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(MIS)RECOGNITION AND CHANGING ROLES – A LACANIAN READING OF
HENRY JAMES'S *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*

por

SANDRA MINA TAKAKURA

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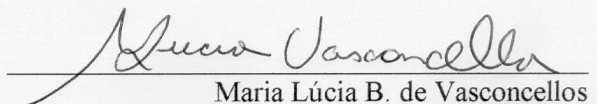
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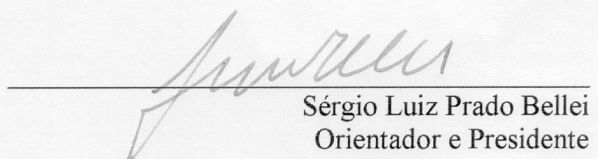
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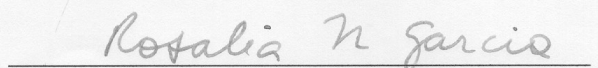
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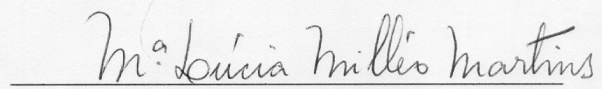
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 Maria Lúcia B. de Vasconcellos
 Coordenadora

BANCA EXAMINADORA:


 Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei
 Orientador e Presidente


 Rosalia Angelita N. Garcia
 Examinadora


 Maria Lúcia Milleo Martins
 Examinadora

Florianópolis, 25 de Fevereiro de 2003

For my mother Chiyoko, my father Noboru,
my elder sister Mayumi, my little brother Koji,
and my little sister Izumi.

For my roots, Hiura no Jiitchan and Baatchan
and Takakura no Jiitchan and Baatchan who
are in Tengoku.

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ABSTRACT

(MIS)RECOGNITION AND CHANGING ROLES – A LACANIAN READING OF
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SANDRA MINA TAKAKURA

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

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Supervising Professor: Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei

James B. Twitchell suggests that horror art develops at a moment of “communal insecurity.” The English *fin-de-siècle* monsters, for example, appeared in a moment of deep questioning of Victorian cultural value (50). The ghosts of The Turn of the Screw are monstrous in the sense that their anti-hegemonic discourse is opposed to the governess’s discourse, which is subjected to the master’s hegemonic and patriarchal power. My hypothesis is that the novel illustrates the confrontation of those antagonistic forces, having as a battlefield the pupils Miles and Flora. I base my analysis mainly on Psychoanalytical Feminism and the historical account of the Victorian governess and its intrinsic relation with lunacy. My analysis of the novel aims at scrutinizing these antagonistic powers, as well as the discourse that each side sustains. Finally, I conclude that, although the novel illustrates a resistance against a hegemonic patriarchal discourse, it points to the permanence of that oppressive system and to the maintenance of the female in a passive position in society.

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RESUMO

James B. Twitchell sugere que a arte do horror se desenvolve no momento de “insegurança comunal”. E este é o caso dos monstros ingleses do fim de século, que apareceram no momento de profundo questionamento da cultura da sociedade vitoriana (50). Os fantasmas de The Turn of the Screw podem ser incluídos nesse grupo, já que expressam um discurso anti-hegemônico que se opõe ao discurso da governanta, que é submetido ao discurso hegemônico e patriarcal do mestre. Minha hipótese é que a novela ilustra o confronto dessas forças antagônicas, tendo como campo de batalha os pupilos Miles e Flora. Minha análise baseia-se, principalmente, na teoria do feminismo psicanalítico e em dados históricos sobre a governanta Vitoriana e sua relação estreita com a loucura. O objetivo da análise da novela é examinar as forças antagônicas e os discursos que cada uma dessas forças sustenta. Finalmente, concluo que, apesar da novela ilustrar a resistência contra o discurso hegemônico e patriarcal, ela enfatiza a continuidade do sistema opressivo e a permanência da mulher em uma posição passiva na sociedade.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In James's *The Turn of the Screw*, the main character of the novel is a female who is attributed the role as governess by the uncle of two children, Miles and Flora. Having to provide motherly affection and paternalistic education, she attempts to establish a mother-daughter relationship with Flora and a mother-son relationship with Miles. As an educator, the governess attempts to provide an ideal model to be followed by the pupils, despite the evil influence of the ghosts, molding Miles and Flora in her image and thus constructing her own identity.

The story is centered on the process of acculturation of these children, but this process is disrupted by the presence of the characters Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. These apparitions convey an opposing power that sustains a resistance to the process of acculturation imposed by the governess. The governess confronts the ghosts and re-establishes the order, but the price is Flora's mental breakdown and Miles's death.

The novel proposes a reading of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel as being either ghosts or the result of the governess's hallucinations, or lunacy. Some critics sustain that the novel illustrates a case of apparition of ghosts: Joseph Warren Beach, Carl and Mark Van Doren, F. O. Matthiessen, Kenneth Murdock, Elmer Stoll, Katherine Anne Porter, Allen Tate, F. R. Leavis, among others (Booth 314; Beidler 133). Other critics have claimed that the story is a case of hallucination or lunacy: Edmund Wilson, Thomas M. Cranfill and Robert L. Clark, Jr. Building, and Leon Edel, among others (Beidler 130-2). In the late 1970s, a third view, influenced by Tzvetan Todorov and Jacques Lacan, accepted both theories and proposed the possibility of reading the novel as a ghost story *and* as a case of hallucination, or lunacy. The

representatives of this view are, among others, Dorothea Krook, Christine Brooke-Rose, Shlomith Rimmon, and Shoshana Felman.

This new perspective expands the frame of possibilities in the reading of the novel. In this context of interpretive expansion, my own reading will privilege the governess's testimony about the ghosts in the attempt to explore the intrinsic relation between the governess and lunacy in Victorian History. I will deal with the construction of identity and gender undergone by the governess and the pupils through the master's patriarchal discourse of socialization and acculturation. These processes are opposed by the ghosts Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, who induce the pupils to resistance by providing them with an anti-hegemonic discourse. The governess's job is to exorcise the ghosts, saving the pupils from the evil influence and conducting them to the acceptable patterns established by the master.

A brief comment on Gothic elements, the intertwining of the historical data on the governess's job, its intrinsic relation to lunacy, and texts on Lacan's theory on ego and subject will provide me with the basis to analyze the novel. That will lead to a discussion of categories such as the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. Lacanian psychoanalysis will be studied in the light of essays by Jane Gallop, Elizabeth Grosz, and Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, as well as by Lacan's work. Despite the fact that the novel is written by a male writer, I will approach the novel through a Psychoanalytical Feminist perspective, since the novel deals with the role assumed by females in the Victorian Age, especially the role of moral maintenance of the nucleus of the family. In this thesis, the concept of man and woman will be based on two categories, one related to biologic sex, female and male, and the other related to socially constructed gender, masculine and feminine.

*

The title of my thesis, *(Mis) recognition and Changing Roles – A Lacanian Reading of Henry James's The Turn of the Screw*, can be explained in the following way: As the

governess has to build a new identity to fit her position as mother substitute and as educator, Flora and Miles also have to adjust themselves in order to fit in this new reality. For Lacan, the identification first occurs through the recognition of the other, the external *gestalt*, or the imago in the mirror, the whole being that is internalized as being an *ideal ego*. That is sustained by *ego-ideals*, signifiers provided by the Other (A) who continuously categorizes the self by inscribing categories such as name, gender, occupation, and so on. The title points to this notion of (mis) identification through and with the other(s) in the process of identity construction. That process of identification is disrupted as the ghosts attempt to subvert the order, inducing the pupils to resist the imposition of cultural categories by providing an alternative *ideal*. Their aspiration to usurp a position of command and control, which is the place of the Other (A) occupied by the master, provokes a struggle for occupying the place of the master, causing them to endeavor to change their roles as dominated to the role of command. The governess also endeavors to occupy the place of the master in order to *save* the children. In the final struggle, the governess imposes the patriarchal model on the pupils, subjecting her own identity to the master.

**

I believe that this reading of The Turn of the Screw will amount to a contribution to the field of literary theory. It might also throw new light on The Turn of the Screw. I also believe that the present study will be a contribution to the understanding of James's novel as a work of permanent interest. The argument is organized in the following way:

In the first section, I will present a discussion of the dialects of the novel that allows for two contradictory perspectives: the ghost story and a case of hallucination or lunacy. I will also present a third view that advocates both perspectives, thus broadening the scope of possibilities of reading the novel. Then, I will introduce the problematic to be investigated: first, the construction of the governess's identity as being the acculturating power; second, the

movement of resistance instigated by the ghosts and the attempt to subvert the role established by the master, and, finally, the confrontation between both. I will also include a brief presentation of the theoretical basis that will help me tackle the issues of the novel, as well as an explanation of the choice of my title. Finally, I will present a brief summary of the sections of the thesis.

In chapter two, divided into three parts, I will scrutinize the bases through which the problematic of the novel will be tackled. First, I will explore the novel as reflecting the insecurity and the deep questioning of the historical moment. Second, I will present the socio-economical and cultural milieu in which the governess lived, observing its intricacies, such as the required sexual *neutrality* that causes the nullification of her own sexuality, and eventually leads her to insanity. Third, I will scrutinize Jaques Lacan's theories of the formation of the ego and the subject.

In chapter three, I will scrutinize the governess's identity as being dependent on the role attributed to her by the master, who assumes the role as the Other (*A*), as the entity of the Name of the Father. In this role, the governess provides patriarchal values through signifiers or *ego-ideal* to Miles and Flora. However, Miles's presence is important for her identity as well as for her sexuality, inasmuch as he becomes her *object a*, or her substitute phallus, through which she endeavors to solve her castration problem. The ghosts Peter Quint and Miss Jessel become representatives of the values of the lower class, providing another *ideal*, which is opposed to the one offered by the governess based on the values of the master. If the master represents the hero, hegemonic culture, civilization, and beauty, the ghosts symbolize the villain, subversive culture, uncivilized behavior, and monstrosity.

In chapter four, I will study the governess's struggle against the ghosts. She seems to lose control of the situation, as Flora and Miles play games with her. In the final encounters with the ghosts, the governess exorcises them, saving Flora from Miss Jessel's influence and

Miles from Quint's domain. She thus maintains her position as subject of desire, whose identity is intrinsically related to the role attributed by the master.

In the final chapter, I will summarize the main points discussed in the reading of the novel. The governess becomes the spokeswoman for the master's discourse in order to confront the ghosts' anti-hegemonic discourse. The governess represents the patriarchal *ego-ideal*, whereas the ghosts sustain another *ideal* based on lower-class values. However, the discourse of the ghosts leads to the recognition of the impossibility of subverting the order and of undermining patriarchal hegemony. The governess saves both Miles and Flora, imposing the patriarchal discourse, submitting her identity to the *ego-ideal* strongly embedded in patriarchal and gender values.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter consists of three parts. The first focuses on the scrutiny on the novel as a means through which the individual reveals his or her deep discontentment and questions the values of society. The second explores the cultural attribution of a Victorian governess as an oppressive apparatus of Victorian society and her predicaments as a common figure in Victorian asylum. Finally, the third aims at presenting considerations on Lacanian theories of the construction of identity and the process of acculturation.

2.1- The Ghosts as Mirrors for Discontents

In The Gothic Flame, Devendra P. Varma explores the *Gothic writing* as “the psychological condition of literate Western Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, and [as] the psychological condition of *other periods* when men experienced *similar pressures*, and thus, ultimately, to the permanent nature of man¹” (xiii). Victorians have also faced a similar situation, as James B. Twitchell points out: “[writers] in the 1880s simply admitted what was first implicit and then endemic in Victorianism: things were coming apart, and fast. The center – if ever there was such a thing – was simply not holding” (50). He also suggests that horror art develops at a moment of “communal insecurity,” as in the case of the *fin-de-siècle* monsters that questioned the cultural values of Victorian society (50).

In this context, James’s novel reveals images that also question the manners, values, and habits of Victorian society, by opposing them to the values of the working class. David Punter, in The Literature of Terror, points out that the governess, who repeats the discourse of the master, “represent[s] one kind of education, an induction into reason and order,” and that

Peter Quint and Miss Jessel offer “the children [Miles and Flora] a different kind of ‘education’, less pure” (54).

The education proposed by Quint is conveyed through the significance of his deformity, since he is pictured as having a “villainous back that no hunch could have more disfigured” (James 66). Deformities, as Sérgio Bellei points out in Monstros, Índios e Canibais, is crucial to the comprehension of the concept of monstrosity (13). Quint thus fits in the category of monster. Like Quint, the monster, the native, and the cannibal are considered as disfigured, dark, and primitive, and form a single group that opposes the group of the civilized and white. A line is drawn between those groups that legitimize the status of hegemonic, national, identity, and system, and the groups that are excluded. In James’s novel, the master represents the white, civilized, and socialized individual, who is part of the dominant system as a whole, whereas Peter Quint symbolizes the monster and the excluded.

2.2- Victorian Emissaries of Culture

The governess was considered a cause of anxiety for the Victorians, inasmuch as she performed a singular role in society. Being responsible for moral maintenance, she was also responsible for keeping the boundaries between the middle class and the working class. According to Mary Poovey, a Victorian governess “was like the middle-class mother in the work she performed, but like both a working-class woman and man in the wages she received.” She was, indeed, “the very figure who theoretically should have defended the naturalness of separate spheres [but] threatened to collapse the difference between them” (127). Thus, she reproduced the discourse of society on gender roles justified by naturalism and biologism, relegating the female to the private sphere and the male to the public sphere.

Naturalism is here understood as a form of essentialism that defines identity according to ontological, or theological reasons (Grosz, Difference par.8).

Biologism also limits the role of the female in society, as it is also “a particular form of essentialism in which women’s essence is based in terms of women’s biological capacities” (par.7). Naturalism becomes tantamount to biologism in the sense that it “presumes the equivalence of biological and natural properties” (Grosz, Difference par. 8). Thus, the governess’s attributions reinforced those biological and natural assumptions about the female. Since she helped to distinguish the “well-bred, well-educated, and perfect gentlewoman” of a higher class from the “low-born, ignorant, and vulgar” working-class woman (qt. in Poovey, 128), she also established the boundary between the working class and the middle class. The governess, for some critics, “was not the bulwark against immorality and class erosion but the conduit through which working-class habits would infiltrate the middle-class home” (Poovey 129). That was a threat, as a tradesman’s daughter could assume the role as governess, provoking the “degradation of [the governess’s] body so important to the moral interest of the community” (qt. in Poovey 29). Thus, the governess’s duty in maintaining the separation of the spheres and preventing class erosion depended exclusively on her morality.

The *ideal* was believed to be achieved “If the lower-class women were to emulate middle-class wives in their deference, thrift, and discipline.” In this context, “the homes of rich and poor alike would become what they ought to be – havens from the debilitating competition of the market” (Poovey 129). The achievement of this ideal would also involve the issue of morality, since the culture of the working class was considered as being immoral and inappropriate for the higher class.

Another problem for the governess was the hardship of her job, that required “self-control” and “sexual neutrality” (Poovey 129). Since the governess played her role as mother substitute and as educator, she had to be well composed, with a serene mien that conveyed

confidence, security, and emotional stability. Besides that, she was expected to perform her monotonous daily routine without expressing annoyance, or losing her composure. The governess's attribution consisted in the instruction and acculturation of the pupils, producing the "next generation of middle-class wives" (Poovey 128). In this process, female pupils were subjected to the sexual repression and the strict social codes and manners that would shape them into marriageable women.

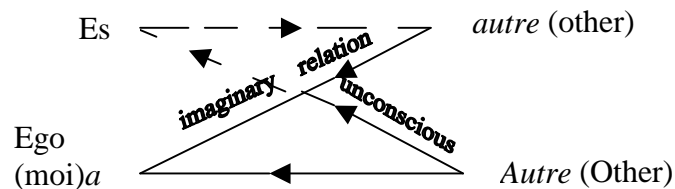
On the other hand, the governess also had to manage her own libido, as she was supposed to decline any attempt of male approach in the name of morality. Ironically, the image of the governess became associated with the images of the lunatic and the fallen woman (Poovey 129), and thus, the governess's sexual *neutrality* became somehow doubtful. Any female who allowed male approach was considered a fallen woman, or a prostitute, since the notion of prostitution was broad, as sexual relation was only permitted within the bounds of marriage. The relation of the governess to lunacy was grounded on historical reasons. The governess "accounted for the single largest category of women in lunatic asylums," according to Lady Eastlake's review for the 1847 report of the GBI (Governess Benevolent Institution) and the author of "Hints on the Modern Governess System" (Poovey 130). Lady Eastlake attributed to the predicament of the governess's job, which was hardened by her sexual repression, the reason for such a great number of inmates (Poovey 130). Therefore, the governess was a figure that established the morally irreproachable environment at homes of middle class families, epitomizing the domestic ideal, and also a figure that threatened to collapse this ideal (Poovey 127). Thus, the model of an ideal family required necessarily the governess's sexual *neutrality*, which was achieved at the expense of the nullification of her libido and the repression of her sexuality. This repression would, inevitably, produce mental disturbances.

Victorian doctors attributed the origin of madness to moral and to physical reasons. For instance, “domestic grief, unemployment, and loss of property” were considered moral causes for madness, whereas “intemperance, masturbation, and head injury” were examples of physical cause (Showalter 30). For some doctors, morality was intrinsically associated to socioeconomic class, inasmuch as the less privileged individuals had to struggle for their survival, and thus, the hardship inevitably predisposed their brains to lunacy (Showalter 29). Victorian doctors also formulated a theory named “reflex insanity in women,” that linked “female reproductive system and nervous system” (Showalter 55): This theory explained that “women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because of the instability of their reproductive systems [that] interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control” (Showalter 55). As biologic sex defined lunacy, the concept of lunacy became problematic. The fact that the governess of James’s novel is considered a lunatic does not depend on whether she sees hallucinations, or ghosts. It depends on the very fact of being female and of possessing an unstable reproductive system. Victorian asylums became known as paternalistic institutions that domesticated insanity by submitting madwomen to sessions of repetitive domestic tasks that would reintegrate them to society, as well-adjusted and productive females capable of performing household tasks and finding their place in society. Thus, Victorian doctors, supported by an underlying patriarchal discourse, categorized females as potentially insane. This would lead to two premises: females should be constantly watched due to their unstable sexual organs, and should be domesticated to remain or to become sane. For Victorians, lunacy became essentially female. In the Arts, women were portrayed in terms of “poetic, artistic, and theatrical images of a youthful, beautiful female insanity” (Showalter10).

2.3- The Construction of Identity - Theories on Ego and Subject

This section aims at presenting the theories of the ego and the subject from the Psychoanalytical Feminist perspective, observing the resulting construction of identity and the categorization of gender. The following Lacanian illustration will be instrumental for my discussion:

The Formation of Ego and Subject



Schema 1: Schema L

Source: Grosz, Feminist 73

For Lacanian scholars, prior to the formation of ego and the organization of drives, the newborn infant still lives in the Real². This condition makes the infant deeply dependent on the mother, as he/she still lives as if it were inside the uterus, or in the Real. During this period the infant cannot hold “borders, divisions, or oppositions” (Grosz, Feminist 34), and seems to be “ubiquitous”, since it is not distinguished from the environment that surrounds it or from the object that satisfies it. During this period, the infant cannot hold “borders, divisions, or oppositions” (Grosz, Feminist 34).

From six to eighteen months, the infant recognizes its *gestalt* in a mirror that provides an illusion of being “whole,” which is called an “orthopaedic” being (Écrits 5). The recognition of the body as being whole is followed by a moment of jubilation and a paranoid knowledge that is “constructed by a split, misrecognizing subject” (Lacan, Écrits 2; Grosz, Feminist 40). From the locus that the infant does the perceiving, it distinguishes the inner

environment, mental world, or *Innenwelt* from the other(s), the outside environment, or *Umwelt* (Lacan, Écrits 4). Contact with the *Umwelt* allows for the entrance of the infant into a process of acculturation, for it initiates a “social exchange” (Grosz, Feminist 73). The infant gradually distinguishes the *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*, the ego and the other, and the subject and object, ultimately endeavoring “to *be* the other in a vertiginous spiral from one term or identity to the other” (Grosz, Feminist 47). Henceforth, the infant leaves the Real towards the Imaginary, initiates the process of formation of the ego, eventually faces a rift in the Real, and starts dwelling in the realm of “the order of images, representations, doubles, and others in its specular identifications” (Grosz, Feminist 35).

The counterpart in the mirror provides an illusion of being whole that suggests that the world is inhabited by whole beings. Those beings are the other (*a*) that are gradually identified and internalized, forming the illusion named ego, *moi, autre*’ represented by small *a* and apostrophe: *a*’ (Grosz, Feminist 74). For Ragland-Sullivan, Lacan “collapsed the Freudian id and ego into the *moi*, and extended the id into the realm of unconscious Desire” (53).

After the mirror phase, a symbolic father as the Other (A) disrupts the mother-son relationship, thus avoiding incest. Thus, from the place of the Other (A), all the questions related to the individual’s existence are proposed (Lacan, Écrits 214). In short, the Other (A) proposes the signifier that categorizes the individual. Any presence of authority in the discourse of the mother or the father can represent the entity that imposes the Name of the Father; for instance, in James, the master in the novel is this authority, as he corresponds to the entity that imposes the Law. The infant, then, finally enters into the Symbolic Order, the field of the Other (A) and of language. The locus of the Father, or the Other (A) establishes the subject’s unconscious that accesses directly the “Es”, which no longer can be called id or it, but je, “I”, or the subject of the unconscious (Grosz, Feminist 74). Then, the subject is

ready to occupy the speaking position within a discourse as “I”, or “je”, having all her relations mediated by the *autre*, or *moi* and Other (A). The father functions as a superego and the male infant “introjects the key ingredients of social morality, and the appropriate psychical attributes which enable him to undertake social relations as an active subject” (Grosz, Feminist 72). The father installs the castration³, and the male infant has direct access to the mother barred, by the same token, he is attributed an “authorized speaking position,” (Grosz, Feminist 72) inasmuch as he receives the right to have his name. On the other hand, the female infant receives the father’s name temporarily, inasmuch as she has to substitute the husband’s name for the father’s name with the advent of marriage (Grosz, Feminist 72). Thus, the female speaks either in the father’s name or in the husband’s name. Identity, in this process, *is* constructed, instead of being formed naturally. Lacan in Écrits posits that:

the marriage tie is governed by an order of preference whose law concerning the kinship names is, like language, imperative for the group in its forms, but unconscious in its structure [...]

[...] This law, then, is revealed clearly enough as identical with an order of language. For without kinship nominations, no power is capable of instituting the order of preferences and taboos that bind and weave the yarns of lineage through succeeding generations. (72-3)

The female “accepts the mother’s submission to the Law and to the Father (Grosz, Feminist 69). The female infant starts speaking “in a mode of masquerade, in imitation of the masculine phallic object” (Grosz, Feminist 69). In James’s novel, this is particularly evinced in the relationship between the governess and the master.

Ideal Ego and Ego-Ideal

According to Ragland-Sullivan, the *moi* is “originally constituted by an identification with another as whole (body) object in the mirror stage” (48). Also, the *moi* is constituted by layers of successive identifications or fusion, by which it then constitutes reality and its objects. In conscious life the *moi* appears as persona, role, or appearance rather than consciousness or even subjectivity. While adhering to language, the *moi* makes implicit demands for response and recognition, in which statements of opinion and manifestations of knowledge are inverted questions of identity posed to the Other (A) via the other (‘Who am I really? What am I to / of you?’).” (Ragland-Sullivan 48)

The *moi* “(which was initially mother-oriented) gradually comes to identify with the father as a secondary introjection identified with cultural ideals while the (m)Other remains as the conscious source for primary identity with objects of Desire (Ragland-Sullivan 56). The *moi* can be seen as an *ideal ego*, inasmuch as “*ideal ego* is linked to a primordial sense of self, as it enters into the projection of one’s being in requests or demands, while the [*ego-ideal*] is the reflection of one’s idealized *moi* identity in the secondary narcissistic relationships” (Ragland-Sullivan 54).

The *moi* is, then, the *ideal ego*, the imago that is internalized as being the ego (Ragland-Sullivan 3). The *ideal ego* functions on the Imaginary level and is legitimized by the *ego-ideal*, through signifiers provided by the parents who represent the Other (A). Thus *ego-ideal* belongs to the Symbolic Order and categorizes the *moi* through signifiers such as name, gender, ethnic group, socio-economic class, occupation, and so on. The *ego-ideal* can be seen as the culture that imposes several categories on the individual. This means that the subject’s identity is constructed by the identification with signifiers provided by the Other. That process

explains that the individual is the effect of cultural and social factors, thus contradicting the argument of biologism, in which “social and cultural factors are the effects of biologically given causes” in the individual (Grosz, Difference par.7).

For Lacan, identity is not pre-established and defined by biology, but constructed. Especially in Victorian times, biologism and naturalism prevented the emancipation of the female by asserting that identity and, consequently, gender were pre-determined, given, and pre-established, instead of being constructed. Those patterns can be understood as biologic sex defined or determined by gender, in which the male had to be masculine and the female had to be feminine.

Subject of Desire - Need, Demand, and Desire

Need, Demand, and Desire roughly correspond to the categories of *Real, Imaginary,* and *Symbolic*. For Grosz, when the infant is born, it is but a piece of flesh that lives in the Real (Feminist 62), and, as any living animal, feels *need* that is essentially biological and primordial to guarantee its survival (Grosz, Feminist 62). When it perceives that the mother is absent it starts making demands; thus, when the infant cries for the breast, it demands two objects: “the object or thing demanded [...] and the other to whom the demand is ostensibly addressed” (Grosz, Feminist 61). By demanding the breast, it, in fact, demands the mother. Since the object of demand is always an imaginary object, the infant wishes an imaginary mother who can be unconditionally present and who can provide him her absolute love. Demand cannot be satisfied since it requires the ego’s identification with the other’s demand, which will only be fulfilled by the “nullification” of the demanded ego (Grosz, Feminist 61). The baby’s cry is a demand originated from the submission of the biological need to language. As females are considered individuals castrated by language, the castrated mother demands, in her turn, that the male infant be the missing phallus (Grosz, Feminist 71).

The male infant demands the mother's unconditional love and attempts to correspond to the mother's demand by endeavoring to *be* her missing phallus. The demand occurs "on a conscious level, yet it exists in a limbo region where the subject is neither fully animal (natural need is alienated by its articulation) nor fully human (not yet regulated by and positioned within a signifying and social order)" (Grosz, Feminist 62-3). Demands are directed to others who can "either comply or refuse to satisfy it, being submitted to an interpersonal and familial pressure that prefigures social morality and the norms governing the superego" (Grosz, Feminist 65). Though demand begins a process of acculturation and social interaction, it is always directed to the *phallic mother*, previous to the castration. For this reason, demand is "insatiable, a correlate and function of the mother's phallic omnipotence *vis-à-vis* the child. Demand is the result of the ego's self idealization and aggrandisement – a measure of the magnitude of the *ego-ideal* (the psychic double or ideal of otherness to which the ego aspires)" (Grosz, Feminist 63).

Thus, the dyad relationship between mother and infant is structured on what Lacan has organized around two verbs: "to be" and "to have" (Écrits 320). The mother wants to "have" a phallus and wants the male infant "to be" her substitute phallus, and, thus, the infant is supposed to submit to the mother's demand nullifying itself, since she does not want him, or his phallus, but she demands that he become her substitute phallus. However, the mother's demand is not satisfied, since the Law castrates both the mother, who is prevented from *having* the phallus, and the infant, who is prevented from *being* her substitute phallus. The law castrates also both the male infant who challenges the Law, by identifying with the signifier of power, and the female infant, who perceives her castration as well as the mother's castration, and becomes aware of the phallus as a signifier of power. Knowing that the Father possesses the phallus, the female infant turns her attention to him.

Since demand results from the verbalization of need through language, demand introduces the infant to language. But it still cannot occupy the position as subject, speaker, or “I”. Only through *desire* can the infant occupy this position, since *desire* marks the entrance into the field of the Other, “the domain or order of the Law and language,” where the “signifier has primacy over the subject” (Grosz, Feminist 66).

In 1964, Lacan postulated the origin of Desire as being “the void, the voice, the gaze, and the Phallus”, but in 1972 and 1973, he added the imagistic part-objects: the breast, the excrement, the gaze, and the voice with human and non-human objects (Ragland-Sullivan 75). The part-objects become related by the umbrella term *object a*, which is a signifier (Ragland-Sullivan 75). In Encore, Lacan points out the nature of the object as being a “semblance of being”, inasmuch as “it seems to give us the basis (*support*) of being,” (95) and also a fragment of the splitting between mother and infant, at the moment in which the infant feels *jouissance*. Lacan distinguishes *pleasure* from *Jouissance*, since the former “obeys the law of homeostasis that Freud evokes in ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, whereby, through discharge, the psyche seeks the lowest possible level of tension. ‘*Jouissance*’ transgresses this law and, in that respect, is *beyond* the pleasure principle” (Sheridan xiii). In other words, in this quest for unity (*jouissance*), the ego pursues what would complete it, even though this would also mean to pursue something that inevitably causes pain and discomfort. Thus, in the pursuit of the lost *jouissance* the ego will attempt to recover that state of unity, endeavoring to repeat that mother-infant relationship (Ragland-Sullivan 303).

Desire is originated from the loss of the *object a*, whereas the possession of this object is believed to restore that loss providing reunification (*jouissance*). The phallus, like the *object a*, creates lack initiating desire and the ever-lasting search for substitutes for the lost mother-infant unity, and in this way the individual does not endeavor to renounce and to

repress desire, but attempts to satisfy desire through re-encountering the “presocial self” (Ragland-Sullivan 271).

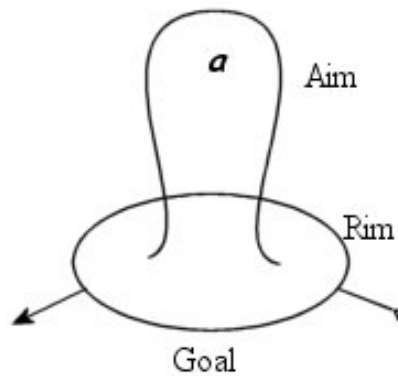
For Lacan, the “subject exhausts himself in pursuing the desire of the other, which he will never be able to grasp as his own desire, because his own desire is the desire of the other” (Lacan, Technique 221). It thus pursues itself i.e. its own identity. In James, this is the case of the governess, as her attempt to be recognized by the master reveals her desire for the master (37). In her relationship with the master, she thus attempts to grasp her own identity and desire.

Instinct and Drive

According to Ragland-Sullivan, Lacan substituted need, demand, and desire for Freud’s instinct and drive. However, in Os Quatro Conceitos Fundamentais da Psicanálise, Lacan amply explored the concept of drive as a mechanism that always produces satisfaction. For Lacan, drive distinguishes human beings from animals, which are guided by instincts. These are always satisfied, as the object is pre-established and irreplaceable, and is primordial for survival, such as milk. When human beings live in the realm of the Real, they feel the primordial biological *need* that is ruled by “instinct.” However, it is very complex to explain exactly when the shift from *instinct* to drive occurs in the individual. Instinct is closely related to drive, as it prepares the field for drive, which uses the erotogenic zone that connects the psychic and the somatic zone used by instinct for primary needs. Inasmuch as drive involves the field of the Other, it pertains to the Symbolic (Grosz, Feminist 59).

During the Mirror Phase, the infant encounters the other in the mirror and its body becomes erotogenized as a whole, some zones being more privileged than others. The following illustration will help in detailing the mechanism of drive. The erotogenic zone is a hole surrounded by a rim (Grosz, Feminist 76) that connects the somatic field, which pertains

to the territory of the subject, or the body to the psychic field, which belongs to the domain of the Other. Thus, through the erotogenic zone, the infant establishes communication with other(s).



Schema 2: Drive

Source: Lacan, Conceitos 169

The aim of drive is the *object a*, the object lost with the advent of the Symbolic that, once lost, can be replaced by any object, or any substitute for this object. The loss of the *object a* is the cause of an ever lasting desire, and thus, drive becomes the “field where desire is manifested” (Grosz, Feminist 76). The drive occurs in the following mechanism: a vector leaves the somatic field towards the *object a* on the field of the Other (Lacan, Conceitos 101, 169-0). But when the circuit approaches the *object a*, its place is perceived to be empty; thus, the vector bypasses the empty space and returns from the field of the Other toward the field of the ego (Lacan, Conceitos 169-0). This movement of the circuit creates a pressure that keeps the hole open.

The goal of the drive is the “itinerary” itself, the going to the field of the Other and the returning from the field of the Other to the somatic zone of the body (Lacan, Conceitos 170). The aim of the drive is the *object a*, which is never reached. Since the goal is the circuit itself, the ego always finds satisfaction through drive (Lacan, Conceitos 170).

Lacan uses the example of “scopic drive,” which involves the images of the voyeur and the exhibitionist to illustrate this trajectory of the drive as being passive and active:

The gaze is not located just at the level of the eyes. The eyes may very well not appear, they may be masked. The gaze is not necessarily the face of our fellow being, it could just as easily be the window which we assume he is lying in wait for us. It is an x , the object when faced with which the subject becomes object. (Lacan, Technique 220)

The gaze has the power of turning the one who is gazed into an object. Lacan also mentions the possibility of the active becoming the passive: the one who gazes at, becomes the one who is gazed at (Lacan, Conceitos 172-3). Drive as motivated by the phallus also disrupts the “identity and certainty,” (Grosz, Feminist 79) since it promotes the encounter with the demand of the other.

When the individual gazes at the other, it has a significant S^1 , the idea “I am X”. Through gazing, the ego goes towards the field of the other in search of the *object a*, it encounters the demand of the other, and then, it returns to its body with the signified S^2 , *I am Y*. This process occurs when the infant gazes at the mother, expecting her demands as answers for its *demand* and identity: *you are hungry or thirsty or you are boy, or girl, strong, or delicate*. But this process of identification always leaves residues; namely, doubts, and the ego is entrapped in a continuous cycle of searching for the *object a* in the other. This process continues forever, ending only with the advent of death.

Subject and Phallus

In Freud’s Paper on Technique, Lacan postulates that it is primordial to analysis “recognizing what function the subject takes on in the order of the symbolic relations which covers the entire field of human relations, and whose initial cell is the Oedipus complex,

where the assumption of sex is decided” (67). Ragland-Sullivan interprets Lacan’s “biologic sex” as intrinsically related to identity as male or female; but since the processes of identification also involve the entrance into language and the process of acculturation, she also adopts Schneiderman’s concepts of “gender identity” as “feminine or masculine” (qt. in Ragland-Sullivan 268). Also, she proposes that the phallus is mistakenly used to refer to the male genital organ, defining the distinction of the male who possesses it and the female who lacks it. She sustains Lacan’s view on the neutrality of the phallus, inasmuch as “the phallic signifier does not denote any sexual gender or superiority” (Ragland-Sullivan 271). Also, she proposes that “femininity and masculinity are Oedipal interpretations of castration-as-loss, and prepare the way for normative womanhood or homosexuality; for instance, masculinity first experiences castration-as-loss, but later denies this loss and incompleteness, as lesbianism or normative manhood” (Ragland-Sullivan 294-5). Thus, woman identifies with a seeker of phallus, and man with the possessor of phallus. For instance, if the female interprets the Oedipus drama denying the loss, she will become phallic or lesbian, and if the male identifies with the loss becoming a seeker of phallus, he will become a homosexual. At first, this problem seems to imply social effects abstracted from biology, but then, it is possible to notice that the issue cannot be abstracted from the relation between the phallus as a signifier that engenders a difference, namely, the “penis” that privileges the male as its possessor of it over the female who is defined as lacking it.

Following Lacan’s definition of women as being *pas toute*, or not whole, men are considered *tout*, or whole (Encore 7), this distinction fits the binary A B system of language, in which “A” is not “B”. Grosz criticizes Lacan’s binary A B opposition, as “one term generat[es] a non-reciprocal definition of the other as its negative,” privileging one of those terms as being the positive (Grosz Feminist, 124). She sustains the essentialistic view of “pure difference,” in which each term would be defined according to its *essence* without privileging

either term (Grosz Feminist, 124). This viewpoint is problematic, since it is not possible to grasp the essence of man and woman and of masculine and feminine.

She also points out that “the valorization of the penis and the relegation of female sexual organs to the castrated category are effects of a socio-political system that also enables the phallus to function as the ‘signifier or signifiers,’ giving the child access to a (sexual) identity and speaking position within a culture” (Feminist 122). In her view “it is not men per se who cause women’s oppression, but rather the socio-economic and linguistic structure, i. e. the Other” (Feminist 144).

In Thinking Through the Body, Jane Gallop also deals with the issue of phallic power, as she proposes that “to have a phallus would mean to be at the center of discourse, to generate meaning, to have mastery of language, to control rather than conform to that which comes from outside, from the Other” (127). Thus, the very categorization based on the individual’s biologic sex and social gender causes oppression. Gallop seems to be a more optimistic critic, as she believes in a shift of representation. In my reading, rather than emphasizing this shift, I will privilege Lacan’s proposal to denounce the system that engenders the whole apparatus of dominance, having as its focus the figure of the governess. I will draw on Ragland-Sullivan’s view of genre identity as resulting from castration, and I will adopt the view of Grosz and Gallop on the phallus as a signifier of *difference*⁴ that mirrors the privileged position of the male within language and within society. Lacan’s reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s “Purloined Letter” illustrates the case of how a subject can be positioned in relation to the phallus.

*

Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” illustrates the role of the phallus represented by the stolen letter. Augustine Dupin is visited by Monsieur G, the prefect, who tells him the story about a lady who received a letter. The Minister D recognizes a male

handwriting in the address. He writes a letter identical to hers and replaces it, so the lady cannot do anything as a third personage has also come in. The prefect is notified of the happening and uses the police to solve the problem. After several searches in the Minister's hotel, being unable to find the letter, the prefect offers an amount of money to have Dupin's service. Dupin receives the full description of the letter, and suggests that it might be in a visible place. The prefect laughs and leaves. After a time, the prefect visits Dupin again and tells of his frustrated attempt to find the letter. Dupin asks the prefect to sign a check as a guarantee and gives him the letter. Dupin's friend asks how he was able to find it. Dupin says that he went to the minister's hotel to pay a visit, wearing green glasses. He found the letter in an obvious place, in the middle of a mantelpiece. The missing letter is the opposite of the one described by the prefect. Lacan, in his analysis, refers to the lady as being the Queen, and the third personage as being the King.

The story is composed of two parts. In the first part, the Queen receives a letter, the King comes in, and the Queen dissimulates and puts the letter on the table. The Minister perceives the Queen's embarrassment, and takes out an identical letter, substituting it for the first (Poe par. 28). The Queen sees the stealing, but can do nothing (Poe par. 28). In the second part, the police searches for the letter at the Minister's hotel and cannot find it. Dupin is asked to help the Queen. He goes to the Minister's hotel and recognizes the letter in a place where everybody could see it (Poe par. 114). On the next day, as the minister is distracted by an incident on the street, Dupin steals the letter and gives it back to the Queen through the prefect (Poe par. 88). For Lacan, the second part is a repetition of the first, as it is a scene composed by three elements that interact around the stealing of a letter (Marini 66; Lacan, Escritos 19-20).

The gaze of the characters involved is also related to knowledge: The first one gazes at and sees nothing (the King and the police); the second gaze sees that the first gaze failed to

see, and feels an illusion of having veiled what it hides (the Queen and the Minister); and the third observes what the first and the second leave unveiled (the Minister and Dupin) (Marini 66; Lacan, Escritos 22). The letter represents the phallus that can only become a signifier of power and authority when veiled (Lacan, Écrits 319). The story illustrates the Oedipus complex, since there is a mother (Queen), a father (King) a loyal son (Dupin), and an unfaithful son (Minister) (Marini 68). The King, who has his power legitimized by the Law-of-the-Father, gives his power to the Queen, who does not possess it and has only the authority to delegate his power. The marriage demands that the Queen be loyal to this alliance.

As the phallus is mistaken by the penis, an illusion that all men possess it is created. But the Minister does not possess the power, or the phallus. He thus attempts to possess the letter that represents the King's phallus (Lacan, Escritos 42; Marini 68). By doing so, he becomes effeminate, occupying the position as a *seeker* of the phallus. Since Dupin returns the letter to the Queen, he resolves his Oedipal drama, for he plays the role of a male infant who reaches heterosexuality, by the phallic authority of the King. In this context, the mother's phallus can be interpreted as being the authority delegated by the father to her. Dupin knows that the police has not found the letter because the Minister knows the police's procedures and knows how to defeat them. Thus, Dupin finds the missing letter by doing exactly the contrary of what is expected: he goes to the Minister's house when the minister is at his place, he looks for the letter in an evident place, and, finally, he finds a letter that presents the opposite characteristics of the one provided by the prefect. Ironically, this letter is written in a female handwriting, and addressed to a male. Thus, the story depicts the process of construction of identity that is not explained by biologism, or naturalism. The individual being born female or male has to face a binary world of oppositions in which the male has necessarily to be masculine and the female has to be feminine. Dupin's ability to solve the mystery shows that

there is no other option except for a binary A B opposition. While the police attempted to find the letter with B features, Dupin followed the A features. In the next chapter, this process will be studied as the effect of the imposition of a patriarchal culture, with its values and manners, on the characters of The Turn of the Screw.

Notes:

¹ My italics.

² In the schema L it is referred as “Es, it, or id”.

³ For a more detailed discussion of castration, see pages 16 and 17.

⁴ Difference, in this case, is made by the presence or the absence of a male organ.

CHAPTER III

IDENTITY, ACCULTURATION AND ANTI-SOCIAL DISCOURSE

This chapter consists of three sections. The first focuses on the subjection of the governess's identity and desire to the master's patriarchal discourse, consequently embodying the role as a spokeswoman of the master's discourse. The second aims at presenting the processes of construction of identity and gender undergone by the pupils Miles and Flora, processes through which the governess imposes the hegemonic discourse on her pupils. And the third explores the influence of the anti-hegemonic discourse of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel on the governess. In doing so, I will present the antagonistic forces that act in the novel, represented on one side by the acculturating hegemonic ideal of the governess and the master, and on the other side by the anti-hegemonic ideal of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel.

3.1. Delegation of Power and Social Attribution

In The Turn of the Screw, the master attributes to a twenty-year-old female, "the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson" the role of governess (James 25), henceforth causing a growth of a deep affection in her. He impresses her because he is "handsome and bold and pleasant, offhand and gay and kind," a "gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life" (James 25). He also represents the values and the culture of the higher class, becoming representative of a *civilized* society. This remarkable male figure, which the governess knows only in dreams, posits her task as a favor, "an obligation he should gratefully incur" (James 25). Thus, the moment at which the labor relation is established becomes also an affective contact. The master requires the service of a governess for being inapt to play the role of mother substitute or educator, roles usually attributed to females in

society: He has become guardian of his orphan nephew and niece Miles and Flora, as a result of the death of their parents in India, but he is unable to care for them, as he is “a lone man without the right sort of experience or a grain of patience” (James 25). This inappropriateness is due to the roles attributed according to gender in a society in which females should rear children in the private sphere, whereas males should work in the public sphere.

One view that justifies that distinction is the kind of naturalism that is based on theology or ontology. Theology, of course, explains the nature of man and woman as being given by God. Naturalism studies the nature of being. In Freudian Ontology, for instance, the nature of being is based on the sexual organs. In the context of naturalism, men are believed to be the strong sex, and thus, proper to be positioned as the head of the family and as its sustainer, while women are naturally infant bearers, the fragile sex that should perform domestic tasks and child rearing. Such an argument becomes difficult to refute, since it is deeply embedded in the culture of society and, in particular of Victorian patriarchal society.

The former “anxious girl out of Hampshire vicarage” (James 25) becomes a governess who is equated with the middle-class mother and her attributions (Poovey 127). James’s governess takes the role as substitute mother without ever experiencing a real process of pregnancy, or childbirth, and since kinship names or blood do not connect the governess to Miles and Flora, a gap is already formed between them. Thus, the governess has to overcome that gap in order to establish the mother-infant relationships with the infants of the family whom she works for. However, she has to respect a single condition imposed by the master, that of never disturbing him. She should “neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything; only meet all questions herself, receive all moneys from his solicitor, take the whole thing over and let him alone” (James 27).

In that condition, the governess has barred her access to the master, who becomes absent. Since desire, for Lacan, is lack and absence, the governess desires the absent master to

whom she subjects herself. As the master excludes himself from the process of the formation of the infants, she is alone to face any eventual problem, possessing only delegated power and authority. The governess accepts that condition and an alliance is sealed through a handshake, an extremely paternalistic gesture, especially in terms of Victorian society. Through that gesture the master treats her as a male equal to him, desexualizing her. He dismantles the *sexual neutrality* required for any Victorian governess (Poovey 129).

The master thus becomes the Other (A) that establishes the categories or signifiers through which the governess's identity is molded; and, thus, he functions as an *ego-ideal* that categorizes her as being a governess whose functions are mother substitute and educator. The discourse of the governess, then, has to be in accordance with the master, who becomes an authority present in her actions and a legitimizer of her authority. The master then represents what Lacan calls the Name of the Father, or the Law, at Bly.

The shift of names that occurs with marriage for females means, especially in terms of Victorian society, that females speak either in the name of the father, or in the name of the husband. A *kinship name* marks the delegation of authority to speak. In *Écrits*, Lacan posits that “the marriage tie is governed by an order of preference whose law concerning the kinship names is, like language, imperative for the group in its forms, but unconscious in its structure” (72). Thus, the relation of the law that rules kinship names and the one that rules language is intrinsic, inasmuch as “without kinship nominations, no power is capable of instituting the order of preferences and taboos that bind and weave the yarns of lineage through succeeding generations” (Lacan *Écrits* 73). Therefore, kinship names, like the Law-of-the-Father, install the morality and hierarchy in society.

In that perspective, it is possible to notice that the governess seals an alliance with the master through a contract of service that permits her to occupy a place “of supreme authority” (James 26). But her contract of service does not provide her with the master's

name, as she is not married to him. Thus, since females should speak either in the name of the father, or in the name of the husband (Grosz Feminist 72), it is problematic for her to speak in the master's name without being legitimized as a wife. Thus, without having ever received the master's name, the governess only imitates authority, and stands as a subject of the master's discourse. She molds herself according to her own interpretation of the master's demand, and establishes the dominant morality at Bly. The construction of identity undergone by the governess is thus, in Lacanian term, a misidentification. Once the governess is subjected to the master, or the Other (A), her identity is subjected to the *ego-ideal*, or to the signifiers that come from him and are embedded in his values and culture. As the master's culture represents the hegemonic culture, the governess constructs her identity *qua* governess, as a cog in a system. Her identity becomes an apparatus that will help to maintain patriarchal hegemony by embedding gender roles on the pupils. The governess needs the legitimization of her authority to command Bly, inasmuch as hierarchically she is not distinguished from the other servants, as she is also lowborn and receives wages for surviving. Since she needs the authority of the master to speak in his name, she needs to possess his phallic power to legitimize her role as subject of his discourse. Previous to her admission at Bly she is referred to as "the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson" or "an anxious girl out of Hampshire vicarage" (James 25). Her name seems to be replaced by the social position she occupies henceforth, since she is referred to in the novel simply as "the governess." In a similar way, the name of the authority presented in the novel is simply referred to as *the master* (James 34) which also seems to be enough for conveying the idea of what he signifies in the story. The governess seems to change her identity the moment she seals the job contract with the master. Henceforth, her new identity is shaped according to the position she is given by the master in relation to the other characters of the novel.

In her daily attribution, she is directly in contact with the pupils Miles and Flora and the servant Mrs. Grose, a “stout simple plain clean wholesome woman” (James 29). She is flattered by Mrs. Grose’s gaze, who receives her as “the mistress or a distinguished visitor” (James 28). Being the object of such a gaze implies complying with its demand. As the one who is seen interprets those responses by identifying or failing to identify with them. The governess interprets Mrs. Grose’s treatment as her demand, and identifies with her new role. The distinct treatment reveals the difference between those females as being intrinsically related to culture and language. Mrs. Grose cannot read the master’s letter for the governess (James 32), nor can she understand the *language* used by the governess when the latter uses the word “to contaminate,” that she has to explain as “to corrupt” to make it easier for the poor woman (James 33). That distinction also marks class difference between the governess, who is culturally equal to any middle-class mother who has to provide the infants with the acceptable pattern of behavior in society, and Mrs. Grose, who, as a member of the working class, does not have access to the written form of language, or to the elaborate words of the higher class. Thus, through teaching the pupils language, the governess becomes the bulwark against the infiltration of the working-class culture in the middle class family. She helps to create a cultural boundary between the working class to which Mrs. Grose belongs and the upper-class to which the master belongs.

The manners also mark the distinction between social hierarchies. When the governess presents her decision of doing *nothing* in the affair of Miles being expelled from school, Mrs. Grose has an unexpected reaction:

[...] What will you say then?” she immediately added.

“In answer to the letter?” I had made up my mind. “Nothing at all.”

“And to his uncle?”

I was incisive. “Nothing at all.”

“And to the boy himself?”

I was wonderful. “Nothing at all.”

She gave with her apron a great wipe to her mouth. “Then I’ll stand by you. We’ll see it sour.”

“We’ll see it out?” I ardently echoed, giving her my hand to make it a vow.

She held me there a moment, then whisked up her apron again with her detached hand. “Would you mind, Miss, if I used the freedom-”

“To kiss me? No!” I took the good creature in my arms and after we had embraced like sisters felt still more fortified and indignant. (James 35-6)

Mrs. Grose’s manners prove to be typical of her class, as she holds her apron, wiping her mouth and whisking up. But, at the same time, Mrs. Grose reveals to be a very warm ally to the governess, for, when the governess gives her hand, thus imitating the master, to seal their alliance, Mrs. Grose asks for a kiss in order to show her support to the governess’s decision. Thus, both females seal their vow by holding and kissing each other. That gesture, however, differs significantly from the handshaking used to seal the alliance with the master, as his gesture of shaking hands conveys the values of the dominant class. The distance of the bodies and the formalities show the decorum and the customs of the higher class, which are sustained for the creation of borders around the individual and require, in the name of respect, a minimum of distance between the bodies. Obviously, the master pays respect to the governess, who is female, through not embracing her and keeping a certain distance from her, but the very idea of *respect* also implies the notions of creating borders and imposing limits. Thus, two cultures are opposed, on the one hand the master’s culture, which is considered *more civilized*, on the other, the culture of the working class, which is considered *less civilized*. The master’s gesture of shaking hands represents the values and manners of the

dominant class and, of course, the values that the governess has to impose on the pupils by teaching them the written form of language, thus raising borders and installing limits.

The warmer gesture between the governess and Mrs. Grose conveys a further identification between them, as they are comparable to two “sisters.” It is true that the shaking of hands is not appropriate for Mrs. Grose to convey her support to the governess, since that gesture is not appropriate to the culture of the working class to which she belongs. But it is precisely through *holding* that Mrs. Grose attempts to disrupt the borders and limits between them, calling the governess back to her original status, to her lowborn origin. Consequently, Mrs. Grose becomes a threat for the maintenance of the distinction between classes, and to the hegemony of the culture of the dominant class. Indeed, she becomes a threat to civilized society, as it is sustained through the formation of borders and limits between individuals and classes. It is the job of the governess, of course, to avoid the disruption of the social order.

In the novel, the governess has to suppress the values of the working-class in order to educate Miles and Flora. But, ironically, the governess cannot deny her humble origin, and in this case she succumbs to Mrs. Grose’s warm proposal of embracing and kisses her. The governess has to impose the values of the master on the pupils; specifically, these are the values of the dominant class, that operate through signifiers or *ego-ideal*. On the other hand, Mrs. Grose proposes a model contaminated by the values of the working class. Both females convey confusing signifiers to Miles and Flora. Inasmuch as the governess and Mrs. Grose are representative of two distinct cultures, they should not become allies, but marked by separate functions in the process of acculturation of Miles and Flora. This, of course, they fail to do.

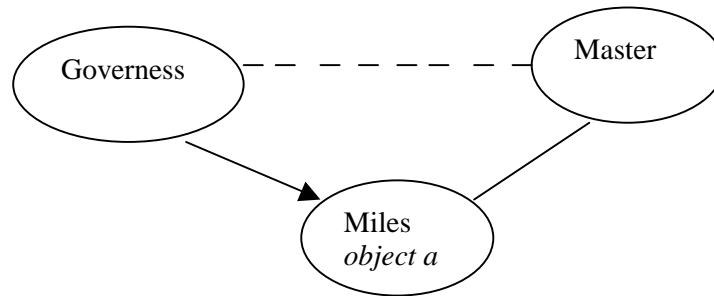
3.2 - The Governess as (M)other and the Question of incest

In the beginning, the governess knows Miles through a letter sent by the master. She also receives a letter from the head master of the school where Miles studies. In the first letter, the master gives the governess total control of Miles's life, including the control of school affairs. The master does not give the governess *his name*, but only the authority to speak in his name. Then, the letter sent by him functions as a signifier of power, and, indeed, as a phallic symbol that gives the governess the right to speak in *his* name. But, as the phallus is a signifier that cannot be grasped, the governess's search for the missing phallus continues.

The letter from the boarding school addressed to the master, and then, re-addressed to her, on the other hand, consolidates Miles's intimate relationship with the governess, as he becomes the object through which she can access the master. She can thus speak in her own voice and, thus, to grow in possession of a phallus of her own. As Jane Gallop points out, "to have a phallus would mean to be at the center of discourse, to generate meaning, to have mastery of language, to control rather than conform to that which comes from outside, from the Other" (127). This control would free her from the domain of the master (the Other (A)), who defines her as female, feminine, castrated, and governess.

The fact that Miles becomes her son-substitute, the phallic substitute that Lacan calls the *object a*, is the beginning of the solution of the governess's castration problem. This would also help her to be free from the subjection to the master's discourse, and thus, free to construct her autonomous identity. Becoming the governess's missing phallus, Miles would provide autonomy to her discourse, allowing her to speak in *her* own name. In the illustration below, the governess would be placed at the empty place left by the absence of the master. In the absence of the master, the governess places Miles's in his empty space. This means, of course, that the governess does not see Miles as a boy, but an "older person" to be treated "as

an intelligent equal” (James 90). The schema below illustrates the governess’s incestuous relationship with Miles, as her access to the master is barred.



Schema 3

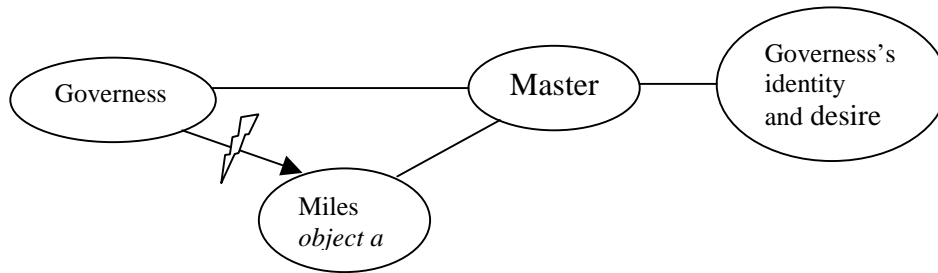
Though the letter suggests that Miles is “an injury” to his colleagues (James 32), he possesses “the same positive fragrance of purity” as Flora (James 35). Taking Miles to her “heart,” the governess feels something “divine” about the child, an “indescribable little air of knowing nothing in the world but love” (James 35). The governess’s attitude clearly shows Miles’s seductive power, even though Miles is not aware of that. For her, Miles has carried “a bad name with a greater sweetness of innocence,” (James 35) or, in other words, Miles is innocent of the inquisitive tone of the letter.

Since Miles is a boy “whose education for the world [is] all on the point of beginning,” (James 36) he seems to carry a natural air of innocence not yet corrupted by society and civilization. Soon, the governess’s lesson to Miles becomes directed to her, since she learns something other than “the teachings of [her] small smothered life” prior to her attribution at Bly (James 36). She learns “to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow,” and she knows “the space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature” (James 36). The governess experiences, for the first time, the privileged life of a middle-class mother that differs abruptly from the kind of life she has been used to, and enjoys the freedom that she had not had access to previous to her attribution. Thus, the governess escapes from the laborious life of the working class and enjoys the privileges of the higher class, which are received at the expense of the sacrifice of the working

class. Ironically, the originally humble girl, who is now the governess, becomes the figure that sustains the distinction of classes and the endurance of a system that oppresses the lower class.

Through assuming the role as governess, she subjects herself to the demands of the master, as she also believes to do what the master has “earnestly hoped and directly asked [of her],” (James 37) molding her identity according to his *ego-ideal*. Her good performance would prove her to be “a remarkable young woman’ whose merits “would more publicly appear” (James 37). This would make her recognized by the master, and capable of recognizing her own desire, so that, as Lacan puts it, the desire for recognition would become the recognition of desire (Écrits 190). And, finally, by acknowledging her desire, she would construct her own identity (Lacan, Technique 211). The identity she believes the master can provide her with is directly related to the recognition of herself as an impeccable governess, and thus, the identity that she believes to reach is the *ego-ideal*, provided by the master, that she has internalized as being her *ideal* of becoming an effective governess.

However, the governess, as educator, has to impose patriarchal values and manners through signifiers. In other words, the governess has to repeat to Miles the discourse of the master in order to mold him according to the hegemonic patriarchal discourse. The master functions as an authority that is present in the governess’s discourse, becoming the entity of the Law-of-the-Father, since, for Lacan, any authority present in the mother becomes the entity that imposes that Law. Thus, the governess introduces the disruptive force that avoids incest in her relationship with Miles, imposing the Law-of-the-Father, but she also becomes the one who would establish the incestuous relationship. She both produces desire and prevents the fruition of that incestuous desire. The schema below illustrates the process of acculturation of Miles and the consequent avoidance of incest:



Schema 4

Her recognition would be undermined by her incestuous relationship with Miles. Thus, in order to be recognized by the master, she has to acculturate Miles, preventing him from being her *object a*, and spoiling her chance of solving her castration complex. Therefore, the governess plays a dubious role, inasmuch as she endeavors to establish an incestuous relationship with Miles and she is the one who indirectly avoids the accomplishment of this incestuous relationship. Her choice for subjecting Miles to the Law-of-the-Father indicates the subjection of her own identity to the master's demand, and the repression of her sexuality. It also involves Miles's castration, which finally deprives her of possessing a substitute phallus.

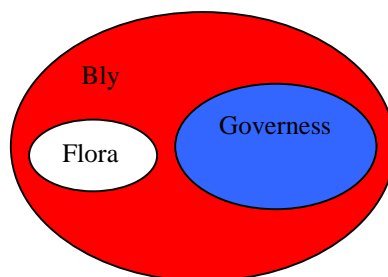
Sexual repression, according to Poovey, was the main cause of lunacy of Victorian governesses (130). The lowborn governess is twice susceptible to lunacy, as she is a woman and poor. Her lunacy, ultimately, is not derived only from the fact that she sees ghosts or apparitions, but also from the fact that she is not allowed to bring her desire to fruition at Bly.

3.3- The (M)other and the daughter – Castrated and Passive or Phallic and Active

The governess is presented by Mrs. Grose to Flora. The girl is described as “the most beautiful child” she has ever seen, a “beatific” possessor of an “angelic beauty” with a “deep serenity [...] of one of Raphael’s holy infants” (James 28-9). Since the Victorian governess is responsible for forming the future middle-class wife, she is expected “to watch, teach, form little Flora,” (James 29) molding her according to the hegemonic patriarchal culture of the master and inculcating the distinction between classes and gender roles.

Flora's natural purity can be perceived when she looks from the governess to Mrs. Grose "with a placid heavenly eyes that [contains] nothing to check" (James 30). She gazes from one to another and shifts her eyes, without making any distinctions, that is, being perfectly unaware of the social differences that distinguish the two adult females. The governess imposes on Flora a social model by conveying signifiers that necessarily distinguish the individual according to social classes and gender.

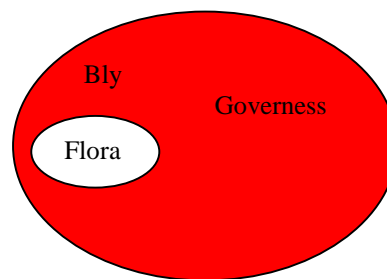
In order to be known by Flora and to establish a relationship with her, the governess lets Flora become her *conductress*, showing her the place "step by step and room by room and secret by secret, with droll delightful childish talk about it"(James 31). They walked "in empty chambers and dull corridors," "on crooked staircases," "on the summit of an old machicolated square tower" (James 31). And in this tour, the governess portrays Bly as being a "castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite" that, through Flora's eyes, seems to be pictured in "story-books and fairy-tales" (James 31). As Flora shows the castle to the governess, the governess exposes herself to Flora. Thus, both the interiors of the castle and the governess inner side are explored. In the illustration below, it is possible to notice that the castle represents the *Umwelt*, the outside environment that corresponds to the *Innenwelt*, or the governess's inner side.



Schema 5

Traditionally, in gothic novels, castles represent boundaries between the inside and the outside. As Eugenia C. DeLamotte points out, "castle walls isolate an inside world from an outside world" (20). In James's novel, Bly functions as a castle, a symbolic female body,

with its dull corridors and empty chambers that represent female phalluses and uteruses, respectively. They are images long lost in the past. The crooked stair seems to be similar to a screw that, through twisting, goes deeper and deeper in a movement towards the unconscious and the past, in which the infant still constitutes a unity with its mother. And thus, this quest shows a nostalgic experience of returning to the origin prior to the split that occurs during the Mirror phase, and the later creation of borders, which distinguish the inner environment, or the *Innenwelt* from the outside environment, or *Umwelt*. Since through this quest the governess endeavors to overcome her strangeness in order to establish a mother-daughter relationship, what is represented is a symbolic return to the uterus. In this context, the castle represents the governess's body, momentarily the border that distinguishes the inner environment of the governess and the outside environment. Bly, in this sense, becomes a large uterus. Inasmuch as Flora is placed inside this uterus, this journey represents a union that intimately relates Flora and the governess.



Schema 6

The journey is necessary for overcoming the gap between them, since the governess and Flora are not related through kinship names, or blood. As a result, they become “tremendous friends” in “half an hour” (James 31). After this experience, the governess looks at Flora:

I turned and saw that Flora, whom, ten minutes before, I had established in the schoolroom with a sheet of white paper, a pencil and a copy of nice “round O’s,” now presented herself to view at the open door. She expressed in her little way an

extraordinary detachment from disagreeable duties, looking at me, however, with a great childish light that seemed to offer it as a mere result of the affection she had conceived for my person, which had rendered necessary that she should follow me. I needed nothing more than this to feel the full force of Mrs. Grose's comparison, and catching my pupil in my arms, covered her with kisses in which there was a sob of atonement. (James 33)

By gazing at the governess, Flora conveys the expected acceptance of the governess position and the subjection to her command. The governess, in turn, assumes her castrating role as model for an *ideal* that places female in the passive roles within the private sphere. The mother-daughter union is split, and the Law-of-the-Father has to be established to produce healthy heterosexuals. For that, Flora has to recognize the governess as a castrated being as well as her position as castrated individual. Flora's gaze convinces the governess that the little girl has a remarkable temper, which is equivalent to Miles's good nature. The governess expresses her satisfaction with the positive result of her effort by seizing Flora with her arms and covering her with kisses. Ironically, the governess, holding Flora, does not treat her with the composure of the higher class; instead, her gesture shows the values of a lowborn female. She is thus betrayed by her humble origin as a daughter of a "poor country parson" (James 25).

Miles and Flora are as a "pair of little grandees, of princes of the blood, for whom everything, to be right, would have to be fenced about and ordered and arranged" (James 36). The governess, by instructing and educating them with written language, fiction, and poetry (James 41), creates a cultural gap between the pupils and Mrs. Grose, who cannot read (James 32). She thus helps to reinforce the socio-economic difference between Mrs. Grose on the one hand, Miles and Flora on the other.

3.4- The Anti-Hegemonic Ideal: The Devil and the Governess

The apparitions of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel disturb the governess, as they provide *ideals* that sound strangely familiar to her. They motivate her to identify with them and to accept their *ideal*, as opposed to the *ideal* provided by the master.

In the novel, Quint is described as follows:

[a man of] red hair, very red, close-curling, and a pale face, long in shape, with straight good features and little rather queer whiskers that are as red as his hair. His eyebrows are somehow darker; they look particularly arched and as if they might move a good deal. His eyes are sharp, strange – awfully; but I only know clearly that they're rather small and very fixed. His mouth's wide, and his lips are thin, and except for his whiskers he's quite clean-shaven. He gives me a sort of sense of looking like an actor. (James 46-7)

As the red color suggests “fire,” “hell,” and “devil,” Quint represents Evil. The word “actor” also suggests the devil, inasmuch as Lucifer attempts to *become* the Master, as an actor who imitates and plays God. Quint, appropriately, wears the master's clothes (James 47), for clothes distinguish the group to which each individual belongs. Costumes also indicate the status occupied by an individual within a certain group. In the novel, the master's clothes are signifiers of his status as authority and power, and thus, they represent his phallic power. Since Quint wears the master's clothes, he attempts to possess the master's power and authority, trying to be in the master's place and in possession of his (the master's) phallus. In other words, Quint endeavors to occupy the place of the Other (A), the logos of the Symbolic, the place from which all the questions about the individual's existence are proposed. By pursuing power in the form of the master's phallus, therefore, Quint is a “seeker of phallus,

rather than [a] possessor of it". He would be, according to Ragland-Sullivan, in the role of the female. This would make him effeminate and, ultimately, a homosexual.

Peter Quint appears to the governess for the first time when she thinks about the master. She desires that "some one [the master] would appear there at the turn of the path and would stand before [her] and smile and approve" (James 37). She wants the master to know about her good performance, as he represents her *ego-ideal*. As she also wants to be gazed at by the master, she attributes to him the position of active voyeur, looking at her as a passive exhibitionist. Through the scopic drive, the governess would interact with the master, her eyes would meet his demand to make her a subject dependent on him for her identity and desire. In Lacan, it is through this process that the subject, who has initially the signifier S^1 , becomes eventually a signified S^2 . The governess's initial signifier S^1 is her belief that she is doing what the master expects from her (James 37).

However, the governess is actually gazed at by Quint, not by the master. Quint is standing "high up, beyond the lawn and at the very top of the tower," and he gazes at her (James 37-8), assuming the position of voyeur / active, a position that the governess had attributed to the master. An object of Quint's gaze, the governess becomes, again, the passive exhibitionist. However, she attempts to take control of the interaction, endeavoring to place herself as the active voyeur. She gazes back at Quint in order to turn him into the object of her gaze. And, then, there "[is] a moment at which [...] some challenge between [them], breaking the hush, would have been the right result of [their] straight mutual stare" (James 39). And, finally, the demand of the master is replaced by a "question, just the scrutiny" raised by Quint's apparition (James 39). When the governess thinks about the master, she carries the signifier S^1 in relation to what she is and to the job she is doing, and she expects to receive the master's recognition (S^2). But since the interaction occurs with Quint, the governess's initial signifier S^1 is turned to another signified S^2 that raises a question about her identity.

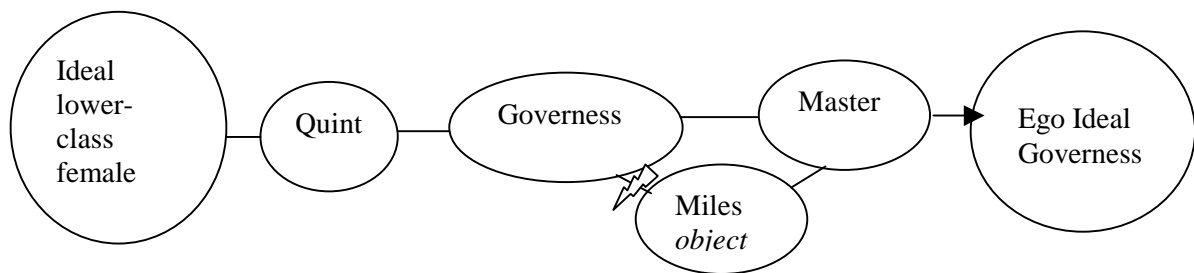
As Quint stares at her, he gives her the impression of a “strange freedom,” since in a “sign of familiarity” he does not wear any hat¹ (James 39). He is definitely not a “gentleman,” like the master, (James 45) since he gazes indiscreetly at the governess (James 47). In this sense, Quint is the opposite of the master. It is interesting to notice that Quint used to wear the master’s clothes, but he never wears the master’s hats (James 47). Quint, in other words, wants to embody the master’s power and authority, but he refuses to agree with the master’s culture and morality.

The second time that the governess sees Quint, he is standing outside the room, and gazing through the window glass into the “‘grown-up’ dining-room” where the governess has just entered (James 42). Quint, at first, gazes at the governess, placing her again in a passive position as object and as exhibitionist. But he soon starts to gaze “successively [at] several other things” (James 43). This shift provides the governess with the conviction that he has come for somebody else. And, later, the governess strongly affirms that he has come for Miles (James 49).

Although Quint failed for not being able to grasp the authority of the master, he influenced the future heir of Bly, Miles. Therefore, he subverted the Law that structures hierarchies at Bly, and undermined the hegemony of the master’s discourse. The governess suggested that Mrs. Grose knew the reason why Quint had come to Miles, and indeed, Mrs. Grose knew the reason, as she confessed that Quint was evil (James 50) and that he used to be Miles’s “tutor” (James 60). But even though she knew, she did not denounce Quint to the master. With this omission, Mrs. Grose supported Quint’s conspiracy against the master. Quint’s acts imply his attempt to subvert the Order, making the governess and Mrs. Grose face the possibilities of subverting their dominated position to a position of dominance.

In that encounter, the governess has the impression that she has been “looking at him for years and [has] known him always” (James 43). This sense of familiarity seems to connect

the governess with Quint, who belongs to the working class, as he is a late valet (James 47). The governess, culturally speaking, belongs to the middle-class, and teaches the values of the middle-class. But speaking in economical terms she is not different from the working class. Quint represents the working-class culture that opposes the master's culture. In this sense, he raises questions related to the governess's identity *qua* governess and to her desire for recognition as governess. In the effort to be recognized, she pursues the *ego-ideal* that is grounded on her desire for recognition. And that can only be achieved through the repression of her sexuality, as well as through Miles's and Flora's education. But Quint reminds her of another reality, that of her lowborn origin. He provides her with another *ideal* that inscribes signifiers with the values of the lower class.



Schema 7

Quint, of course, is considered morally loose, inasmuch as his existence has been marked by “strange passages and perils, secret disorders, vices more than suspected” (James 51). And that is problematic, as Quint's life is portrayed in a negative way, whereas the master's life, which is also worldly, is portrayed in a positive aspect. The master is “rich, but [...] fearfully extravagant,” being also “all in glow of high fashion, of good looks, of expensive habits, of charming ways with women” (James 25). His residence is “filled with the spoils of travel and the trophies of the chase” (James 25). Quint is a vulgar “hound,” whereas the master is a gentleman who, like Quint, has “charming ways with women.” But Quint is considered vulgar and immoral for belonging to the working class, calling to mind a generalized assumption about morality in the lower class, as the place of less reliable

individuals. Class destruction and social hierarchies are thus clearly marked, but also blurred. As Quint's devilish aspect points to his lowborn origin and to his working class values, his proposal questions the socio-economical identity as a subaltern², vulgar, and immoral individual, excluded from the decisions made in high society. Quint uncovers the moral veil that covers his aspiration and his desire, thus providing an alternate *ideal* that proposes a shift in the signifiers used to categorize the individual of the working-class, who can thus aspire to a position of command.

The Infamous Lady and the Governess

The governess sees Miss Jessel for the first time on the opposite side of the lake (James 53). She describes her as being "unmistakeable horror and evil: a woman in black, pale and dreadful – with such an air also, and such a face!" (James 54). She suggests that this mysterious lady is her predecessor, then, she shares this information with Mrs. Grose:

"The person was in black, you say?"

"In mourning ___ rather poor, almost shabby. But ___yes ___yes with extraordinary beauty." I now recognize to what I had at last, stroke by stroke, brought the victim of my confidence, for she quite visibly weighted this. "Oh handsome ___ very, very," I insisted; "wonderfully handsome. But infamous."

She slowly came back to me. "Miss Jessel - *was* infamous." She once more took my hand in both her own, holding it as tight as if to fortify me against the increase of alarm I might draw from this disclosure. "They were both infamous," she finally said. (James 56)

As the governess describes the apparition, Mrs. Grose reveals, for the first time, the name of the late governess, Miss Jessel. Both Miss Jessel and Peter Quint are pictured as being “infamous,” and associated with Evil. Then, the governess asks the reason for her death:

“[...]Of what did she die? Come, there was something between them.”

“There was everything.”

“In spite of the difference - ?”

“Oh of their rank, their condition” – she brought it woefully out.

“She was a lady.”

I turned it over; I again saw. “Yes –she was a lady.”

“And he so dreadfully below,” said Mrs. Grose. (James 56-7)

The conversation shifts from the subject of Miss Jessel’s death to her relationship with Quint, which proves to be closer than expected. Miss Jessel is, like Quint, an individual of the working class, concerned with the wages she received. Thus the economical condition is basically the same. But in the socio-cultural aspect, they differ enormously, as Quint is a valet belonging to a lower class and Miss Jessel is like any middle-class mother who should inculcate the middle-class cultural values on the children. Although they belonged to the same economic class, a cultural and moral barrier separated their categories, as Miss Jessel is expected to behave as any middle-class lady. And thus, because of their relationship, Quint and Miss Jessel have crossed a barrier, deconstructing the symbolic structure that separates them. They thus challenged Victorian morality and culture. By getting involved with Quint and identifying with him, Miss Jessel lowers her rank, becoming a working-class girl. Consequently, she becomes an immoral example for the pupils, contaminating them with the habits of the working class. She was, accordingly, punished for her sinful behavior.

The novel suggests that Miss Jessel could have been pregnant, which might be the reason for her to leave Bly: “[Miss Jessel] could n’t have stayed. Fancy it here – for a

governess! And afterwards I imagined – and I still imagine. And what I imagine is dreadful” (James 57). Since Quint is portrayed as a “clever, good-looking, [...] man; imprudent, assured, spoiled, depraved” and as a “hound,” (James 57) it is possible that their involvement resulted in serious consequences. Nevertheless, in Victorian society, failing to behave morally and to occupy a sexually appropriate position would be reason enough for Miss Jessel to be expelled from Bly and to face social death and exclusion before encountering her real death. Quint’s death is also unexpected, as it is provoked by a wound associated with immoral ways: “such a wound as might have been produced (and as, on the final evidence, had been) by a fatal slip, in the dark and after leaving the public-house, on the steepish icy slope, a wrong path altogether, at the bottom of which he lay” (James 51). Ironically, that resulted from his wrong step, which suggests that he was punished for his own wrong choice. The circumstance of Quint’s and Ms. Jessel’s deaths reinforce the idea of exclusion from the system, since their deaths function as punishments for their attempt to change the hegemonic patriarchal discourse. Thus, the *ideal* that they insistently bring to light also causes them to suffer, as they tried to subvert the Order. Far from projecting a successful *ideal*, their apparitions bring, by retroaction, the failure of their precipitate attempt to deconstruct social hierarchies, escaping from their categories as socio-economic and cultural subalterns. Both Quint and Miss Jessel aimed at undermining the hegemonic discourse through a discourse that would change their category from subaltern, to a place of command. For Quint to promote change, he has to subvert the socio-economic hierarchies that privilege the higher class, which dominates the working class by imposing its norms and cultural patterns. Miss Jessel being twice a subject of domination, as a working class member subjected to the higher class and as a female subjugated to patriarchal Law, has to fight twice against the socio-economic exploitation that structures male dominance. Therefore, through getting involved with Quint, Miss Jessel

attempts to deconstruct old cultural patterns of behavior, grounded in a morality that places females in the private sphere and in passive roles.

The Victorian governess was expected to maintain sexual neutrality and emotional stability, in order to avoid class erosion (Poovey 127). Failing to keep a sexually neutral position, Miss Jessel threatens and destroys class boundaries, and thus, her attitudes towards Quint can be seen as an attempt to efface borders and limits between classes. For Lacan, the process of acculturation starts through the creation of borders and limits, with the differentiation of the infant's inner environment. The individual is thus subjected to culture and to language, and society is structured. In this sense, Quint and Miss Jessel are considered evil and infamous because they represent a threat to the structure of the system and because they inspire a subverting *ideal* to be followed.

Notes:

¹ The act of covering the head for leaving the private sphere in order to enter the public sphere has a cultural meaning intrinsically related to morality.

² The term subaltern is not used in the sense of Spivak, referring to the position occupied by a female in a (Post-)Colonial context. Subaltern, here, refers to the members of the working class, who, obviously, do not have a voice. For this reason this word refers to male and female characters.

CHAPER IV

RESISTANCE AND CONFRONTATION

This chapter consists of two parts. The first section aims at presenting a further discussion of the relationships between the pupils Miles and Flora and the ghosts Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. And the second part is about the confrontation between the governess and the ghosts and the redemption of the pupils.

4.1- (Mis)Identification and (Counter)Identification

The third time the governess sees Quint, he is on the crooked stair, and provides the subverted *ideal* again: “The apparition [...] reached the landing half-way up and was therefore on the spot nearest the window” (James 65). At first, she resists identifying with him, as his presence causes her to feel as if she were in danger. But, then, she does not feel dread anymore: she accedes to Quint’s inspiring model, identifying with him. She becomes “able to meet him and measure him” (James 65), reading and accepting the signifier proposed by Quint instead of resisting to it. The identification intensifies as she interacts with him:

[...] the thing was as human and hideous as a real interview: hideous just because it *was* human, as a human as to have met alone, in the small hours, in a sleeping house, some enemy, some adventurer, some criminal. It was the dead silence of our long gaze at such close quarters that gave the whole horror [...]. If I had met a murderer in such a place and at such an hour we still at least would have spoken. Something would have passed, in life, between us; if nothing had passed one of us would have moved. (James 66)

Quint's hideous aspect is related to his humanity and to the circumstances of the encounter: a lone man at a late hour meeting a lady. He is described in a negative aspect, as he is compared to an enemy, an adventurer, or a criminal. He thus assumes a role as villain, placing the governess as a potential victim. He is also compared to a murderer, but he differs from other villains, as he is prevented from moving and directly hurting the victim (the governess). This attitude can be explained because he is supposed to know the victim, who, in turn, identifies with him. She only feels that something identifies them, otherwise they would have spoken to each other.

Quint disappears as he turns "on receipt of an order, [with his] villainous back that no hunch could have more disfigured, straight down the staircase and into the darkness in which the next bend [is] lost" (James 66). Quint seems to lose the touch of humanness to become a deformed monster. Quint, like the monster, the native, and the cannibal is disfigured, dark, and primitive (Bellei, 13). Quint thus belongs to the category of the excluded of the system as opposed to the master who belongs to the group of the hegemonic white and *civilized*. Quint's monstrosity haunts the governess with the threat of social *exclusion*.

Quint, before disappearing, goes down through a crooked stair, imitating the movement of tightening of a screw and returning to darkness, which is associated to the Devil and Hell. Quint's return to darkness symbolizes that he is banished from the light that represents reason, *civilization*, and the master. Quint is thus associated with darkness, ignorance, and lack of reason. The light / darkness dichotomy illustrates the disadvantage of choosing Quint's *ideal*, as he is associated with the exclusion from society. The governess, therefore, chooses to submit her identity to the *master's ego-ideal*.

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Miss Jessel appears to the governess for the second time on the crooked stair. While the governess is on the top of the stair looking downwards, she sees "a woman seated on one

of the lower steps [...], her body half-bowed and her head, in an attitude of woe, in her hands” (James 68). That position of woe suggests the tragic end Miss Jessel will encounter, and instigates the governess to counteridentify with the former governess. Even though Miss Jessel vanishes without looking at the governess, the latter believes to know Miss Jessel’s “dreadful face” (James 68). The governess suggests that instead of “being above [she] had been below, [she] should have had the [...] nerve for going up (James 68). She believes that Miss Jessel is incapable of facing her, due to the shame and suffering caused by the sin of getting involved sexually with Quint and of following a subversive ideal. The governess, on the contrary, believes she is morally apt to look at anybody’s eyes, including Miss Jessel’s eyes, as she has not committed any error and as she has chosen to assume the safe position of a loyal subaltern.

The governess sees Miss Jessel at her table in the schoolroom, again, in a position of woe:

Seated at my own table in the clear noonday light I saw a person whom, without my previous experience, I should have taken at the first blush for some housemaid who [...] had applied herself to the considerably effort of a letter to her sweetheart. There was an effort in the way that, while her arms rested on the table, her hands, with evident weariness, supported her head; [...] in spite of my entrance, her attitude strangely persisted. Then [...] her identity flared up in a change of posture. She rose, not as if she had heard me, but with an indescribable grand melancholy of indifference and detachment, and, within a dozen feet of me, stood there as my vile predecessor. (James 85)

At first, the governess believes she sees a “housemaid,” who writes a letter to a sweetheart, then, as the strange female stands up, the governess recognizes her as being Miss Jessel. The ghost’s gesture of writing a letter points to the governess’s main concern at that

moment. First, Mrs. Grose has requested her to write a letter asking for the master's presence at Bly (James 75). And second, Miles has threatened that he would make the master come to Bly, if she did not write him a letter (James 83). Thus, Miss Jessel gives force to the decision that would probably cost the present governess's job and decide her exclusion from Bly. Her appearance in the study room instigates the governess to educate the pupils according to the subversive *ideal*, instead of educating them according to the hegemonic culture.

The confrontation occurs through their mutual gaze, and the governess reads Miss Jessel's face as if it were a signifier. The previous governess claims for her right to sit at the present governess's table (James 85). By doing so, she gives an illusion that she has the same rights as the present governess at Bly, forcing the present governess to identify with the former. Nonetheless, the governess seems to lose space in this confrontation, as she realizes that the true "intruder" is, in fact, herself. She objects against that by raising her voice, "You terrible miserable woman!" (James 85). Ironically the governess listens to her own voice (James 85), and, thus, the message addressed to the previous governess ends up having a strong impact on her. Miss Jessel then looks at the governess as if she has heard this message, and disappears (James 85). The governess thus refuses to comply with the ghosts and to identify with their *ideal*, preferring to remain in the safe position as a subaltern.

Manifestation of Evil – Flora's Possession

The governess sees Miss Jessel for the first time at the lake. The governess, then, moves her eyes from Miss Jessel to Flora and sees that the girl has "picked up a small flat piece of wood which happened to have in it a little hole that evidently [had] suggested to her the idea of sticking in another fragment that might figure as a mast and make the thing a boat." Indeed, Flora has been "intently attempting to tighten [the mast] in its place" (James

54). That hole in a flat piece of wood is a signifier for the empty place of the master, the place of the Other (A), whereas, the other fragment symbolizes a mast, the main core of a boat, which becomes a signifier of power, more precisely, of phallic power.

Flora's attitude can be seen as an attempt to deny her castration in order to reach the wholeness or *jouissance*. Through this Flora shows an attempt to compensate for the loss of the mother-daughter union, in which she enjoyed the primordial wholeness and completeness. But, once the primordial wholeness is lost, it is not recoverable anymore. Her gesture, then, becomes an opposition to the governess's castrating *ideal*. The governess thus fails in inculcating in Flora the hegemonic culture and in shaping the girl into a marriageable passive female. The little girl resists the governess's attempt to impose the master's discourse by making a boat with a mast that represents power and the phallus, which corresponds anatomically to the male organ. The pupil reveals what is implicit in Victorian society: the correspondence of the phallus and the penis as signifiers of power. Flora depicts her struggle for possessing a phallus, repeating Quint's frustrated attempt at possessing phallic power and revealing the governess's inner struggle to possess it.

Quint's similarity to a mast is clear, since he is described as being "very erect" on the top of the tower (James 39) and as assuming an upright position behind the window (James 43). Quint, being a male, has an illusion of possessing a phallus. That reflects the culturally accepted idea that males are believed to be the possessors of phallic power, which results from the blurring of the concepts of *phallus* and *penis*. But Quint does not possess either the phallus, or power. He only *attempts* to possess it by wearing the master's clothes.

The governess, on the contrary, being female and castrated, desires to fulfill the empty space of the master through Miles, who assumes the role of *the object a*, or substitute phallus, which would legitimize her subject position. As the master, present in the governess's

discourse, represses her desire, her libido is normalized¹, her access to Miles becomes barred, and she is again castrated.

Thus, Flora's innocent play depicts the illusional blurring between *penis* and *phallus* in a society in which males are supposed to occupy more privileged positions in relation to females. Quint's struggle for power shows that penis and phallus are not synonyms and that males do not have equal access to power. Thus, Flora's gesture conveys a deep questioning about who, in fact, possesses the phallus and the power in society. And her gesture proves that she must have been under the influence of the ghosts.

Games of Duality – The Governess versus Miles and Flora

Miles and Flora also perform games in which the governess loses her position of command. Those games become signs of possession for the governess. First, the governess finds Flora's bed empty and notices that the "white curtains" have been "deceivingly pulled forward" (James 66). As Flora emerges from behind the "window-blind" where she has been "ducking down" (James 66), the governess realizes that she has been deceived. For the governess, this game evidences that Flora sees the ghosts, but her pupil refuses to corroborate the idea. Both Flora and Miss Jessel assume similar positions, as Flora ducks down behind the window-blind and Miss Jessel sits on the stair with her head in her hands (James 68). These positions resemble the fetal position. Through that, both females show the desire to return to the mother's body, to the moment previous to the process of acculturation and of socialization, in which the fetus presumably feels wholeness and jouissance. By assuming that **posture**, Flora seems to convey a further identification with Miss Jessel, debilitating the identification with the governess. This is explained as the governess helps to establish the

castrating culture that increasingly categorizes and fragments more and more the individual living in society.

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Later on, the governess wakes up and notices Flora's bed empty again. Flora has blown the taper, "squeezed in behind the blind," and was "peering out into the night" (James 68). The governess wonders at whom she is gazing and, then, going and pausing in front of Miles's threshold, she notices that the boy is quiet and in silence. She decides to go to a lower room "though high above the gardens – in the solid corner of the house that [was] spoken of as the old tower" (James 69). From the windowpane of this room, the governess sees the object of Flora's gaze, who, ironically, is revealed to be Miles (James 70). However, the governess feels that there is "clearly another person above [her]" in the tower (James 70), whom she is unable to see, but who might probably be Flora. This game shows an attempt to bar the governess's authority at Bly, inasmuch as she ends up strategically placed between Miles, who is on the lawn, and Flora, who is in a room above the place occupied by the governess. The governess is maintained in the square room that becomes momentarily a prison cell.

The governess is deceived to follow the one on the lawn, who prevents her from seeing the other who is at the window. This game depicts the obligatory choice that the governess has to make, as Miles represents the *object a*, the solution for her castration, whereas Flora, her daughter substitute, reflects and reinforces her own position of castrated individual subjugated to the Law. On the one hand, by pursuing the *object a*, or the substitute phallus, she would satisfy her desire, but, also, subvert the Order and undermine her chance of being recognized by the master. On the other hand, by accepting her castration and her passive role in society, she would construct her identity according to the master's *ego-ideal*, being thus recognized by him. Therefore, the recognition of the governess by the master

depends amply on the decision on how she would manage her relationship with the pupils. In other words, the governess's identity and desire are strictly dependent on the pupils.

Miles tells the governess that he has plotted the game and performed it with Flora's help. He also justifies his attempt to deceive the governess as an endeavor to prove that he can be "bad" (James 73). He confesses that he wanted to show that he could do it (James 81), which is a clear attempt to deal with power and control. These games thus suggest that the pupils are possessed by the ghosts, confirming the governess's suspicion about the influence of the ghosts on the pupils.

Since the ghosts can destroy the pupils (James 74), Mrs. Grose suggests that the master is the only one who can prevent the corruption of the children (James 75). But the governess refuses to write him a letter reporting what has happened, or simply asking for his presence at Bly (James 75), as it could cost her her job. The governess's interest seems to be mainly her desire for the master, as the pupils' safety and well-being do not convince her to write the letter to the master. But, as the ghosts seem to corrupt the children more and more, also risking her job, the governess becomes forced to risk her position in order to save the pupils.

The Disruption of Evil - Miles's Possession

Miles wears the clothes sewn by the same tailor as the master, "who [has] had a free hand and a notion of pretty waistcoats" that could fit "his grand little air" (James 80). Since costumes are signifiers of values and culture, Miles's costumes reveals to the governess his "whole title to independence, the rights of his sex and situation, [...] so stamped upon him that if he had suddenly struck for freedom [the governess] should have nothing to say" (James 80). Miles's costume conveys the same values, as well as the position *qua* wealthy, white, and

male individual. Being aware of “the rights of his sex and situation,” Miles is conscious of the privileged position attributed to the male individual in society.

Being the future heir of bourgeois values, as well as being wealthy, white, and male, Miles would have the right to have a voice. As he follows Quint’s subversive example in order to promote change at school, he, like Quint, also suffers exclusion. And because of the governess’s decision to educate him at home, he becomes confined to the private sphere. Miles thus loses his allowed subject position and his space in the public sphere. Losing the possibility of occupying a subject position, Miles seems to imitate the master, the true possessor of the phallus. The governess perceives that Miles claims for his *right* of having the voice that is attributed to his sex. Miles thus demands his right for freedom and independence for being male *per se*, as opposed to the governess, or Flora, who are both females and castrated and do not have such a right.

Miles, then, demands to return to school, as he wants “to see more life” and “to be with his own sort” (James 82). As a boy, he is excluded from the category of man, which should be his in the future, through the rite of passage. In order to fit the category of man, Miles repeats the universalizing discourse of society that defines identity according to biologic sex. The word *life* thus becomes associated with man, which can be understood under the frame of male, masculine, and the possessor of the phallus, whereas *death* refers to woman, associated to the category of female, feminine, and castrated. The word *life* also refers to the public sphere where politics are discussed, trades are established, political decisions are made, and works of arts are produced. Unmistakably, *death* refers to the private, or the domestic sphere of society where the individual is confined to be a mere spectator of the decisions made in the public sphere, and where the responsibility for reproduction, nourishment, and rearing of infants takes place.

The incompatibility of Miles and the governess is explained when each one interprets the concept of man and of woman in distinct aspects. For the governess, being educated at home does not function as a mark of genre identity, whereas, for Miles, this is substantial for distinguishing the masculine from the feminine. Once Miles is confined to the sphere reserved to females, he is also relegated to the position occupied by the feminine, the castrated being. Of course, he protests against the situation:

“I want my own sort!”

It literally made me bound forward. “There are n’t many of your own sort, Miles!” I laughed. “Unless perhaps dear little Flora!”

“You really compare me to a baby girl?”

This found me singularly weak. (James 82)

Since the individual is categorized as male or female, and as masculine or feminine, the governess, by comparing Miles to Flora, categorizes the two pupils under the same framework, which necessarily has to be distinct in society. Since society attributes the masculine gender to male and the feminine gender to female as patterns of normality, Miles needs to fit the category as male and masculine to be considered an active member of society. Within that context, the governess blurs the gender difference that should distinguish Miles from Flora. He, then, attempts to change his situation of equivalence with Flora by evoking the name of his uncle, the sole figure who can promote a change in his life (James 83).

This blurring of the peculiarities of each gender proves to be very harmful to society, as a feminine male can only be interpreted as being a homosexual in Victorian society. Society requires and imposes a distinguished treatment and education to the infants of different sexes, imposing the *correct* formation of gender.

Miles is finally in a position to press the governess for a decision: “Either you clear up with my guardian the mystery of this interruption of my studies, or you cease to expect me

to lead a life that's so unnatural for a boy" (James 84). She perceives that Miles is aware of what is considered natural, or not, for a boy to live in society. Being raised in a private sphere by a governess, whose main duty involves growing females to become marriageable women, means to be treated like his sister Flora, in the private sphere. That is definitely unnatural for him, as he should be educated in schools and prepared for the public sphere.

Miles thus reveals "a consciousness and a plan" (James 84), as he knows what is natural, or unnatural for a boy. For a governess who expects to form him, it is a revelation, as he is aware of the different roles imposed by society to each sex, and of the proscriptions of each sex concerning behavior and treatment. The governess, who has endeavored to impose the hegemonic culture, has missed the point in inculcating gender identity on the pupils. She ends up producing an excluded and a rebel – an outsider, who desperately wants to be a part of the hegemonic culture as the future master. However, the governess is not guilty for her mistake, because of the difficulty, in the novel, of conceptualizing gender identity and consequently *man* and *woman*. As the governess instigates Miles to tell her what he wishes, the boy tells her: "Oh *you* know what a boy wants!" (James 90). Miles's answer can be interpreted in more than one way, as wanting to become part of an adult society, or as wanting sex. The way that Miles posits his desire evidences the tendency of society to universalize identity, as being formed of common characteristics such as biologic sex and common attributes. According to Miles, the governess has to tell the master about his good behavior so he can go back to the public sphere. He, then, reveals his plan:

"Well, don't you [the governess] understand that that's exactly what I'm [Miles] working for? You'll have to tell him [the master]– about the way you've let it all drop: you'll have to *tell* him a tremendous lot!"

[..]"And how much will *you*, Miles, have to tell him? There are things he'll ask you!"

He turned it over. "Very likely. But what things?"

"The things you've never told me. To make up his mind what to do with you. He can't send you back _"

"I don't want to go back!" he broke in. "I want a new field." (James 90-1)

Miles has plotted to make her persuade the master to change his mind about him. The master's demand for not being annoyed with any news from Bly suggests that something must have happened in the past to make him assume that posture. Probably Quint and Jessel's involvement in the previous year and their involvement with the pupils had caused that. In order to know about what has happened at school, she needs to investigate the boy's relationship with Quint. But, instead of providing an answer, Miles decides to refuse to go back to the same school, as something happened at his previous school that is irreversible and inexcusable.

The governess then insists in making Miles tell her what has happened at school (James 91). This time she instigates the boy by saying that she has begun a letter to the master, but the moment she asks for his help to save him (James 91), she is surprised by an amazing development:

[...] an extraordinary blast and chill, a gust of frozen air and a shake of the room as great as if, in the wind, the casement had crashed in. The boy gave a loud shriek which, lost in the rest of the shock of sound, might have seemed, indistinctly, though I was so close to him, a note either of jubilation or of terror. [...]

"Why the candle's out!" I then cried.

"It was I who blew it, dear!" said Miles. (James 91-2).

What is supposed to be a moment of revelation becomes a scene of manifestation of evil. Miles does not confess and he is not saved. Though he wanted to escape his status as excluded, he refuses to abandon the anti-hegemonic posture that aims at blurring the socio-

economical differences. His gesture in blowing the light of the candle represents the darkness into which Quint disappears and the endurance of their straight relation. That gesture thus conveys the close connection between them.

4.2- Confrontation between the governess and the ghosts: Flora's Salvation

As Miles takes the governess to the study room, she pays attention only to the boy, and forgets about Flora. When she eventually notices Flora's absence, she starts looking for the girl. She meets Mrs. Grose and they start a conversation:

“[Flora is] at distance” [...] “She has gone out”.

Mrs. Grose stared. “Without a hat?”

I naturally also looked volumes. “Isn't that woman [Miss Jessel] always without one?”

“She's with *her*?”

“She's with her!” I declared. “We must find them.” (James 94)

As the conversation between the governess and Mrs. Grose suggests, the gesture of covering the hair is a sign of prudery. Respectable females wear hats before leaving home, differently from morally weak females such as Miss Jessel and Flora, who do not veil their hair. The governess decides to go after Flora and Miss Jessel, leaving behind Miles, who she believes to be with Quint at the study room² (James 94). Ironically, both the governess and Mrs. Grose end up leaving the house with their hairs exposed (James 94), which indicates that they have become as morally weak as Miss Jessel.

The governess finds Flora by the lake, where Miss Jessel had appeared for the first time. The lake symbolizes the uterus and the desire to return to the mother's body, to the primordial unity. Flora reveals a wish to recover the mother-daughter union, prior to the

entrance to the Symbolic Order and to the field of the Law-of-the-Father. By doing so, Flora resists the imposition of the hegemonic culture and reveals to be a rebel against the system and the governess, whose job is to preserve that order.

For the governess, Flora is “not lone, and at such times she’s not a child: she’s an old, old woman” (James 96). The governess realizes that Flora is under the influence of Miss Jessel, which is why the little girl becomes “old.” The girl’s disfiguration points to her monstrosity *qua* threat to society and to civilization, as it reflects the same dreadfulness conveyed by Miss Jessel’s morbid appearance. The governess also notices that the girl was helped by the ghost to perform this game, as the boat used by her was “intentionally left as much as possible out of sight and was tied to one of the stakes of a fence that came, just there, down to the brink and that had been an assistance to disembarking” (James 96). Flora is then found smiling and Mrs. Grose throws “herself on her knees and, drawing the child to her breast, clasped in a long embrace the little tender yielding body” (James 97). Mrs. Grose, believing in Flora’s innocence, cannot grasp the girl’s role in subverting the Order. Flora, then, gazes at the governess over Mrs. Grose’s shoulder:

[Flora] was struck with our bare-headed aspect. “Why where are your things?”

“Where yours are, my dear” I promptly returned.

[...] “And where’s Miles?” she went on

[...] “I’ll tell you if you’ll tell *me* - ” I heard myself say, then heard the tremor in which it broke.

“Well, what?”

Mrs. Grose’s suspense blazed at me, but it was too late now, and I brought the thing out handsomely. “Where, my pet, is Miss Jessel?” (James 97)

Flora points out that both the governess and Mrs. Grose have transgressed a moral code as their heads are not covered. Flora has just accused two grown-up women of acting

against decency and morals, which is a clear indication that Flora assumes a place of command in the game. Instead of providing the *ego-ideal* strongly rooted on patriarchal values to be followed by Flora, the governess follows accidentally Miss Jessel's *ideal*, that is provided indirectly by Flora. Then, on the opposite bank of the lake, the terrible female ghost appears (James 98).

Miss Jessel appears in order to justify the governess's suspicion of Flora's involvement with evil. The governess, then, becomes "neither cruel nor mad" (James 98) for oppressing the pupils. However, Flora turns at the governess "an expression of hard still gravity, [...] absolutely new and unprecedented and that appeared to read and accuse and judge [the governess]. This, the narrator observes, was a stroke that somehow converted the little girl herself into a figure portentous" (James 98). Flora's mien contrasts abruptly with her expression at the beginning of the novel, when she gazes at the governess and Mrs. Grose "with placid heavenly eyes that [contains] nothing to check [them]" (James 30). This serene mien suggests that, previously, Flora was not conscious of the social intricacies involved in the relationship among socialized individuals, and of the gender roles. But, this time, Flora is capable of reading the governess as if she were a signifier, judging her, and, therefore, being capable of distinguishing the particularities that each woman represents in the novel.

Flora confronts three different signifiers, or *ideals*, provided by the governess, Miss Jessel, and Mrs. Grose. First, the governess imposes the socializing model that would mold her to fit the private sphere of the bourgeoisie as a passive female, subjugating her identity to the hegemonic discourse. Second, Miss Jessel offers a reverse choice: she provides a subverting model in which the social hierarchies are violated and gender roles are subverted. Finally, Mrs. Grose represents the balance between these two models, since she belongs to the working class, and thus, her model does not require the excessive castrating discipline required for a member of the middle-class bourgeoisie, as she cannot read (James 32).

Mrs. Grose defends Flora: “What a dreadful turn, to be sure, Miss! Where on earth do you see anything?” (James 99). The governess thus perceives that Mrs. Grose cannot see Miss Jessel, who is “erect on the spot” (James 98). The ghost of the previous governess witnesses the present governess’s defeat and Flora’s reaction (James 99). The governess, then, notices physical signs of change in Flora. She becomes “common and almost ugly,” a “vulgarly pert little girl,” with a “dreadful little face” (James 99-100). Those signs of corruption, which resulted from her exposure to the former governess’s evil influence, are signs of Flora’s resistance to the hegemonic culture. Flora, then, buries her face into Mrs. Grose’s dress and ignores the governess. She refuses to gaze at the governess and to be the object of her gaze, hiding behind Mrs. Grose’s skirt. The signifier that the governess has conveyed to Flora is unbearable, as the governess demands the acceptance of the female castrated position. The governess admits her defeat and shows contempt for Mrs. Grose, who defends Flora (James 100). The little girl, who had been in Miss Jessel’s domain, now, turns her attention to Mrs. Grose. The former governess’s subversive *ideal* was as unattainable as the *ego-ideal* provided by the present governess. Flora thus turns her attention to the attainable model provided by Mrs. Grose. By doing so, Flora chooses to be subversive again, as the working-class culture of Mrs. Grose is not suitable for her. She is, after all, a future member of the bourgeoisie.

As the governess goes back alone to Bly, she notices that Flora’s belongings are not placed in her room anymore (James 101). This is evidence that Flora has decided not to accept the governess’s *ego-ideal*, resisting the process of acculturation. However, Mrs. Grose reports to the governess that Flora has been “so markedly feverish that an illness was perhaps at hand; she had passed a night of extreme unrest, a night agitated above all by fears that had for their subject not in the least her former but wholly her present governess” (James 101). Miss Jessel’s libertarian *ideal* was barred by the castrating *ego-ideal* provided by the master, which

now the governess sustains. Flora thus fears the governess because of the strong castrating power that she represents. Therefore, the girl is afraid of accepting her own castrated role in society, as a passive female confined to a private sphere of the bourgeoisie. The governess makes her point after being defeated by Flora:

“Why that of dealing with me to her uncle. She’ll make me out to him the lowest creature -!”

[...] “And him who thinks so well of you!”

“He has an odd way – it comes over me now,” I laughed, “ – of roving it! But that doesn’t matter. What Flora wants of course is to get rid of me.”(James 102)

The governess is mainly concerned with her affairs of identity and desire, which are related to the master. Through the process of rupture with Flora, the governess feels a coming threat, a separation from the girl’s uncle, and her exclusion from Bly. As a solution, the governess decides to take Flora from Bly and away from the ghosts, from Miles, and from herself (James 103). The governess thus asks for Mrs. Grose’s “loyalty” (James 103), in other words, she asks amicably Mrs. Grose to abandon her position as the *ideal* attributed by Flora, giving away her place to the master. Mrs. Grose finally takes Flora to the master, the sole figure that can install the process of castration and draw Flora to culture and to socialization.

Miles’s Redemption

As the governess turns her attention to Miles, she realizes that her letter for the master has disappeared. She infers that “if Miles took it [...] he probably [...] read it and destroyed it” (James 105). For her, the boy feels guilty for stealing the letter, and he needs to confess (James 106). She sees the confession as a means of expiation of sins and of salvation. The very idea of sin comes from the transgression of the Law, and the need for confession

indicates a possible expiation and acceptance of the Law. As she supposes that Miles's dismissal from school had been due to the stealing of letters, she believes that "if he confesses he's saved" from the ghosts and, then, she would also be saved from the threat of exclusion (James 106). Her decision is to save the boy without the master's help (James 106).

The stealing of the letter represents an attempt to possess a phallus. As Miles is castrated by the master, the boy searches for a phallus that would define his position as a subject. In the absence of the master, of course, the governess performs his castrating role, relegating the boy to a private sphere, without the right to become the subject of his discourse. As Miles wears the Master's clothes and, therefore, imitates his powerful father figure, he assumes the position of a female, as the subordinate act of imitating somebody else implies an act through which the female reaches the power. In this context, Miles's sole option is to steal the letter addressed to the master. He becomes, then, a seeker of phallic power and is thus equated with a female. He is, in the last analysis, a homosexual who repeats Quint's gesture of possessing the master's phallus. As he finally burns the letter (James 114), Miles legitimates the status of the letter as a phallus and as a signifier of power and authority. As Lacan explains, the phallus becomes a signifier only by being *veiled* i.e. by becoming the ungraspable object *a* (Lacan, Écrits 319).

The last confrontation starts as the governess has dinner with Miles before the window in which Quint had already appeared (James 107). They share a mutton, which suggests the idea of sacrifice of a victim for the expiation of sins. As Miles wants to leave the room, the governess thinks that she cannot "do it [the exorcism] in *any* way" since it would be an "act of violence" (James 111). Then, the governess attempts to give Miles time, as she knows that the inquisitive questions have to be properly posed. She reveals her fascination for Miles, as he is the "small helpless creature who [has] been for [her] a revelation of the

possibilities of beautiful intercourse” (James 112). But, as Miles moves to leave the room, she posits a question about her letter to the master (James 112).

Peter Quint then appears at the window and gazes at the governess, who immediately grasps the boy and presses him against her breast (James 112-3). Miles confesses that he stole the letter and burned it later (James 113-4). The governess, then, asks Miles to give the reason why he has been expelled from school, and he tells her that he has “said things” to those he liked, who, in turn, spread them to those they liked (James 115). Miles might have been spreading Quint’s subversive ideology of seeking *for phallic power*. Because Quint’s ideology aims at the deconstruction of hierarchies and limits, the subject was unsuited to be discussed at school, an institution responsible for establishing those borders and limits in society. Miles would thus have probably been considered a threat to his mates.

The governess insists in making Miles confess his dismissal from school, and his involvement with Quint, who, at this point, stands outside of the window as a “sentinel” (James 112). Miles resists, and the ghost gazes at the governess:

[...] For there again, against the glass, as if to blight his confession and stay his answer, was the hideous author of our woe – the white face of damnation [...] I saw him, from the midst of my act, meet it with as divination, and on perception that even now he only guessed, and that the window was still to his own eyes free, I felt the impulse flame up to convert the climax of his dismay into the very proof of his liberation. “No more, no more. No more!” I shrieked to my visitant as I tried to press him [Miles] against me. (James 116)

As she is gazed at by Quint, she becomes the object of his gaze, but she resists in order to protect Miles from him. She needs to remain the subject of discourse in order to keep the control of the situation. She then grasps Miles violently, in an attempt to save him. The final confrontation starts:

“Is she *here*? [...] “Miss Jessel, Miss Jessel!” he with sudden fury gave me back.

[...] “It’s not Miss Jessel! But it’s at the window – straight before us. It’s *there* – the coward horror, there for the last time!”

[...] “It’s he?”

[...] “Whom do you mean by ‘he’?”

“Peter Quint – you devil!” His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. “*Where?*”

[...] “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 for ever!” [...] “There, *there!*” I said to Miles.

But he had already jerked round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day. With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of the uttered cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him - it may be imagined with what passion; but at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was that I held. We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped. (James 116)

The governess thus realizes that even though Miles is under Quint’s influence, his eyes are barred, and he cannot see the ghost. In her attempt to rescue Miles from Quint, the governess reveals “how [her equilibrium depended on the success of [her] rigid will, the will to shut [her] eyes as tight as possible to the truth that what [she had] to deal with [is], revoltingly, against nature” (James 108). As she keeps her eyes open, she is divided: she is both the active voyeur, who gazes at Quint, and the passive exhibitionist, who is gazed at by him. On the one hand, she faces the *ideal* of the working class, of deconstructing the social hierarchies, on the other, she faces her obligation of saving Miles, in order to guarantee her

recognition by the master. Her final decision is to close her eyes, thus denying Quint, in order to become the *spokeswoman* for the master's discourse.

She ends up grasping Miles, the ungraspable *object a*, in an attempt to save him. Paradoxically, she thus transgresses the Law, holding against her breasts the little boy who can complete her with a substitute phallus. Becoming phallic and powerful, she is given autonomy to speak in her own name and to save Miles. But in order to remain a subject, she needs to lose Miles, or the *object a*. Therefore, the final grasping symbolizes Miles's saving from Quint's domain, but his death suggests that the one who saved him has also destroyed him. Thus, the mother-son union that defeats Quint ends up destroying the life of the son.

In the end, only the master triumphs, as the governess loses Miles, her substitute phallus, and returns to her previous state as castrated individual. She thus starts to speak again in a mode of masquerade, as an imitation of the master, without being given a *name*. The governess's identity and desire are again subjected to the hegemonic discourse of the master. Therefore, she remains the spokeswoman of the patriarchal discourse and the one who helps to establish the Order, maintaining the hegemony of a discourse that, ironically, molds her as a castrated and passive being.

Notes:

¹ *Normalization* in this sense refers to the process of producing healthy heterosexuality, through resolving the libido through repression.

² She also leaves the letter, that she has written for the master, on the table in the hall.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Turn of the Screw, of course, has been interpreted in many different ways. However, no reading can provide us with the final interpretation. This research aimed at presenting a Lacanian reading of the novel and at positing a possible answer to the meaning of the novel by choosing between two possibilities of reading: as a ghost story and as a case of hallucination. Choosing to read the story as a case of hallucination involved examining the governess's testimony about her experience with the ghosts and the concept of lunacy, the latter related to female sexuality. Ironically, female sexuality is depicted in the novel as a problem without a solution. Liberation is achieved at the expense of punishment and woe, as in Miss Jessel's case. Sexual repression also produces a life of discomfort and solitude that causes lunacy, as in the case of the governess. Lunacy is thus not related to the fact that the main character sees the ghosts, or has hallucinations, but is a consequence of the impossibility of neutralizing sexuality through repression.

The novel depicts the construction of identity in Victorian society. On the one hand, the governess, an emissary of Victorian culture, tries to impose the master's values in order to establish and keep the morality at Bly. The ghosts, on the other hand, disrupt the Order, bringing to light their past of corruption. There are, therefore, two diverging cultures that strongly influence the construction of identity and gender undergone by the characters: The culture of the master, on the one hand, represents the hegemonic culture of the white and civilized and, on the other hand, the ghosts represent the dominated culture of the working class.

The ghosts are monsters that question the culture and the values of a bourgeois society, which is structured in socio-economic classes in the so-called civilized society. They

instigate the other characters to question their position of passive and castrated subalterns, and, if possible, to change their positions from dominated individuals to active beings. But, ultimately, the ghosts are excluded from society because they attempted to blur the hierarchies that fragment society, and because they allowed female desire to come to fruition. The governess chooses to remain in a safe position as a loyal subaltern escaping from the threat of exclusion. She thus opposes the ghosts by repeating the discourse of the master.

The confrontation between the discourse of the ghosts and the discourse of the master shows a clear struggle for occupying the subject position, which is delegated specifically to the male individuals in Victorian society. But, the male individual of the working class could not verbalize his aspirations or needs, and, in fact, only the male of the privileged class had a voice to establish his domain over the working class, imposing his culture. Within this context, only the males of the privileged class are possessors of phallic power, and are therefore subjects of their own discourse. The male subalterns, on the contrary, occupy positions comparable to castrated females, as Peter Quint, who belongs to the working class, and Miles, who is relegated to the private sphere.

From the perspective of Lacan's works, James's characters are similar to Edgar Allan Poe's characters in "The Purloined Letter," in the sense that they pursue *objects* that become signifiers of phallic power. The characters thus attempt to possess a phallus to overcome their castration and powerlessness and, thus, to occupy a place of command, or the place of the master. Quint attempts to possess the master's phallus by wearing his clothes and by imitating him. Miss Jessel's involvement with Quint suggests that she believed that he would provide her with phallic power. In a woman of Victorian society, however, phallic power depends on the male's authority. Eventually, her attempt to overcome her castration is unsuccessful.

Miles steals the letter that represents the master's phallus, or the *object a*. That desperate act is the only way for him to subvert the passive position he is relegated to after

being expelled from school. He attempts to occupy a speaking position at Bly that is denied by the master, who refuses to acknowledge the news from Bly. Ironically, his attitude in pursuing a letter that represents a phallus equates him with a female. Thus, he ends up making the same mistake as Quint, who has also endeavored to possess the master's phallus but succeeded only in being relegated to the status of homosexual.

By making a boat, Flora depicts her desire for overcoming her castration. She refuses to accept the education imposed by the governess, as it relegates her to a castrated position within a private sphere. Her attempt to subvert social order becomes visible when she helps Miles to set up games, creating situations in which the governess loses her position of command.

The governess also attempts to possess phallic power, as she speaks in the mode of masquerade of the master without, however, ever achieving fulfillment, as a contract of service does not provide the governess with *his* name. She thus demands that Miles become her substitute phallus, or the *object a*, in the hope that this substitute will be a solution for her desire and for her castration. The governess fills the master's absent place with Miles, and thus, starts performing double roles as castrating educator and incestuous mother.

The novel also portrays the difficulty in distinguishing the concepts of man and woman, which ultimately leads to the concepts of masculine and feminine. This reinforces the governess's difficult relationship with the pupils. After Miles's dismissal from school, the governess decides to educate him at home. However, for Miles, being educated in the private sphere is a mark of the *feminine*, whereas the mark of the *masculine* is to be educated at public schools and prepared for the public sphere. Questions like "Is *education at home* instead of *education at school* typical of feminine?" or "Is *preparation for the public sphere* characteristic of masculine?" are raised. However, for the governess, *giving education at home* does not mean that she is making Miles an effeminate boy, but for Miles, *receiving*

education at home means to be treated as a *girl*. Miles feels that he is being equated with Flora, thus experiencing a *female position* at Bly, and a passive and castrated position in society. Ironically, the governess only becomes aware of the problem when Miles starts asking her about going back to school. The governess ends up confining both Flora and Miles to a private sphere.

Flora resists her *proper* feminine position as a castrated individual at Bly. This becomes particularly evident in her escape to the lake in search of freedom and identification with Miss Jessel. Going to the lake signifies an attempt to recover the mother-daughter union, a return towards a phase prior to the Symbolic and to the subjugation to the patriarchal Law-of-the-Father. Flora's rebelliousness brings to light the obligation of the individual to choose sides. Since birth, individuals are separated into two groups, the male and female. These, in turn, necessarily lead to two different patterns of behavior and roles in society. The novel illustrates the imposition of patterns of normality, such as the dominant masculine for the male, and the feminine subaltern for the female, without any possibility of problematizing the various meanings of being masculine or feminine in society.

The governess exorcises Flora's evil influence by repeating the master's castrating discourse. But Flora turns her attention to Mrs. Grose, who offers a mild ideal that does not require excessive castration. The governess, then, asks for Mrs. Grose's loyalty, and Flora loses this secondary ideal as well. Mrs. Grose finally takes Flora to the master, who is the ultimate power capable of exercising the power of castration. By doing so, the governess assures the normal heterosexual development of Flora, which ultimately relegates her to a passive position in the private sphere.

The governess also exorcises the evil influence on Miles, who confesses that he has spread Quint's ideal of subverting the Order among those he liked. The governess's attention is split between Quint, who stands outside the window, and Miles, whom she grasps. As the

boy is the governess's substitute phallus, her grasping expresses a desire for phallic power. But, she loses him precisely when she grasps him, as he is the ungraspable *object a*. Miles is lost, and the governess returns to her previous position as castrated female. Her identity is again submitted to the master's *ego-ideal*. The governess saves both Miles and Flora by imposing the patriarchal discourse on herself as well.

In Poe's story, the letter always reaches its destination. In James's novel, the *phallus* remains with the master, its possessor, reaching also its destination. Nothing thus changes in James's novel, the master still represents the Other, who dictates the Law-of-the-Father and is the *ego-ideal* to whom the other characters must submit their identity. The Order is not subverted, and all females are still oppressed and relegated to passive roles in the private sphere.

To conclude, the novel depicts an attempt to subvert the Order and to change the patriarchal oppressive system that silences the excluded and imposes the culture of the hegemonic class. By ending the novel with Miles's death, James suggests the difficulties involved in changing the rules of the game in Victorian society.

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