

'A Fury of Intention': The Scandal of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*

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*With a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children
from play, and old men from the chimney corner.*

Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*

From its publication in twelve serial instalments in *Collier's Weekly* (27 January 1898 to 16 April 1898), Henry James' novella *The Turn of the Screw* has constituted nothing less than a *scandal*, though the site of that scandal has shifted with the history of the criticism — whose name is legion — of the tale.

His [James'] manners are perfect, even in his late studies of the putrescence of human existence. (*The Bookman*, November 1898)

Human imagination can go no further into infamy, literary art could not be used with more refined subtlety of spiritual defilement. (*The Independent*, 5 January 1899)¹

The early scandal, then, is a moral one. James' characters are scandalous (*The Bookman*), or James — by way of his imagination — is scandalous (*The Independent*). Thus we have a scandalous text refracted through a scandalous (authorial, not yet narratorial — that will come later) imagination and containing scandalous characters (the ghosts, so far).

As criticism of the text amasses, criticism itself — and one particular criticism — comes to constitute a scandal.

According to this theory, the young governess who tells the story is a neurotic case of sex repression, and the ghosts are not real ghosts at all but merely the hallucinations of the governess.²

For the following half-century, critics line up to agree or disagree, wholly or in part, with Wilson. Either the governess is scandalous, or Wilson is. The ghosts are real: the ghosts are projections of the governess's 'sex repression'; the governess is viciously deluded, and destroys the children: the governess is deluded but virtuous, and wishes only to save the children from the (actual or imagined) ghosts; the governess is a reliable narrator and her text may be trusted: the governess is an unreliable narrator and her text is a minefield of traps for the unwary reader; and so on, and so on. Such a body of criticism — contradictory, mutually exclusive, mutually hostile, self-assured, tentative — builds up to such an irresolvable diversity that one of the

most influential critics of the rhetoric of prose fiction of the last quarter-century is led to conclude that it is the totality of the criticism of *The Turn of the Screw* that constitutes the scandal. Actually, for him, the scandal resides in far less than the totality; it resides in *critical difference as such*. Referring to *The Turn of the Screw* and James' *The Sacred Fount* (1901), Wayne C. Booth asserted:

The critical disagreement revealed to anyone who compares two or three critics on any one story is a *scandal*.³

If one compares that outraged ejaculation with the following assertion dating from a mere decade later, one can see why Booth and his coevals such as M. H. Abrams and Cleanth Brooks, who were eminently influential for at least a generation of undergraduates and the teachers who constructed their curricula, were so concerned if not appalled by the influence of French semiology and deconstruction on the next generation of American college students and, by implication, the next-but-one generation of curriculum constructors.

What evaluation finds is precisely this value: what can be written (rewritten) today: the *writerly*. Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a *producer of the text*. [emphasis added] This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness — he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious*: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*. Opposite the writerly text, then is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the *readerly*. We call any readerly text a classic text.⁴

And we call any 'writerly' text a *modern* (or *Modern*) text. For Barthes, the 'Modern' (in France, at least) begins with Flaubert and *Madame Bovary* (1857); for myself, it begins (in English) with Henry James and (say) *What Maisie Knew* (1897).⁵ Whereas Wayne C. Booth sees and laments an 'unintentional ambiguity of effect' as characteristic of Jamesian and post-Jamesian narrative (though the notion of 'intention' and the lack thereof is a vexed one), with its point-of-view perspectives and its subjectivities, we 'modern' readers rejoice in just those qualities, in our freedoms as *writerly* readers, in the possibilities of (responsible) play and pleasure such a 'modern' perspective makes possible. Shoshana Felman expresses a truly 'modern', contra-Boothian/post-Barthesian point of view when she maintains that the scandal is not simply in the text, but *in the reader's relation to the text*, as well.

The publication of *The Turn of the Screw* thus meets with a scandalised hue

and cry from its first readers. But, interestingly enough, . . . what is perceived as the most scandalous thing about this scandalous story is that *we are forced to participate in the scandal*, that the reader's innocence cannot remain intact: there is no such thing as an innocent reader of this text. In other words, the scandal is not simply *in* the text, it resides in *our relation to the text*, in the text's *effect on us*, its readers; what is outrageous in the text is not simply that *of which* the text is speaking, but that which makes it speak *to us*.⁶

Felman is led to raise the — scandalous to some critical sensibilities and to veneration of James as 'the Master', alike — question as to whether

It [would] be possible to say, indeed, that the *reality of the [critical] debate* is in fact more significant for the impact of the text than the reality of the ghosts? . . . The scene of the critical debate is thus a *repetition* of the scene dramatized in the text. The critical interpretation, in other words, not only elucidates the text but also reproduces it dramatically, unwittingly *participates in it*. (pp.98,101)

The critical debate more important than the realities of the text? Can this be? But hasn't the Master, James himself, given just that licence?

Such was the private source of *The Turn of the Screw*; and I wondered, I confess, why so fine a germ, gleaming there in the wayside dust of life, had never been deftly picked up. The thing had for me the immense merit of *allowing the imagination absolute freedom of hand*, of inviting it to act on a perfectly clear field, with no 'outside' control involved, no pattern of the usual or the true or the terrible 'pleasant' (save always, of course, the high pleasantry of one's very form) to consort with.⁷

The 'imagination' that is allowed 'absolute freedom of hand' is, in the first place, James'; but this 'freedom' so informs James' narrative structures and his point-of-view presentation — subjective, partial, and in effect incorrigible — that the freedom is passed on to the reader, the modern, 'writerly' reader, in a sort-of narratorial 'transference'. Such freedom does not exist, of course, without constraints; the constraints of form, of genre, being pre-eminent. Such constraints only exist, however, to be kicked against, tampered with, varied upon.

James' governess — his central narrator within a tri-partite narratorial frame⁸ — speaks of a 'fury of intention':

'Know? by seeing her! By the way she looked.'
 'At you, do you mean — so wickedly?'
 'Dear me, no — I could have borne that. She gave me never a glance. She only fixed the child.'
 Mrs Grose tried to see it. 'Fixed her?'
 'Ah, with such awful eyes!'
 She stared at mine as if they might really have resembled them. 'Do you mean of dislike?'
 'God help us no. Of something much worse.'

'Worse than dislike?' This left her indeed at a loss.

'With a determination — indescribable. *With a kind of fury of intention.*'
(*TS*, p.184; emphasis added)

That 'fury of intention' is not 'Miss Jessel's' alone. It is, if Edmund Wilson, for example, is to be believed, the governess's also — the text represents the 'neurotic' fury of 'sex repression'. Wilson does not stop there — the 'fury of intention' (albeit an unconscious intention) is, via the medium of the notoriously convoluted late-Jamesian style, a pernicious way by which James avoids dealing with sex (Wilson, pp.152-3). Such biographical reading reaches its most extended as well as intended, and most furiously circular, expression in Leon Edel's *Life of Henry James*:

Something far deeper within him had been touched than the mere thought that he was leaving bright London and 'the world' for a rustic and rural life of solitude. [James was about to move to Rye.] *The Turn of the Screw* is a tale of a governess frightened by her own imaginings. And we must look at it closely, to see what were the hidden imaginings of its author.⁹

Mr Edel will never be content until he has teased out a hidden imagining. And the more familial that 'secret', the better.

We are reminded as we think of the trapped and dead little boys and young adults in James' own life, during the long-ago period of his rivalry with his strong and active elder brother. . . . We have then evidence, at different stages of Henry James' life — from childhood to maturity — of the masculine-feminine problem exemplified repeatedly in his fiction. There was, in the novelist, a compelling drive to masculinity which Miles expressed; but it had been driven underground. . . . There remained in James (as we can see in *The Turn of the Screw*) a young assertive male who wanted a life of action and courage, who wanted to curse and swear with his fellows. (Edel, pp.252-3)

The critical, if not the biographical, vulgarity of this is scandalous. It also involves Edel, it might be noted, in taking the governess's account of Miles' behaviour at face value. Such psychoanalysis of the author via psychoanalysis of one of his characters makes even more pointed Brooke-Rose's insistence that we *cannot psychoanalyze a character in a work of fiction*, because all we have is a congeries of words. She claims to be *psychoanalyzing the text*, a project with which I sympathize, though it also seems vexed with analogical problems — it seems to imply, for example, that a text has consciousness and a subconscious. (Brooke-Rose, p.193 *et seq.*)

I am, however, most sympathetic to Brooke-Rose's over-arching purpose:

Since it is my purpose to preserve the total ambiguity of *The Turn of the Screw*

text, I shall not argue for the ghosts or for the hallucinations, but try to show that the text is structured on a poetic principle that functions in both hypotheses. (p.158)

I agree with her that,

It is precisely because of the perfect ambiguity (undecidability) of the text that, paradoxically, I must here adopt the position of 'limited pluralism' . . . and say that no, all interpretations are *not* equally valid, and yes, there *are* aberrant (or partly aberrant) readings. (p.128)

Some readings, to be brutal, are better than others. While enjoying that proffered by Eric Solomon (1964; Kimbrough, pp.237-45), in which he argues that Sherlock Holmes would have had no trouble in deducing that all the characters have been 'the victims of that most clever and desperate of Victorian villainesses, the evil Mrs Grose' (p.245), I recognize it for what it is — a pre-emptive strike in the tradition of *The Pooh Perplex*.¹⁰

Edmund Wilson, however, has seen in James' ambiguities something perhaps pernicious, and authorially pernicious at that. In *The Turn of the Screw*, he says, James

has carried his ambiguous procedure to a point where it almost seems as if he did not want the reader to get through to the hidden meaning. (Wilson, p.138)

The stichomythic dialogue in which James' ambiguities are embedded, the 'syntactic complementarity', to use Brooke-Rose's term, which distinguishes late-Jamesian dialogue — and I would like to suggest that such complementarity may be illusory and erroneous; that is, one character may complete another's dialogue not at all in the manner or to the end that the former would have concluded it — suggests to Wilson that 'characters are able to carry on long conversations with each consistently mistaking the other's meaning and neither ever yielding to the impulse to say any of the obvious things which would clear the situation up' (Wilson, p.138). Wilson carries his particular (Freudian) 'furious intentionality' so far as to suggest that this aspect of the late-Jamesian style is a (pernicious) way of avoiding dealing with sex and mature sexuality (Wilson, pp.152-53). There may be some justice in Wilson's claim, if we consider this apparently harmless exchange between Lambert Strether and Maria Gostrey in *The Ambassadors* (1903):

She turned it over, but as hoping to clarify much rather than to harmonise. 'The thing is that I suppose you've been disappointing —'

'Quite from the very first of my arrival? I dare say, I admit I was surprising even to myself.'

'And then of course,' Maria went on, 'I had much to do with it.'
 'With my being surprising . . . ?'
 'That will do,' she laughed, 'if you're too delicate to call it *my* being! Naturally,' she added, 'you came over more or less for surprises.'
 'Naturally!' — he valued the reminder.
 'But they were to have been all for you —' she continued to piece it out — 'and none of them for *her*'.

There is no guarantee that either speaker is 'piecing it out' correctly! In such circumstances, the reader (the 'writerly' reader, that is), experiences an emotion akin to that of the unnamed narrator of *The Sacred Fount* (1901):

I struck myself as knowing again the joy of the intellectual mastery of things unamenable, that joy of determining, almost of creating results . . .

James himself enjoys this 'intellectual mastery', with a sort of sober playfulness, in the following passage from *The Ambassadors*, where author and reader share a joke that is concealed — by the typography, as it were — from the characters.

Chad showed, not without amusement, his doubt. 'Who then?'
 Strether — though a little dimly — smiled at him. 'Women — too.'
 "'Two?'" — Chad stared and laughed. 'Oh I don't believe, for such work, in any more than one!'¹¹

Where, then, if indeed anywhere, are these varying versions of 'furious intentionality' — of reading-intentions brought passionately to a text, through which that text is read, resolutely and reductively, but possibly disrespectfully — where are they to lead us, in our consideration of *The Turn of the Screw*, in particular, and of 'modern', 'writerly' texts at large? Perhaps a consideration of the text as an aesthetic object — which does not empty it of ethical concerns — may be a profitable course to follow. Let us join Henry James in sober play.

The importance, for James, of 'aesthetic bliss' (the term is Nabokov's, *apropos Lolita*) as a characteristic of prose fiction — the bliss is both the author's and his readers' — is attested to in the 'Preface' to *The Turn of the Screw*. (James' Prefaces, collected in *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (1909; repr. New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1962) are *the* definitive aesthetic 'defence of prose' in English). His tale delights him because it is a 'perfectly independent and irresponsible little fiction' which 'has the small strength . . . of a perfect homogeneity' (p.35), James' host (the Archbishop of Canterbury?) 'recovered for us the scantest of fragments' of 'a beautiful lost form' (p.36). The 'ghosts', which are 'not "ghosts" at all, as we know the ghost, but goblins, elves,

imps, demons as loosely constructed as those of the old trials for witchcraft' (see my observations about the 'Hawthorne aspect' of Henry James, below), 'please at the best but through having helped me to express my subject all directly and intensely' (p.41). That is, the 'ghosts' function is *aesthetic*; not literal, not psychological, but aesthetic! And James' reply to the suggestion that his tale is scandalous — 'my being assailed, as has befallen me, with the charge of a monstrous emphasis, the charge of all indecently expatiating' (p.42) — typically interweaves the aesthetic and the ethical.

Of high interest to the author meanwhile — and by the same stroke a theme for the moralist — the artless resentful reaction of the entertained person who has bounded in the sense of the situation. He visits his abundance, morally, on the artist — who has but clung to an ideal of faultlessness. (p.42)

It seems to me that William H. Gass is correct when he teases out of James' fiction a central ethical tenet by which *the fiction* lives. Gass offers a paraphrase of Kant's irreducible moral imperative — 'So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only' — and contends that this imperative is negatively present in all of James' great works. 'In nearly all the works of his maturity his theme is the evil of human manipulation.' Gass concludes his essay, 'The High Brutality of Good Intentions' — this might perhaps have served as a sub-title for *The Turn of the Screw?* — with a wonderful and moving paragraph, which deserves to be considered in full, the last sentence of which reads: Henry James' 'aim is rather to appreciate and to respect the things of his experience and to set them, finally, free.'¹²

Such an assertion of 'freedom' as being central to James' *oeuvre* guarantees the propriety of invoking Barthes and the 'writerly' text. Surely it would involve James in a scandalous and uncharacteristic contradiction for him to offer his characters freedom through choice, and then *deny it to his readers*. Shoshana Felman is not guilty of hyperbole when she characterizes certain readers of James, as she does the governess, as *totalitarian*.

In their attempt to elaborate a speech of mastery, a discourse of *totalitarian* power, what [Edmund] Wilson and the governess both *exclude* is nothing other than the threatening power of rhetoric itself — of sexuality as division and as meaning's *flight*, as contradiction and as ambivalence; the very threat, in other words of the unmastery, of the impotence, and of the unavoidable castration which inhere in language. . . . In demanding that the text 'speak in clear language', Wilson thus reveals the *terroristic status* of his psychoanalytic exegesis . . . Wilson's treatment of the text indeed corresponds point for point to the governess's treatment of the child: Wilson, too, forces, as it were, the text to a *confession*. (Felman, p.192)

Just as the governess's forcing Miles to a confession results in the child's *death*, so over-determined, 'totalitarian', 'terroristic', 'furiously intended' readings ('readerly' readings of a 'writerly' text) will result in *the death of the text*.

When in his 'preface' James asserted that his ghosts were not ghosts at all, but 'goblins, elves, demons *as loosely constructed as those of the old trials for witchcraft*' (p.41, emphasis added), he was invoking New England's Puritan heritage, its major redactor, Nathaniel Hawthorne, on whom James had written a critical monograph of historic importance, and, by way of our understanding of Hawthorne's literary techniques, was, I suggest, *licensing* just such a 'writerly' reading of his tale as I have been not alone in pointing to. When in his 'preface' to *The Turn of the Screw* James refers to it as a 'sinister romance,' he conjures up the shade of Hawthorne. Not merely the 'sinister' Hawthorne of *The Scarlet Letter* and the Tales, but the Hawthorne who, in his 'Preface' to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1850-51), had some very valuable things to say about 'romance'.

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the ordinary course of man's experience. The former — while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and *while its sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart* — has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. . . . When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through *a far more subtle process than the ostensible one*.¹³

If, as Kimbrough suggests, *The Turn of the Screw* shows James moving towards his 'later phase of the involuted style and the technique of the restricted point of view' (Kimbrough, p.ix), then it might be asserted that the *effect* of just those characteristics is the same as that produced by Hawthorne's syntactic signature devices, his indirections, his 'as if's, his 'some averred's, his 'it was rumored's. And the effect in both cases, produced by utterly different and perhaps — dare I say it? — in James' case, more sophisticated, means, is exactly the same — relativism, dubiety, perhaps even aporia. In each case, *the syntax will not permit a 'totalitarian' reading*. Leon Edel is correct in suggesting that in *The Turn of the Screw*, as in *What Maisie Knew*, *In the Cage*, *The Awkward Age*, and *The Sacred Fount* (all dating from 1895-1900), 'the reader's mind is forced to hold two levels of awareness: *the story as told*, and *the story to be deduced*. This is the calculated risk Henry James took in his writing for audiences not prepared to read him so

actively' (*The Psychological Novel: 1900-1950*. Quoted in Kimbrough, p.234). Tzvetan Todorov is correct in suggesting (quoted in detail below in note 10) that in *The Turn of the Screw* the verb 'to be' has lost one of its functions: in late-James, as in Hawthorne, Hamlet is turned on his head: *nothing is — everything seems*. Todorov, in 'The Ghosts of Henry James' (1969), relates relativism and point-of-view and continues:

the disorder ends, however, if we give up looking for the ghost of the fantastic genre and turn to the project which unifies all of James' *oeuvre*. This author grants no importance to the raw event but concentrates all his attention on the relation between the character and the event. Further, the core of a story will often be an absence (the hidden, the dead, the work of art) and its quest will be the only possible presence. Absence is an ideal and intangible goal; the prosaic presence is all we have to work with. Objects, 'things' do not exist (or if they exist, do not interest James); what intrigues him is the experience his characters can have of objects. . . . James makes a fundamental thematic choice: he prefers perception to action, relation with the object to the object itself, circular temporality to linear time, repetition to difference. (Todorov, pp.184-85)

Felman is right to say that, in this textual world of relativism and terminal dubiety, 'the prologue [of *The Turn of the Screw*] . . . deconstructs . . . the distinction between reader and writer. The reader here becomes the author, and the author is in turn a reader' (Felman, p.127). Likening the text of *The Turn of the Screw* to the unread and unreadable letters that litter it (Miles' school letter, e.g.; see Felman pp.138-48, 'The Scene of Writing: Purloined Letters' for a full account of the letters in the novella), Felman points to the double-bind that even the least 'totalitarian' reader of James' tale may end up in.

How can *unreadable* letters be *read*, even as they demand to be *read as unreadable*? This question, which is indeed raised by *The Turn of the Screw* on all levels, is crucial as much for the readers as for the characters of the story, whose fortunes are wholly determined by the mystery that the letters at once point to and withhold. [Felman is using 'letters' in both senses — missives and print-devices.]

How can we read the unreadable? This question, however, is far from simple: grounded in contradiction, it in fact subverts its own terms: to actually *read* the unreadable, to impose a *meaning* on it, is precisely *not* to read the unreadable as *unreadable*, but to reduce it to the readable, to interpret it as if it were of the same order as the readable. (Felman, p.142)

Now this is exactly where *criticism* of *The Turn of the Screw* and 'Modern' texts at large (e.g., Ford's *The Good Soldier*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Beckett's *Trilogy*) finds itself. This is what deconstructionist critics mean when they say that 'reading is no longer possible'. That is, reductive, 'totalitarian', 'terroristic' readings are no longer possible. Indeed, Felman captures the irony of this situation:

It is precisely *because* the letters fail to narrate, to construct a coherent, transparent story, that there is a story at all: there is a story *because* there is an unreadable, an unconscious. Narrative, paradoxically, becomes possible to the precise extent that a story becomes *impossible* — that a story, precisely, 'won't tell'. Narrative is thus engendered by the displacement of a 'won't tell' which, being transmitted through letters, forwards itself as a *writing-effect*. (Felman, p.143)¹⁴

Any reader (impossible notion!) who attends to the aesthetic intricacies of *The Turn of the Screw* cannot fail to notice how scrupulously it is patterned from the governess's opening words (and before, of course). 'I remember the whole beginning as a succession of flights and drops, a little see-saw of the right throbs and the wrong. After rising . . .' (p.152). The novella is structured through 'flights and drops'¹⁵ and the defining image of a see-saw begs the question, 'Where does (the) truth lie?' At the point of balance? At the *strong* extreme? etc, etc.

The Turn of the Screw is typical of the late phase of James' career also in that it is organized through patterns of dominant metaphors which have led Brooke-Rose to discuss their source *within the text* with respect to authorial metatexts and narrator's metatexts in a manner which immensely complicates any reading — which by now, I take it, we recognize can only be 'writerly' — of James' text. (See Brooke-Rose, Ch.8, pp.188-229, in particular). The determining metaphor of this novella, of course, is found not merely in the (governess's) text, and in the 'prologue' to that text, but constitutes its very *title*. Shoshana Felman is most acute on the function of this over-determining metaphor.

This then, is the final turn of the screw of the metaphor of the turn of the screw: the reader who tries to take hold of the text can but find himself [sic] taken in *by* it. As a performative (and not a cognitive) figure of the ironic textual force of reversal and chiasmus, of the subversion of the subject by the very irony of language, the 'turn of the screw' — or *The Turn of the Screw* — *acts out*, indeed, the very narrative — or tale — of reading, as precisely *the story of the subversion of the reader*. While the reader thus believes he holds and comprehends the story, it is in effect the story which holds and comprehends the reader. (Felman, p.184)

This, then, is the initiating image of this 'unreadable' tale that has held children from play and old men from the chimney-corner — or *by* the chimney corner, in James' frame-situation — for almost a century. In that century, the tale has not been exhausted, though much criticism of it now is. And there is *nothing scandalous* about that.

NOTES

- 1 Robert Kimbrough (ed.) *Henry James: The Turn of the Screw. An Authoritative Text. Backgrounds and Sources. Essays in Criticism*. (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), pp.172, 175. This volume contains many essays representing various interpretations of *The Turn of the Screw*, as well as a valuable bibliography. Another useful collection of critical essays is, Gerald Willen (ed.), *A Casebook on Henry James' The Turn of the Screw* (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 2nd edition, 1969). I have neither the space nor the desire to recapitulate all the various sides of this critical debate. Some aspects of it are mentioned in the next paragraph.
- 2 Edmund Wilson, 'The Ambiguity of Henry James' in *The Triple Thinkers* (New York, Harcourt Brace, & Co., 1938), p.12. Wilson more than once amended his case in the following years. I have chosen to preserve his strongest expression of it.
- 3 *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961), p.315; emphasis added.
- 4 Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (1970, Paris; trans. 1974, Richard Miller, *S/Z*, New York, Hill and Wang), p.4. Barthes, in a dedicatory note, observes that 'this book is the trace of work done during a two-year seminar (1968-69) at the Ecole pratique des hautes Eudes.' Paris: 1968. The very scene of the children trying to kill off the political — and pedagogical — fathers!
- 5 See Don Anderson, 'Can Strether Step Into the Same River Twice? *The Ambassadors* as Meta-novel,' *Sydney Studies in English*, 10 (1984-5), 61-77.
- 6 Shoshana Felman, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation.' *Yale French Studies*, Number 55/56: *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (1977), 97. This is reprinted as Chapter 7 of her *Writing and Madness* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985). All references here are to *Yale French Studies*. Felman has, just before this passage, quoted from *The Independent* (see the first paragraph of this essay.) Cf. Mark Spilka, who argues that not only is the governess prurient, but that James *constructs a prurient reader*: 'Turning the Freudian Screw: How Not To Do It' (1963: in Kimbrough, pp.245-53).
- 7 Henry James, 'Preface' (1907-8) to *The Turn of the Screw* in vol. XII of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, The New York Edition (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908). Reprinted in Henry James, *The Aspern Papers and The Turn of the Screw* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986 rpt), p.37; emphasis added. All references to the Preface to and text of *The Turn of the Screw* are to this edition.
- 8 For detailed, intricate, and satisfying accounts of the frame-tales (the 'beginning' Narrator/Douglas/Governess); of whether the frame is completed *before* the central tale is told, or whether, in a Mannerist fashion, we have a *non finito* tale; of James' Preface(s), letters, and notebook entries as 'frames', see Felman, *op. cit.* See also Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative & Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981). I make so bold as to suggest that the Felman and the Brooke-Rose are the *best* things written on *The Turn of the Screw*. They could not, however, have been written in the absence of everything that antedates them, *just as this essay could not have been written in the absence of all the texts cited in these Notes, to which body of work it is a humble codicil*. And even such scrupulously attentive readers commit Homeric nods. Brooke-Rose repeatedly misnames 'Griffin' 'Griffith' (p.173, e.g.), while Felman is careless enough to assert that Miles pronounces Quint's name, 'face to face with his ghost' (p.96, emphasis added). Wilson, too, is guilty of oversimplifying the frame-situation (p.122).

- 9 Leon Edel, *The Life of Henry James* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977), Volume 2, p.247. The circularity of Edel's text — an incident in James' life generates a situation in James' fiction which in turn validates the (perhaps) hypothesized incident in Edel's 'Life' — is everywhere apparent. It is teasing to imagine *another* equally magisterial *Life* of James that would project an utterly different Master, other than this vulgarly Freudianized one. The James we know is to a very great extent *Edel's* James. I find it productive to put against Edel's massive work the last paragraph of Todorov's 1969 essay, 'The Secret of Narrative': 'Henry James was born in 1843 in New York. He lived in Europe after 1875, first in Paris, then in London. After several brief visits to the United States, he became a British citizen and died in Chelsea in 1916. No event characterizes his life; he spent it writing books: some twenty novels, tales, plays, essays. His life, in other words, is perfectly insignificant (like any presence): his work, an essential absence, asserts itself all the more powerfully.' Tzetvan Todorov, *La Poétique de la Prose* (1971). *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1977), p.178.
- 10 While rather old-fashioned, Anthony Curtis's Introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Turn of the Screw* (see note 7, above) is generally sensible and helpful. It sins, however, on two issues. One is minor: 'Either reading [ghosts v 'sex repression'] is possible and *we shall never know for sure what James intended.*' (p.24, emphasis added). This 'furious' rage for 'intention' is a fruitless quest, even though we have access to James' notebooks, letters, and Prefaces — they may, in fact, obscure the issue, either by refusing help, or by offering it. We can much more profitably address ourselves to the *text's* intentions. The other is major: his uncritical recommending of E. A. Sheppard's *Henry James and The Turn of the Screw* (Auckland University Press: Oxford University Press, 1974). Those familiar with Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* will know what I mean when I say that this book is a triumph of Kinbotism. Sheppard, for example, devotes the forty-two pages of Chapter VI to 'proving' — to his own satisfaction, at least — that Peter Quint is George Bernard Shaw! (Contrast Todorov — 'We do not even have the verb to say "the governess is . . ." or "Peter Quint is not . . ." In this world, the verb *to be* has lost one of its functions, that of affirming existence and nonexistence. All our truths are no better founded than that of the governess. 'The Secret of Narrative', *op. cit.*, p.159). Curtis's recommending of Sheppard's chapters on James and the psychic researches of his of his contemporaries may have some point, but I am not convinced that Sheppard *establishes anything*. Even if James were familiar with these researches, and if what appear to me to be at best tangential similarities between passages from the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research* and *The Turn of the Screw* were substantial, it is still possible that James used such material hypothetically, in the subjunctive mood, so to speak, and not as an object of belief or fact. I suppose one of the most significant 'furies of intention' with respect to reading and interpretation relates to the nexus between belief and literature. A reader who believes in ghosts is more likely than one who does not to accept *that* explanation of the events of James' novella. What both 'ghost' reader and 'Freudian' reader must avoid, as Brooke-Rose and Felman again and again remind us, is the temptation to read *reductively*; we must not behave like Peacock's philosophers:

All philosophers, who find
Some favourite system to their mind
In every point to make it fit
Will force all nature to submit.

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In this instance, for 'nature', substitute 'fiction'.

- 11 Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (London, The Bodley Head, 1970), pp.405, 460 — n.b. the masterly placing of the question-mark in the latter quotation: *The Sacred Fount* (New York, Grove Press: Black Cat Edition, 1979), p.214.
- 12 *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), pp.181, 190.
- 13 New York, Signet Classics, 1961, pp.vii,ix. Emphases added.
- 14 We might note the several occasions on which, in attempting *her* 'impossible' story, the governess becomes enmeshed in what can best be termed a *paranoid* narrative (pp.183, and 206 seq. may serve as paradigms; and we may observe how the 'paranoia' is served by the stichomythia, by the 'syntactic complementarities'). In this way, at the dawn of the 'modern', *The Turn of the Screw* anticipates such postmodernist works as Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, where paranoia is elevated to a principle of narrative, epistemology, and ontology. We might note in passing that Pynchon, like Hawthorne and like James, is deeply aware of America's Puritan heritage. We might also note that the central, sinning character of Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* is one Judge *Pyncheon*.
- 15 In a serialized narrative, as any attentive reader of Dickens knows, the 'flights and drops' of episode end/beginning are crucial. James' twelve serial instalments correspond to the following chapters, allowing for the fact that the text as we read it is a revised version of its original appearance in *Collier's Weekly*: Instalment I: the 'prologue'; II: Chapters 1, 2; III: 3; IV: 4, 5; V: 6,7; VI: 8, 9; VII: 10, 11, 12; VIII: 13, 14, 15; IX: 16, 17, 18; X: 19, 20; XI: 21, 22; XII: 23, 34.