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Screwed?
Interactive Interpretations of
Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*.

By

Ava Harris Bowen

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of English

UNION COLLEGE

June, 2022

Abstract

BOWEN, AVA *Screwed? Interactive Interpretations of Henry James's The Turn of the Screw.*

Department of English, June 2022.

ADVISORS: Dr. Claire Bracken and Dr. Jennifer Mitchell

I began thinking about my thesis by wondering why we read, why we read the books we read, why we read a book the way we do, and how we read leads to different interpretations and opinions of a book. In my thesis, I have focused on figuring out how we can determine who we are based on the interpretations we make about a text. I have determined that one's interpretation is based on their baggage which includes their memories, expectations, and imagination. A reader, either consciously or unconsciously, brings baggage to every text they read in order to come to their own interpretation. In my encouragement of exploring one's own interpretation of a text, my thesis involves its own reader by referring to them as 'you' throughout to reinforce the idea that reader involvement is crucial to understanding a text. I urge my reader to, "before you get into this thesis, do some things for yourself. Get comfortable. Get uncomfortable. Choose or switch your chair depending on this preference. You know yourself. Get rid of possible distractions." I implore my reader to think about their own interpretation of a text by using Henry James's novella, *The Turn of the Screw*. The novella works perfectly for this study as it invites different interpretations because of its ambiguity. I have created and explored three possible readers to the novella: the Surface Reader, the Freudian Reader, and the Savior Reader. The Freudian Reader is a reader who looks for the deeper meaning which almost always refers to sexual desire. The Savior Reader is a hopeful reader who desires a happy ending and above all

for the hero to succeed. The Surface Reader is a reader who would rather not become too invested by trying not to tie themselves to the text with their baggage. In my explanation of the readers, I not only explore their relationship with the novella, but I also give examples of who they might be as people. This includes where they would be reading the novella, what they would be listening to, who they would be with, and what they would be doing before, during, and after their reading experience. This grounds not only my thesis but also allows the reader to imagine themselves as a reader of *The Turn of the Screw*. I explore how each reacts to different sections of the novella. Discussing the readers and how they interpret different sections of the novella shows the power of interpretation as well as why the novella has been debated over by many literary theorists and critics.

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Part I: How to Read This Thesis

Before you get into this thesis, do some things for yourself. Get comfortable. Get uncomfortable. Choose or switch your chair depending on this preference. You know yourself. Get rid of possible distractions. Turn on the music or turn it off. Sit in a quiet library with a muted hum, a lively cafe, or in the isolation of your own home. Make sure you have eaten or be okay with saving that snack for after. Open a window, close a window. Create a space.

Now that that is done- welcome. The space you just set up is crucial to the success of my thesis and how much you get out of it. The movement you might have taken to get in a proper reading position is much appreciated. The physical space will create the right mental one. Trust me. This involvement is just beginning. The following section is a sort of a how-to. You are going to learn about your role in this thesis and as a reader and as a reader of other works. You will also learn how your realization of your position as a reader is relevant to exploring different interpretations of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. You are going to learn that you are more than a mere reader. After it is clear who you are, I am going to explain to you who I am and why I matter more than just as the writer of this thesis.

You: The Reader

So let's get into it. You are a reader. As the reader of this thesis, whether you are aware of it or not, you have just participated in reader-response. You have already made interpretations about this thesis based on who you are as a person and as a reader. You may already know what reader-response theory is. You may not. It does not matter because your possible past with reader-

response theory will be compromised by the following. You are going to learn how to **not** define reader-response theory before how to properly interact with a text. You may feel you are chained to the pieces of paper or the gigabytes of the document in front of you and have no freedom. Don't worry, you have more agency than you think. Not only do you have the power to close your laptop or throw this thesis in the recycling bin, you also have the potential to interpret this text any way you choose. The excitement associated with reader-response, which Harkin describes, does not come from knowing you are involved but rather from the involvement itself.

What is Reader-Response Theory

Patricia Harkin's *The Reception of Reader-response Theory* gives a biased history on reader-response theory. Harkin believes, "that reader-response *conceptions* are simply assumed in virtually every aspect of our work" now but that this is the problem (Harkin 413). She reminisces about the time when everyone did not have access to reader-response theory: "my interest (and my nostalgia) here is not only conceptual. I also miss the *affect—the productive emotions* that attended the notion that readers make meaning. Now that that notion is thoroughly normalized, it has more or less ceased to be exciting" (Harkin 413). Harkin takes away the inclusive beauty of reader-response. This beauty, which you will find, in the very alive theory is its accessibility to all readers with the right involvement from both the writer and the reader.

Harkin believes that reader-response theory is becoming extinct because of its normalization. Her closed and secular definition of reader-response is incredibly damaging because of its limitations in terms of gender and class in who she believes has access to interpret a text in depth. Harkin describes the popularity of the theory in two movements, "the (elitist) theory boom

of the 1970s and the (populist) political movements of the 1960s and 1970s” (Harkin 410). She blames the demise of the theory on its naturalization from elitists to populist. She compares the downfall to a conspiracy in that, “finding conspiracies, as Marxian thought reminds us, can usefully be thought of as an effort to come to terms with totalization. If you feel that you’re the victim of a conspiracy, that is to say, there’s a good chance that you’re beginning to understand how late capitalism works” (Harkin 414). Knowing that one is participating in reader-response does not take away from the enjoyment of participating in it. Knowing that others are able to participate in reader-response does not take away from the relationship that one can build with a text. Harkin continues to assert that “theories survive in a competitive academic marketplace in part as a consequence of the degree of difficulty ascribed to them, the extent to which they give their adherents the sense of power that comes from understanding a discourse other people don’t understand (Harkin 415). I find it hard to believe that, “theories disappear— *as theories*— when they become naturalized— when they (apparently) *so easy to understand* that they no longer serve to demarcate their adherents as more knowledgeable or *more intrinsically intelligent* than the average person (Harkin 415). If this were the case, every reader who used a theory to better understand a literary text has to believe that by using it, they are smarter than the average person. This may happen for other theories however it is in the nature of reader-response theory to be available to everyone. If it were the naturalization of the theory that made it possible for the theory to exist, how can it be the theory’s own downfall? It was fair of Harkin to associate the theory with its founders who may have thought they were better for using it, however, to say that anyone now who uses the theory needs to believe they are an elitist is hypocritical to the nature of the theory.

If you have any desire to read Patricia Harkin's *The Reception of Reader-Response Theory* further, you will find that she does indeed summarize the reader-response founding fathers well. Wolfgang Iser will give you a useful definition of reader-response theory while David Bleich will introduce the importance of the theory:

Bleich's emphasis on the subjectivity of criticism, indeed of all reading, has become commonplace. We no longer even expect different readers to arrive at identical readings... Holland's work helps to explain the exuberant multiplicity among individual reading. Fish's account of interpretive communities as 'a set of practices that are defining of an enterprise and fill the consciousnesses of the enterprise's members' ("Yet" 36) helps to explain how groups of readers develop similar interpretations in spite of the differences that Holland uncovers. Iser's elaborate descriptions of the processes by which consciousness constructs meaning as readers encounter gaps and build consistencies in literary texts provided by perhaps the most elaborate account of reading processes to emerge during this period. (Harkin 412)

Iser articulates reader-response well although he refers to it as Phenomenological Theory. His Phenomenological Theory focuses on the experience of reading as, "one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text" (Iser 279). Iser found value in how you, a reader, interprets work to the extent that he was willing to claim that a text is valued proportionately to your interpretation.

Bleich writes his own praise of reader-response theory with its possible effect in the classroom. Like Iser, his own term for reader-response is subjective criticism. Bleich shows the power of validating one's own emotions through literature by also involving a teacher's beneficial

influence. He writes of a teacher's influence and wonders about the background behind your motivations to read. Similar to how a therapist might teach you to validate your own emotions, Bleich focuses on how your feelings play a part in your connection with a text. Joseph Wood Krutch's *Experience and Art* extends these romanticized ideas of the connection between you, the reader, and a text. He romanticizes his own connection with literature as an experience like Iser. Krutch validates his own reading experience, as you should, with "however incomplete and inadequate my observations may be, they will not seem wholly irrelevant or false" (Krutch 8). This is because his understanding of the text in front of him relies on his experience of reading it which cannot be false because the experience is his. He finds that his comprehension of a text increases "informally out of my own experience with various works of art and represents only an effort to understand these experiences more fully by relating them both to one another and to the more general experience of living" (Krutch 8). Bleich and I both want you to have a teacher like Krutch who encourages you to focus on your emotional responses.

This thesis is your teacher and "if a teacher believes that feelings are important, that one's own feelings have a great deal to do with what one learns and teaches, that one can understand for oneself why one want to know the subject, one will be able to lead student to discover what they want to know, and how to connect their feelings about who they are with their effort to become involved in what they do" (Harkin 455). Like Bleich's work, this thesis is not only giving you the permission to care about the texts you read but also encouraging you to wonder why you have these feelings about a text, what your reaction says about you, and what your reaction says about the text.

What is Baggage

As mentioned above, this thesis will teach you about reader-response by forcing you to participate in reader-response. If nothing else, this introduction will provide you with tools to locate your own participation in reader-response and by doing so show you the impact that your response can have on your relationship with a text, or in other words—your baggage.

Before you start interpreting, there are some things you need to keep in mind when approaching any text. And so, since it is here in front of you, let's use this thesis as a practice run. You need to be mindful of your relationship with the papers you are holding or with the text that is brought up in front of you on a computer. You need to accept that you have judgments about a thesis and its function and role. You may have written one or more, read many, or have not read a single one. No matter your predisposition to a thesis or an academic paper, it is crucial that you understand these judgements and opinions and how they affect a reading of a text. You do not need to try to change them, rather be aware that they exist and will frame how you may think of this thesis (and other texts).

You also need to keep in mind how your environment can affect your response. So you remember when this thesis told you to get into a prime reading position? Well let's say you are sitting in a desk chair, in bed, in a comfortable armchair, in an uncomfortable armchair. No matter the space, it is already affecting your reading experience and how you are making an interpretation. If you are conscious of the drafty window close by, you may feel the need to get out of your chair and be finished reading. If you are sitting in bed, you may feel the need to sleep

or to pretend you are the one writing this, possibly leading to a more existential view on your role as a reader. No matter the space, you are being affected by it.

While you should allow a text to absorb you, you also need to be present while interpreting. Interpretation requires agency on your part. This reading process will not be as easy as you think. You should not be passive when reading this thesis and other texts. You cannot just stand by and take every word as it is. You need to validate your feelings. You need to sit with your thoughts on how reading this section makes you *feel*. If you think it makes you feel nothing and if you find yourself staring at a wall cringing about something you did ten years ago, question why this occurred. If you think you are above participating in reader-response, question why you feel this way. Are you reading this thinking, *I already do this, I am self-aware, I see a therapist?* This is definitely your baggage. There is nothing wrong with having baggage as long as you realize what it is and where it comes from.

Without the reader-response experience, you may think you are insignificant. You may think you have no power over this text. You have most likely read many theses before this in which you participated in a passive experience. You may have learned, judged, and most likely edited them which may have given you a small sense of power. Your past relationships will not only dictate how you respond to this but also in creating your expectations for this thesis by using your own unique imagination. This combination of memories, expectations, and imagination represent the baggage you bring to texts. You have already involved your own baggage when it comes to reading a thesis. As I have already asserted, baggage is not a bad thing. It sounds like a heavy weight placed on your shoulders. And it is. But you already have the weight so you might as well

allow it to give you strength to make your reading experience your own. It should, in return, give you a sense of freedom and originality during your reading experience.

Memories

Your memories are uniquely your own. When you bring them in to better understand a text in terms of your own experience, you are participating in reader-response. This is where Harkin was wrong about the theory. She did not understand that reader-response depends on a person's ability to resonate with themselves. Reader-response is not a theory that only a select few can participate in. You only need a past and the ability to connect the past with the text in front of you.

As established, your memories have even influenced how you have responded to this section of this thesis thus far. Accept your previous interactions with the topics talked about in the following pages. As you continue with this thesis and other readings, past images, emotions, previous knowledge, childhood memories, thoughts about an event that you regret will present themselves. You will have the tools to locate these memories as baggage and understand why you interpret texts a certain way. Understanding why these certain memories have come to your mind give depth to your reading experience as well as in terms of further understanding.

Expectations

Your memories are your past and they dictate your expectations for your future. Your expectations for the pages that lie ahead are just as important as the pages that lie before you. Your expectations will determine what you look for when reading. Your expectations will make

you rejoice when the couple you have been shipping over a series finally reveal their love for each other. In becoming aware of your expectations, you may feel the need to drop these expectations if you dub them 'silly'. Refrain. Dive into them. Be aware of their effect on your reading experience but do not stop having expectations. Once again, they are your baggage and your baggage makes your reading experience usefully unique.

Imagination

This thesis is not something you should distance yourself from. Involve yourself. Be creative. Iser discusses the state of using your imagination while reading as the 'virtual dimension. He expands the role of this dimension because the dimension, "is not the text itself, now it is the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination" (Iser 284). A reader's engagement is, "why the reader often feels involved in events which, at the time of reading, seem real to him, even though in fact they are very far from his own reality" (Iser 283). If your memories are your past, expectations- your future, then your imagination is your present. Your creative participation is a combination of how your past and your future interact. Your strong relation with a text because of your baggage causes you to imagine certain events that are not specified in the text. You use your imagination to fill in these gaps. This creative process is essential to reader-response. It is what draws you into a text. It is what makes you care about what you are reading because you feel directly involved. The events before you are not only on the page but also in your mind. As with the other versions of your baggage, be not only aware of when you are participating in this creative process but also allow yourself to participate when you have recognized it. Iser explains you have a power in this participation considering, "the fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the 'reality' of a particular text is

ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written” (Iser 283). Baggage is uniquely one’s own which is why there is power in using your own imagination.

Reader/Author Responsibilities

It is not only important to understand your baggage and to involve it but also to be cognitive of your role as a reader. When you read using reader-response, you will find that there are certain texts that will allow you, some that will encourage you, and some that will refuse your involvement. Iser outlines the involvement process. This process starts when the writer only reveals what is necessary to engage the reader’s imagination. It is the writer’s role, if they desire readerly involvement, to be vague for “if the reader were given the whole story, and there was nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us” (Iser 280). A reader’s imagination, as discussed just previously, will only be engaged if the author upholds their responsibility. The writer’s goal for a text to “be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader’s imagination in the task of working things out for himself” (Iser 280). Iser notes the balance that the author needs to keep for you. The balance is completed when the author creates a sense of vagueness in which you are not bored because everything is clear to you, but you are also not confused because the text is too complicated to involve your own imagination. Although the balance is fragile, when done correctly it will lead to a successful reader-response.

Different interpretations

So far, this thesis has given you a pep talk on how much power you have as a reader. If you think you are special for making interpretations, you aren't. If you think you are special because your interpretation is uniquely your own, you are. As said previously, what makes reader-response so powerful for the reader is that no interpretation is exactly the same because of each reader's varying baggage. In Norman N. Holland's *Five Readers Reading*, he argues how ridiculous it is that critics believe there can only be one interpretation of a text. Discovering different interpretations of a text shows not only the variety of the text's audience but also the author's success in creating a variety of possible pathways of interpretation. Holland uses comedy as an example of a type of communication that involves different audiences with different baggage. Holland explains that the response to jokes may vary as, "someone might have heard the joke before; someone else might be depressed; a third person might have no sense of humor, and so on" (Holland 6). This individuality in response is important to look into. Holland explores this: "psychoanalysis, however, is par excellence the science of human individuality (if there can be a 'science' of uniqueness), and we would expect it to be most interesting about literary response when it speaks about individuals" (Holland 11). Holland points out the importance in a psychoanalytic interpretation as it depends on the individual reader rather than just the text. In these terms, psychoanalytic literary theory is a subsection of reader-response.

This is not the last time this thesis mentions psychoanalysis. This thesis's aim is to explore individual readerly responses by focusing on three specific interpretations of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. Of which psychoanalysis is one. The individuality will be expressed through the complicated relationship between the interpretations and how a reader can be one, two, all

three, or neither of the explored readers. It will be important to consider these other interpretations when thinking about the possibility of your own. This thesis will explore different interpretations of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and in doing so will require you to consider your own interpretation of the novella.

Summary of The Turn of the Screw

In order for you to have your own interpretation of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, you must be familiar with Henry James's novella and how a reader can experience it. If you have not read it I want you to imagine you have. This section will allow you to picture yourself reading the novella. If you have not read the novella, you are going to need to use your imagination during this section. You are going to have to picture your own reading experience of *The Turn of the Screw* as you read its summary. REMEMBER YOUR BAGGAGE during the following.

Let's get to it. You are about to begin reading Henry James's novella, *The Turn of the Screw*. If you have ever read Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*, you know the drill. As I told you before, "relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade" (Calvino 3). After you have attempted this, you open the short novella. The novella starts with a frame narrative before beginning the main plot line. This first narrator is nameless. If you are paying close enough attention, you see that the narrator's reactions have the capacity to mirror you as a reader. The narrator is a listener, among others, awaiting the storyteller to begin his story. You observe that the scene consists of the narrator, the other listeners and the storyteller, and an elderly man named Douglas, sitting around a fire. Douglas begins the story which he is reading from a manuscript written by a woman he reveals he once loved. This woman, a

Governess of Douglas's sister, becomes the singular narrator for the rest of the novella.

The Governess's story begins as she becomes your storyteller. She is currently arriving at Bly Manor, the home of two children Miles and Flora, the housekeeper Mrs. Grose, and, depending on the interpreter, two ghosts. You learn that the Governess is hired by the two children's uncle. His only request is that the Governess takes care of everything herself and does not reach out to him. You follow the Governess's obsession with both children despite Miles's mysterious expulsion from his boarding school and their overall uncanny nature. You and the Governess eventually witness the children interacting with the two ghosts that Mrs. Grose mentioned. Both you and the Governess later learn that the two ghosts, Miss Jessel and Peter Quint, were both past employees of Bly Manner. The rest of the plot, depending on which interpretation you have, surrounds the Governess's attempts to receive validation from the children of the ghosts' existence *or* surrounds the Governess's attempts to protect the children from the ghosts. No matter how you read the rest of the novella, the story ends as Miles dies in the Governess's arms

That should be helpful to you. Read it again if it wasn't or look up another's summary of novella. Your resources are endless. No matter your source, the summary is crucial if you are going to be able to understand how little Henry James provides us in terms of the character's desires and how this vagueness is key to open our minds to interpretation. Yes, the *our* was deliberate.

We: The Readers

Just as 'you' is being used to describe one's individual reading experience, 'we' will be used to describe the inevitable nature of readers. We are a united community. Even though we differ in

how we interpret words, we still all interpret them and by doing so insert ourselves in literature. Holland so eloquently says, “a literary text, after all, in an objective sense consists only of a certain configuration of special carbon black on dried wood pulp. When these marks become words, when those words become images of metaphors or characters or events, they do so because the reader plays part of a prince to the sleeping beauty” (Holland 12). Despite the gendering of the reader as a man within this description, there is something romantic in how we as readers can act as a prince as “he gives them life out of his own desires. When he does so, he brings his lifestyle to bear on the work. He mingles his unconscious loves and fears and adaptations with the words and images he synthesizes at a conscious level” (Holland 12). We have such a relationship with words that we are able to ignite a world within ourselves where a story can live on outside of its pages. Although it is important to note that some texts are easier to participate with than others in that they are more easily interpreted. As stated above, these texts are those who are vague in a deeper meaning themselves, those texts which engage with us in a way that invites a stronger relationship, a more engaged readership. Not only does our baggage enable us to do so but, as previously said, the writer’s responsibility is to set up a sense of vagueness within the text to pique our curiosity and our interest. This section will work to elaborate on why *The Turn of the Screw* is the perfect text for several interpretations, exploring baggage, and our varying distances to a text.

Our Response to Vagueness

Our response to this vagueness is to question what is vague. In the case of *The Turn of the Screw*, we begin to question the reality and reliability of the story. James creates the perfect opening for these questions with the involvement of the ghosts and of the first-person narrator in both the

framed introduction as well as in the characterization of the Governess. We question the reliability of the Governess because of her romanticization of Bly and the children in the first couple of pages of the novella. If she has the ability to romanticize the building and Bly, could she become a Catherine Morland figure from *Northanger Abbey*? The Governess even admits to us, “I have not seen Bly since the day I left it, and I daresay that to my older and more informed eyes it would now appear sufficiently contracted” (James 9). What about *our* eyes which can only see what the Governess romanticizes? Since we are unable to see for ourselves what the children look like or act like, we are given the space to question the Governess. We are first placed outside of the story so we only have access to her through Douglas’s reading of her manuscript. Since the book is outlined with a frame narrative singularly in the beginning, we may debate whether we should be seeing the story from the Governess’s eyes or from our own.

We see the Governess questioning her own reliability in a complicated conversation between Mrs. Grose and the Governess. We are privy to the Governess herself questioning Miles’s power over her.

‘You like them with the spirit to be naughty?’ Then, keeping 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*?’ She put the question with such a fine bold humor that, with a light, a little silly doubtless, to match her own, I gave way for the times to the apprehension of ridicule. (12)

Through the excerpt above, not only do we see the Governess questioning her storyteller but also that she is unable to cater to a certain audience such as Mrs. Grose. Although James makes it

clear to us that it is Mrs. Grose's lack of advanced vocabulary which causes the lack of clarity, this conversation should also make us question our own receptibility, our own ability to become corrupted by a text. Are we limited by our own ability to comprehend? Are we believing the Governess's word too easily? This gap in assurance of a reliable narrator makes us question the reality of the ghosts as well.

The Governess is the only person we know for sure has seen the ghosts, whether or not we believe the ghosts are real. We are made to question their existence as the Governess questions her mental stability. Should we trust this woman who is choosing her 'truth' instead of rationally debating the truth? She brings in her emotions when considering, "it was not so much yet that I was more nervous that I could bear to be as that I was remarkably afraid of becoming so; for the truth I had now to turn over was, simply and clearly" (James 18). The Governess's choice to believe her own truth turns into an obsession. Throughout the novella, we observe the Governess's desire to be validated by the children confirming that they correspond with the ghosts. She tries to get it out of them, "you see, you see, you know that you do and that you already quite suspect I believe it; therefore, why not frankly confess it to me, so that we may at least live with it together and learn perhaps, in the strangeness of our fate, where we are and what it means?" (James 41). We cannot help but hear desperation in her desires. James leaves out the actual truth of the ghosts' existence because of who is telling us the story. James has fulfilled his responsibilities as a writer.

We must first think about how James allows us to involve our memories, expectations, and imagination. James has less control over our specific memories as he does on our expectations

and ability to imagine certain possibilities. Our own memories are useful when starting the process of interpretation as we are able to use our own experiences to picture what the Governess may be going through and potentially seeing. Maybe we have been babysitters. Maybe we have gotten jobs where there was a mysterious boss. Maybe we have seen ghosts. Whatever our connections are, they will be beneficial. Our expectations for *The Turn of the Screw* will come when we involve these memories to make assumptions about what may or may not occur. Since we see this story through the eyes of the Governess, we are already using our imagination to picture the events. As we continue to dissect our baggage's connection to the ultimate interpretations we make, it will be important to consider what this baggage is and how it influences our reading response.

Participating in the discovery will allow us to look at how our baggage affects our distance from *The Turn of the Screw*. The distance we have from a text depends on our baggage since it may rely on how we view Henry James, the diction and syntax of the novella, the framed narrative, the Governess as the narrator, the Governess as a character, the children, the reliability of the story, Mrs. Grose, the ghosts, the possible trauma that each character faces, and more. These are all things that we can have possible opinions on and therefore all the things that determine how we choose to distance ourselves from the novella. This idea will be expanded upon when I outline different types of readers of the novella.

Me: The Writer

I am the writer of this thesis. I am writing how the readerly interpretations of the novella differ within *The Turn of the Screw*. I will also expand on what these differing interpretations mean for

the novella. The next section will be a conversation between myself and two academic texts: Shoshana Felman's *Turning the Screw of Interpretation* and Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's *Surface Reading*. The conversations will serve as an introduction to specific readers of James's novella. From there I will finally discuss the types of readers that I have decided to focus on. I believe these three readers to be the most effective when thinking about how one's interpretation of a text can change the meaning of it. The readers are the Freudian Reader, the Savior Reader, and the Surface Reader. I will characterize the difference in these readers, discuss their complicated relation to one another, and what these readers' interpretations can tell us about Henry James's complex novella. To conclude the thesis, I will reveal my own interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw* which ultimately expresses how complex one's own relationship with a text can be.

Part II: Conversations

“What is reading? What does the text have to say about its own reading? What is a “Freudian reading” (and what is it not)? What in a text invites— and what in a text resists— a psychoanalytical interpretation?” (Felman 102)

“What does the act of turning a screw have to do with literature? What does the act of turning a screw have to do with psychoanalysis? Are these two questions related? If so, might their relationship help define the status of literature?” (Felman 94)

Freudian and Savior Reader

It is these questions which prove the significance of *The Turn of the Screw* when considering and debating readerly experiences. When reading the novella, one is moved to not necessarily come to any conclusions regarding the questions above but rather madly ponder them. In the process of simply considering, a dialogue forms with oneself regarding the experience of reading the text. One comes to the conclusion that reading is a beautifully perplexing experience that not only is stimulating, but also affects us in ways that we cannot even approach comprehending. This dialogue is critical. To possibly encourage you to have one, this chapter will serve as its own dialogue between me and Shoshana Felman. In the following pages, Felman and I will not attempt to answer, “what is reading,” however the other questions listed above will serve as our topics for our conversation. This will lead to conversations about the scandalous nature within and surrounding text, the ambiguous title, and the type of readers the text invites. Felman and I will be looking at the reactions to *The Turn of the Screw* and come to our own conclusions about what these reactions tell us about how we read the novella.

The Double Scandal

Scandal is written all over the reactions to the novella. Felman separates the scandal surrounding the novella into two parts- one as a scandalous relationship and the other as a scandalous debate. This section will focus on our scandalous relationship with the novella. After reading the novella for the first time, it was clear to me that it outlines our own reading experience within itself. As I read, I became obsessed that James was mirroring my experience reading his novella back to me. I felt involved. And not because I wanted to be involved but because James demanded it. In Shoshana Felman's words, "this two-level reading- which also must return upon itself." This two-level reading not only causes us to participate with the novella but also does so to a level that makes us question our own participation with.

Felman's first chapter, "An Uncanny Reading Effect," aims to simply express the "uncanny trapping power of Henry James's text as an inescapable *reading-effect*" (102). As Felman states, "the scandal is not simply *in* the text, it resides in *our relation to the text*, in the text's *effect on us*, its readers: what is outrageous in the text is not simply that *of which* the text is speaking, but that which makes it speak *to us*" (97). No matter how you read may differ from Victorian readers, the novella is a scandal and a scandal that you just can't seem to want to stop reading. This is due to the fact that, as Felman says, "the most scandalous thing about this scandalous story is that *we are forced to participate in the scandal*" (97).

The relationship one has with the novella is scandalous because of the level of involvement the reader experiences. Felman asserts that this forced participation causes the reader to have a

complicated relationship with the novella. She continues that, “if the strength of literature could be defined by the intensity of its impact on the reader, by the vital energy and power of its *effect*, *The Turn of the Screw* would doubtless qualify as one of the strongest-i.e., most *effective*- texts of all time” (Felman 96). Felman uses a direct quote from James to mention that even he, “was himself astounded by the extent of the effect produced on his readers by his text” (Felman 96). The effectiveness is due to its forced participatory reading experience. However, it is the multiplicity of the experiences that have produced not only reactions to the novella but reactions to others’ reactions. This sets *The Turn of the Screw* apart from other literature of the time as well as literature now as “few literary texts indeed have provoked and ‘drawn behind them’ so many ‘associations,’ so many interpretations, so many exegetic passions and energetic controversies” as the novella has (Felman 96).

The Turning of the Title

Along with the rest of the book, the relevance behind the title is ambiguous. And so, as with the rest of the ambiguities James provides, it is important to draw meaning from all of them. In simplistic terms, the title’s metaphor describes a turn that causes something else to turn. When considering the deeper meaning of the metaphor and its significance to the rest of the text, it is beneficial to try to determine who or what is forcing the turn. Felman wonders, “what, in fact, is the significance of a *turn*, if not that of a *change*, precisely, of *direction*, the modification of an orientation, that is, both a *displacement* and a *choice of sense*, of meaning? And if indeed what is at stake in *The Turn of the Screw* is the question of *sense* in *all* its senses (meaning, sanity, direction), it is not surprising to discover that the text is organized as a certable *topography of turns*” (179). Felman’s focus on the meaning, sanity, and direction of the metaphor are almost in

vain as she comes to the conclusion that, “whatever the case, the metaphor of the ‘turn of the screw,’ in referring to a *turn*—or a twist— of sense, establishes an ironical equivalence between direction and deviation, between a turn of sense and a turn of madness, between the turn of an interpretation and the turning point beyond which interpretation becomes delirious” (Felman 181). For Felman, who is mainly studying the two extremes of interpretations, the turn is an extension of the debate between mere interpretation and delirium. Although she never outright says it, the process that Felman goes through to dissect the meaning of the title is not unlike the interpreting process. She takes the ambiguous title, and based on her baggage, she is able to come to the conclusion that it alludes to the debate between interpretations.

This is where Felman and I may differ in our concluding thoughts about the title’s significance. To me, of course, the metaphor deals with the novella forcing its reader to ‘turn’ or interpret instead of the description of the novella as a balancing act. Due to the significance of the two-level reading that the novella enforces, my interpretation of the metaphor pertains to the reader and not just to the contents of the story. The ‘turn of the screw’ is the two-level reading-effect. This means that *The Turn of the Screw* is not only about a governess’s experience with ghosts and children but also about the journey of a reader becoming affected. As I have established, *The Turn of the Screw* is the perfect text for looking at the complicated relationship between text and reader because of its effect over the readers. The complicated relationship encompasses these turns which are the pushes and pulls in the relationship between the reader and the novella. These pushes are when a reader would rather distance themselves from the novella and the pulls when the reader cannot help themselves but to be invested and loyal to the plot. The points at which the turns occur can be both related and unrelated making for a consistent map for all

readers impossible. I will give examples of these instances in the next chapter to develop this point.

In discussing our interpretations of the title, it is fair to come to the conclusion that each reader has a different ‘turn’ depending on who they are rather than how the novella screws with them. It is impossible to define the ‘turn’ because not only is it different depending on the reader but also because of the novella’s ambiguity to define it for us. We bring in our memories, expectations, and imagination to interpret the text. This means that while the novella expects an effective and scandalous reading response, the effect that the novella has on its readers varies depending on a person’s memories, expectations, and imagination. There is value in debating what ways the novella affects its reader to interpret and what the interpretation may be because it allows us to think about what memories, what expectations, and how our imaginations affect how we read.

Interpreting the Debate

As discussed above, and within the first section of this thesis, the ambiguity of the novella is why the text allows varying interpretations. However, labeling the ambiguity as sexual is what makes the text a Freudian interpretation. The first Freudian critical reading of the novella is credited to Edmund Wilson in 1934. Wilson’s interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw* started the interpretive debate surrounding the novella. He, “for the first time suggests explicitly that *The Turn of the Screw* is not, in fact, a ghost story but a madness story... this psychoanalytical interpretation will hit the critical scene like a bomb. Making its author into an overnight celebrity by arousing as much interest as James’s text itself” (Felman 97). By introducing a Freudian interpretation of the text, Wilson did more than have different interpretations of the significance

behind a title. Wilson questioned the reality of the text and in doing so made enemies in those who believed *The Turn of the Screw* needed saving from his interpretations. Felman outlines the debating sides:

The ‘psychoanalytic’ camp, which sees the governess as a clinical neurotic deceived by her own fantasies and destructive of her charges; and the ‘metaphysical,’ religious or moral camp, which sees the governess as a sane, noble saviour engaged in a heroic moral struggle for the salvation of a world threatened by supernatural Evil. (Felman 98)

As Wilson is labeled as the head of the psychoanalytic camp, Robert Heilman is labeled his adversary. Robert Heilman believes, “‘*The Turn of the Screw* is worth saving’” (qtd. in Felman 100). Felman includes Heilman not only as acting in this disputant role but also as an almost exorcist to the other readers. In Heilman’s “urgency of rescuing, of *saving the text*,” he “strongly resembles the exorcistic operations of the governess” (Felman 101). In Heilman’s exorcism, he may be trying to rid the demon of reading sex into everything ambiguous or in other words, reducing texts to “‘a commonplace clinical record’” (Felman 101). In creating a clinical record, Wilson, “answers with the riddle’s missing word, with the mystery’s solution: the governess’s sexual desire for the Master... [Wilson] answers with a *diagnosis*: the ghosts are merely the symptoms of pathological, abnormal sexual frustration and repression” (Felman 105). Therefore, he questions what is hidden in the ambiguity that James initiates. Much like a psychoanalyst examining a patient, the psychoanalytic camp answers the text’s apparent question of ambiguity by deciding what the text is repressing.

And yet, I argue this description of the way the psychoanalytic camp interacts with the text is how all readers should. Felman asserts the creation of this clinical record is the “freudian critic’s

job” which includes pulling “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” (Felman 105). The point of reading any book is to suck it dry of all the meaning and significance you can. Of course, one who reads with a Freudian perspective has a knack for bringing the meaning to the surface. However, this is also what an interpretation is. Every reader is hopefully participating with *The Turn of the Screw* in this way. Unlike how Felman presents the metaphysical camp, even the reader in opposition to the Freudian Reader takes part in this same participatory reading process. Felman extends the debate by making the different interpretations of the novella oppositions to each other. In reality, the psychoanalytic and metaphysical camps participate with the novella in similar ways. Interpretations cannot also be binaries to each other due to the nature of them coming from a sense of desire.

As evident from the descriptions of each camp, Felman does a great job in simplifying both sides of the debate. However, in simplifying the interpretive debate surrounding the novella in this way, she limits the interpretations of the novella. If we were to use Felman’s outline to look at the different interpretations of the novella, there is a reader who reacts to the novella based on their previous knowledge of Freudians work and those who do not seem to have their own interpretations to the novella at all, only reactions to those in the psychoanalytical camp. Felman’s description of the metaphysical camp does not take the readers’ own experiences into consideration. It is impossible to say that an interpretive camp can have a relationship with a text based merely on being the opposition of another reader. To be called interpretation, it must be made directly from one’s relationship with a text.

Although Felman uses the oppositional angle beneficially to establish the scandalous discourse surrounding the text, she does not elaborate on the readers themselves and their specific relationships with the text itself. Not once does she step into their shoes. In the remainder of this thesis, I plan to develop the two readers Felman discusses with the addition of a third. My description of these readers will be framed as interpreters rather than mere reactionaries.

This brings us to our third reader-- the Surface Reader.

The Surface Reader

When I came across Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's *Surface Reading*, I had no intention of using it in my thesis. I thought, *wow, this is cool*. I wondered what it would be like to approach *The Turn of the Screw*, a text that forces interpretation, with such a surface level involvement that I feel weird using the word 'involvement'. As I have made clear- I believe making interpretations is an effect of reading. I believed this even before writing this thesis because, as *Surface Reading* states, "as literary critics, we were trained to equate reading with interpretation: with assigning a meaning to a text or set of texts" (1). So when I came across *Surface Reading*, I was curious about the hypocrisy in the existence of a Surface Reader. I am going to explore this hypocrisy in the remainder of this section. I will also match my approach to Felman by adding my own thoughts on *Surface Reader* alluding to how my own Surface Reader is going to participate with *The Turn of the Screw*.

Like Savior Reading, Surface Reading is its own sort of anti-Freudian perspective. By participating in Surface Reading, a reader denies the existence of anything hidden not only

within the book but within themselves. A Surface Reader cannot learn anything from a book because they contest any involvement with it. The ‘surface’ on which Best and Marcus focus is “what is evident, perceptible, apprehension in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth” (9). They compare this with Symptomatic reading which is the category in which the Freudian and Savior Reader fall into. Symptomatic reading is that “what a text means lies in what it does not say, which can then be used to rewrite the text in terms of a master code. By disclosing the absent cause that structures the text’s inclusions and exclusions, the critic restores to the surface the deep history that the text represses” (3). It is a question of depth which outlines the difference between a Surface reading and a Symptomatic one. If there is ambiguity within a text, the Surface Reader pays little attention to it while “Symptomatic readings also often locate outright absences, gaps, and ellipses in texts, and then ask what those absences mean, what forces create them, and how they signify the questions that motivate the text, but that the text itself cannot articulate” (3). In my opinion, the reader has no choice but to question the meaning within ambiguous texts. A proper reader does not skip over what is vague. They do not simply accept that they either do not understand what is going on or that the author does not want them to. They consider the possibilities present from the ambiguity.

Surfaces and Freedoms

However, despite my criticism, I do agree that surface reading could possibly be useful in lending one particular perspective. Best and Marcus assert that Surface Reading can be an ethical stance in that, “such an embrace involved accepting text, deferring to them instead of master or using them as object, and refuses the depth model of truth, which dismisses surfaces as

inessential and deceptive” (10). Although I do in fact argue against surfaces as deceptive, when considering the political angle that Best and Marcus have, it is understandable that they feel this way about interpretations. It is true that, “Surface reading, which strives to describe texts accurately, might easily be dismissed as politically quietist, too willing to accept things as they are. We want to reclaim from this tradition the accent on immersion in texts (without paranoia or suspicion about their merit or value), for we understand that attentiveness to the artwork as itself a kind of freedom” (16). To understand their position as well as mine, it is important to question what this sense of freedom provides for the reader. Best and Marcus agree with Charles Altieri who says, “an ideal of being able not to worry about performing the self so that one can pursue potentials within the range of ongoing practices that are blocked by worries about identity and authenticity . . . [a freedom to be able] to enjoy what and where one is without having to produce any supplemental claims that promise some ‘significance’ not immediately evident” (16).

However, if freedom is blocking a reader from understanding their own identity and the text’s authenticity, not only is this blindness limiting the understanding of oneself but also the novella. What is more *free* than being able to explore oneself without judgment through a text? If it is a question of enjoyment, then why would someone try to limit their own gratification in understanding how a text is relevant and significant? These are all rhetorical questions, but they prove that they limit reading to the degree that their definition of freedom is flat. The act of reading is freeing in that it is individualistic.

So now you may be questioning why I am using the Best and Marcus’s *Surface Reading* to explore interpretations when they describe one that is so limiting. I have chosen to use Surface Reading as another approach to *The Turn of the Screw*. More than anything, I am going to focus

on the definition that a “surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*” (9). This means that my Surface Reader will be focused on entertainment value and may have a mental struggle while trying to be ‘free’ from a text. This will be dissected in how this affects the reader’s relationship with the text. The Surface Reader will not only round out what it means to be an interpreter but also enforce my message to be aware of how one's interpretation affects their relationship with a text.

Part III: Interpretations

It is your turn. This is the moment. Everything in the thesis thus far has been leading to this. It may be more of a process rather than a flashing moment. This is where you will learn what kind of reader you are. Think of it as a BuzzFeed quiz if you like those sorts of things. The process might be a little bit more complex than answering a series of multiple-choice questions.

However, the results will also be more than just a label on what type of reader you are. But that is where the fun is, don't you think?

In my descriptions of the three readers, you will find that you may align with one reader only, a combination of two or all three, or none of them. Just know- all these options are okay. The categorization of these readers is fluid. However, do not let this fluidity take away from the importance of the differences between the readers. Let the descriptions encourage you to imagine yourself in the scene. To make you wonder 'is this me?' and 'Is this what I think when I'm not engrossed in a book?' In the following descriptions of the readers try to imagine which categories you fall under.

This chapter will continue to explore baggage and how it pertains to each reader's relationship with the novella. I have chosen four excerpts from *The Turn of the Screw* that have relevant significance to each reader for different reasons. These sections will not only show how James anticipates multiple readers in his text but also reinforce how a reader's own baggage determines their perspective of the novella. There will be examples of how each reader's memories, expectations, and imaginations impact the different interpretations. This will result in

determining the readers' varying distances from the novella. In order to do so, the following sections will consist of possibly exhaustive and complete reader narratives and how these narratives have the ability to interact with one another. In addition to categorizing hypothetical readers, the next section will also categorize the types of readers some critics are according to their own readings of the novella.

I will be devoting the sections to stripping away the layers of the unconscious thoughts of a Freudian Reader, the affectionate dedication of a Savior Reader, and the passivity of a Surface Reader not only for you to define who you are as a reader, but also to show how *The Turn of the Screw* invites and supports this type of reader involvement.

The Freudian Reader

Imagine. If you are a Freudian Reader, you are a woman in her twenties, a middle-aged man or woman, or an old man. If you are the woman in your twenties, you are sitting either in a library, in a coffee shop, or on top of your bed. You are not yet conscious of it, but you take pride in your poses. You think, 'this is how I should look.' You tell yourself it is because you are most comfortable in these positions, but it is really because you desire to see yourself in these places and you desire other people to see you in these places.

If you have chosen the library, you have done so because you are there for the aesthetics. You want to be seen alone, always alone, deep into a book, headphones with blaring angsty classical music. You may have a cup of coffee. The caffeine is only there so you will be able to finish your book before you leave the library that day. You pose hunched over the book resting on the

large table you snagged around noon. Your nose points five inches from the pages. If you choose the coffee shop, it is because you want a hipster library and a sandwich. Or maybe a muffin. You get dressed up because you know people will be wondering ‘who is that girl and what is she reading.’ You know that the book in your hands is a reflection of who you are and will affect how others view you. If you are in your bed, you still have a cup of tea, or an IPA if it's later in the week or day. You are lying on your stomach, head facing the end of your bed, feet towards the throw pillows. You are picturing someone walking in at any moment. You keep a notebook near you for quotes from books that speak to you. From *The Turn of the Screw*, you write down lines such as “‘I don’t change— I simply make it out’” (47) and “‘She saw him only twice.’ ‘Yes, but that’s just the beauty of her passion’” (6). You never reread these quotes. The act of writing them down is enough for you. You feel like you belong within these quotes. They are pieces or descriptions of you.

If you are the middle-aged man or woman, you are still conscious about your image so instead of purposefully reading in public places, you vocalize your dedication to literature to all those who will and will not listen. You believe you have a knack for understanding people on a deeper level simply from surface level conversations. You have gone to a couple of therapy sessions but haven't been in two decades. You think you are a logical person, but you usually unconsciously end up making decisions based on your emotional desires. You listen to books on tape to help you fall asleep although you claim it is because you cannot get away from the book. You believe you are the first person to discover most things. You are always telling your spouse and friends about a new book or podcast you found. You treat your ability to interpret text in a certain way as an inner connection with the author and because of this, you may subconsciously think you

have some control over the characters as the author does or at least some inside knowledge. You often reflect that it is as if your interpretation is exactly the way the author wanted you to read the novel.

If you are the older man, you are sitting in a chair with a built-in footrest. The armrest has tea and coffee stains on it that remind you that you should grab a cup before you become immersed. You are either wearing thick wool socks or letting your dry crusty feet soak with Vaseline. It is midafternoon. You have already turned on the CD player with five discs of Chopin, Liszt, Beethoven, a London Philharmonic concert, and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds's album *Abattoir Blues/ The Lyre of Orpheus*. You have spent your life staying silent and watching those around you. You believe that the only conversations worth having are ones that consist of a bit of whiskey and watering eyes. You are surprisingly sex positive, but you also have an obsessive belief that sex is present in all art and conversation. You are unsure if you believe in love, but you know you believe in desire. If love is real, you think it lies in the category of masochism. You miss having someone to dissect literature with and so you are nostalgic about the times when you went to your professor's office hours and talked for an extra two hours about the book you were reading at the time. You miss the surprised and impressed glances you got in the classroom when you revealed the meaning behind a metaphor. You have always been good at finding hidden meanings.

No matter your age, if you are a Freudian Reader, you are looking for pleasure. This pleasure comes from interpreting art in a way that reveals a hidden desire. It is not necessary for you to

have previous knowledge of Freud to be a Freudian Reader. It is a desire to take things to deeper levels. You are always looking for explanations for why things happen. Think horoscopes.

Despite your wishes, you are labeled as a romantic in the definition that you are looking for reflections of yourself in the texts you read. You have a passion for literature because of your ability to romanticize both it and you. I wouldn't go as far as to say you are a narcissist, but you focus on what you can learn about yourself from a text. This involves relating everything within a text to yourself which implies romanticization.

You may be thinking that a Freudian Reader is an awful person. Or if you aligned yourself with any of the readers above, you may still be thinking about the 'egomaniac' line. However, a Freudian Reader is more common than you think. A Freudian Reader may be a person into psychology, horoscopes, or art. It may be as simple as that. And if you are still thinking, 'yeah but they are egomaniacs,' just consider the number of times you have thought about yourself and the way you read throughout this thesis. Bringing yourself (YOUR BAGGAGE) into a text isn't a bad thing if it encourages you to think about a text in a different way.

In this section, question how you view the governess, how you view the children, and your own relationship with the text. Through the descriptions of a Freudian Reader's response to the novella, you may notice two different Freudian Readers: the one who is unconsciously similar to the governess and the one that views everything within the novella as sexual. These are in fact the same reader.

You, as the Freudian Reader, have an overwhelming desire to be validated in your Freudian perspective whereas the Governess has her overwhelming desire to be validated that the ghosts exist. This desire links you and the governess and how you both view and use the children in order to gain validation. Your determination to relate aspects of the book to Freud's psychoanalytic work mirrors the governess's own struggle with validating the reality of the ghosts. Your memories, your expectations, and the way that your imagination affects your interpretation of the book mirrors the governess's own baggage to her experience and how she handles seeing the ghosts. Like the Governess, you know, "it was not, I am as sure today as I was sure then, my mere infernal imagination" (James 49). You know that you did not imagine the presence of Freud in the novella. If only you could convince others of his presence. You, however, will not admit your similarities with the Governess. She is hysterical. You are not. You are a Freudian scholar. Your abilities to psychoanalyze allows you to draw conclusions on the governess' greater nature. Although you and her have nothing in common, she is more than a character in a novel. She is a body for you to dissect. A vessel to be filled with sexual tendencies, passion, and childhood trauma. It is this inclination exactly which aligns you with the governess. Now debate with your own imaginative leanings to become the Freudian Reader.

[Disclaimer: Use your imagination once again to view yourself where you would most likely be reading *The Turn of the Screw*. Although these quotes are not presented chronologically, you have not finished the novella until I reveal the ending excerpt to you. You are here. You have the book in front of you. Your memories, expectations, and imagination are all active.]

Memories

Despite not starting at the beginning of the novella, the following excerpt pertains to memories and dissecting things that may be vague or even hidden. The excerpt is a good place to begin because it allows us to see how each reader responds to the Governess talking about vagueness. The same vagueness we are struggling with and using to make assumptions. As the Governess reflects, she reveals what is hidden and what is revealed in her relationship with the children.

It is a long excerpt from the novella but pay close attention to the governess's language and tone. Ponder the following questions: What memories is the Governess bringing to her governing? To her seeing the ghosts? What are her expectations of Flora and Miles? What is the Governess imagining? What is she imagining will happen? How does she position herself in the story she has created out of her imagination? Is the governess possibly hysterical?

It was not, I am as sure today as I was sure then, my mere infernal imagination: it was absolutely traceable that they were aware of my predicament and that this strange relation made, in a manner, for a long time, the air in which we moved. I don't mean that they had their tongues in their cheeks or did anything vulgar, for that was not one of their dangers: I do mean, on the other hand, that the element of the unnamed and untouched became, between us, greater than any other, and that so much avoidance could not have been so successfully effected without a great deal of tacit arrangement. It was as if, at moments, we were perpetually coming into sight of subjects before which we must stop short, turning suddenly out of alleys that we perceived to be blind, closing with a little bang that made us look at each other—for, like all bangs, it was something louder than we had intended—the doors we had indiscreetly opened. All roads lead to Rome, and there were

times when it might have struck us that almost every branch of study or subject of conversation skirted forbidden ground. Forbidden ground was the question of the return of the dead in general and of whatever, in especial, might survive, in memory, of the friends little children had lost. There were days when I could have sworn that one of them had, with a small invisible nudge, said to the other: 'She thinks she'll do it this time—but she won't!' 'To "do it" would have been to indulge for instance—and for once in a way—in some direct reference to the lady who had prepared them for my discipline. They had a delightful endless appetite for passages in my own history, to which I had again and again treated them; they were in possession of everything that had ever happened to me, had had, with every circumstance, the story of my smallest adventures and of those of my brothers and sisters and of the cat and the dog at home, as well as many particulars of the eccentric nature of my father, of the furniture and arrangement of our house, and of the conversation of the old women of our village. There were things enough, taking one with another, to chatter about, if one went very fast and knew by instinct when to go round. They pulled with an art of their own the strings of my invention and my memory; and nothing else perhaps, when I thought of such occasions afterwards, gave me so the suspicion of being watched from under cover. It was in any case over *my* life, *my* past, and *my* friends alone that we could take anything like our ease—a state of affairs that led them sometimes without the least pertinence to break out into sociable reminders. (James 50)

As a Freudian Reader, you are thinking about your own memories already. You do not just let the memories flow in and out during the process of reading. If you have aligned yourself with the Freudian reader thus far, you probably actively seek out memories which you believe apply to

your own beliefs about the novella and in the passage you just read. Much like the Governess, during your reading, you have remembered what that forbidden ground felt like when you talked about it for the first time or realized that it existed and how you handled not talking about it. Then you hopefully remembered the vagueness of the forbidden ground and how that could be interpreted as sexual. The dead friends expressed in this “forbidden ground was the question of the return of the dead in general and of whatever, in especial, might survive, in memory, of the friends little children had lost” could be more than friends (James 50). You wonder why someone wouldn’t talk about an old friend unless there was something to hide. Why would a relationship between a child and an adult be hidden unless there was something untoward between them? Like the governess, you search for an answer. You come to the conclusion that the forbidden ground is there because of a sexual relation between the children and Miss Jessel and Quint. The type of sexual relation is vague, but you are sure that it is there because of text’s own vagueness. You are a suspicious reader so coming to this conclusion is logical for you.

However, it is this suspicious nature that you share with the governess. Felman also recognizes this comparison when she discusses the meaning behind the *turn of the screw*. Your suspicious nature builds a relationship between “*reading* and *madness*.” This madness is not only what you are looking for in the Governess but it is also what you become by doing so. This interaction “implicates *us* as the story’s readers, places *us* in the same boat as the governess” (Felman 182). She makes the comparison explicit with, “the governess is herself essentially a *reader*, engaged in an interpretative enterprise” (Felman 183). However, you as a Freudian reader would rather not focus on this clear comparison as you would like to deny any commonalities with the

Governess. Instead, you focus on your own memories and knowledge of Freud to separate yourself from her.

In doing so, you analyze how the Governess herself is conscious that she has shared her memories with the children. You notice she is suspicious that ‘they pulled with an art of their own the strings of my invention and my memory; and nothing else perhaps, when I thought of such occasions afterwards, gave me so the suspicion of being watched from under cover’ (James 50). You, as the Freudian Reader, resonated with this. You have used your memories to form expectations on the novella and may have felt you have shared these memories with the novella. You may have even felt that the novella has the ability to control you as the children appeared to have been controlling the Governess. However, you tell yourself, you are not the Governess. No, you have more control and sanity than she does.

You shake your head at the Governess but as you do so you have a smile on your face. In all her innocence (or stupidity as you call it), you are able to claim her actions as evidence. You desire to see your Freudian perspective present within the novella and so even though you shake your head when the Governess believes the children are whispering behind her back, “‘she thinks she’ll do it this time— but she won’t!’ ‘To “do it’ would have been to indulge for instance—and for once in a way—in some direct reference to the lady who had prepared them for my discipline”, you are pleased that she is being tricked and tormented by the children (James 50). You are pleased that your expectations based on your Freudian memories are present.

Expectations

Everything relates to sex and pleasure. And since you have found that everything relates to sex and pleasure, you have come to expect it since you have trained your mind to look for sex and pleasure in everything, you have come to expect it. You have come to conclusions that everything is related to sex or pleasure because of your memories, you have come to expect it. This expectation makes finding the sex within the vagueness of the novella easier. We return to the beginning of the novella for an excerpt that does not need much context. This is one of the few times in the novella that the Governess states she is actively looking back on her time at Bly Manor. This excerpt explains the Governess's own expectations that come from her own memories and experiences with the children. So when you read the following excerpt, wonder: What is the Governess expecting? What kind of charm was she under? Who casted it? Did she have any agency over the charm? What is her tone throughout this section? Who is she blaming and who is she defending? You, as the Freudian Reader, agree that all futures are rough. And so who is to blame for the children's inevitably rough futures?

This at all events, was for the time: a time so full that, as I recall the way it went, it reminds me of all the art I now need to make it a little distinct. What I look back at with amazement is the situation I accepted. I had undertaken, with my companion, to seek it out, and I was under a charm, apparently, that could smooth away the extent and the far and difficult connections of such an effort... I learned something— at first, certainly— that had not been one of the teachings of my small, smothered life; learned to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow. It was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature. And then there was consideration— and consideration was sweet. Oh, it was a

trap— not designed, but deep—to my imagination, to my delicacy, perhaps to my vanity; to whatever, in men, was most excitable. The best way to picture it all is to say that I was off my guard. They gave me so little trouble— they were of a gentleness so extraordinary. I used to speculate — but even this with a dim disconnectedness—as to how the rough future (for all futures are rough!) would handle them and might bruise them. (James 14)

First, go back and reread the section above. Imagine these as your own thoughts. Imagine this as *your* reading experience of the novella. You look back “with amazement” at the situation *you* accepted. You opened the book. You accepted the reading experience. You allowed yourself to be taken by the charm of the novella and were therefore swept up in the events. You learned something in this. You caught yourself off guard for the novella was a trap. It refuses to prove your Freudian beliefs. And you are obsessed.

You have not finished the novella, but you expect the ending to be void of answers. You hope that you are validated. This validation, along with the governess’s, relies on the children. You lean into the children. You put the pressure on them. You do not really care whether or not the children are safe or not. The children are objects. Evidence. Means to an end. You dissect their actions and words. Their actions and words match your expectations as you have made sure of this. Just as the Governess, your purpose as a reader is confirmation or remedy as the Governess calls it. She, like you, uses the children when she insists that Mrs. Grose take Flora away to the Master, her uncle. At this point in the novella, the Governess is distraught at almost proving the active relationships between the ghosts and the children. After the Governess was close to revealing Miss Jessel and Flora by the lake together to Mrs. Grose, Flora becomes sick and needs

to be taken away from Bly Manor. The Governess and Mrs. Grose continue to talk about Flora's silence on her interactions with Miss Jessel and who should take Flora away.

My visitor, at this, did speculate. 'But where in the world—' 'Away from here. Away from *them*. Away, even most of all, now, from me. Straight to her uncle.' 'Only to tell on you—?' 'No, not 'only'! To leave me, in addition, with my remedy.' She was still vague. 'And what *is* your remedy?' 'Your loyalty, to begin with. And then Miles's.' She looked at me hard. 'Do you think—?' 'Won't, if he has the chance, turn on me? Yes, I venture still to think out. At all events, I want to try.' (James 74)

The governess expects that Miles will refuse to reveal the existence of the ghosts to her. You also expect Henry James will turn on you because you believe it is in an author's nature to withhold a desired ending, to be unfaithful to your wishes because it's all about desire. For you. For the Governess. For the ghosts. And even possibly for the children. But the remedy is there. The Governess's remedy is Miles's validation. Your remedy is the confirmation that there is a sexual current connecting the Governess, the children, and the ghosts in all of James's innuendos. But in the meantime, you have to use your imagination for your own validation.

Imagination

I have asked you to use your imagination throughout this thesis. I have asked you to imagine yourself as a Freudian reader and the governess and just a person with memories and expectation pertaining to *The Turn of the Screw*. But this is the end. This is where it all comes together to form your overall impression of the book. As I have stated before in the introduction, it is your baggage that allows you to form these deep connections with the Governess, the children, and your own involvement in the novella. These deep connections force you to imagine the novella

as ending with a Freudian meaning although it is not clear what the ending means. In order to understand your connections with the novella, I would like you to, before continuing, take a step back and question: what is it that you desire to happen? Build your own thoughts. C'mon. Involve yourself.

The scene you are about to read consists of the Governess, Miles, and up for debate- Peter Quint. After you have solidified your own thoughts, your questions for the last excerpt of the novella must include: What do you hope for the ending? For yourself and for the governess? What do you feel while reading the ending? Do you want it to be over with? What is your relationship with the novella thus far? Do you believe it will change depending on the ending?

At this, after a second in which head made the movement of a baffled dog's on a scent and then gave a frantic littler shake for air and light, he was at me in a white rage, bewildered, glaring vainly over the place and missing wholly, though it now, to my sense, filled the room like a taste of poison, the wide, overwhelming presence. 'It's *he*?' I was so determined to have all my proof that I flashed into ice to challenge him. 'Whom do you mean by 'he'?' 'Peter Quint—you devil!' His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. '*Where*?' They are in my ears still, his supreme surrender of the name and his tribute to my devotion. 'What does he matter now, my own?— what will he *ever* matter? *I have you,*' I launched at the beast, 'but he has lost you forever!' Then, for the demonstration of my work, "There, *there!*" I said to Miles. But he had already jerked straight round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day. 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 the 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. (James 87)

Now that you have finished *The Turn of the Screw*, reflect. As a Freudian Reader, how do you view the ending? How do you view your reaction to it? What did you picture? What did you ignore or pay attention to get the outcome you desired? Are you ready to let the book go into oblivion but really just back on the shelf in the ‘have read’ section? What is your relationship with the book now?

While reading the excerpt above, you probably read into “I was so determined to have all my proof” and “yes, I held him— it may be imagined with what passion.” You likely feel both of the statements as your own reading experience while also feeling satisfied with the Governess’s desire for Miles to see Peter Quint. His acknowledgement of the Governess’s struggle is even better during “‘Where?’ They are in my ears still, his supreme surrender of the name and his tribute to my devotion” (87). His words are still in your ears in a foggy mess when you read “his little heart” that you ignore a foggy mess that you ignore “dispossessed” but definitely pay attention to “had stopped” (James 87).

Based on what you have focused on and what you have ignored, this might be the scene you pictured while reading the last section: the Governess is giddy with excitement over seeing Peter Quint and desire for Miles to see him for her own confirmation. The dialogue is spaced-out shouts, mostly coming from the Governess. Everything happens really fast. The shouting, the appearance of Peter Quint, the Governess launching herself at the ghost. But everything stops

when Miles turns around. There is a silence in the ending even as Miles, “uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss” (87). It is muted just as you imagine the Governess might have heard it. The room that you once imagined them in vanishes. A spotlight gently moves onto the kneeling Governess with Miles limp in her arms. It is dramatic. You close the book slowly, eyes glassy, unfocused over the cover.

As you did with the rest of the novella, you aligned yourself with the Governess. She, like you, wants confirmation of a relationship. You either wanted confirmation of a sexual relationship between Miles and the Governess or Miles and Peter Quint. However, as you finished the novella, you became aware of the unsustainability of either relationship. Miles will never be able to replicate either of the relationships he had with the Governess or with Peter Quint. As you have finished reading, you are unable to let this go. This unsustainability does not sit well with you. You thought the sexual acts of the characters would reveal themselves fully. You invested not only time reading the book but you invested bits of yourself into the Governess so that you became close with her. You are going to want to distance yourself from this novella but most of all, the Governess. You are going to convince yourself that the way you desire is not like the way she does. You are going to want to say that you did not care about the book. That it meant nothing to you and did not impact your relationships with literature. Some days later you might tell your friends about all the representations of Freud there were in *The Turn of the Screw*.

But here we are at the end of the Freudian Reader section. It may be hard to move on and forget who you have become while reading this section but you must. It is time to be someone else.

The Savior Reader

Imagine. You are an older woman reading for entertainment and peace of mind of a teenager in high school.

If you are the older woman, you read before you go to bed or in a comfortable chair in the midafternoon. You are reading with either your knees bent and toes curled into the edges of the cushion or legs propped by a foot rest. You feel rested and are waiting to be swept away by the easily romanticized novella. You romanticize stories to fit your hopes and desires. You try to manipulate a plot (obviously with no success) to help the character you identify with. You are a powerless reader wanting power. You choose this book specifically, consciously or not, to escape.

You want to escape, but you also want to be involved (although involved might be too weak a word). You want the book to become real and sometimes it means romanticizing the main character. Making them into a God. You think the world of them before you have met them. Sometimes it means replacing the face of the main character with your's. You could be the main character. You believe this because you are not the thoughtful type. You just think you are. You have depth. Your older sibling told you so when you were little and since you idolize them, you believed it. This happens a lot for you and you have not seemed to catch on. At least not yet. But this naivety keeps you strong. For your sake, I hope no one tells you what they actually think of you. I'm sure it's not all bad but you are the type of person that holds onto things, puts your heart on the line and invests 100%. Who knows what would happen if you learned people aren't always how they present themselves to be. But maybe it is this optimism that keeps you from

doubting your place within the books you read. It surprises you each time when you are brought back to reality when the laundry announces it is done, your child comes in holding their own poop in their hands, or your cat knocks your glasses case off your nightstand. But your imagination does not stop when you are brought back to reality. You imagine yourself as the main character of your own life and of other people's too.

You're a social person. You know how to have and hold conversations. While you are a certain kind of romantic, you have a life outside your own thoughts. And even though you are the main character, you care about others. You have empathy. You help people because you know that's what you're supposed to do and you often expect it out of others.

You love your life because you have invested yourself into it. You have many artistic and athletic interests. You have friends, children, a partner, and loving parents. To put this plainly- you are a good person. You're kind, loving, optimistic, and loyal. Maybe you're a little average, dramatic, naive, and selfish but who isn't?

If you are the teenager in high school, you are more introspective compared to the woman previously described. You are currently in science class in which you talk when you have to, participate when called on. But to be honest, you would rather be in the library reading in that chair in the corner you like. Unfortunately, your free period isn't until the next class. So you are sitting in science class reading because you already completed the questions in the workbook last class. One could say you're an overachiever but really you just find the work easy and unstimulating. This is why you enjoy the struggles of the hero you're addicted to reading about

in that chair in your corner of the library. Instead, you're caught reading in class and despite what the teachers think, you are aware of their annoyed stares. They think you believe you are better than everyone else, that you are smarter in your perceived indifference. But you aren't indifferent. You care quite a bit.

You are close to your parents who are both professors at the local university. You live in a quiet household. The three of you spend your Sunday nights curling up in the living room watching Alfred Hitchcock movies or separately reading. Both parents spend a majority of their time in their offices and the house is empty with the silence of the separation. You like it like this. The loneliness helps you picture yourself as Harry Potter or Percy Jackson. You finished both series when you were nine. You loved the stories of kids figuring out who they were on these big adventures with a couple of friends. You want to be the hero. The one who believed they were average but after a significant event finds out they have powers and needs to save the world.

When you finish a novel, you even tend to daydream about living in the fantasy world of the text. You hang onto these worlds. You try to keep the story going. This is why you despise endings. You try not to expect anything because you know it will lead to disappointment. You do end up hoping despite what you tell yourself. You have the self-awareness to label yourself an optimist.

No matter if you are the older woman or student, this is your baggage. You are desperate to be transported into the story that you are overly trusting that your expectation will be satisfied. You are insecure. But you're not discouraged. You are an author's perfect reader. You will find a connection with one of the characters even if it is not the narrator. You will follow the pushes

and pulls that the author has set up for you. You will fall into the traps. You will smile and cheer. You will be frustrated and most likely cry. And this is the experience you wanted. So no matter how the story ends, your experience will be emotional.

Memories

I hope you have imagined either a Savior Reader or imagined yourself as one. As a Savior Reader, you use pleasant memories to guide your decisions and assumptions. You are an avid reader so your past reading experiences will guide this one. Your memories are going to directly affect your expectations and imagination even more so than a Freudian Reader. While reading the following excerpt again as the Savior Reader, think about your favorite protagonists and your relationship with them, the worst (or the greatest depending on how you view it) villains and your relationship with them. As a Savior Reader you are used to jumping into a book. Before you read *The Turn of the Screw*, appreciate your intense and great connection with stories. Your imaginative and creative tendencies allow you an escape, allow you to hope, and above all care for what is in front of you. In the following excerpt, see how the following thoughts on distance, barriers, and memory relate to your relationship with literature.

It was not, I am as sure today as I was sure then, my mere infernal imagination: it was absolutely traceable that they were aware of my predicament and that this strange relation made, in a manner, for a long time, the air in which we moved. I don't mean that they had their tongues in their cheeks or did anything vulgar, for that was not one of their dangers: I do mean, on the other hand, that the element of the unnamed and untouched became, between us, greater than any other, and that so much avoidance could not have been so successfully effected without a great deal of tacit arrangement. It was as if, at moments,

we were perpetually coming into sight of subjects before which we must stop short, turning suddenly out of alleys that we perceived to be blind, closing with a little bang that made us look at each other—for, like all bangs, it was something louder than we had intended—the doors we had indiscreetly opened. All roads lead to Rome, and there were times when it might have struck us that almost every branch of study or subject of conversation skirted forbidden ground. Forbidden ground was the question of the return of the dead in general and of whatever, in especial, might survive, in memory, of the friends little children had lost. There were days when I could have sworn that one of them had, with a small invisible nudge, said to the other: ‘She thinks she’ll do it this time— but she won’t!’ ‘To “do it” would have been to indulge for instance—and for once in a way—in some direct reference to the lady who had prepared them for my discipline. They had a delightful endless appetite for passages in my own history, to which I had again and again treated them; they were in possession of everything that had ever happened to me, had had, with every circumstance, the story of my smallest adventures and of those of my brothers and sisters and of the cat and the dog at home, as well as many particulars of the eccentric nature of my father, of the furniture and arrangement of our house, and of the conversation of the old women of our village. There were things enough, taking one with another, to chatter about, if one went very fast and knew by instinct when to go round. They pulled with an art of their own the strings of my invention and my memory; and nothing else perhaps, when I thought of such occasions afterwards, gave me so the suspicion of being watched from under cover. It was in any case over *my* life, *my* past, and *my* friends alone that we could take anything like our ease—a state of affairs that led

them sometimes without the least pertinence to break out into sociable reminders. (James 50)

Your memories while reading the excerpt above allowed you to picture the Governess as your ideal role model. If not a role model than definitely your ideal protagonist. You believe she is aware of her surroundings when she talks of forbidden ground. She takes her relationship with the children seriously which you find admirable. Like all of the protagonists you read, you hope to be able to save her. She is above the life that James has given her. It is out of the companionship you have built admiring the governess that your pity for her forms. The pity that makes you want to save her and the children from the ghosts and the trauma which James ensnares them in. You want the best for her so as you listen to the governess's predicament in the excerpt, you sympathize with her when you remember how you were in situations you deem similar. You remember a time when you had to decide whether or not to reach out to someone above you in status. You remember a time when you cared for your own kind of charge- maybe a younger sibling, a child you tutored, or even a friend. You remember the last time you let someone in. You remember the strange fulfilling pleasure you felt when it seemed they pulled your life, your past out of you without your approval. It showed how comfortable you were with them. You trusted them because that's who you are. You and the governess not only think everyone needs saving but that only you can save them.

You also remember how frustrating forbidden ground is. You cannot reach it. You know this more than any more other reader because despite your best efforts to join the pages in front of you, you cannot. You are kept in the position of a mere viewer. There is no kind of conversation that you can approach that has the power to change the fate of the characters in *The Turn of the*

Screw. The only power you have is over yourself and how you respond to the novella. And yet, you still create expectations for the character depending on past relationships with stories and your own life.

Expectations

I mentioned that you have a great bond with the governess above and the excerpt below is where it comes to fruition. Of course, you were going to have a bond no matter what, but this is the excerpt you have been waiting to really solidify your affinity to her. Both you and the Freudian Reader are similar to the Governess. However, you differ in that you force the similarities whereas the Freudian Reader is forced into them by their tendencies to psychoanalyze. When you are reading the following excerpt, think of your reading experience- the one you expect and the one you are having.

(If you would like a more challenging engagement with this text, I invite you to anticipate how you, as the Savior Reader, are going to connect with the governess. What is the following excerpt going to reveal about the Governess that invites you to produce the relationship you have been craving? How are you similar to the Governess?)

This at all events, was for the time: a time so full that, as I recall the way it went, it reminds me of all the art I now need to make it a little distinct. What I look back at with amazement is the situation I accepted. I had undertaken, with my companion, to seek it out, and I was under a charm, apparently, that could smooth away the extent and the far and difficult connections of such an effort... I learned something— at first, certainly— that had not been one of the teachings of my small, smothered life; learned to be amused,

and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow. It was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature. And then there was consideration— and consideration was sweet. Oh, it was a trap— not designed, but deep—to my imagination, to my delicacy, perhaps to my vanity; to whatever, in men, was most excitable. The best way to picture it all is to say that I was off my guard. They gave me so little troubled— they were of a gentleness so extraordinary. I used to speculate — but even this with a dim disconnectedness—as to how the rough future (for all futures are rough!) would handle them and might bruise them. (James 14)

Now that you have read this excerpt, you have accepted the situation. The reading ‘situation’ which does not only allow you to escape your own world but forces you into the Governess’s world at Bly Manor. You are trapped within the world. You like this kind of trap. It is the reason you are a reader. Reading as a Savior Reader gives you “space and air and freedom’ to escape as you have done many times before. As you read this excerpt, you paired your experience reading it to the Governess’s experience as a governess. This sets up the bond you have been waiting for to solidify. You used this excerpt to connect with the novella and become invested in the characters and the outcome. As you always do, you convinced yourself that you were ‘off your guard’ when you connected with the governess in this way. However, in actuality you have been waiting for this moment. You expected it to occur and it did. From this point on you are unequivocally rooting for the Governess to become the Savior. Not only do you desire this but you expect it.

For the next excerpt, question how this bond that you have now solidified with the Governess in the last excerpt affects the way you interpret this one. How do you view the Governess and her decisions? Do you believe and trust her? Is she always in the right? Is she capable of bad choices? Does she care about the children more than herself? Again, how does your opinion of the Governess affect what you expect from her?

My visitor, at this, did speculate. ‘But where in the world—’ ‘Away from here. Away from *them*. Away, even most of all, now, from me. Straight to her uncle.’ ‘Only to tell on you—?’ ‘No, not ‘only’! To leave me, in addition, with my remedy.’ She was still vague. ‘And what *is* your remedy?’ ‘Your loyalty, to begin with. And then Miles’s.’ She looked at me hard. ‘Do you think—?’ ‘Won’t, if he has the chance, turn on me? Yes, I venture still to think out. At all events, I want to try’ (James 74).

You believe she wants nothing but to save the children from the ghosts. She has no other motives. Everything she says benefits the children first and only. She is willing to fight the ghosts because she knows it is the only way that the children will be saved. She is willing to send Flora and Mrs. Grose away because you and her both know that it is one step in saving Miles and Flora. She is willing to try. You admire the Governess for all of this. And yet, it is important to remember that she has all these admirable qualities because you expected her to have them. You have interpreted from her actions that she has no other motives than to save the children.

Your loyalty to Governess is commendable. Not only have you allowed your expectations to steer your interpretations but you have done so in a way that places you close to the Governess. This closeness in distance allows your imagination to flourish when you act on these

expectations.

Imagination

Since you are so close to the Governess, your faith in the governess has placed you near her so that you have set yourself up to be affected by the outcome of the novella. As you close the novella as a Savior Reader, think about who you are trying to save. Think about why you are trying to save them. When reading the last excerpt of the novella as the Surface Reader, keep in mind your expectations for endings and how you imagine the end for the Governess.

Ponder the following questions while reading: How has your memories and expectations affected how you imagine the last scene? What is your role as a Savior Reader and do you think it has changed with how the story has progressed? Once you have finished reading, question your immediate reaction.

At this, after a second in which head made the movement of a baffled dog's on a scent and then gave a frantic littler shake for air and light, he was at me in a white rage, bewildered, glaring vainly over the place and missing wholly, though it now, to my sense, filled the room like a taste of poison, the wide, overwhelming presence. 'It's *he*?' I was so determined to have all my proof that I flashed into ice to challenge him. 'Whom do you mean by 'he'?' 'Peter Quint—you devil!' His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. '*Where*?' They are in my ears still, his supreme surrender of the name and his tribute to my devotion. 'What does he matter now, my own?— what will he *ever* matter? *I have you,*' I launched at the beast, 'but he has lost you forever!' Then, for the demonstration of my work, "There, *there!*" I said to Miles. But he had already jerked

straight round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day. 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 the 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. (James 87)

This is what you have been waiting for. As a Savior Reader, you yearn for endings. As you read the excerpt above, you shook with giddy anticipation. Your memories of previous relationships with protagonists have led you to expect happy endings. Consequently, your stomach dropped with angry confusion as you read the last line. It was not the ending you planned, not the one you wanted, and not the one you expected.

The novella denied you your desired reading experience. The promise of a happy ending is the only thing that makes all the pain and trauma that you and the Governess have experienced worth it. You have failed at your duty as a Savior. You have seen the death of a child, you have experienced hauntings, ‘After a minute’, you think moments after you close the book, ‘I began to feel what it was I truly held.’ *The Turn of the Screw* rests in your hands. It is no longer a book that consists of a mere partnership between reader and main character in which you can separate yourself from her. She has failed and so have you.

And as I have reinforced, unfortunately a happy ending is inconceivable for the ending of *The Turn of the Screw*. So instead, after you finish the novella, you place yourself as *the* Savior in order to get your happy ending. You imagine being able to email Henry James with complaints

and words of justice for the Governess. You reread the excerpts of the novella that prove the Governess as a possible savior of the children's circumstances. You do anything to save the Governess from her fate in failing as a protector.

The Turn of the Screw will be a pain in your thoughts when you begin other books. You will remember it as the book that broke your faith in all authors. No matter how much you will try to distance yourself from it, it will remain one of the books you think about most. You will never stop hoping for happy endings. If anything, reading *The Turn of the Screw* has made you crave them even more.

The Surface Reader

Imagine. You are any age and sex. You are passive but independent. You have never been super close with your family. You are about to experience the following or already have: you have always loved reading but never really liked English classes. They were too structured for you and you never had a knack for understanding the references and the metaphors within the texts. You write a poem every couple of months, but the poems are mediocre and only consist of occurrences around you at that moment. Your mother forced you to run track in middle school but stopped when you went to high school. You played an orchestral instrument from primary school through high school. You were rewarded solos based purely on your skill rather than work ethic. You did not care whether you got them or not which made your peers jealous and angry. You did practice but not very often and only when your instrument was presented in front of you and you did not have anything better to do. In college you had no education pertaining to

literary theory or psychology. You focused on political science and philosophy with some liberal art requirements thrown in.

You are either socially popular or you do not have any friends. Most likely both are true. You're an oddball because of your indifferent nature. And since you do not care, I am going to tell you the three ways in which people respond to you. People either hate you, hate you and are intrigued by you, or hate you because they love you. You, in response, are an advocate for having friends with benefits in romantic relationships. No strings. No feelings. You lead people on because you have convinced yourself but not others that you do not 'catch' feelings. You do not love. The underlying truth is that you think you are above it. You have convinced yourself that you're different. You have told others that you are different. At first they did not believe you but they were quickly corrected after they got hurt because they mistook your indifference as flirting and your surface level interest for caring. In your desire to be indifferent, there is a desire to be noticed. You succeed in the spotlight. You like drama and you like to be entertained. You like things happening around you as long as you are not forced to be involved. The drama can be about you. You actually prefer it. And most of all, you would like to watch the drama. To be entertained by it. You are an observer.

The sad thing is that when you finally have feelings for someone, you will wonder why you're heartbroken. You will wonder why your chest hurts, your hands shake, why your throat is clogged and your vision blurs. You will go to a friend with these symptoms. You will start to cry. They will laugh. They will not hold you and they will not listen. You will end up processing

and grieving alone. You will think- *who else is to blame but myself?* You created this untouchable persona.

For argument's sake, separate yourself from this reader. You are no longer a surface reader. What do you think of them? Do you pity them? Hate them? Relate to them? Why do you? What does that say about you and what does it say about this surface reader and their possible relationship with things, people, and especially literature? Think about it and then, if you can, become them again. I will give you a little bit of added time to pretend to become them once more.

Things have always come easily to you so you tend not to go outside of your comfort zone. You're smart but not curious. You expect things to come to you. Therefore, you expect *The Turn of the Screw* to not mean anything to you because you usually mean things to other people, not the other way around. You only have expectations for yourself, not for art or others. No one has ever had specific expectations for you either. You did not pick up *The Turn of the Screw* off the shelf of a bookstore. The book was gifted or loaned to you with a strong recommendation. The book could also be your school's property. You never buy books because you do not reread them and you do not make notes in the margins or underline certain sections that you like. You read books whenever you know you will be undisturbed. You stay away from audiobooks, however. You know you will not become that involved in the story that you need someone else to tell it to you. You have never felt the need to listen to a book while doing something else. Not while weeding or cleaning or driving. You are usually reading unseen within the comfort of your house. The singular stiff armchair in your living serves as the best place. You sit upright, the

bottoms of your feet pressed against the hardwood floors. The book is propped up on the space between your hips and knees. You look down at it indifferently. Your face remains unaffected when your eyes twitch from side to side. You know you will not feel that big of a connection with the plot, the characters, or the author with their specific writing style. The novella was recommended to you by the librarian, a friend, or required reading. You have read a few before. You are unattached to any certain genre or time period of writing. You are indifferent and therefore open to trying new books. You have no desires while reading because you will have no connection with the book. It is fiction after all. This is what you convince yourself. Or at least attempt to.

Memories

Since you are determined not to apply any of yourself within the novella, let us just get into it.

“It was not, I am as sure today as I was sure then, my mere infernal imagination: it was absolutely traceable that they were aware of my predicament and that this strange relation made, in a manner, for a long time, the air in which we moved. I don’t mean that they had their tongues in their cheeks or did anything vulgar, for that was not one of their dangers: I do mean, on the other hand, that the element of the unnamed and untouched became, between us, greater than any other, and that so much avoidance could not have been so successfully effected without a great deal of tacit arrangement. It was as if, at moments, we were perpetually coming into sight of subjects before which we must stop short, turning suddenly out of alleys that we perceived to be blind, closing with a little bang that made us look at each other—for, like all bangs, it was something louder than we had intended—the doors we had indiscreetly opened. All roads lead to Rome, and there were

times when it might have struck us that almost every branch of study or subject of conversation skirted forbidden ground. Forbidden ground was the question of the return of the dead in general and of whatever, in especial, might survive, in memory, of the friends little children had lost. There were days when I could have sworn that one of them had, with a small invisible nudge, said to the other: ‘She thinks she’ll do it this time— but she won’t!’ ‘To “do it’ would have been to indulge for instance—and for once in a way—in some direct reference to the lady who had prepared them for my discipline. They had a delightful endless appetite for passages in my own history, to which I had again and again treated them; they were in possession of everything that had ever happened to me, had had, with every circumstance, the story of my smallest adventures and of those of my brothers and sisters and of the cat and the dog at home, as well as many particulars of the eccentric nature of my father, of the furniture and arrangement of our house, and of the conversation of the old women of our village. There were things enough, talking one with another, to chatter about, if one went very fast and knew by instinct when to go round. They pulled with an art of their own the strings of my invention and my memory; and nothing else perhaps, when I thought of such occasions afterwards, gave me so the suspicion of being watched from under cover. It was in any case over *my* life, *my* past, and *my* friends alone that we could take anything like our ease—a state of affairs that led them sometimes without the least pertinence to break out into sociable reminders. I was invited—with no visible connection—to repeat afresh Goody Gosling’s celebrated *mot* or to confirm the details already supplied as to the cleverness of the vicarage pony. (James 50)

As a Surface Reader, I hope you enjoyed the diction, the syntax and the form of the quote above. It was created for you as I am sure you know. This is all your version of freedom is giving you. You can appreciate the words for words. Not what the words create and their effects and representations of the human condition.

I doubt this is all you felt. You must have felt more when you read, “it was in any case over *my* life, *my* past, and *my* friends alone that we could take anything like our ease” (50). Did you have any longing, any connection with that statement? What about when James said, “there were times when it might have struck us that almost every branch of study or subject of conversation skirted forbidden ground. Forbidden ground was the question of the return of the dead in general and of whatever”? (50) Anything there? A twinge of some emotion. It is okay. I will convince you that it is okay to be affected by literature by the end of this section.

Expectations

At this point, it is not that you merely expect nothing in that you are open to possibilities, you expect to feel nothing and are determined to feel nothing. Your expectations are that you will be able to stay distant from the text. To remain uninvolved. Freedom is your main objective. You are confident in who you are. You do not need to learn anything from anybody or anything. Especially from literature which does not give you any attention back. When reading the section below remember to: Be selfish. Be free from all responsibility that James will try to force on you. Remember that the object in front of you is a surface with words on it. Nothing more. It cannot affect you. It cannot touch or hurt you.

This at all events, was for the time: a time so full that, as I recall the way it went, it reminds me of all the art I now need to make it a little distinct. What I look back at with amazement is the situation I accepted. I had undertaken, with my companion to seek it out, and I was under a charm, apparently, that could smooth away the extent and the far and difficult connections of such an effort... I learned something— at first, certainly— that had not been one of the teachings of my small, smothered life; learned to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow. It was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature. And then there was consideration— and consideration was sweet. Oh, it was a trap— not designed, but deep—to my imagination, to my delicacy, perhaps to my vanity; to whatever, in men, was most excitable. The best way to picture it all is to say that I was off my guard. They gave me so little troubled— they were of a gentleness so extraordinary. I used to speculate — but even this with a dim disconnectedness—as to how the rough future (for all futures are rough!) would handle them and might bruise them (James 14).

While reading the excerpt above, you could not help but think that you have nothing in common with the Governess and her thoughts. You have never felt that there was “a time so full that, as I recall the way it went, it reminds me of all the art I now need to make it a little distinct. What I look back at with amazement is the situation I accepted” (74). You have never undertaken such a responsibility that you were not prepared for. You have always “known space and air and freedom” (74). They have always been available to you because freedom has been your priority. You have never been closed in on by someone, forced to make a decision. You do not expect anyone to force this on you either and if they did, you are independent and strong and do not

permit affliction. You have never been off your guard so much as to be able to let in anyone as the Governess has. You have always known that such action is a trap.

At this point, you look up from *The Turn of the Screw*. You have thought all of this because of the text above. You think, *has this surface made me realize something about myself? In my stubbornness to stay at the surface of all things, to refuse a deep trap, have I lost out on something? Is this stubbornness a weakness?* You shake your head. Ha! How could you let a book affect you so? Continue reading with an extra focus on diction and syntax.

My visitor, at this, did speculate. ‘But where in the world—’ ‘Away from here. Away from *them*. Away, even most of all, now, from me. Straight to her uncle.’ ‘Only to tell on you—?’ ‘No, not ‘only’! To leave me, in addition, with my remedy.’ She was still vague. ‘And what *is* your remedy?’ ‘Your loyalty, to begin with. And then Miles’s.’ She looked at me hard. ‘Do you think—?’ ‘Won’t, if he has the chance, turn on me? Yes, I venture still to think out. At all events, I want to try.’ (James 74)

You trust the novella less and less as an object of entertainment. You have started to become angry at the Governess. You wonder how could she be so stupid to first form these bonds with Flora and Miles, and then to urge Mrs. Grose to leave her alone with Miles. This act will surely close the gap between Miles, The Governess, and the ghosts. It will bring things to a climax. It will force something to happen.

You are not ready for the end of the book. You think about closing the book where you are. You think you may be better off not knowing. You realize you have two options. You can either close the book or remember who you are. Choose your own ending. You have that freedom.

Ending 1: You do indeed close the book on page 74 without a bookmark. You stop the process at expectations because imagining is too hard. Too involved. You have stopped many times before when you sense a closing distance. You are a pro at stopping. At restraint. You call it freedom in simplicity. You refuse to lose control. Especially to a book. Others have tried. Closing *The Turn of the Screw* will be easier than the other habits or people you have left. After you close the novella, you may think of it from time to time but only not as the book that got away but as the book that got too close. If this is truly the ending you desire, do you feel cheated? Did the reading process feel anticlimactic? Was it boring? Are you still angry? Are you angry at the Governess? Are you angry at yourself? Do you feel free? Do you feel in control? Although you may not admit to anything, I hope I have at least made you wonder why that is. If you still refuse to wonder, I have nothing more to tell you and you can close this thesis.

Ending 2: You then remember it is all just entertainment and you are just an observer. Whatever happens within the novella will not affect you because you are not in the novella and you have not placed yourself within it. You feel your left over anger for the Governess is simmering. You remember you have your own senses. You hear the birds outside. You see that everything in the room is still, unaffected. The smell of your last meal is lingering in the air. You feel the book in your fingertips. Someone is not going to come into the room, grab it out of your hands, and throw it at you. It cannot hurt you. You are unaffected. And with this, you continue.

Imagination

While reading the end, try not to do anything other than imagine the scene created by the surface in front of you. Forget the birds, the scent, and the possibility of someone walking into the room. Forget you are in the room. Forget there is a book in your hands. Open a door to another room where you imagine this scene:

At this, after a second in which head made the movement of a baffled dog's on a scent and then gave a frantic littler shake for air and light, he was at me in a white rage, bewildered, glaring vainly over the place and missing wholly, though it now, to my sense, filled the room like a taste of poison, the wide, overwhelming presence. 'It's *he*?' I was so determined to have all my proof that I flashed into ice to challenge him. 'Whom do you mean by 'he'?' 'Peter Quint—you devil!' His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. '*Where*?' They are in my ears still, his supreme surrender of the name and his tribute to my devotion. 'What does he matter now, my own?— what will he *ever* matter? *I have you,*' I launched at the beast, 'but he has lost you forever!' Then, for the demonstration of my work, "*There, there!*" I said to Miles. But he had already jerked straight round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day. 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 the 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. (James 87)

So that was the end. I hope you pictured yourself in the scene. I hope you witnessed the death of Miles and *felt* something. I hope you fell in love with Henry James and he broke your heart. I

hope you feel everything that the world offers to you. I hope you are angry. I hope you feel cheated. I hope you felt no freedom and that you let go control of your thoughts and your feelings. If you did not- I believe you have failed. No matter whether you are a five year old, a student, a parent, a loner, a sinner, a world leader- the purpose of reading is to feel. Because when we feel we experience things and we learn. Never again cheat yourself out of such an experience ever again. Be brave. Be independent. Believe in freedom. But also allow yourself to learn from others even if it means you get hurt or confused by the relationship. Use the opportunity to learn about yourself and grow. You may have been a Surface Reader at the beginning of this thesis, but you can start interpreting. It is not hard. Just focus on your memories, your expectations, and your imagination.

Part IV: How I Read

There was one winter in high school when I realized my interpretation was worth something. It sounds like the soliloquy from the beginning of a coming-of-age film but it's true. I was in A.P. Language and Composition trying to figure out what Steinbeck thought when he wrote *East of Eden* and what he wanted us to think. I remember thinking- *I have no idea what he is thinking and I have no idea what he wants me to think*. But I did know what *I* thought. I knew what I felt, desired, who I cared about, and who I despised. It was around this time I started drinking coffee, journaling every day, and dedicating large amounts of time to drawing, painting, reading, and writing. That winter, I watched *Dead Poets Society* for the first time and *Call Me by Your Name* was made into a movie. I also became obsessed with Leonard Cohen who had died only a couple months beforehand. I probably would have been a Freudian Reader if I weren't so naive. I was so desperate for validation that when Robin Williams said, "When you read, don't just consider what the author thinks. Consider what you think", I felt that I had been both hit by a train and enveloped in a hug (*Dead Poets Society* 43:40). This was not a super carefree and social time for me. I obsessed over the potential power that I could have over a book and its power over me.

I was a sophomore in college when I read *The Turn of the Screw* for the first time. It was the early spring of 2020, meaning everyone was in quarantine from the outbreak of Covid-19. The reading experience was an obsessive one. The novella was a great escape from the present. It was a time when if you weren't struggling with the overwhelming presence of death, you were finding pleasure in the little things. This is why before I opened *The Turn of the Screw*, I had already made myself a cup of tea and eaten a full breakfast before sitting down in my

grandfather's uncomfortable chair.

It is important to recognize my baggage as a Freudian Reader by fault of being in a class about the relationship between Freud and literature. Other than the expectation that I would be able to apply psychoanalysis to the novella, I had no other expectations. This allowed me to bring in my own readerly expectations and hopes. As a reader, I am constantly attentive to texts that interact with me. This interest led me to write a paper for the class on how James reflects the different stages of the reading process back to us rather than on psychoanalysis. I argued that the reader's relationship with the novella was parallel to the relationship between Miles and the Governess. Other than being a Freudian Reader by default, my own nature as a reader most likely caused me to straddle between being a Freudian and Savior Reader.

My relationship with the novella has changed less than one would think over time. The events of the novella have had a minimal effect on me. Not to say that my reading was surface level, however the plot itself had little effect on the me. I barely think about the Governess or the other characters. When I do, From the first time I read *The Turn of the Screw*, I have always disliked the Governess and found Miles intriguing. I have always had trouble with my dislike through "We were cut off, really together; we were united in our danger. They had nothing but me, and I— well, I had *them*... I was a screen— I was to stand before them. The more I saw, the less they would" (James 27). I have always felt a twinge of respect for the Governess because of her ability to desire to protect the children in this way. And yet, by the end of each reading, I hope for the Governess to fail and for Miles to survive. I have always been attracted to the lake scene in Chapter VI which ends with the Governess stating, "I faced what I had to face" (James 29).

When I think of *The Turn of the Screw*, I do not think of the scenes above. I think of readership, distance, sexual ambiguity, psychoanalysis, and my relationship with literature.

After this thesis is fully edited and turned in, I know that I am going to physically distance myself not only from *The Turn of the Screw* but also from this. I will not reread this thesis until I have to or when I am nostalgic. Despite this, I know I will not be able to psychologically distance myself from the ideas that I have related to the novella in this thesis. I have already applied it to other works. In the frenzy bliss of writing this thesis, I found myself unhealthily categorizing not only people I knew but also fictional characters. Of course this thesis's purpose is not to categorize people but to show the freedom in interpreting. However, it's still good fun. I pictured Leonard Cohen as a Freudian Reader, Harry Potter as a Savior Reader, and Holly Golightly from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* as a Surface Reader. In Sally Rooney's novel *Beautiful World, Where Are You*, Alice, a novelist writes how her occupation affects her own readerly experience:

I'm not a painter or a musician, for good reason, but I am a novelist, and I do try to take the novel seriously—partly because I'm conscious of the extraordinary privilege of being allowed to make a living from something as definitionally useless as art. But if I tried to describe my experience of reading the great novels, it would not be remotely like the aesthetic experience I've described above, in which no volition is involved and no personal desires are stirred. Personally I have to exercise a lot of agency in reading, and understanding what I read, and bearing it all in mind for long enough to make sense of the books as I go along. In no sense does it feel like a passive process by which beauty is transmitted to me without my involvement; it feels like an active effort, of which an experience of beauty is the constructed result. (242)

Alice's baggage is that she is a writer. The way she reads is influenced by her privilege, ability to possibly place herself in the shoes of the writer themselves, and to understand the weight of a writer's power over their reader. Alice continues to dissect the effect of literature as she compares great novels to other mediums of art, "When I look at the 'Demoiselles d'Avignon', I don't 'want' anything from it. The pleasure is in seeing it as it is" (Rooney 242). I also believe this is the beauty of literature. One can still interpret a painting but I find it hard thinking of a painting that outwardly desires the viewer to interpret it. I think this is why fanfiction has become such a fad. When people are allowed to interpret, there is a sense of involvement that causes the interpreter to have a desire to control.

When I reread *Beautiful World, Where Are You*, I realized that Rooney had described my own Savior Reader. Alice, in a letter to a friend, reveals, "when I read books, I do experience desire: I want Isabel Archer to be happy, I want things to work out for Anna and Vronsky, I even want Jesus to be pardoned instead of Barabbas. Again it might be that I am a narrow-minded and rather vapid reader, sentimentally wishing the best for everyone" (Rooney 243). Like Alice, I brought my own baggage to my descriptions of my readers. And that is *okay* because they were my interpretations and I hope you as the reader of this thesis agree. My entire promotion of making an interpretation would be hypocritical if I had approached my writing as a Surface Reader. I hope that I have demonstrated the power of an interpretation not only in the content of my thesis but also in the form of my thesis.

You see, this thesis is laced with my baggage. I found that I was picturing others and parts of myself as different readers. I was indeed judgmental of the Freudian Reader, mean to the Savior

Reader, and spiteful against the Surface Reader. However, not only am I judgmental of the Freudian Reader, but I am the Freudian Reader. I am the Savior Reader and I am the Surface Reader.

I am a Freudian Reader in the way that I categorize others. I am the type of person to scroll Pinterest for hours singularly categorizing pictures into folders I will never look at again. I am a Freudian Reader in that I believe we do things because of our subconscious. I think our childhood surroundings play a larger part in our lives than we as a society and as individuals would like to admit. I always think there is more to a person's motives than what is immediately considered. I am a Freudian Reader in my obsession with aesthetics. I believe you can create the way you want to be perceived by curating your own aesthetic. Do not be fooled, I am not here just because I like literature. I enjoy the reputation of being an English major. I enjoy tweed jackets and coffee and tea and whiskey and brooding and deep talks for the sake of talking deeply. I like classical music and I like being caught blasting it through my headphones. I like having conversations about sex and how it underlines our actions and relationships and ultimately who we are and how we act within this world around us.

I am a Savior Reader in the way that I am often swept away in the beauty of things. Often distracted actually. In my particularity for things, I romanticize everything, so it fits my hopes and desires. I am selfish. When I said, "You're a social person. You know how to have and hold conversations. While you are a certain kind of romantic, you have a life outside your own thoughts. And even though you are the main character, you care about others. You have empathy. You help people because you know that's what you're supposed to do and you often

expect it out of others,” I was speaking to myself (Bowen 45). When I finish a show, book, or movie I will move on to Fanfiction, YouTube, Tumblr, or any other platform that allows indulgence. I refuse endings and I refuse the ending of *The Turn of the Screw*- hence this thesis.

I am even a Surface Reader when it comes to my relationship with people and things. I refuse endings but if I am forced into one, it is the end. I am good at taking a pair of scissors to people and things. At one point in my life, I tried to convince myself that I was namely a Surface Reader. I know the harm that can come not only to a person but also to others when they believe they have the capability to be a Surface Reader. As I learned junior year of high school, “we rip out so much of ourselves to be cured of things faster that we go bankrupt at the age of thirty and have less to offer each time we start with someone new. But to make yourself feel nothing so as not to feel anything- what a waste” (*Call Me by Your Name* 2:00:08). What a waste to spend time pretending to be a Surface Reader.

So before you turn this last page or turn off your computer, please read this last paragraph. If you ever get caught up in thinking that you have no impact on the world or it has no impact on you—do something. Anything. Read this thesis. Go for a walk. Call a parent. Drink a cup of tea. So something that affects you and possibly affects another. I have learned that the cure to the harmful mindset is simply reading something that affects me. Or surrounding myself with people I love. Or thinking about things or partaking in activities I love. I have to remind myself that involving oneself is not a weakness. It is human and it is beautiful.

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