her, "It was practically the end of everything," which, in this context, seems to suggest the sexual consummation of their relationship; as Miles declares in the same scene, "When I'm bad I *am* bad," an assertion also very pleasing to the governess, who deems it "charming" (75). What has thus been established so far is the governess' desire for Miles to be bad, his reciprocated desire for her to know she is bad, and the sexual nature of Miles' "badness."

As the text progresses, so does the intimacy between the governess and Miles. Miles begins, in a very gentlemanly and adult manner, to refer to the governess as "my dear," as a husband often addresses a wife; "His 'my dear' was constantly on his lips for me, and nothing could have expressed more the exact shade of the sentiment with which I desired to inspire my pupils than its fond familiarity. It was so respectfully easy" (83). We thus see the governess' satisfaction in "inspiring" Miles to a certain level of feeling.

Another key moment in which the growing intimacy between the governess and Miles is seen is the night the governess comes to Miles' room and finds him lying still

awake and thinking. After holding Miles' "old" hand, a term which also reveals her conception of Miles as beyond his years, the governess asks:

"What is it," I asked, "that you think of?"

"What in the world, my dear, but you?"

"Ah the pride I take in your appreciation doesn't insist on that! I had so far rather you slept." (92)

The idea that Miles lies awake thinking of the governess suggests her domination of his thoughts. The "my dear" here again is suggestive of an adult intimacy. Also, the governess admits to being proud of Miles' "admiration" of her. This admiration, and the happiness it engenders within the governess, are discussed in a very romantic way, as the couple hold hands and exchange compliments. Miles continues:

"Well, I think also, you know, of this queer business of ours...the way you bring me up. And all the rest!"

... "What do you mean by all the rest?"

"Oh you know, you know!"

I could say nothing for a minute, though 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. (my emphasis 92)

Again in this romantic moment, as the governess and Miles look into one another's eyes, fantasy, the "fabulous," is linked to passion and reality. We are thus informed the governess has found her fantasy gentleman in Miles. However, Miles still questions their

“queer business” and “all the rest” she “knows,” which seems to indicate their romantic, and increasingly sexual, relationship; for, as Miles tells the governess that same night, “Oh *you* know what a boy wants” (93). This conversation, and seeing Miles “under the spell laid on him,” draws a strong reaction from the governess, setting “my heart aching with such a pang as it had never yet known” (93). It thus also seems Miles has entered under the same spell as the governess; as she discloses earlier of her time at Bly, “Of course I was under the spell, and the wonderful part is that, even at the time, I perfectly knew I was” (43). This spell could be nothing other than love.

The governess describes her time at Bly by saying, “Oh it was a trap—not designed but deep—to my imagination, to my delicacy, perhaps to my vanity; to whatever in me was most excitable” (38). In these lines, the governess already seems to want to offer an explanation for her “most excitable” feelings, her passion for Miles; as the narrator states in the prologue, “that’s just the beauty of her passion” to which Douglas, as Miles, fervently agrees (28). In the above lines, the governess informs us that this passion was not “designed” but accidental, and, once again, the governess’ fantasy is associated with her desire, which has all come to fruition through her “little gentleman” (96).

### **Bly: Douglas and Miles**

To make a claim that Douglas is in fact Miles, the scene in which Miles seemingly dies must first be analyzed. Finally alone with Miles, the governess sees “precious opportunity which had now come” (112). Miles and the governess, exclusively in each other’s company, become embarrassed when the maid briefly comes in, “as some

young couple who, on their wedding-journey, at the inn, feel shy in the presence of the waiter. He [Miles] turned round only when the waiter had left us. “Well—so we’re alone” (113). What is implied in these lines, as the governess draws parallels between herself and Miles to a newlywed couple in their shyness, is that as soon as the two are alone they will finally be able to sexually consummate their relationship. The governess even transforms the maid who was with them into a waiter to reinforce this parallel, saying Miles turns around only when the “waiter” had left.

Indeed the sexual tension builds as the scene progresses, leading to a consummation in Miles’ *Donnian*<sup>9</sup> death. “From the boy’s *embarrassed* back” the governess realizes “I was not barred now” (my emphasis 113). When the governess discovers Miles is “admirable but not comfortable,” she “took it in with a *throb* of hope” (my emphasis 114). The tension builds as the governess and Miles engage in a veiled conversation regarding their sexual passions for each other; after Miles ensures the governess he is quite happy at Bly and has “never been so free,” the governess becomes quite excited, “My voice trembled so that I felt it impossible to suppress the shake” (115). The governess proceeds to say, ““Don’t you remember how I told you, when I came and sat on your bed the night of the storm, that there was nothing in the world I wouldn’t do for you?”

‘Yes, Yes!’ He, on his side, more and more visibly nervous, had a tone to master; but he was so much more successful than I that...he could pretend we were pleasantly jesting” (115). The conversation thus becomes increasingly intimate and serious with references to commitment and the bedroom. Additionally, what James means by “on his

side” is ambiguous. It could, for one, mean on his part. However, the placement of the phrase in the sentence also suggests that Miles was actually lying on his side, implying bodily movements that are occurring but not necessarily explicit in the governess’ narrative. What is certain, however, is the physiological changes that are taking place in both characters, as they both get progressively excited and nervous.

The intimacy and excitement progress as the governess and Miles begin to discuss the letter the governess writes for the children’s uncle. After Miles admits he took the letter, the governess says, “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...” (117). In an allusion to sexual intimacy, the governess moans and draws Miles close, as his body heats up and his heartrate increases. Furthermore, when the governess finds out that Miles took the letter to ““To see what you said about me,”” she considers it a “personal triumph” (117), a confirmation of Miles’ feelings for her.

Perhaps the most telling of all is the governess’ undoubtedly fervent desire to know the nature of Miles’ badness, why he was expelled from school. It seems, for the governess, to know Miles’ sexual past is to gain possession of his sexual future. After simply finding out he said “things,” the governess says, “I was infatuated—I was blind with victory” (118). The idea that Miles could be innocent, on the other hand, caused her “appalling alarm...for if he *were* innocent what then was I” (119). The governess then lets “the impulse flame up to convert the climax of his dismay,” his badness, “into the very proof of his liberation” (120). Therefore, it is suggested that by engaging Miles

sexually, the governess frees him from any shame about his sexual history, including his suggested relationship with Peter Quint; for when Miles says Peter's Quint's name the governess proclaims, "They are in my ears still, his supreme surrender of the name and his tribute to my devotion" (120).

The governess closes this sexual consummation with these lines:

With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of 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—it may be imagined with what a passion; but at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was that I held. We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped. (120)

In these final sentences of the main narrative, Miles gives a violent cry that makes the governess "proud" in her possession of him, and his dispossession by Peter Quint. As the governess states earlier in the text, as she kneels at Miles' bedside, she longs to "seize once more the chance of possessing him" (95). This possession comes in the act of their sexual consummation. The violent "passion" with which the governess possesses Miles is justified by the governess at the beginning of this scene; as the governess watches Miles twirling his hat, the symbol of a gentleman, she thinks "To do it in *any* way was an act of violence, for what did it consist of but the obtrusion of the idea of grossness and guilt on a small helpless creature who had been for me a revelation of the possibilities of beautiful intercourse" (115). Sexual intercourse can thus be seen in relation to violence and beauty, innocence and shame.

Violence and sex were not paradoxical concepts at the time of *The Turn of the Screw*. Though its use is now rare, from approximately 1646-1900 orgasm was also defined as “violent excitement; rage, fury; and outburst of excitement or rage” (OED). When taken in this context, the closing moment of the main narrative seems to be almost a prototypical embodiment of an orgasm. Orgasm in the late nineteenth century was also analogous to death. As seen in works such as John Donne’s “The Canonization,” the parallel between death and orgasm was present in literature as early as the sixteenth century. Therefore, after Miles’ orgasmic cry, his “little heart” stopping seems more a figurative rite of passage, a new beginning with a new possessor of his heart. Sami Ludwig sees death functioning in this text as a symbol of ““transition, an act of sexual initiation, which leaves Miles alive. Thus we would have a triple pun on ‘death:’ 1) physical death, 2) orgasm, and 3) rite of passage (50)”” (cited in McCollum 47). I agree with this reading, as it seems “death” for Miles in this passage is both orgasm and rite of passage, the beginning of Miles as Douglas.

Taken in this context, *The Turn of the Screw* is indeed less of a ghost story and more of a love story, written “in the most beautiful hand” (24), the only thing Douglas has left of his governess, “*his* author” (my emphasis 29). With these two words, we see the governess as not only the author of the story, but the author of Douglas himself, as Miles.

As Rolf Lundén reports in his article, as of the year 2000, only six scholars have argued that Miles and Douglas are the same person. Lundén argues that the whole written narrative is fictional, “a love letter to Douglas, speaking in code about the love he and the

governess experienced during the summer when Douglas at the age of twenty met her in his home” (33). This argument, though interesting, is somewhat more dependent on speculation than textual evidence.

Lundén paraphrases the works of other scholars, such as Louis D. Rubin, Jr., who points out Douglas’ declaration that the story will not tell in any “literal vulgar way” with whom the governess is in love; according to Rubin, the text “literally” reveals an infatuation with the uncle, thus the veiled object of her affection must be Miles (31). Lundén also cites Carvel Collins, who was the first to note, as the prologue reveals, that Miles and Douglas are both ten years younger than the governess, both had younger sisters who the governess tended to, and both met the governess during a summer vacation away from school. Collins also speculates that Douglas’ first name is Miles (31), as the full names of either character is ever revealed. Both Rubin and Collins thus make very intriguing, accurate, and convincing arguments as to the ways in which Douglas is revealed as Miles.

Indeed, as Douglas declares “she’d [the governess] have been worthy of any whatever” he seems to be referring to boy or man. As noted, Douglas could not have held in such high esteem a woman who has given him a confession of murder, establish a relationship with her, or allow her to govern his sister. Therefore, Douglas must have known the truth behind the apparent “murder,” and the only way he could possibly have known is to have been there. As “the story *won’t* tell” who the governess is in love with, neither will Douglas (25). The importance of its secrecy is so great that Douglas keeps the narrative locked away with a key that he seemingly always holds for twenty years



after the governess' death. Therefore, keeping this text secret was not only of vital importance to the governess, but to Douglas as well, which is hard to understand if the text does not involve Douglas himself.

Furthermore, at one point in the narrative, the governess writes, "if I could immediately have succumbed to it I might have spared myself—well, you'll see what" (69). This line suggests that the governess' narrative was written for someone. Douglas declares with absolute certainty that the governess has never shared the story with anyone other than him. It would thus seem that the narrative could only be written for him. The governess writing this story for Douglas would only make sense if Douglas had some significant part in it, which could only be the part of Miles. Also, before his passing, Douglas leaves the text in the care of the prologue's narrator. The fact that he does not destroy the text or let it be thrown away, choosing instead to preserve the narrative, reveals its great value to him.

There are also details that Douglas provides to his audience in the prologue that it seems unlikely and unnecessary that the governess would share with him, or that, so many years later, Douglas would even remember if he had not been present. For example, Douglas tells the group that at Bly, besides Miles, Flora, and Mrs. Grose there was "a cook, a housemaid, a dairywoman, an old pony, and old groom and an old gardener" (28). Unmentioned in the narrative except for the maid who acts as "waiter" to the honeymooning couple about to consummate their marriage, it is very difficult to believe that Douglas would remember the details of the other residents of the house, whose roles in the written narrative are practically nonexistent, if Douglas had not been a resident of

Bly himself. It also important and interesting to note the meaning of Bly at the time *The Turn of the Screw* was written: “likeness or resemblance in look, aspect, species, character” (*OED*). In choosing Bly as the name of the main narrative’s setting, James thus cunningly alludes to the similarities noted between Miles and Douglas.

The parallels between Douglas and Miles seen in the many details of the short prologue/epilogue are thus highly suggestive of the argument that these two men are one and the same. As the reader is given an end in the text’s beginning, only by turning to these pages can we find out what happens between the governess and Miles in their blossoming romance. What we see, therefore, is a fantasy come true in a story that speaks of both terror and love in yet another turn of the screw.

## Notes

1. For an interesting analysis of how the title, prologue, and main narrative work to condition the reader to expect a ghost story, see Richard Sawyer's "What's your title?": *The Turn of the Screw*," *Studies in Short Fiction*, 30 (1993): 53-61. Sawyer argues Douglas's deeming of the written narrative as a "ghost story" in the prologue works to prevent readers from doubting the governess' perception of ghosts in her story.

2. In another example of Douglas' unreliability, he claims the governess was "the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson" (26). However, the governess later twice refers to her "brothers" (66, 79). This inconsistency again reveals Douglas' manipulation of the governess' story.

3. For more critical arguments that discuss the governess' evident sexual hysteria, Stanley Renner cites the following articles: Harold C. Goddard's "A Pre-Freudian Reading of *The Turn of the Screw*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 12 (1957): 11-13, John Silver's, "A Note on the Freudian Reading of 'The Turn of the Screw,'" *American Literature* 29 (1957): 210-11 and Oscar Cargill's, "*The Turn of the Screw* and Alice James," *PMLA* 78 (1963): 242, the last of which discusses James' personal familiarity with hysteria and mental illness as suffered by his sister, Alice. Furthermore, for an interesting discussion of hysteria and reversing power structures evident in *The Turn of the Screw*, refer to Albaraq Mahbobah's "Hysteria, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Reversal in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*" *The Henry James Review* 17.2 (1996): 149-61.

4. As editor Peter G. Beidler notes, "That he [the mysterious man] wears no hat would have suggested to a Victorian audience that he was not a gentleman" (James 48).

5. For more information, though somewhat outdated, on this argument, Linda Kauffman cites several critics who have also claimed that Douglas and Miles are the same person, including: Carvel Collins, "James' *The Turn of the Screw*," *Explicator*, 13. 8 (1955), Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "One More Turn of the Screw," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 9 (1963-64): 314-28, and Stanley Trachtenberg, "The Return of the Screw," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 11 (1965): 180-82.

6. Data Sources: National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 50, No.6. Life Expectancy at Birth, by Race and Sex, Selected Years 1929-98.

7. Though Henry James never married and had no known children, there is no evidence or report of his engagement in any queer sexual activity. For more on the life of Henry James, refer to F.W. Dupee's *Henry James* (1956), Quentin Anderson's *The American Henry James* (1957), or Leon Edel's *Henry James* (5 vols., 1953-1972).

8. See Ellis Hanson, "Screwing with Children in Henry James," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies*, 9.3 (2003): 367-91. For a discussion on the figure of the erotic child in relation to Victorian culture, see James R. Kincaid's, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1994, which comprehensively traces our modern cultural construction of pedophilia through time.

9. John Donne (1572-1631) is an English metaphysical poet famous for his use of metaphor, one of the most prominent being the analogy between death and orgasm.

## Works Cited and Consulted

- Carroll, Joseph. "Screw-Turn-izing the Governess's Touching Story: Pedophilia in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*." *Sigma Tau Delta Review* 12 (2015): 16-29.
- Felman, Shoshana. "Henry James: Madness and the Risks of Practice (Turning the Screw of Interpretation)." *Writing and Madness*. Trans. Martha N. Evans, Shoshana Felman, & Brian Massumi. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Hanson, Ellis. "Screwing with Children in Henry James." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 9.3 (2003): 367-91.
- James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw*. Ed. Peter G. Beidler. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2004.
- Kauffman, Linda S. "The Author of Our Woe: Virtue Recorded in *The Turn of the Screw*." *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 36.2 (1981): 176-92.
- Lundén, Rolf. "'Not In Any Literal, Vulgar Way': The Encoded Love of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*." *American Studies in Scandinavia* 32.2 (2000): 30-44.
- McCollum, Jenn. "The Romance of Henry James's Female Pedophile." *MP Journal* 3.1 (2010): 39-56.
- OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2015.
- Renner, Stanley. "Sexual Hysteria, Physiognomical Bogeymen, and the "Ghosts" in *The Turn of the Screw*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 43.2 (1988): 175-94.
- Smith, Elton E. "Pedophiles amidst Looming Portentousness: Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*." *The Haunted Mind: The Supernatural in Victorian Literature*. Eds. Robert Haas & Elton E. Smith. Lanham: Scarecrow, 1999.

Williamson, Alan. "The Turn of the Screw and the Locus of Psychoanalytic Criticism."

*Literary Imagination* 16.3 (2014): 322-330.