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Initiation in the Novellas of Henry James

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INITIATION IN THE NOVELLAS OF HENRY JAMES

by

COLLYN ELISA MILSTED

Under the direction of Marilyn Richtarik

ABSTRACT

This Master's Thesis seeks to explain the process of initiation undergone by Henry James's characters. Characters are chosen for initiation into forbidden knowledge, and, like the Biblical Adam and Eve, are exiled as a result. Though initiation is erotic, it is not sexual, and society falsely perceives a sexually charged relationship between the initiator and the initiate, also called the complementary pair. The initiate faces exile and death because of his forbidden knowledge. He no longer has a place in his society, which leads to his social death and eventually physical death. James's reader is initiated along with the characters, becoming a critical reader who no longer sees reading as a passive activity but brings his own judgment to the text. The Jamesian Reader does not face the same fate as the initiate, but he does change substantively as a result of his new perspective on the text.

INDEX WORDS: Henry James, Initiation, Isolation, Knowledge, Death, Sexuality, *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Figure in the Carpet*, *Daisy Miller*.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband and my son, without whom I would have finished much more quickly but much less happily.

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INTRODUCTION: *DAISY MILLER*

In Henry James's novellas, initiation into forbidden knowledge results in the protagonist's social disgrace and death. To be initiated in a James novella is frequently to be set on a path to ruin, one that paradoxically is the only possible way to progress. Gert Buelens argues that "interesting, conscious characters in James are invariably associated with loss and deprivation" (34). James's initiates, as Buelens indicates, pay a price for their knowledge and inclusion; they have acted more innocently than those around them despite knowing more than others. They have been initiated, yet remain apart from the corruptive influence of the knowledge they gain. They are isolated within circles of intimacy, both physically and emotionally. This isolation provides the perfect place for the revelation of taboo knowledge, and the initiates remain isolated afterward since their knowledge sets them apart from their societies. Their initiation means that society will see a sexually charged intimacy between the initiator and initiated that does not in fact exist, and that perception taints only the initiated. Such destructive initiation appears in *Daisy Miller*, *The Figure in the Carpet*, and *The Turn of the Screw*, in which characters effectively ostracize themselves in pursuit of a desire that ultimately brings them nothing. These characters choose initiation because it is the only way forward, but they must also accept that this figurative birth will lead to social shunning and eventual death.

The initiation of each character takes place within a complementary pair composed of opposites who nonetheless work productively together. These pairs are divided by gender, but often also by social class, occupation, or experience. The initiatory pair mirrors the Biblical Adam and Eve and follows their path of exile and death. Initiation provides a new moral framework in which the initiate sees beyond the mores of his society to life itself, just as Adam "will be like God, knowing good and evil" after eating the fruit that is "desirable for gaining

wisdom” (*Thompson Chain-Reference Bible*, Gen. 3:5-6). Critically, Adam is punished for his disobedience, not his knowledge; initiatory knowledge is powerful, not corruptive, and brings initiates agency in their own lives and the lives of others. God confirms that “the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil,” and, to keep him from being able to eat from the tree of life and “live forever,” God “banished him” from Eden (*Thompson Chain-Reference Bible*, Gen. 3:22-23). The initiate, too, is exiled; he has been in a circle of intimacy, a group isolated within an Edenic setting, and his opened eyes make him unfit for the society in which he has lived. Just as God feared that man would become immortal in addition to his understanding of good and evil, society fears that the initiate will bring unpredictable changes as a result of his knowledge and banishes him for its own protection.

The initiate begins the process as the inexperienced member of the pair, and his more experienced counterpart provides the forbidden knowledge. The initiate desires this knowledge, or what he believes it will give him access to, but he has made a Faustian bargain that will refuse him what he wants. He functions as a protégé to the initiator and therefore remains at the fringes of the initiator’s group throughout the text. Eric Haralson explains that “James had a substantial history of eroticizing” relationships between a mentor and a disciple figure, and it is clear that the initiation process casts an unwarranted sexual shadow on the initiated (123). Initiates are singled out for a desired trait; initiators choose initiates as they would choose mates, drawing from the group the individual with the qualities most important to them. Initiation is therefore sexualized without being sexual; while physical touch accompanies the transfer of knowledge in an isolated, erotic setting, the complementary pair rarely consummates a sexual relationship. Although the relationship between them compromises the initiate in the eyes of society, it is not

until he sees himself through the eyes of society – naked, as it were – that he realizes he is no longer part of his society and must face exile.

The initiate will experience two deaths after his or her fall: one social and one physical. The social ostracism prefigures the physical death, both by foreshadowing it and by establishing a rationale for it. Victoria Coulson argues that James viewed his time as one of sexual upheaval that brought about a “reaction by the social hegemony against reform and change” (3). The “unique views” (Coulson 197) of James’s initiated characters cannot survive within traditional society, and the characters must be “exiled” (135). In each case, the character is in a spiritual situation that requires physical death; usually, he or she is no longer compatible with his or her world and must simply cease to exist. James’s early work *Daisy Miller: A Study* establishes this pattern of initiation and death. The character of Daisy Miller is socially initiated by the charming Winterbourne; remains surprisingly innocent throughout the text despite her wanton appearance; is shunned by Mrs. Walker, a fellow American expatriate who leads a small social circle in Rome, and Winterbourne himself; and dies of malaria, which symbolizes not only her reckless behavior but also the society that ostracizes her.

Daisy is first initiated into society as half of a complementary pair. She and Winterbourne are both American, yet he is almost European in his ability to navigate expatriate society and speak the language of society matrons such as Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker. Winterbourne initiates Daisy primarily by exposing her to the suspicions of society as she is seen in his male company. He suggests introducing Daisy to his aunt and then must lie to her and retract the invitation when he discovers that Mrs. Costello “must decline the honor of her acquaintance” because of Daisy’s flirtatious behavior beginning with their starlit trip to Chillon (James, *Daisy Miller* 15). Winterbourne has initiated Daisy in two ways: individually, she has

now seen the workings of society and can enter it at least partially, and socially, she has been exposed to Winterbourne's peers, who have formed opinions about her, however unfounded. While she appears compromised by Winterbourne's attentions, she has not in fact behaved indecently, merely inappropriately through her ignorance of social mores, while Winterbourne remains unscathed. Though Winterbourne has "admitted to shifting visions of Daisy's nature," in the end he associates her with a "black little blot," which Lynn Wardley interprets as "immodesty" (Wardley 248). Daisy never performs a sexual action, however; only her observers project sexuality on her (247-8). Though she falls, she retains her innocence, as validated by both Winterbourne and Giovanelli near the close of the novella.

Daisy's friendship with Winterbourne facilitates her initiation into society, though ultimately her association with him furthers her outcast state. Though Winterbourne's patronage could help Daisy move up in society, his taking her out at night without a chaperone negates this effect and sets Daisy in the midst of scandal. She is able to meet other members of society, but each of these new contacts, though apparently helpful in that they represent the establishment that Daisy longs to join, worsens her situation. Mrs. Walker, though well-meaning, insists that Daisy enter her carriage rather than walking with Mr. Giovanelli, at which point Daisy rebels and refuses. Daisy's actions are not nearly as problematic as her new-found knowledge; when Daisy understands how society sees her actions, she rejects its strictures, which leads to her exile. When she sees that even Winterbourne, whom she believes to be her friend, agrees with Mrs. Walker that her behavior is unacceptable, Daisy quickly denies their aspersions, insisting on her own innocence and freedom to do as she pleases. Jeff Staiger contends convincingly that Daisy "does not sufficiently allow for evil, and is therefore set up for a fall" (128). Mrs. Walker has, in effect, projected a wantonness onto Daisy that Daisy refuses to accept. Staiger asserts that Daisy

is “contrasted” with those like Mrs. Walker who are fallen and remains “suspended . . . between innocence and experience” (128). Her innocence is clear to herself, and she blindly trusts that it is clear to others, saying “if [my walk with Giovanelli] is improper, . . . then I am all improper” and Mrs. Walker and her society “must give me up” (James, *Daisy Miller* 35).

The initiation that Daisy and other Jamesian characters undergo, much like the biblical Fall itself, is sexualized without being sexual; that is, it has sexual implications without in fact involving sex. Staiger pictures this initiation as a “suspended fall” in which “the [hero or] heroine achieves experience without losing [his or] her innocence” (128). Throughout *Daisy Miller*, characters accuse Daisy of flirting and of being too familiar. The scene in which she and Giovanelli hide behind her parasol is particularly striking here; while there is no evidence in the text that they kiss, Mrs. Walker firmly believes that they do. Mrs. Walker, of course, is a member of the corrupted society into which Winterbourne has initiated Daisy and treats Daisy as if she shares Mrs. Walker’s understanding of its rules. David Southward explains that because social mores play such a dominant role in James’s work, his characters often fail to understand each other or form meaningful relationships since they essentially speak different social languages (516). Each character must learn the prevailing social codes to be able to communicate, and Daisy will never be able to do this because she has already been tainted through her association with Winterbourne and will never be fully accepted by society. Daisy’s initiation brings her into an intimacy with Winterbourne that is innocent, but that creates the image of Daisy as a sexual being in the eyes of society so that, when she walks with Giovanelli, their intimacy is seen as sexual rather than friendly.

Daisy’s mask of social acceptability – the correct clothing, the “best rooms in Rome” – belies her fundamental incompatibility with society (James, *Daisy Miller* 31). She believes

steadfastly in her own individual propriety above the collective judgment of the social group, her primary mistake. She remains at the fringes of the social group, only invited to certain parties and into a few homes, where she makes continual social mistakes, such as asking to bring Mr. Giovanelli to Mrs. Walker's with her. At this party, Daisy's very entrance marks her as an outsider; she is late, gives a poor excuse that revolves around the unwanted foreigner, and then does not "wait to be spoken to," but rushes up to her hostess uninvited (James, *Daisy Miller* 38). Even Mrs. Walker's hints, particularly her "pregnant" statement that "everyone knows you," slip past Daisy (James, *Daisy Miller* 38). Daisy has been initiated into society – she can enter it – but she will remain at the edge of it because she is, according to Winterbourne, "completely uncultivated" (James, *Daisy Miller* 14).

While many critics focus disproportionately on the sexual in James, specifically his own alleged homosexuality and its appearance in his texts, these novellas merely introduce sex, primarily as a paradigm of initiation. Characters experience initiation that either casts sexual aspersions on them or appears in a homoerotic setting, as in *The Figure in the Carpet*, but no actual sex occurs, nor do the initiated characters seek it. The initiation resembles Adam and Eve's disobedience in Eden in that action is less significant than knowledge. It is the knowledge, not the action, that corrupts, and when characters in James's novellas are initiated, each leaves a largely idyllic, prelapsarian state. They start out naïve and are brought into knowledge through intimacy with another character who understands the postlapsarian world into which he initiates them and seems to have only a dim view of the innocent state out of which he brings them. Kevin Ohi posits that "the 'fall' ... [seems] to mark the eventual realization that the effort to protect another from knowledge unknowingly produces an 'innocence' in one who attempts to promulgate it on another's behalf" (119). In the case of the Jamesian novella, the initiated

maintains his or her innocence despite being knowledgeable and therefore apparently fallen. Ohi argues that, when the initiated, having realized the effects of his own initiation, attempts to protect another character from the fall that he has experienced, he regains his own innocent, pre-fallen state, though this is not true of James's later, more complex works.

Much modern criticism of James leads as if inevitably to discussions of both overt sexuality and homosexuality, though there is little to no evidence that James's characters are closeted homosexuals or that they act as they do in order to reject heterosexuality. Though critics like John Bradley see Winterbourne's rejecting Daisy as a rejection of heterosexuality, I would argue that he is instead refusing to be associated with the open sexuality that society projects on Daisy, thereby maintaining a sexuality that society is willing to overlook if not fully accept. Staiger asserts that to the "Europeanized American" like Winterbourne, "there is a vaguely sexual boldness about [Daisy's] activity" that he feels he must reject (128). Ironically, however, Daisy's preference for flirtation over marriage follows the example of Winterbourne who, at the end of the novella, returns to Geneva, ostensibly to study, though most believe he is studying a "very clever foreign lady" rather than an academic subject (James, *Daisy Miller* 51). Daisy is entirely unlike Winterbourne's secretive lady in Geneva; she is young and innocent, her only artifice the expensive clothing that marks her as wealthy though she lacks the training that her outward appearance is designed to suggest. Ultimately, Winterbourne upholds the double-standard of his day. He has never been or pretended to be innocent, and appears unaffected by his relationship with Daisy as he returns to the same life that he lived at the beginning of the novella. He can go to Chillon in the evening and still see Mrs. Costello, and his trip to the Colosseum leaves him unscathed. Because Winterbourne is secretive about his sexuality, the

whispers about it are powerless, but because Daisy loudly insists on her innocence, she draws attention and therefore censure.

Though Daisy's rejection of Mrs. Walker's offer of a carriage ride and all that it represents will lead to her social shunning by Mrs. Walker's group for the same reason that Mrs. Costello refuses to meet her, and ultimately to Daisy's death in the Colosseum, it is this decision that accounts for Daisy's developing personal strength and agency. When Mrs. Walker insists that Daisy's behavior is inappropriate on her walk with Giovanelli, Daisy reacts for the first time as an adult, her words and actions finally reflecting her own decisions rather than the gossip and innuendo surrounding her. This show of agency on Daisy's part marks her complete initiation; she now understands the rules of the society around her and actively refuses to follow them. Coulson posits that Daisy sees that she must refuse the prevailing social strictures as she refuses Mrs. Walker's carriage ride, which is why she also does not fear the ramifications of her trip to the Colosseum with Giovanelli. I disagree that Daisy fully understands the ramifications of her refusal to enter Mrs. Walker's carriage, but Daisy's actions clearly demonstrate that she sees prurience in Mrs. Walker's assumptions about her and not in her own actions. Staiger suggests that Daisy is too much of a threat to the "James-like bachelor of the story" and must therefore "lose her independence" and ultimately disappear (133). While this is true, Daisy is also a clear threat to women in the story, such as Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker. Her reputation reflects on their society should they accept her, and her apparent sexual freedom offends their carefully constructed notions of womanhood, in particular because Daisy appears to be so similar to them in dress and station. Since women like Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello have the power to marshal society behind them, Daisy is forced out, albeit through her own rejection of their rules and under her own power. There is no place for what James called the New Woman in Roman

expatriate society, and, just as Winterbourne must “cut” her because she appears loose, she must also contract Roman fever and die. She does, however, develop strength which she uses to choose actively; though the price for this is death, she is nonetheless the only character in the novella who approaches this level of agency.

Wardley argues that James paints sexual agency as specifically masculine, yet Daisy clearly takes control in her scenes with Giovanelli (236). Daisy demonstrates this in entering the Roman Colosseum. Not only does Giovanelli say that “she wanted to go,” but she demonstrates through leading Giovanelli that she has been initiated (James, *Daisy Miller* 50). Whereas early in the novella Winterbourne leads her to the boat and so into social scandal by volunteering to row her to Chillon, Daisy leads Giovanelli into the Colosseum of her own volition, demonstrating an adult, sexually aware persona, one who cannot fit into the society that surrounds her. Because society has shunned rather than educated her, she does not realize that she should not venture into the Colosseum or that Giovanelli is doubly immune, from the sexual insinuations because he is a man and from malaria because he is native, while Daisy has neither protection. The Colosseum is a battleground; Daisy draws her battle lines here, and Winterbourne must choose whether to accept or reject her new-found power. While Daisy appears surprised when Winterbourne “cuts” her in the Colosseum, her surprise is not the result of her ignorance about society, but of her realization that the social mores confining her transcend the personal for Winterbourne. His principles and reputation outweigh their friendship, placing him in stark contrast to Giovanelli. Winterbourne is the one associated with Daisy’s death; by “cut[ting] her dead,” he reaffirms that there is no place in his society for a woman who leads the way (James, *Daisy Miller* 51).

Daisy's insistence that Giovanelli take her to the Colosseum precipitates her two deaths: the physical, technically from malaria but tellingly called Roman fever here, perhaps suggesting the power of the expatriate Roman society that the Millers try and fail to infiltrate, and the social at the hands of Winterbourne. With Daisy's literal death, Winterbourne realizes his misprision of Daisy and reevaluates her. He is startled by Giovanelli's assertion that she was "the most innocent" person of his acquaintance and transfers his disapproval from Daisy to Giovanelli, blaming him for Daisy's decision to visit the Colosseum (James, *Daisy Miller* 50). He demonstrates here that he has completely misunderstood her, ascribing her agency to Giovanelli and unable or unwilling to see Daisy as a woman of power and substance. Winterbourne does, however, recognize that his shunning of Daisy had in fact hurt her, as he reinterprets her final message to him for Mrs. Costello. "She would have appreciated one's esteem," he says, and then admits that the "mistake" in the situation was his (James, *Daisy Miller* 51). Daisy again appears innocent; through her death, she has won the battle over her reputation. Daisy regains her innocence, as Ohi suggests, when she protects Giovanelli from Mrs. Walker's aspersions. When she refuses to enter Mrs. Walker's carriage, she not only declares her independence from the rules of Mrs. Walker's expatriate society, but she also declares her own and Giovanelli's innocence, paving the way for Giovanelli to set the record straight about Daisy after her death. Daisy, who is traditionally read merely as a foolish flirt, demonstrates power and presence by the end of the novella, becoming an initiated woman who chooses a path that forces her out of society and leads to her death.

The pattern of initiation leading to death appears even more distinctly in James's *Figure in the Carpet* and *The Turn of the Screw*. In these more complex, later works, the original initiate passes the torch to another character who pays the price for the initiate's failure to

succeed in a personal quest. In *The Figure in the Carpet*, novelist Hugh Vereker privately introduces the unnamed narrator to the existence of a mysterious “figure in the carpet” that ties together all of his writing under the surface. The narrator and Vereker form a complementary pair of critic and author, but this initiation is abortive. Though the narrator is shunned by both his friend and fellow critic George Corvick and the literary society at Bridges, where Vereker is the guest of honor, he never discovers the secret, though he is ironically far more successful by worldly standards than Corvick, who does claim to discern the Figure. Further, the narrator escapes death, even claiming to have had his “revenge” when he discovers that Gwendolen’s second husband, Drayton Deane, is also ignorant of the secret. He does not experience a physical death, likely because he fails to “get at” Vereker as Corvick has instructed him to do, and is thus never fully initiated (James, *Figure 2*).

The narrator passes the mantle of initiation to Corvick, who claims to uncover the secret while on a trip to India. Vereker asserts to the narrator that, together, a man and woman might find it out, suggesting that when Corvick marries Gwendolen Erme, a minor novelist, their differing genders and careers could help them find the answer together. Corvick experiences multiple complementary pairs that help him discover the secret, despite remaining at the fringe of the critical world. His trip to India provides the key; Corvick moves from a Judeo-Christian worldview with one male God to a polytheistic belief system in which the chief god and his consort form a complementary pair like James’s initiates. Both Corvick and Gwendolen die before their time, leaving only the narrator and Gwendolen’s second husband to search in vain for the Figure.

In *The Turn of the Screw*, the master of Harley Street is the primary initiator in a chain that spreads initiated knowledge throughout his estate and beyond it. The master initiates the

young governess whom he sends to Bly to raise his orphaned niece and nephew. Once she arrives at Bly, the governess meets the ghost of Peter Quint, who was also initiated by the master, and who takes over her initiation from him. The governess's obsession with Gothic novels leads her to corrupt the initiated knowledge that the master and Quint give her, and, in the end, she corrupts her young charge, Miles, even as he takes over from Peter Quint to complete her initiation. The shifting in complementary pairs reveals deep class divides at Bly that propel the characters toward both intimacy with and isolation from each other.

The master of Bly elevates a servant, Peter Quint, far above his station, putting him in charge of everything at Bly and allowing Quint to rule in his stead. Quint makes Bly his own, upsetting class boundaries and the rules of propriety. He initiates Miss Jessel, and they are also sexual partners, which leads to her exile and death. Quint also initiates young Miles, who is nonetheless innocent, despite his initiated knowledge, until the governess interprets his knowledge for him and forces corruption on him. Bly is a corrupted place once the governess arrives, and it is no longer run according to the established social order, since the master has abdicated his rule to a succession of corrupt servants. Miles's death at the end of the text is the result of his being unable to survive in the new social order of Bly.

Henry James's characters are initiated in his novellas, and so are his readers. James wrote extensively in his notebooks and prefaces about the kind of reader he wanted to produce as the result of reading his texts. His own practice is the pattern for his readers to follow. James claimed to be a highly critical reader who reenacted the process of writing a text as he read it. He considered every aspect of the text from form to plot as he read, constantly asking questions and augmenting his judgment. James and his reader form an extra-textual complementary pair as James's texts initiate his reader into James's own Figure, his desire for a more critical, informed

readership. Ross Chambers contends that James sought a readership willing to be seduced by his texts, which were structured specifically to entice the kind of reader he wanted, and that his ideal reader would “conform” to the “image” that James set out in his texts (15). I will argue that James creates his ideal reader, whom I call the Jamesian Reader, through the process of initiation, and that as his characters, specifically his unnamed narrators, are initiated, the reader must recognize and participate in the process in order to interpret James’s texts.

The reader of James’s work participates in the initiatory process in two ways. James’s narrators tend to be unnamed and possess few overt characteristics, which enables the reader to insert himself in the position of the narrator and also judge his actions. The reader becomes a more critical reader through James’s text because he considers the biased viewpoint of the narration and must ascertain whether to believe the narrator or search for an alternative interpretation of the events of the text. James’s notoriously abrupt endings contribute to the reader’s work. Without a summation of the story to rely on, the reader must judge the good or evil in the story for himself. This is the second way that he participates in the initiatory cycle. In reading James’s “fruit,” the reader becomes initiated by Henry James himself into a new knowledge and way of reading, becoming a critical Jamesian Reader in the process. He is not exiled, but becomes part of a new society of critical readers; he does not die, but he ceases to be a mere receptacle and is reborn as a scholarly reader and thinker. His exile, like Adam’s, is fraught with toil; he can no longer simply read a book, but must now question and critique, doing some of the work of the author as he reads.

The destructive force of initiation in James’s novellas ruins his most alive, most energetic characters. Though they do not seek initiation or trespass as a result of it, they nonetheless pay a price for the knowledge that they gain. Their falls, necessitated by the singularity conferred on

them by initiation, take them first from society and finally from life itself. They become walking paradoxes – innocent yet initiated, aware yet naïve – and ultimately they are entirely misunderstood by those around them. Jamesian Readers, too, are separated from society by allowing James to seduce them into initiation through his texts. They now read critically, so that reading becomes as active as writing. Initiation is important for James's characters and his readers. It defines them, sets them apart, and changes the societies they leave behind. While it may ruin them, it is a kind of birth, and the only way to move forward. The characters, over whom James exerts authorial control, may die, but they have at least lived for a while, though they leave behind many who, while socially accepted, will never truly live.

THE FIGURE IN THE CARPET

Henry James's *The Figure in the Carpet* explores the relationship between initiation and power through the literary world. Here, author and critic combine to create a complementary pair, the product of which is both knowledge and punishment. The characters search for the mysterious figure in the carpet that Hugh Vereker says underlies all of his books and calls "a secret in spite of itself," since it was never intended to be hidden (James, *Figure* 9). Those who claim to discover it die, while those who remain ignorant live. The narrator of *The Figure in the Carpet* fails to discover the secret of Vereker's works, and the novella itself is notoriously unclear as to whether anyone discovers the Figure or what it might be. This ambiguity suggests that the secret itself is less important than how each character goes about searching for it. This search begins with initiation and ends in knowledge, exile, and death.

The unnamed narrator of *The Figure in the Carpet* is unusually conscious of others' opinions, continually judging others and himself, as well as making asides and insinuations, as though he is interacting with an interlocutor rather than a reader. James is famous for his unnamed narrators, and they are the conduits through which he initiates his readers as opposed to his characters. Each initiate is reborn, so that initiated death appears to be a baptism rather than a true death, and enters a circle of intimacy that leads to a change in society's perception of him or her. The reader, too, faces his death as a reader but is reborn as a Jamesian Reader, one who looks beyond the biography of the author, who lets his imagination supply the details, who notices tiny things and makes connections within the text. As one reads *The Figure in the Carpet*, one continually questions the narrator and reads into his intimations about other characters. His very unreliability forces the reader to sift carefully through the evidence the narrator provides, which makes the reader more proficient in his pursuit of the "truth" of the text.

Ross Chambers contends that the text itself seduces the reader into “a closed world” in which the initiated “engage in a fascinating game” with the “text-reader relationship ... at the center” (152). Just like the characters in the text, the reader enters what I will call the circle of intimacy, plays a game with the characters, and is eventually exiled.

James’s letters and notebooks are full of references to the reader, and he structured his texts with the express purpose of creating the Jamesian Reader. James wrote to his publisher that he was preoccupied with “certain things missed by the reader, things that might rather confidently have been looked for” by a more critical reader, and bemoaned the lack of “serious or attentive criticism” for his work (James, *Letters* 407). James proposed himself as the pattern of his desired reader in a letter to H. G. Wells, saying that he was “a critical, a *non-naïf*, a questioning, worrying reader” and explained that “to read a novel at all I perform afresh, to my sense, the act of writing it, that is of rehandling the subject accordingly to my own lights and over-scoring the author’s form and pressure with my own understanding” (James, *Letters* 686). James mimicked the process of writing as he read. He believed that “the writer makes the reader,” and thus that the writer should create a text that will, in turn, create a critical reader (James, *Theory* 321). James’s expectations of his reader are as stringent as those he set for himself. In a letter to the Duchess of Sutherland in which he explained to her how to read *The Ambassadors*, James directed her to “read five pages a day – be even as deliberate as that – *but don’t break the thread*. The thread is really stretched quite scientifically tight. Keep along with it step by step – and then the full charm will come out ... all the drawing-out the reader can contribute helps a little perhaps the production of that spell” (James, *Letters* 301-2). James wrote that novels fail when “the reader never touches the subject and the subject never touches the reader” (James, *Theory* 66), and his novels are therefore calculated to create what Julie Rivkin

calls an “authorial echo,” a reader so in tune with James’s meaning, so thoroughly seduced by and initiated into his writing, that the author can relax and relinquish control of his text (479). To raise up a critical, thoughtful reader was, to James, also to raise literature itself from the “demoralization [and] vulgarization” into which he believed it was sinking (James, *Theory* 338). Since he believed that “the reader does quite the labour” of becoming a Jamesian Reader through a text, James used his works to set out the template that the reader should follow; these texts initiate the reader into James’s perspective on literature and on life (James, *Theory* 321). The reader must be initiated in order, as James says, to “guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implications of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern” (James, *Theory* 35). The Jamesian Reader must understand the tale through the judgment of the narrator, and must therefore be doubly skeptical, judging both the narrator and his narration.

James uses *The Figure in the Carpet* to show his ideal reader how to relate to a text. James seeks an amateur reader, not a literary critic, who can see the game played in the text’s literary world as a doubtful exercise that may or may not reveal literary truth. Chambers proposes that James does this by showing “the behavior patterns of the literati” in pursuit of the titular Figure as “ludic,” merely part of a game certain to distract from precise understanding of the text (152). The search for the Figure separates those who live solely through literature, with success in that field as their only goal, from those who learn to live life, with literature a highly prized part of it. *The Figure in the Carpet* thus provides an allegory by which the Jamesian Reader understands his own relationship to the text. The reader finds himself in a situation much like that of Coleridge’s mariner, trapped between Death, suffered by George Corvick and Gwendolen, and Life-in-Death, which claims the unfulfilled narrator and Drayton Deane. While initially all four characters privilege literature over life, Corvick and Gwendolen learn to live life

beyond the pursuit of literature, leaving the narrator and Deane to their half-lives of disappointed desire. While Corvick and Gwendolen claim to possess the secret, we can never be sure that they do. Though the narrator and Deane outlive Corvick and Gwendolen, we know that they are frustrated and impotent in their ignorance. The Jamesian Reader must decide for himself which path to take, and must choose either to be initiated and thus follow Corvick and Gwendolen out of the story, or to accept the impotence of the narrator as his own.

The narrator demonstrates the principle that James's initiates, though they possess special knowledge, are less successful than those who remain outside the intimate circle of initiation. The narrator at first appears to have achieved less than his friend and fellow critic, George Corvick, though the narrator is the first possessor of the secret. Corvick has "done more things" and "earned more pence" than the narrator, though the language here is somewhat sardonic and suggests that Corvick, despite being a bigger success than the narrator, is still average at best (James, *Figure 2*). Gert Buelens posits that "the cost of consciousness and conscience, in James, is always won at the cost of material power. Vulgarities and literal possession ... are associated with the latter; artistic interest ... with the former" (34). The narrator's vulgarity appears in his review of Vereker; though he possesses Vereker's book and the coveted assignment to review it, he lacks Corvick's level of sensitivity and utter devotion to the novels. Corvick even obliquely calls the narrator "vulgar" in refusing to elaborate on his own highly suspect understanding of Vereker's Figure (James, *Figure 13*). Corvick demonstrates that he is actually the better candidate to discover the Figure despite being the secondary initiate and, in the narrator's biased estimation, a relatively average critic.

The complexity of this novella is such that there are multiple initiations, but only one that seems to lead to knowledge of the Figure. The narrator's initiation is the first one, but certainly

the least successful. The narrator “count[s his] real start” from George Corvick’s assigning him the task of reviewing Hugh Vereker’s newest novel (James, *Figure 2*). This scene represents the narrator’s first initiation into the Figure, though it is incomplete and will ultimately fail to produce results. In this initiatory scene, Corvick merely gives the narrator “the first volume” of Vereker’s work “tied up with a stout string” (James, *Figure 2*). Not only does this argue that the narrator does not even receive the full work to be reviewed, but it also suggests that the work is closed to him. The string around the book itself indicates that the narrator has not been initiated into the knowledge contained therein. Neither man opens the book during this scene, nor is any information exchanged. Clearly, the initiation to take place will revolve around this novel, but Corvick has not opened it for the narrator, nor has he truly initiated the narrator. This initiation is abortive from the start, though this scene does set the stage for Corvick’s eventual claim to have discovered the secret.

Corvick’s initiation of the narrator is fruitless for two major reasons: first, he focuses on Vereker himself rather than on his work, and second, he is unable to express precisely what he wants the narrator to find in his search. Corvick sets the narrator on a quest to “try to get AT [Vereker]” in his review of Vereker’s latest novel (James, *Figure 2*). This attempt to get at an author through his work will ultimately fail and is perhaps an argument against the kind of criticism often leveled at James himself. Much of the current critical response to James’s own work revolves around his personal life, specifically his sexuality, although he was quick to dismiss the claim that biographical criticism revealed truth within a work of fiction. F. O. Matthiessen argues that *The Figure in the Carpet* “was designed as a plea for . . . mature criticism,” showing critics that “their task is not fulfilled unless they have passed beyond the trees to the wood . . .” (qtd. in Levy 457). In James’s preface to *The Figure in the Carpet*, he

asserts that criticism in his day was nothing “like close or analytic appreciation” and that his intent in writing *Figure* was to “reinstate analytic appreciation” of literature (James, *Figure* xv). In this way, the *Figure* itself serves as a beacon to the critic to move beyond the surface of a text or even a writer’s life and delve into the work not only as a single text but also as part of the larger body of the author’s work, as Corvick’s quest for the *Figure* demonstrates. The narrator’s abortive initiation by Corvick focuses more on Vereker, and on Corvick himself, than on Vereker’s text. Leo Levy argues convincingly that “James is characterizing the narrator in such a way that he comes to symbolize what is wrong with or missing in the ‘analytic appreciation’ of the age,” especially since the narrator searches both alone and with a focus on the author rather than the text (459). Both Corvick and the narrator avoid Vereker in the end; the narrator is ashamed that his reputation improves dramatically by the end of the novella despite his having “irremediably missed [Vereker’s] point” (James, *Figure* 18). “Not only had I lost the books, but I had lost the man himself: they and their author had been alike spoiled for me. I knew too which was the loss I most regretted. I had taken to the man still more than I had ever taken to the books” (James, *Figure* 18). Here, the narrator shows not only that his focus has been on the author rather than the text, but also that he has been exiled from the intimacy he once enjoyed, both literary and personal.

The narrator attempts Corvick’s assignment with very limited information. Corvick’s discussion of the review to be written is ambiguous and vague, since Corvick himself cannot explain what he wants; furthermore, Corvick’s goal for the narrator is not in fact focused on Hugh Vereker or his new novel. Corvick tells the narrator to “speak of [Vereker] ... as I should have spoken of him” (James, *Figure* 3). This initiation also fails because Corvick is unable to express what the narrator should strive to capture. Corvick says that Vereker “gives me a

pleasure so rare; the sense of ... something or other” (James, *Figure 3*). When the narrator presses Corvick to be more explicit, he replies that Vereker’s true impact is “just what I want YOU to say” (James, *Figure 3*). This implies that Corvick actually wants the narrator to ascertain Corvick’s own reaction to Vereker’s work, which Corvick has not yet read, rather than any true sense of Vereker’s work itself. This is ultimately why Corvick’s initiation of the narrator is incomplete; the narrator is pursuing Corvick’s unformed idea of Hugh Vereker’s work, yet he has been given Vereker’s work as his text rather than Corvick’s own understanding.

As the narrator begins the doomed quest that Corvick has set him, he “[sits] up with Vereker half the night”; he immediately goes to Vereker’s texts, not Corvick, which demonstrates that he is on the right path. However, the language here shows that he focuses on the author rather than the text, and this focus will ultimately contribute to his failure to discover the Figure. Levy takes issue with Quentin Anderson’s argument that “the critics in *The Figure in the Carpet* ... are Virgilian intelligences, acquisitive of knowledge and incapable of love” (qtd. in Levy 459), arguing instead that “this indictment applies ... to the narrator alone,” which is why he ultimately fails to unravel Vereker’s secret (459). I agree that, while Corvick and Gwendolen are cunning and calculating, they do actively live life as they search for Vereker’s secret, in particular through their somewhat tumultuous relationship. While the narrator works in frustrated seclusion, Corvick succeeds primarily because he moves between circles of intimacy, forming and benefiting from complementary pairs. The narrator, in contrast, is set an impossible task by Corvick with which he must struggle alone. His failure to capture Corvick’s sense of Vereker is therefore unsurprising, since he was in fact on the wrong path to the Figure. The narrator’s failed search for the Figure mirrors his frustrated desire for companionship as he

becomes tangled in the biographical criticism that James deplored while Corvick learns to mine the relationship between the author and the text.

The narrator, ironically, displays great potential to discover Vereker's Figure, despite his relative inexperience, and his failure to reveal the secret is due not to a lack or weakness in himself but to his isolation and incomplete knowledge. Vereker sees something in the narrator that makes him choose to share his secret. The narrator has "a spice of intelligence...exceptional sharpness" in Vereker's estimation, and Vereker picks the narrator out as a "rising young [man]," an "awfully clever" young reviewer who nonetheless "missed [Vereker's] little point," albeit "with inimitable assurance" in his recent review (James, *Figure 7*). The narrator does not possess knowledge that makes him worthy of further knowledge; in fact, his ignorance is part of Vereker's rationale for the initiation. Though he appears at first to be on track to discover the Figure, this appearance is deceptive; as Buelens suggests, those who appear materially successful lack the artistic understanding that matters in the Jamesian world. The narrator possesses "the tip," but not the wherewithal to turn it into understanding (James, *Figure 15*).

It is not enough for the narrator to be presented with Vereker's text and to be invited to review it; he must still meet Vereker and be initiated by him before he can lose his innocence. This indicates that there is a human element not only to initiation but also to the secret in Vereker's work, and that the narrator must relinquish his isolation before he can understand the Figure. The narrator must therefore experience a connection with Vereker; the human element must be introduced, though the complementary pair formed by the narrator and Vereker turns out to be a mere distractor. One is a critic and the other an author, for example, but they are nonetheless both men, and their connection can be only so intimate in the context of the Jamesian novella. Moreover, the narrator has only intellectual promise and some minor

accomplishments in the critical world to suggest his potential. Vereker is a renowned author whose wide experience includes familiarity with the narrator's critical world. The narrator cannot balance this with experience or achievements of his own, and he reveres Vereker and his work almost without reason, likely in mere imitation of Corvick. According to John R. Bradley, the narrator's relationship to Vereker is "idolizing," which inequality further separates the narrator from the Figure. Though he and Vereker form a complementary pair, their experiences are so disparate that no lasting connection remains between them, which thrusts the narrator back into his isolation and away from the Figure (126). The relationship between Vereker and the narrator allows Vereker to pass his knowledge to the narrator, but the narrator cannot, in a Jamesian text, have a full relationship with Vereker and will therefore be unable to discover the secret. Their relationship does, however, make Corvick's and Gwendolen's initiations possible, since the narrator passes Vereker's knowledge to them.

The intimacy between the narrator and Vereker is forged through physical touch, which precipitates their initiatory scene and brackets the narrator's leaps and shifts in understanding. Though the narrator feels initially that his review is "an acute little study" and that Vereker is "cruelly conceited" to dismiss it, the narrator's view of his own article changes as soon as Vereker touches him (James, *Figure 6*). The moment that Vereker puts "his hand on [the narrator's] shoulder" and asks "leave to cross [the narrator's] threshold" to talk, "the sense of [Vereker's] solicitude made all the difference" to the narrator, who then sees his review as "cheap" and imagines that it "fluttered off into space, and the best things [he] had said became flat enough beside the brilliancy of [Vereker's] being there" (James, *Figure 7*). The human element has now been introduced, the mentor/disciple relationship has been established, and the narrator is primed for initiation by Vereker in the obliquely homoerotic scene in the narrator's

bedroom at Bridges. Eric Haralson notes that James often eroticized the mentor/disciple relationship between men, reflecting the Greek practice of combining sexual and intellectual initiation between male teachers and students. At the end of that scene, Vereker lays his hand on the narrator to reassure him. This physical touch closes the initiatory sequence just as the initial touch opened it. The narrator's first guess about the Figure – “an esoteric message” – is incorrect, and Vereker “put his hand out as if to bid [the narrator] good-night” (James, *Figure 10*). But the narrator “kept hold of his hand” and declares his intention to publish an article on the Figure once he has discovered it (James, *Figure 10*). Their next touch is shortly after this when Vereker “indulgently shook [the narrator's] hand again,” urging him to give up as he veers off on wild guesses about the Figure (James, *Figure 10*). The narrator tries to retain the human element, his connection to Vereker, but Vereker retracts it and, with it, any chance of the narrator's success.

Vereker's initiation of the narrator is first couched in sexual terms, but the initiation is sexualized without actually being sexual in nature. The two men enter the narrator's bedroom with Vereker's hand on the narrator's shoulder. They cross the threshold like a married couple, the larger, more masculine and experienced figure leading the smaller, younger, “inferior” one through touch, like an experienced groom leading a virginal bride to the marriage bed, the expected paradigm in James's time (James, *Figure 7*). Vereker stands “on [the narrator's] rug, in the firelight ... his fine clear face all bright with the desire to be tender to my youth,” in a striking parody of the Victorian notion of the wedding night (James, *Figure 7*). The “sight of [the narrator's] relief touched [Vereker], excited him, brought up words to his lips from far within” (James, *Figure 7*). Here, the initiation is clearly sexualized, even homoerotic. J. Hillis Miller argues persuasively that “the passing on of the secret obviously has something to do with

sexual intimacy and sexual knowledge” and that “the narrator’s ‘impotence’ [his inability to discover the secret] seems connected with his celibacy” (116). The narrator’s continued isolation through the text will keep him far from the Figure and “impotent” in his search for it while those around him discover it. Vereker can transfer knowledge to the narrator, he can lead him to the Fall as the serpent leads Eve, but he cannot ultimately form the kind of complementary pair with him that Corvick and Gwendolen can create. This initiation therefore has to do with life and creation, but not actual procreation, though it entails both intimacy and sexuality.

The Figure itself raises passionate reactions and sexual impulses in the initiated. After the scene of initiation, when Vereker and the narrator have left the bedroom, they begin to speak of the Figure in generalities as “buried treasure,” “the joy of [Vereker’s] soul,” and “the loveliest thing in the world” (James, *Figure* 11). Before this, in the intimacy of the bedroom, they speak in specifics, calling it “a heart,” “the organ of life,” and a thing “as concrete as a bird in a cage, a bait on a hook, a piece of cheese in a mouse-trap” (James, *Figure* 10). Denis Flannery posits that the “organ of life” that Vereker refers to may be the male sexual organ, especially since it is listed separately from the heart (150). In this view, the Figure represents both creation and the creative process, which argues for the necessity of a complementary pair to discover it. Morton Dauwen suggests that the novella itself is “a virtual paradigm of James’s notion of the creative mystery” (qtd. In Levy 457). Though the narrator’s initiation is somewhat homoerotic in nature, it becomes a spiritual event, more like the biblical account of creation than the conception of a child. The narrator experiences a Fall, but he does not experience life; nothing comes from his initiatory scene with Vereker, and the narrator is only a vehicle to pass the initiatory knowledge to Corvick.

The narrator experiences intense passion as a result of his initiation by Vereker. In fact, the bedroom at Bridges functions as a kind of Garden of Eden; the narrator is innocent when he enters it but is initiated there into knowledge, an awareness that there is forbidden fruit of a kind, particularly as Vereker tells him to “give it up” despite the narrator’s looking “on him rather yearningly” (James, *Figure* 11). Vereker’s secret is in fact so tempting that the narrator wishes he had Vereker’s book with him so that he could “[spend] half the night with him” again (James, *Figure* 12). After this encounter, the narrator earnestly desires greater exposure to both Vereker and his work. Crucially, he does not gain specific knowledge here; he cannot answer the riddle, but he knows that one exists, much as Adam and Eve could only understand Eden once they had committed the act that would exile them from it. R. P. Blackmur argues that the Figure itself means “no more than that there is a figure in the carpet if you can imagine it . . .” and that, rather than being “there to discover,” the Figure is itself the knowledge of something beyond the immediate (qtd. in Levy 458). The narrator has been initiated into knowledge itself and thus may begin his true quest, searching Vereker’s text instead of focusing on Corvick or Vereker. Once the narrator loses his innocence, he is exiled and can never experience the moment with Vereker again; like Adam, he is punished, not for his knowledge, but for his disobedience in refusing to give up his search for the Figure. Though he remains haunted by the Figure, he can no longer imagine it as clearly or touch its source as he once did.

Language is the vehicle of the narrator’s initiation; much as the serpent uses language to seduce Eve, Vereker uses language to initiate the narrator into knowledge of the Figure. Vereker is the master of words, and the narrator’s innocence and willingness to give up that innocence in Vereker’s presence encourage Vereker to bring up words that are hidden deep within himself. Further, “these words presently conveyed to [the narrator] something that . . . [Vereker] had never

uttered to anyone”; this is a unique experience (James, *Figure 7*). Just as there is only one loss of virginity, so there is only one initiation, and once knowledge is shared, the recipient can never be ignorant again. Vereker talks to the narrator “as an equal” because he has now initiated the narrator through words, “what [they] both loved best” (James, *Figure 7*). They now stand on common ground, language; interestingly, they physically stand on the rug that gives the narrator the inspiration to call the secret a “complex figure in a Persian carpet” as this intellectual shift occurs. This shared stance indicates that the narrator has been initiated by Vereker into a shared understanding, though he is still unequal to Vereker. The narrator feels that Vereker “couldn’t have done anything more intensely effective”; there is no deeper connection to be made or further initiation to take place (James, *Figure 7*). The power of language, particularly among the authors and critics of *The Figure in the Carpet*, is paramount. Their world is predicated on the power of language, and literature is its highest expression.

The form of Vereker’s work is the clue to the Figure; literature for him is not simply a story, but a craft, an art. Vereker says that, for him, the Figure is “that part of the business in which, for [the writer], the flame of art burns most intensely,” and that “the order, the form, the texture of [his] books will perhaps some day constitute for the initiated a complete representation of [the Figure]” (James, *Figure 8*). Language is therefore doubly important to Vereker; it is the vehicle through which he reveals his deepest truth. James himself argues in a letter to Horace Walpole that “form *is* substance to that degree that there is absolutely no substance without it. Form alone *takes*, and holds and preserves, substance” (James, *Letters* 619). In fact, the actual moment that Vereker initiates the narrator occurs when Vereker tells the narrator what the Figure is: “the very thing [Vereker has] written [his] books most FOR,” “the passion of [his] passion” (James, *Figure 8*). Levy rightly contends that, for James, form itself is “not mechanical or

external, but the essence, the soul of meaning itself” (464). This is why the initiate must study Vereker’s texts instead of his biography. Vereker uses the craft of literature to convey essential meaning, even saying that his Figure “chooses every word, it dots every i, [and] it places every comma” (James, *Figure* 10). The narrator never focuses on Vereker’s form as a good critic should do, but instead studies the man for clues, leading thereby to his failure to find the secret.

The Figure reduces the infinite to the finite, that is, the message to the novel, which can only be accomplished through language; for example, though beauty cannot be conveyed directly, it can be described or explained. In this way, the Figure reveals essential truth beyond Vereker’s actual texts. Miller argues that the Figure is the joining of form and content and that the narrator is a kind of Theseus, “compulsively retracing the labyrinth in an always frustrated desire to master it” (Miller 109). Miller correctly concludes that the narrator is destined to fail in his search because he is merely reenacting the Figure even as he tries to unearth it, and I would add that he becomes the Figure in a way, continually expressing it but unable to articulate it, just like Vereker himself. The narrator should be searching both the form and content of the texts to release the Figure; in Miller’s argument, these two elements form a complementary pair of their own, and both parts must be addressed if the Figure is to be revealed. Vereker insists that the Figure is to the text as the heart is to the body, both an element of form and of feeling. He uses literary metaphor to suggest meaning that he cannot confine to language alone; the Figure is life rather than literature, and literature merely teaches the larger lesson. Vereker could have been an artist instead, much as the narrator compares Corvick’s abortive attempt to write about the Figure as a “critical Vandyke”; the essential fact is that he creates and uses his creation to reveal something beyond it (James, *Figure* 25). Understanding the Figure, then, is also a form of creation, making meaning out of art. For the narrator, this is impossible; he does not truly live or

see beyond his own narrow experience and therefore cannot discover the Figure, nor is he able to see it even when it is right in front of him in Vereker's text.

Miller and Flannery both argue that the metaphor of the Figure is itself what convinces the reader that there is a secret to discover, while Levy and others claim that the knowledge that there is a secret is merely the beginning of the initiation into a much deeper truth. Flannery goes so far as to suggest that "for Vereker, there is no secret" (150). In Miller and Flannery's view, Vereker believes his Figure to be so obvious that critics should simply follow a proverbial trail of breadcrumbs through his texts, connecting the dots that draw out the Figure. While Vereker says that he could verbalize the nature of the Figure if he were a critic, he is still unable to pinpoint it himself but has merely laid out a trail, indistinct to him, for critics to follow and interpret so that it reveals a hidden logic. For Levy, however, the knowledge that the Figure exists merely hands the critic a fruit that, once he eats it, reveals secrets to him almost as a matter of course. I agree with Chambers's view that there must not only be a secret, but that it must be explicable outside of the text for the text itself to be meaningful rather than a mere game or intellectual exercise. This is why the narrator mentions Vereker's approbation of Corvick's alleged discovery; a false secret is pointless, and Corvick's letter after he has left India and seen Vereker reveals that the secret must be earned, not simply received. The initiated must follow Vereker's advice and become other than he is in order to seek the Figure successfully; if he is an author, he must also be a critic.

The narrator's resentment resulting from his inability to discover the secret leads him to question the very nature of the Figure. Vereker's Figure was never intended to be a secret, and the narrator's failure to discover what Vereker claims should be obvious contributes to his literary impotence. Vereker shifts the focus of the search for the Figure from himself to the

narrator by saying that the Figure is “naturally the thing for the critic to look for ... the thing for the critic to find,” and thus the initiated have the burden of the task (James, *Figure 8*). Vereker feels like “a failure” because reviewers do not see the Figure, and he blames himself that the Figure remains a secret because he has failed to initiate his critics despite his “years and labours” (James, *Figure 7*). The narrator, in his frustration about his own inability to discover the Figure, doubts Vereker’s word. He wonders where Vereker “got his tip” and, as he leaves him for the last time after their final meeting, imagines him isolated in “some safe preserve for sport,” toying with those who seek the Figure (James, *Figure 15*). The narrator even discredits Vereker in his own mind, as if to make himself feel better for his failure to discover the secret, by suggesting that Vereker depended on the “density” of his readers for his own self-aggrandizement (James, *Figure 15*). James gives no hint whether Vereker created the Figure on his own or whether he, too, was initiated, but I would argue that Vereker is most likely a true Jamesian Reader and, in reading other texts, discovered the Figures of other writers. Vereker claims that he “shouldn’t ... have had the heart to go on” writing if he had considered that critics might miss his Figure as they have, which indicates that the Figures of other writers are as clear to him as he expects his own to be to the narrator. If Vereker created his own Figure based on his interactions with other writers’ texts, he would understand that others must do the same with his and not simply be led to the water to drink lest they fail in their understanding of what they find. The narrator has been given too much help, and is therefore unlikely to find the Figure. He has not discovered the existence of the Figure, and has therefore missed an important step in the process.

Vereker puts the obstacle of ambiguity in the narrator’s path, privileging Corvick and Gwendolen’s attempt over his. As Vereker tries to explain the Figure, the narrator is quick to point out that his portrayal “doesn’t make what [he] describe[s] very distinct,” recalling

Corvick's inability to specify what he wanted the narrator to capture in his review (James, *Figure* 10). These initiations merely open doors, and the knowledge that the narrator gains is knowledge that more exists to be discovered. The writer must create and initiate; the critic must be initiated and explain. This symbiotic relationship is the foundation of discovering the Figure and ultimately why the narrator never discovers it. Vereker believes instead that marriage will assist those seeking the Figure, since the spouses will become, as the Bible indicates, "one flesh," suggesting both that they change intimately and that they produce offspring equally comprised of both parents. Vereker says that he has illuminated and elucidated the Figure in "twenty volumes" in his own way as a writer and that the narrator must go and do it in his way, as a critic, which, despite his repeated readings of Vereker, he only attempts to do once (James, *Figure* 11). This again suggests Corvick and Gwendolen as the perfect pair, since she has theoretically created her own Figure, and Corvick has reviewed her work, conceivably elucidating her Figure. They need only apply the same pattern to Vereker's texts.

George Corvick is the type of "ambivalent realist" that Victoria Coulson notes in James's fiction who can be open to multiple choices and creates "a place of imaginative negotiation" in which his unique view can survive outside of society (197). This character, whom I call the initiate, is "disturbed by [his] unwilling apprehension of the flaws, gaps, and contradictions in the structures of social authority" (Coulson 196). Since this character cannot survive in society, but must remain in his own created space, he must be isolated from it. Corvick, in his trip to India, his intimacy with Gwendolen, and his singular relationship with Vereker, moves from isolation to isolation, never engaging fully with the social world but maintaining small, intense circles of intimacy. Coulson suggests that this type of intimacy – isolated from larger society but keeping several people in close quarters – appears throughout James's fiction, experienced by

characters like Daisy Miller, George Corvick, and the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, whose isolation is fueled by a secret or a hidden truth that sets them apart. This isolation appears to allow Corvick to discover the secret and have it confirmed, but it also leads to his death. Corvick dies on his honeymoon, isolated from the larger world as he increases his marital intimacy. Like Daisy Miller, both George Corvick and Gwendolen Erme will try “for presence and fullness” but end up dead (Buelens 34).

Once the narrator initiates Corvick by telling him of the existence of the Figure, Corvick can combine his sexual initiation with Gwendolen and his literary initiation from the narrator to discover the secret. The narrator sees that “one of the first things [Corvick] would do would be to rush off with [the narrator’s] story to Gwendolen,” thereby initiating her as well and cementing their pairing in the quest for the Figure (James, *Figure* 13). While the narrator sets off on Corvick’s quest alone, Corvick pursues sexual initiation with Gwendolen and thus closes in on the human element first, which paves the way for his understanding of the Figure. Since “the creative act is a collaborative venture” in James, Corvick needs Gwendolen to complete his quest for the Figure (Levy 465). Corvick and Mrs. Erme are in a battle over Gwendolen; the narrator pictures Corvick as a knight in shining armor rushing to the assistance of the “unsupported and alarmed” damsel in distress (James, *Figure* 25). His privileging of sexual initiation over literary appears to make Corvick less likely than the narrator to unravel the Figure, but, in the end, it is what helps him solve the riddle. Transmission of the true Figure requires a sexual union between male and female as well as a literary union between author and critic. This formula contributes to Vereker’s Figure remaining secret, since, though he is married, he spends most of the text away from his invalid wife, and he has not found a suitably acute critic to draw the Figure out. The narrator’s homoerotic initiation is brought about by mere touch, whereas

Corvick and Gwendolen have the potential for fruitful sexual and literary coupling. That their marriage does not produce literal children is immaterial; the Figure itself resists a literal interpretation. The issue is creation itself and the increase of the human element.

The knowledge that Corvick and Gwendolen gain through initiation heightens the passion between them. Gwendolen, on hearing from Corvick that Vereker has a secret hidden in his work, is “ardent,” and Corvick is shocked that the narrator even thinks they might have shared the secret outside their relationship; it is clearly a private, intimate knowledge and “Gwendolen’s ardent response was in itself a pledge of discretion” (James, *Figure* 15). Their pursuit of the Figure is almost sexual; they keep it only to themselves, feeling that it is “too precious to be shared with the crowd” (James, *Figure* 15). For the narrator’s circle, “literature was a game of skill, and skill meant courage, and courage meant honour, and honour meant passion, meant life” (James, *Figure* 19). While the narrator struggles alone with the Figure, Corvick and Gwendolen make it part of their lives, focusing on it and even living through it. Gwendolen’s “passion visibly preyed on her, and in her presence, [the narrator] felt almost tepid”; he has never been as passionate about the Figure as they are, instead preserving his isolated existence, never allowing the pursuit to change him and even reinterpreting events to rationalize his failure (James, *Figure* 19). He dismisses Vereker as having played a trick on him, and tells Gwendolen that he believes the Figure to be nothing, even summing up Corvick’s view of the Figure by saying that “he’d call it letters, he’d call it life, but it was all one thing” (James, *Figure* 15). This description reveals the connection between the Figure and life beyond the literary world in the narrator’s conception, though, ironically, he will fail to realize what he has shown to the reader. Gwendolen and Corvick, however, make the Figure their sole focus, allowing it to permeate their entire relationship. Even before they are married, the narrator sees that Corvick “possess[es]

Gwendolen” and that they seem to have experienced a Fall; they display “intellectual pride” on learning of the secret (James, *Figure 15*). Once they both know the secret exists, Corvick “[speaks] equally for Gwendolen” as if they are married, though as yet they are not but only share the knowledge of the secret (James, *Figure 15*). Their passion for the Figure certainly assists them in their search, even though they must eventually part before Corvick discovers it, which contrasts them strongly with the passionless narrator.

Knowledge fuels Corvick and Gwendolen’s passion both for each other and for the Figure. They are likely to figure out the secret because they have “light to mingle” with each other’s (James, *Figure 15*). This light, as in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, suggests knowledge; they are cast out of Eden together, and so might survive and procreate. Levy asserts that *The Figure in the Carpet* “proposes that the work of art tests the humanity of its readers” and that the novelist’s ideas can only be “understood [within] a community of shared values” (Levy 456). Corvick and Gwendolen’s application of life to literature begins to unlock the Figure for them, and their intimacy increases their chances of success even as it further removes the narrator from intimacy with them and with Vereker. Corvick and Gwendolen even have their own language now, and they have “remarkably little English” left over for the narrator (James, *Figure 16*). The narrator is in a similar situation with Vereker in that he denies them “the detail of what Vereker had said to [him]” (James, *Figure 15*). The narrator, too, can deny intimacy, but he is now shut out of intimacy with Vereker, who was clearly irritated with him the last time they met. His finite knowledge cannot take him to the Figure, but the communal knowledge shared by Corvick and Gwendolen is fruitful.

The image of the narrator “out in the cold while, by the evening fire, under the lamp, they followed the chase for which [he] had sounded the horn” shows that Corvick and Gwendolen

enjoy the comforts of hearth and home – visual images of marriage – while the narrator feels exiled and excluded (James, *Figure 16*). This imagery also shows that he was the one to initiate Corvick by sounding the rather phallic “horn” (James, *Figure 16*). Corvick and Gwendolen “did as [the narrator] had done, only more deliberately and sociably – they went over their author from the beginning” (James, *Figure 16*). This shared reading is productive as opposed to the narrator’s isolated search. The narrator, too, experiences desire, but for him it has no object other than the Figure and is therefore abortive: “It wasn’t a bit true I had ceased to care for knowledge; little by little my curiosity not only had begun to ache again, but had become the familiar torment of my days and nights [like a] disease” (James, *Figure 19*). These descriptions are also common descriptions of masturbation in Victorian writing, casting the narrator’s lonely search in a negative light, and certainly excluding it from procreation despite certain biological similarities. Levy finds that “an act of qualified readership is literally a participation in and a completion of the artist’s labor,” which argues that not only do Gwendolen and Corvick need each other to unravel the secret, they also must acknowledge that they are in a form of relationship with Vereker himself (465). Corvick and Gwendolen resolve to “take [Vereker] page by page” and “let him sink all the way in,” thereby extending their own intimacy as well as their intimacy with Vereker (James, *Figure 16*). The narrator says that “they would scarce have got so wound up . . . if they hadn’t been in love,” since “Vereker’s inner meaning gave them endless occasion to put and keep their young heads together” (James, *Figure 16*). Gwendolen and Corvick already have the Figure. It is part of the fabric of their relationship now, embodied in the very manner in which they search for it. It is important here that Corvick and Gwendolen are both young and innocent, like the narrator was at the start, and that they are in love; this combination yields results. In fact, Corvick and Gwendolen’s marriage is allied with the article

that Corvick is writing to expose the Figure: “Mrs. Erme’s death brought Corvick straight home, and within the month he was united ‘very quietly’ – as quietly, as I seemed to make out, as he meant in his article to bring out his *trouvaille* – to the young lady he had loved and quitted” (James, *Figure* 25). This marriage not only enables Corvick to discover the secret, but it becomes the secret itself.

Gwendolen herself is both literary and sexual, the ideal partner for one seeking the Figure. Though Corvick gave her first novel a “really splendid” review, the narrator calls it “a desert in which she had lost herself, but in which too she had dug a wonderful hole in the sand – a cavity out of which Corvick had still more remarkably pulled her” (James, *Figure* 19). This imagery somewhat crudely indicates the relationship between man and woman as well as author and critic in that Gwendolen’s creation is a “cavity” that Corvick must enter in order to perform his part of their relationship. Corvick has been initiated into Gwendolen’s work through his critical review of it, and he has been initiated sexually through his marriage to Gwendolen (the social aspect of sexuality through marriage is new to him whether sex itself is or not). They therefore experience a balance of literary and sexual initiation that the narrator misses. The narrator accuses Gwendolen of having “vamped up” an engagement to trap Corvick now that he appears to have the Figure. He snidely insinuates that “she must have had resources of which [he] was destitute” to lure Corvick, suggesting that her sexuality is her best tool to get what she wants (James, *Figure* 23). Gwendolen’s first novel is also suggestive of her sexuality; the three-volume novel was traditionally the realm of women such as Oscar Wilde’s *Miss Prism*, overly romantic and ultimately silly, full of head-in-the-clouds fantasies. The irony that popular authoresses often took three volumes to tell very little would not be lost on James’s reader, and, in the narrator’s telling, Gwendolen never takes the literary world by storm despite apparently

having the secret of the Figure. Initiation, whether real or supposed, does little for her apart from improving her last two books over her first, and she never achieves a high level of success, though, in Buelens's view, this argues for her knowledge of the secret since she gives up worldly acclaim. Gwendolen's true power appears to lie in her sexuality, since this furthers not only her literary career but also her relationships with Corvick and Deane.

Before he goes to India, Corvick appears as impotent as the narrator is in his search for the Figure, but after his return, he seems to have regained his literary and sexual power. The narrator reports that "for some time before his going we had indulged in no allusion to the buried treasure, and from his silence, which my reserve simply emulated, I had drawn a sharp conclusion. His courage had dropped, his ardour had gone the way of mine" (James, *Figure* 19). The narrator views Corvick as passionless, having "no knowledge – nobody had any" before he leaves for India (James, *Figure* 12). In fact, Corvick rejects the narrator's knowledge as tainted, saying that "he didn't want to be told too much" as it might "spoil" his search, maintaining the tension between the two critics, each of whom subtly criticizes the other throughout the text (James, *Figure* 13). Corvick goes so far as to leave all of Vereker's books behind, since he needs a complete removal from his situation in England in order to discover the Figure. He enters a self-imposed exile, recognizing that the society around him will suffocate his attempt to unravel Vereker's Figure, and he leaves of his own accord. Corvick's sojourn in India is strongly associated with feminine and sexual power that balances the strongly male-dominated, sexless community of which Corvick is a member in England. It is even orchestrated by a relative through marriage, which suggests that marriage relationships are important in Corvick's search for meaning. Corvick's voyage to India cures his impotence, both literary and sexual, because he becomes immersed in the Other. Gwendolen believes that the "difference of thought,

of scene” gave “the needed touch, the magic shake” that revealed the Figure to Corvick. She claims that “the elements were all in [Corvick’s] mind, and in the *secousse* of a new and intense experience they just struck light” (James, *Figure* 20). Leaving behind the masculine world of Victorian England, Corvick creates a space in which he can see the world, and therefore the Figure, differently.

Corvick goes to India in large part to make enough money to marry Gwendolen, or so the narrator believes, revealing that he “naturally inferred that [Corvick’s] obvious desire to make a little money was not unconnected to the prospect of a union with Gwendolen Erme” (James, *Figure* 18). This will overcome Mrs. Erme’s apparent objections, thereby separating Gwendolen from her mother’s control and thus ending her maidenhood; however, upon leaving, Corvick announces to the narrator’s astonishment that he is “not a bit engaged to her” (James, *Figure* 19). Though there had been “a private understanding,” despite Mrs. Erme’s objections, “there isn’t now,” perhaps due to Mrs. Erme’s recovery (James, *Figure* 19). In India, Corvick regains his literary and sexual power, but obstacles to his union with Gwendolen remain in England until Mrs. Erme’s death. As Corvick regains his sexual power, he becomes a threat to Mrs. Erme, whose clear opposition to the marriage appears throughout the novella. Corvick’s return foreshadows a shadow sexual contest for Gwendolen, which he wins solely because he has the Figure to offer as an enticement, withholding it from Gwendolen until they are married, and thereby trumping Mrs. Erme’s power over her daughter. As soon as Gwendolen receives Corvick’s cable saying that he has discovered the Figure, she tells the narrator that she will marry Corvick “straight off” and that her mother “may swallow the dose” so that Gwendolen will be free for Corvick to return and claim her (James, *Figure* 23-24).

The narrator describes Corvick's discovery as having taken place in Vishnu's temple, indicating that the key to the discovery is Vishnu himself. Tellingly, the Figure appears in female terms, but is found in a temple dedicated to the worship of a male god: "But fancy finding our goddess in the temple of Vishnu! How strange of George to have been able to go into the thing again in the midst of such different and such powerful solicitations!" (James, *Figure 20*).

As a god who has a sexual union with a female counterpart, his consort Lakshmi, Vishnu demonstrates the power of the complementary pair; his name even comes from the root word meaning "to pervade." Vishnu and Lakshmi have children together and always take the same form, so that they are both manifest either in bodies or spirits and therefore always able to interact fully. The two represent family life, the union that drives Corvick's understanding of the Figure. Corvick sends no proof that he has discovered the secret; he merely sends a short, remarkably ambiguous telegram that must be taken on faith. Gwendolen believes that Corvick is certain that he "he has got it" because "when you see it you do know" and proceeds to quote Virgil: "*vera incessu patuit dea*" (she stood revealed, an undoubted goddess in her walk) (James, *Figure 20*). This suggests that Corvick has seen the Female revealed fully. This Female is both sexual and enlightening, since Aeneas refers specifically to Venus, the beautiful goddess of love, as he speaks this in the *Aeneid*. A revelation of knowledge occurs in Aeneas's vision of Venus, since Aeneas recognizes a woman and a goddess, both "other" than himself. The goddess image is Gwendolen's, of course, and is therefore somewhat unreliable. As the female counterpart to Corvick, Gwendolen plays a sexual role and perhaps has a sexual way of understanding Corvick's revelation, just as she quotes Virgil, the father of epic poetry, to describe it since she is the author to Corvick's critic. Corvick discovers the Figure where there is a sexual union

between a god and a goddess rather than in a Christian nation with its sole, masculine God, and Gwendolen sees the Figure in terms of Venus, who is also a married, sexualized deity.

There is power in the sexual union of marriage, and yet there is a terrible price to pay as well; death follows it throughout the text. Miller claims that “the possessors of [Vereker’s] secret die. They die so abruptly and so fortuitously as to suggest that possession of the secret is deadly, like looking on the goddess naked,” which of course is Gwendolen’s very image of Corvick’s discovery (116). The narrator even refers to the Figure as “the idol,” indicating that it is sacred, and that to look on it is to rend the veil and see the face of God (James, *Figure 26*). Corvick dies almost immediately after it is logical to assume that he has consummated his marriage and revealed the Figure to Gwendolen. The narrator wonders, in fact, whether Gwendolen “had ... seen the idol unveiled? Had there been a private ceremony for a palpitating audience of one? For what else but that had the nuptials taken place?” (James, *Figure 26*). Gwendolen, too, dies at a significant moment, the birth of her second child. She lives longer than Corvick does, perhaps because she does not pass on her initiation to Drayton Deane. Vereker and his wife die within a month of each other, showing the power of the marital relationship; their deaths may indicate the fulfillment of the Figure, a life lived fully with a partner. Adam and Eve are cast out and punished with hard labor together; they are one flesh and must suffer and toil in equal measure. While their union means that they can create life, a God-like power, it also means that they perpetuate death when that child grows old and dies. Finding the Figure is like this; the knowledge of it increases passion and intimacy, but for those who have seen behind the veil, death must follow.

Corvick’s death is clearly linked to his initiation, and it makes his widow a far more powerful woman than she was in her own right. The narrator uses the deaths of Corvick and

Mrs. Erme to cast dark aspersions on Gwendolen that, though conceivable, more likely derive from his own desire to criticize those he perceives as more powerful than himself, which he has also done with both Corvick and Vereker. Corvick insists on taking “his young bride for a drive” and “fell horribly on his head,” while “Gwendolen escaped unhurt.” Gwendolen’s safety seems miraculous, and therefore suspicious, since the horse “bolted . . . with such violence that [Corvick and Gwendolen] were hurled forward” (James, *Figure 26*). Corvick’s death from a head injury suggests that he dies as a result of an intellectual blow, perhaps exiting the Platonic cave too quickly, but it also casts suspicion on his wife, who escapes the blow to the head and perhaps also the knowledge of the Figure that it may symbolize. If Corvick was hurt badly enough to “[die] on the spot,” Gwendolen’s escape is highly suspect, much like her mother’s death (James, *Figure 26*). There are no witnesses to corroborate the circumstances of Corvick’s death, of which Gwendolen must have been the only witness.

Earlier, the narrator had all but accused Gwendolen of effecting or hastening the death of her mother, the sole impediment to her marriage to Corvick, which conveniently occurs only after Corvick’s initiation into the secret and his insistence that he and Gwendolen be married before he will share it with her. As Gwendolen maintains that she and Corvick have had a secret engagement despite Corvick’s insistence to the contrary, she says that she intends to marry Corvick with or without her mother’s consent and adds “with a laugh” that “she really MUST” swallow the mysterious “dose” (James, *Figure 24*). Once the narrator reads of the “sudden death of poor Mrs. Erme,” he takes “the liberty of reading into [Gwendolen’s] words, that from the point of view of her marriage and also of her eagerness, . . . this was a solution more prompt than could have been expected and more radical than waiting for the old lady to swallow the dose” (James, *Figure 25*). He further “read some singular things into Gwendolen’s words and some

still more extraordinary ones into her silences” on the subject of her mother’s conveniently timed death, one month after which Corvick and Gwendolen are married (James, *Figure 25*).

Corvick’s death therefore becomes suspect as well; Gwendolen appears to the narrator to have hastened her own mother’s death to gain the secret through marriage to Corvick, and after Corvick’s death she presumably becomes the sole person able to discuss the Figure since Vereker admits that he cannot put it succinctly into words, needing instead to flesh it out through his body of work. Corvick’s death and Gwendolen’s silence both “added at the same time hugely to the price of Vereker’s secret” (James, *Figure 27*), while Corvick’s brief beginning of a paper on the Figure serves to make the narrator believe more strongly in Corvick’s abilities, saying that “had [Corvick] lived, he would have given more striking and ... fruitful examples” of the Figure than the few introductory items in his unfinished review (James, *Figure 16*). The narrator, in contrast, describes his “state” as “in ashes” (James, *Figure 16*); Corvick’s death has ended the search for the Figure for him, though “the torch [Gwendolen] refused to pass on” continues to “flame away” and the light “continu[es] to pour through her eyes” (James, *Figure 28*). The narrator’s suspicions of Gwendolen’s murderous rampage indicate more about his empty life than his real belief in her guilt, as evidenced by his relentless and unscrupulous pursuit of those he thinks may have the Figure throughout the rest of the text.

The narrator imagines that Corvick’s death, ending his intimacy with Gwendolen, opens up the possibility that he might learn the Figure himself by being allowed into a new circle of intimacy with her. Gwendolen, however, insists that she has “heard everything ... and mean[s] to keep it to [her]self,” thereby denying intercourse with the narrator and retaining her absolute power over the secret (James, *Figure 26*). He calls his attempts to discover the secret from Gwendolen a “suit,” couching his desire for the Figure in an ultimately sexual term, though

Gwendolen will reject the narrator's suits both of marriage and for information regarding the Figure (James, *Figure* 26). The narrator knows that "Corvick had kept his information from his young friend till after the removal of the last barrier to their intimacy Was it Gwendolen's idea, taking a hint from him, to [reveal the secret] only on the basis of the renewal of such a relation? Was the figure in the carpet traceable or describable only for husbands and wives – for lovers supremely united?" (James, *Figure* 27). He wonders if he "should have to marry Mrs. Corvick to get what [he] wanted," but questions whether he is "prepared to offer her this price for the blessing of her knowledge" (James, *Figure* 28). The narrator sees her "torch" continue to burn, but is unwilling to sacrifice himself to gain the knowledge it signifies. The narrator believes that the Figure is ample recompense to Gwendolen for the loss of her mother and husband, thereby painting her as a monster and reminding the reader to judge his suspicions of Gwendolen for what they might reveal about him instead (James, *Figure* 27). If she will not be the yielding female he desires, he will reject her outright; while she appeared increasingly attractive to him as she and Corvick drew closer to the Figure, now she appears ghastly. Just as the narrator maligned Corvick and Vereker when his pursuit of the Figure failed, he impugns Gwendolen when she rejects his advances. The narrator has learned that the Figure requires absolute sacrifice, the unalterable confines of the marriage state, though initiation remains a transaction of knowledge rather than sex. The action is far less important than the knowledge to be gained from it, and ultimately the narrator chooses to preserve himself rather than becoming the empty vessel for the burning torch of the Figure that Gwendolen has become.

The narrator's exile becomes permanent after Corvick's death. When Gwendolen learns that Vereker may be dying, the narrator realizes that she has no desire to see him face to face; she has learned what she needed from Corvick. Her "detachment" and "independence rested on her

knowledge ... which nothing could now destroy and which nothing could make different” (James, *Figure* 30). Death is now irrelevant, though inevitable, to the initiated. Knowledge is eternal, and the narrator acknowledges that Vereker “might go down to his grave” as far as Gwendolen is concerned, because “she was the person in the world to whom – as if she had been his favoured heir – his existence was least of a need” (James, *Figure* 30). The secret is more valuable to Gwendolen than ever before. If she does know it, she is now the only one who does, and nothing can affect it, since Vereker cannot write any more. If Gwendolen does not know the Figure, she may be glad that she can no longer be exposed. Either way, since Gwendolen cannot now admit anyone new to her circle without a significant loss of power, the narrator’s exile is permanent. The narrator suggests that her refusal to reveal the secret signals that “it’s nothing,” but she replies that “it’s [her] LIFE” and that, by suggesting otherwise, the narrator has insulted “the Dead” (James, *Figure* 28). Corvick’s death therefore has purpose only if the Figure is real, but merely having a secret to keep, whether it is Vereker’s Figure or not, could be enough to keep Gwendolen’s torch burning. Gwendolen reduces the power of the secret if she initiates a new person, and she knows better than anyone else the price that it will exact; thus, whether she knows the Figure or not, she is unlikely to tell.

There is no evidence that Corvick and Gwendolen ever truly know the secret of Vereker’s works. Chambers notes that “the Vereker secret is no more laid bare in Corvick’s version of it that it is in Vereker’s own discourse. It is indistinguishable from the ... succession of texts [letters, telegrams, and Corvick’s unfinished article] ... that fails to ‘unveil the idol,’ that refer to it, describe it, but do not reveal it” (Chambers 163). This could indicate that Corvick fails to discover the Figure or that, like Vereker, he embeds it in texts without explicitly revealing it. Does either Corvick or Gwendolen become truly initiated, the template for the Jamesian Reader

that James is trying to create through our involvement with this text and our judgment of its characters? The answer lies in Vereker's ambivalence about the discovery of the Figure. When the narrator asked Vereker at Bridges whether he thought he "ought – just a trifle – to assist the critic," Vereker laughed at him, saying that he had "shouted [his] intention in [the critic's] great blank face," and that he "never took the smallest precaution" to keep the Figure secret (James, *Figure* 9). Vereker argues that "criticism" itself is initiation into his novels, implying that both reading the texts and writing about them are necessary to a true understanding of his work. The reader must become a writer, too, performing a creative act instead of being a mere passive receptacle. Not just anyone can accomplish this, according to Vereker, since "the critic just isn't a plain man," but one who intrudes "in his neighbor's garden," digging up secrets and examining other people's intimate spaces. This is why Vereker repents of his initiating the narrator, and why he tries to stem the flow of information about the Figure. He has given the narrator, and thus Corvick and Gwendolen, too much assistance, and their path cannot be complete. They have not discovered the Figure themselves, but have been led to it, bypassing an important step in the process, and still lack a true "glimpse" of "the element in question," as Vereker points out (James, *Figure* 9). They seem, however, to have discovered at least part of it, enough for Corvick to convince Vereker to approve his discovery (or at least not to contradict Corvick's assertions that he has discovered the Figure) and for Gwendolen's writing to improve. Both Gwendolen and Corvick face exile, though their exiles are self-imposed rather than by society, and both die in circumstances that suggest a strong connection to initiation.

When Gwendolen marries Drayton Deane, she creates a second theoretically complete relationship of author and critic, woman and man. The narrator assumes that she will pass the secret along as Corvick presumably passed it to her, having "measured better than anyone the

wealth of understanding the bride would contribute to the union,” since “never, for a marriage in literary circles . . . had a lady been so bravely dowered” as Gwendolen Corvick (James, *Figure* 31). The narrator “began with due promptness to look for the fruit of the affair – that fruit, I mean, of which the premonitory symptoms would be particularly visible in the husband” (James, *Figure* 31). The narrator watches Deane for signs of improved critical skill after having been initiated into the secret of the Figure, but the Jamesian Reader also searches for signs of impending death. The Figure, which Gwendolen calls her very life, is about actual life rather than literature, and she lives it out instead of wrestling with it in solitude as the narrator does. She carries the flame of her putative knowledge into her marriage with Deane, but in order to live out her married life with him, she withdraws from the forefront of the literary world, only publishing one more novel, and thereby maintains her isolation within a small circle of intimacy, just as Corvick did with her. Like Corvick, Gwendolen assumes a self-imposed exile from society. The secret then dies with Gwendolen – ironically, as she brings forth life in childbirth – which argues that the secret is about life but is couched in literary terms, much as the initiation into it appears sexual but is instead about a “supreme unit[y]” (James, *Figure* 27). This sets up the relationship that literature is to life as the critic is to literature; literature analyzes and makes sense of life as the critic then does for that very literary endeavor. Thus the necessity of the complementary pair to discover the secret: there must be intimacy for there to be life.

The narrator realizes that his only chance to discover the Figure is through Deane, so he reprises his situation with Vereker in that nothing can come of their pairing since they are both men and both critics. He believes that Gwendolen “would have broken by the rekindled hearth the silence that only a widow and wife might break, and Deane would be as aflame with the knowledge as Corvick in his own hour, and Gwendolen in hers, had been” (James, *Figure* 31).

The narrator only sees and judges the Deanes through literature, meeting them only in literary circles and judging that Gwendolen's third novel is inferior to her previous work; he even blames this on his belief that "she was keeping worse company" (James, *Figure 31*). "If [Gwendolen's] secret was, as she told me, her life – a fact discernible in her increasing bloom, an air ... that gave distinction to her appearance – it had yet not a direct influence on her work" or on that of Deane, who "wrote on a thousand subjects, but never on the subject of Vereker" (James, *Figure 31*). She is not writing the Figure; she is living it through her marriage to Deane as she could not do with Corvick. Instead of realizing this, however, the narrator "could never remove [his] eyes" from Drayton Deane and, in fact, "beset him in a manner that might have made him uneasy" in his desire for the Figure, which has only increased the longer he is denied it (James, *Figure 32*).

The narrator's permanent exile gives him the feeling of being in a "dungeon" (James, *Figure 31*) from which his "gaolers ha[ve] gone off with the key" (James, *Figure 30*). He chooses, therefore, to appeal to Deane, Gwendolen's widower, for the secret, but becomes instead the initiator yet again. During their initiatory conversation, the narrator "drew [Deane] to a sofa, [and] lighted another cigar" before telling Deane "the anecdote of Vereker's one descent from the clouds ... [and] the extraordinary chain of accidents that had, in spite of the original gleam, kept [him] till that hour in the dark" (James, *Figure 34*). This initiation takes place in a gentleman's club, an all-male, secretive venue with restricted access, like the bedroom at Bridges. The fire in this scene appears as a somewhat phallic symbol, a cigar, while the fire at Bridges is the more traditionally feminine hearth. These images reinforce the notion that this will be an abortive initiation as it exists between two men who are both critics and cannot form a complementary pair.

The narrator, believing that Vereker's death has made the Figure impossible to ascertain definitively, opens a discussion with Deane about it. He first describes the secret in terms of Plato's Allegory: "Corvick ... found the very mouth of the cave" in that he discovered the secret and Vereker affirmed that he was correct (James, *Figure* 33). The allusion to Plato's allegory suggests that the Figure relies on shared knowledge; the cave imagery also reinforces the notion of female sexuality as it is strongly associated with female genitalia. The narrator's questions to Deane augment this reading:

"Where IS the mouth? He told after their marriage – and told alone – the person who, when the circumstances were reproduced, must have told you. Have I been wrong in taking for granted that she admitted you, as one of the highest privileges of the relation in which you stood to her, to the knowledge of which she was after Corvick's death the sole depository? All I know is that that knowledge is infinitely precious, and what I want you to understand is that if you'll in your turn admit me to it you'll do me a kindness for which I shall be lastingly grateful" (James, *Figure* 33).

Here, the mouth of the cave, or perhaps the vagina, is unknown and inaccessible to the narrator. He further associates the passing of knowledge with sexuality, arguing that it must have been given to Deane on his marriage to Gwendolen and implying that the consummation of that relationship equates to knowledge of the Figure. He begs for the information, an end to his exile and solitude, but there is no one left who can satisfy him, since he cannot discover the secret himself.

Deane sexualizes the initiation, expressing his shock and disbelief that his late wife might have had "unmentioned" and "unmentionable knowledge of Hugh Vereker" (James, *Figure* 34). The narrator then "laid [his] hand on [Deane's] shoulder," putting the narrator in the position to

Deane that Vereker was to him during their initiatory conversation at Bridges (James, *Figure* 34). This parallel position during initiation implies that Vereker himself was unable to pinpoint the nature of the Figure any more than the narrator can; both are aware that there is something, but must leave it to other critics to discover. This suggests, since the narrator is doing precisely what Vereker did, that Vereker was equally ignorant when he initiated the narrator and that the narrator's almost mean pleasure in Deane's ignorance at the end mirrors Vereker's joy in the failure of others to discover the Figure. The heart remains invisible and largely mysterious to the body; we know that it is there, working, but not how it works or whether it is even primarily physical or emotional in nature. This image of Vereker's further explains why he tries to halt the spread of the knowledge that he has given the narrator at Bridges; he wants others to find the Figure themselves or share his darkness, and Gwendolen follows the same path by keeping her knowledge, whatever it is, to herself.

Like the narrator, Deane is only "to some extent enlightened" by his initiation, and the two enter an intimacy of shared disappointment and exile (James, *Figure* 34). Deane and the narrator end up the same, both believing that they "would have been worthy to have been trusted by [Gwendolen]," though she did not choose to tell them what, if anything, she knew (James, *Figure* 34). Miller supposes that the narrator's and Deane's ignorance of the Figure is a form of exclusion from sexual union, both being "left equally 'victims of unappeased desire'" (116). A new intercourse is established between them. Their shared exile and the fact that "there isn't a pin to choose between [them]" in terms of their ignorance is the narrator's "revenge" (James, *Figure* 34). After his initiation, the narrator's life continues as before, and he remains an average or perhaps above average critic living alone. His exile is personal; he has no family, and counts dragging Drayton Deane into his frustration over the secret his "revenge"; through initiating

Deane, the narrator provides an equal for himself, in effect overcoming his outcast state.

Corvick and Gwendolen, however, both face the punishments meted out in Genesis: hard labor and painful childbirth. Corvick struggles over the secret like Adam in the fields, and Gwendolen dies in childbirth, both paying the price for the knowledge of life.

The question remains, however, why Gwendolen appears not to have initiated her second husband. I would argue that he is not “dim,” as the narrator suggests, nor is the secret “nothing,” but that the secret itself is beyond literature, that the knowledge that it exists is merely the first step of the initiatory process and that it uses literature to discuss life rather than the reverse (James, *Figure* 34). Her “increasing bloom” that the narrator takes as proof that she knows the secret may simply have been attributable to the fact that she fell in love with her second husband and learned the secret without realizing it. The narrator says of Deane that “his wife hadn’t thought him worth enlightening. This struck me as strange for a woman who had thought him worth marrying. At last I explained it by the reflexion that she couldn’t possibly have married him for his understanding. She had married him for something else” (James, *Figure* 34). Love? Sex? To live out the Figure? To complete the life she could not have with Corvick? The narrator is only initiated into knowledge that the secret exists, not the secret itself, so he continues to think that the secret itself is the important thing, not the bigger issues behind it. He focuses on the Figure as a secret, not as a pattern that Vereker never intended to hide. Though the narrator is more successful after he gives up the search for the Figure, he never gains the knowledge he seeks; perhaps the secret is to differentiate between literature and life, while using one to inform the other. James says in his preface to *Figure* that “the issue of the affair can be but whether the very secret of perception hasn’t been lost” (xvi). The narrator cannot perceive beyond the text, while Corvick looks at life, using the text to understand life, not the other way

around. Corvick *lives* in a way that the narrator never does or seems to desire to do, travelling, marrying, and choosing smaller circles of true intimacy rather than a general acquaintance with the world. Levy believes that the Figure is “a human and humane intention, an act of love” (464). It has been Gwendolen’s very life, as she says, a life from which the narrator has been entirely excluded by the end of the novella, ironically through his own isolated state.

Though many argue that there is no real Figure, I agree with Chambers’s assertion that “not only must there be a secret element in the text, but the secret must be formulable by the critic even though it goes unformulated in the text; and once formulated, it must be self-evidently ‘the’ secret of the text – confirmed, that is, by its repetitiousness – so that the critic’s success will be obvious to all. Consequently, the secret is both not there and very much there, said and unsaid, elusive and formulable” (Chambers 157). There must be a Figure just as “there must ... be initiation” for the cycle to continue (James, *Figure* 9). The narrator and Deane may stare at the carpet all day and not see the Figure, but the initiated reader recognizes it and can articulate it to a fellow reader as Corvick theoretically could for Vereker and attempted to do in his great article. The narrator fails because he is never fully initiated, and this “failure ... is the theme, then, of his impotence and of his exclusion from the intimacy of reading” (Chambers 151). The narrator never learns to read critically or to live fully, and thus can never see the Figure.

Chambers posits that the text/reader relationship is mirrored in the “unequal relationship between Vereker and the narrator” and concludes that Vereker writes not for some obscure secret but for “the pleasure of playing a game in which he has, and retains, the upper hand” (160). Like James himself, Vereker seeks a critical reader who can open up his texts – untie the string around the book – and “get at” him. The reader watches Vereker’s game, learns from it, and judges the narrator for his flaws, molding himself in opposition to the narrator as the ideal Jamesian reader.

The initiated Jamesian Reader knows enough not to join the narrator and Deane in their victimhood. He knows that the Figure is not a thing, per se, and will not fruitlessly search and re-search the text as the narrator has done for an answer that will never appear to him. He sees the Figure instead as Life itself, and goes about living it. Though the text itself creates the need for criticism and perpetuates the author-critic relationship, it must be left behind in order for the initiatory cycle to occur.

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

The initiation sequence in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* controls the plot, forming a chain of initiations in which each succeeding one loses potency. The earliest initiations, those of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, are accompanied by almost complete corruption and end in death, whereas the later initiations allow the governess and the children to live longer and appear less tainted by initiation than their predecessors. While many characters face exile, the only death that occurs during the narration of the story is that of little Miles. This indicates that he is the focus of the story and that his initiation matters most. Two others have been initiated, faced exile, and died before Miles, however; Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, the famously ambiguous ghosts of the story, pave the path of initiation, exile, and death for Miles to follow with the help of his governess, who assists mightily, if unwittingly, in the corruption of the children in her care. Though corruption does not always follow initiation, Quint and Jessel are decidedly corrupt, and perpetuate the cycle of corruption and influence in this tale. This cycle takes on a deeper significance than it has in *Daisy Miller* and *The Figure in the Carpet*, primarily because of the children. The text itself asserts that "two children ... give two turns" to the proverbial screw (James, *Turn* 1) and, as Thomas Bontly contends, plays on the "more or less universal tendency to associate the horrific and the erotic" (728). The "game" of discovering the truth is repeatedly conflated in the text with the children's games, suggesting that the children are both initiates and initiators. The "game" is one of possession in this story as it is in *The Figure in the Carpet*, but here the stakes are far higher and the corruption far deeper. The characters and the reader are initiated into an understanding of the terrible price of knowledge, beginning with the master's point of view and proceeding through multiple characters before reaching the reader. Since each initiation loses potency, we can infer that each also loses corruptive force,

and, at the final initiation, the reader is initiated as a critical, Jamesian Reader, able to see beyond the ghost story to the pattern of influence behind it.

Douglas's initiation of the group into the governess's story demonstrates that both Douglas and the narrator have agency through their involvement with the text. Douglas is the first initiate we see; interestingly, the first initiation that we witness, that of another of James's unnamed narrators, is the last one that actually takes place. Douglas begins his initiation of the people around the fire by whetting their appetites for the governess's story and promising to have it delivered post haste so that he can read it to them. Douglas's insistence on reading the governess's writing to the group rather than allowing others access to it shows that he has power over and ownership of it. He has been initiated and now takes on the mantle of storyteller, claiming that he took "the impression" of the story and its emotional portent in his "heart" (James, *Turn 2*). This decision also maintains the governess's agency, since her words will be heard as she wrote them, and she will thus form our opinions as her perceptions filter our knowledge. However, Douglas takes full authority over the story when he says that it requires a "prologue" to establish the background and set the scene. Since he is initiated, he can now both add to and pass on the story (James, *Turn 4*). John Pearson argues successfully that "Douglas and the prologue narrator, in fact, collaborate to gain authority over the governess's text" by making it their own, one through reading and one through writing (4). Douglas becomes, in effect, the critic to the governess's author, part of her complementary pair of young and old, living and dead, critic and author, and male and female. The narrator, meanwhile, usurps the governess's place as author by subsuming her text into his, even affixing a title to it, and thus perhaps allying himself with Henry James who is, after all, the ultimate initiator of this text.

Douglas is the final initiator in the text and, like each other initiator, puts his stamp on the knowledge that he passes on. Though he appears removed from life at Bly and thus the text itself, he is fully initiated into it. He faces in a general way the dangers of the initiatory rite, experiencing minor social ramifications as his audience “grin[s]” knowingly at him and guesses that he was in love with the governess. He is dead as the story starts, having given the narrator his copy of the story at his death just as the governess gave it to him on her death. By his own admission, Douglas has only the impression of the story and the governess’s written account; he has not lived the events and is therefore separate from the circle of intimacy established at Bly. However, James wrote in his notebooks that “if experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions are experience” (James, *Theory* 35). According to James’s argument, Douglas has experienced the governess’s story “so completely that [he is] well on [his] way to knowing any particular corner of it” and can consequently be initiated by taking the impression of the governess’s story to his heart (James, *Theory* 35). Douglas is separated from the world by this initiation. He is unmarried, perhaps because of his lingering devotion to the governess, and he is unusually reserved, making the narrator wait two days to hear the story he knows Douglas is waiting to tell. Though never at Bly, Douglas is initiated in a similar setting – in a garden by the governess – and is a full part of the initiation sequence.

Douglas’s initiation of the narrator and his “compact and select . . . hushed little circle” proceeds much like Hugh Vereker’s initiation of *The Figure in the Carpet*’s unnamed narrator at Bridges in its isolation from daily life and language-based and literary format (James, *Turn* 3). This initiation, too, focuses on a “common thrill,” a shared desire for information, and consequently takes place, as does *Figure*’s moment of truth, before a symbolic fire reminiscent of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave in a house much like Bridges (James, *Turn* 4). Patricia Merivale

supposes that “these country houses, in solitary circumstances” provide a setting in which “we and the characters may be sealed off together from the outside world, which might have ... reaffirmed the norms of reality” (993). Because of their isolation, the group is more susceptible to the horrors of the story. They are also a highly important part of the story, and James writes in his notebooks that his “report of people’s experience,” his fiction, must be filtered through an audience if it is to have any “interest” or “intimacy” (James, *Theory* 238). The circle of intimacy within the isolated country house provides an audience and thereby a reflection of the expected reaction of the reader. Other similarities abound; for example, Douglas begins the group’s initiation by “looking down at his interlocutor with his hands in his pockets,” mirroring the book tied closed with string that Corvick gives the narrator in *Figure* (James, *Turn* 1). Both Douglas and Corvick resist fully initiating their first audiences. The governess’s story has been “in a locked drawer ... for years ... [and] nobody but [Douglas], till now, has ever heard” it. This “give[s] the thing the utmost price” and allies it with Vereker’s *Figure*, which gains value after Vereker’s death and increases the value of membership in the initiated circle (James, *Turn* 2). The circle of intimacy is stronger because of its exclusivity and the non-falsifiability of their interpretations because of the author’s absence. The text must stand alone, as must the initiated as rare experts in its mysteries.

Though this is a shared initiation, “it was to [the narrator] in particular that [Douglas] appeared to propound [his story] – appeared almost to appeal for aid not to hesitate” (James, *Turn* 2). When the narrator says of Douglas that, in telling the story, “he fixed me,” he implicates himself as the primary focus of Douglas’s initiation, and implies that he alone may understand why the governess chose to share her story only with Douglas (James, *Turn* 2). Douglas’s scrutiny is almost a test of the narrator to see whether he is worthy of the honor that

Douglas bestows on him, which he proves he is by surmising that the story has remained a secret “because she was in love” (James, *Turn 3*). The narrator must show that he will be sympathetic to and understanding of the governess. He tacitly promises to assist Douglas in preserving his fond memories of her, and is thereby initiated into Douglas’s pro-governess view of the events at Bly. This is necessary, since, as Willie van Peer and Ewout van der Knaap find, many academic critics of the story have accused the governess of being little more than a “sexually blocked, poor vicar’s daughter with middle-class ideas” or, at worst, an insane pedophile (703). Because he loves her as she loved the master, Douglas insists that his chosen initiate should accept his bias toward the governess before going further with his story.

The connection between the narrator and Douglas is non-verbal but clear; the narrator “fixed him, too” to show that he understands Douglas’s view and accepts his role as chief initiate (James, *Turn 3*). This “fixing” continues between initiates throughout the tale, demonstrating the sexualized nature of the initiation. Like initiation, it is a sexualized act without being sexual in itself, and Bontly and Michael Moon argue that this “fixing” is part of the sexual aggression inherent in the initiatory act. This moment between Douglas and the narrator, then, is also sexualized, since Douglas chooses the narrator as he would a mate. Douglas even says to the narrator, “you *are* acute” when he deduces that the governess’s motive was love, much as the narrator in *Figure* praises his own critique of Vereker as “an acute little study” (James, *Turn 3*). The incisiveness of the narrators is their primary recommendation as initiates, and it is why they are chosen from the group and drawn away from the figurative fires toward the reality outside the cave. In fact, immediately after this moment, Douglas “quitted the fire” (James, *Turn 3*). His knowledge is for one person, someone who understands that the story will not “tell” whom the governess was in love with “in any literal, vulgar way” (James, *Turn 3*). Just as the Figure in the

Carpet “isn’t for the vulgar,” in Hugh Vereker’s words, the truth of the governess’s story, her secret, is above the common understanding (James, *Figure 13*).

Sitting beside the narrator in hushed suspense is one more initiate. Drawn into the story with the narrator, encouraged to substitute herself for the narrator by the very fact of his being so blank and inscrutable, is the reader. Why else does James use such strong visual imagery? Why else begin the story in medias res and with the markedly unspecific pronoun “us” (James, *Turn 1*)? In his preface to the 1908 edition of *The Turn of the Screw*, James called his tale “an amulette to catch those not easily caught” and claimed that he listened to the very story that spurred him to write *The Turn of the Screw* in similar circumstances to the ones he creates for Douglas’s audience (James, *Preface 182*). James is fishing for a particular reader – “the jaded, the disillusioned, the fastidious” – and he places us in his own situation, as if he would judge us like Douglas judges the narrator (James, *Preface 182*). The narrator simply begins speaking, presumably to the reader since there is no specified interlocutor, thereby making the reader next in the initiatory chain. We are the final repository of this exciting story, those to whom the narrator will tell the story he has been given in written and oral form by Douglas, who had it in turn from the governess herself in her own “beautiful hand” (James, *Turn 2*). Hints of inside jokes abound between ourselves and the narrator, who archly comments on the Mrs. Griffins of the party and their inappropriate yet insightful suggestions about Douglas’s feelings for his sister’s governess. We are now one of the circle around the fire, initiated into the life of the story, trying to guess whether the ghosts are real and just how corrupt the children might be.

The mysteries of the tale draw us in, furthering and reaffirming our own initiatory process. Since “we can never be sure” that we are interpreting correctly, we are “haunted with meanings, [which suggests] that the text itself makes the haunting possible” (van Peer and van

der Knaap 708). Read aloud by Douglas, the text initiates the reader into its ghosts, and they “haunt us all” (Bontly 735). James claimed that he kept the exact nature of the evil at Bly ambiguous to magnify it, leaving “the particulars” to “the reader’s general vision of evil” (James, *Preface* 185). The reader therefore has agency as well as responsibility, and James expected his reader to interact with the text, forming his understanding by using “his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy, [and] his own horror” to “supply him ... with all the particulars” (James, *Preface* 185). David Southward claims that James “initiate[s] his reader into the vie intime” of the story and its characters, and then “provokes that reader [to] make meaning” from an ambiguous text (503). James indicated that he did this purposefully, taking “pains” to make the reader “think the evil” in the story without resorting to the “weak specifications” common to ghost stories (James, *Preface* 185). The reader’s close involvement in the text, and thus his own initiation by James, is yet another turn of the screw; will we, too, face death as the others do? Will the forbidden knowledge we receive taint and isolate us? Yes, if James has his way, but the resulting death is only as a reader; we will be raised to read anew as Jamesian Readers.

What truly arouses horror and fear in many of James’s readers, particularly those of his time, is not the ghostly elements of the story. Instead, Helen Killoran contends that the “unrestrained sexuality” of characters like Peter Quint to whom nothing is off-limits and from whom no one is safe appears as the greatest evil (13). The social order that we expect from a Victorian novel like *The Turn of the Screw* and a place like Bly, a country estate used by a wealthy absentee uncle as a wholesome place to raise his dead brother’s children, is entirely upended. We see children, ostensibly secluded at Bly for their health and safety, “being as exposed as we can humanly conceive children to be” to evil, as James says a letter to Frederic W. H. Myers (James, *Letters* 88). Merivale argues that, as the governess enters Bly possessing a

Gothic sensibility, seen particularly in her love of novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, she shapes Bly into an evil, corrupted place. Bly changes as a result of what she brings to it; she “shape[s] the outer world [of Bly] through the inner” world of her Gothic fantasies (Merivale 992). *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in particular figures the constant but vague sexual threat that the governess perceives at Bly and which she projects onto the children. Despite the evidence in the tale that the governess increases the corruption within Bly, however, Bly’s Fall clearly begins with Peter Quint, whom James describes as “wicked and depraved” (James, *Notebooks* 178). Once the master initiated Quint and placed him in charge of every aspect of Bly’s management despite his lower class status, Quint was free to do as he liked, and Mrs. Grose reports that his behavior and influence were corruptive. Initiation and corruption are two very different things; Merivale is correct that the governess corrupts Bly, but Quint prepared Bly for that corruption by bringing his initiated knowledge there and perverting the social order by controlling everyone, including the master’s wards.

Throughout the text, Bly functions as a paradigmatic Garden of Eden in which the innocent are initiated into forbidden knowledge and eventually cast out, just as Adam and Eve were. In Bly, as in Eden, the danger comes from the forbidden knowledge that the characters gain through initiation. Sexuality is a mere symptom of the change that occurs within an initiated character. Much like a Shakespearean Green World, Bly and country houses like Bridges function as retreats from normal rules and mores. They are places of productive death, a death that leads to renewal. Once the ghosts appear, Bly begins visibly to die: “The place, with its gray sky and withered garlands, its bared spaces and scattered leaves, was like a theater after the performance” (James, *Turn* 50). The governess gives us this description of Bly in June; Bly is not in the midst of winter as it sounds, but instead empty of innocence. Bly also reveals the

extent of Quint and Jessel's punishment. Once Quint disappears after haunting the governess, "the terrace and the whole place, the lawn and the garden beyond it, all I could see of the park, were empty with a great emptiness. There were shrubberies and big trees, but I remember the clear assurance I felt that none of them concealed him" (James, *Turn* 20). Eden is empty; Adam and Eve have been cast out. Though they try to reenter Eden through the innocent children, they never can, and, eventually, the children are no longer innocent. What marks Bly as evil is "a mode of perception, rather than a set of things perceived" (Merivale 992). Because Quint, and later the governess, are in charge at Bly, their view of things prevails, and thus those things that they focus on become corrupt, most notably the children. The schoolroom is an excellent example, since, as Killoran convincingly argues, the governess views it as evil, and thus the events that take place in it become increasingly corrupt. In particular, we can point to two events that confirm this: first, the price of the ceremony between the governess and Mrs. Grose in the schoolroom is that the governess has made Mrs. Grose a "receptacle of lurid things," and second, that the governess sees Miss Jessel's suffering when she appears there and has a clear portent that this will be her fate as well, though she does not change course as a result (James, *Turn* 44).

The Gothic elements of *The Turn of the Screw* contribute to the terror associated with Bly. Neill Matheson argues that James's use of Gothic language helps conflate sexuality and horror throughout the text and "implicat[es] both author and reader in its guilty pleasures" (17). James uses the first ghost that the governess encounters at Bly to establish this; it is neither Quint nor Jessel, but that of childhood itself. The governess says that "there had been a moment when I believed I recognized, faint and far, the cry of a child; there had been another when I found myself just consciously starting as at the passage, before my door, of a light footstep" (James, *Turn* 8). This demonstrates how far Bly has fallen, since innocence can no longer survive there,

nor can the reader ignore the signs. Merivale notes the vampiric qualities of the adults in the text, blaming the “vertical” relationships between pairs divided by age that “signify ... an enforced precocity, a killing of the ‘small ghosts’ of childhood, a bringing-over toward adulthood (plus a ghastly rejuvenation of the old)” for the corruption of the children (Merivale 1000). Vampire-like, the adults, particularly Quint and the governess, corrupt and thus drain the children, and they are supported in this by the “air of evil” pervading Bly. This is “implicit in James’s imagery of the aging of both Miles and Flora under [the] fear [and] pressure” imposed on them by the governess (Merivale 1000). In an enclosed, isolated place reeking with “the poison of an influence,” the children cannot help but be initiated, exiled, and pushed toward death as a result (James, *Turn* 15).

The governess’s initiation of Douglas exposes the passing on of the master’s inappropriate sexual knowledge through the initiatory chain, even to Douglas himself. Someone in the group “[drew] the inference” that Douglas was in love with the governess as she had been with the master, but Douglas “put [it] by” by saying that she “was ten years older” and his “sister’s governess” (James, *Turn* 2). His failure to give a clear answer is an answer in itself, and, since we know that she left her manuscript to Douglas, he is clearly her chosen initiate, like the narrator becomes Douglas’s. We know, too, that Douglas is the same age that Miles would have been had he lived, and that their relationship would be similar – she was his sister’s governess, like she was Flora’s. Douglas goes on to praise the governess as “the most agreeable woman I’ve ever known in her position; she would have been worthy of any whatever” (James, *Turn* 2). Throughout the text, particularly in reference to Peter Quint, social codes are broken and class barriers fall. Here is a prime example in a younger, upper-class male arguing that a mere governess would have been worthy of anyone, perhaps even himself. Douglas further

challenges the social code by displaying feelings for the governess that transcend the sexual. His society might have winked at his taking sexual advantage of her, as it so often did for other young men of his class, but it would never have permitted their love or marriage. The Eden paradigm appears for the first time in the text when the governess initiates Douglas “in the garden” during his summer break (James, *Turn* 2). The weather was “hot” and “beautiful,” and as they walked together, their isolation became a breeding ground for intimacy in which he found her “awfully clever and nice” and admitted that he began to “[like] her extremely” – in fact, he recalled the exact spot in the garden where she told him her story (James, *Turn* 2). They began to form a complementary pair separated by gender, class, education, and experience. We only see the end result of this: both are dead when the story begins; the manuscript (and thus the initiation) has passed from the governess to Douglas to the narrator; and neither Douglas nor the narrator seems to have anyone else with whom to form a pair.

The beginning of the chain that leads to Douglas’s initiation does not appear in the book but must be deduced from later events, though all of the subsequent initiations proceed from this one. The initiatory sequence begins with the master himself, Miles and Flora’s uncle in Harley Street, “the original source of [the] chain of influence” (Killoran 15). The master sends Peter Quint to live at Bly, putting him in charge even over Miss Jessel, the governess. This is striking in that the governess and Mrs. Grose describe Peter Quint as lower class and decidedly not a gentleman; it is therefore a reversal of the social order made even more striking by the account given by Mrs. Grose that the master “believed in [Quint] and placed him there because he was supposed not to be well and the country air so good for him. So he had everything to say ... even about [Miles and Flora]” (James, *Turn* 26). The master turns a blind eye to Quint’s apparent perversions, though the remainder of the staff purports to see them clearly. Quint even

appears in the master's cast-off clothing, which Mrs. Grose suspects Quint of having stolen, though she presents no evidence. Quint, therefore, acts in the master's stead, dressing and behaving as the master of the house would, all with the master's approval. The master makes it clear that he prefers not to have anything to do with events at Bly; he seems to have created a substitute for himself in Quint, which enables him to live his London life while his doppelgänger rules at Bly.

The governess describes Quint as “our employer's late clever, good-looking ‘own’ man,” and interprets Mrs. Grose's description to mean that he was “impudent, assured, spoiled, [and] depraved” (James, *Turn* 32). Since this description indicates that the master has initiated Quint, who has become far more than a mere servant as a result, and that Quint uses his initiation to create Bly as his own personal fiefdom, one surmises that the knowledge the master shares concerns power, both social and sexual. When the governess prompts Mrs. Grose to reveal more about Quint, she is told that “the fellow was a hound” and that Mrs. Grose has “never seen one like him. He did what he wished” (James, *Turn* 32). This imagery suggests sexual pursuit, and provides no boundaries for that appetite. The governess's subsequent query reveals that Quint has passed on his initiation from the master to others at Bly. She asks whether he was “too free ... with [Miss Jessel]?” Mrs. Grose replies: “With them all” (James, *Turn* 32). Killoran posits that the true evil of the story “is not ghostly, but human, emanating from the rivalry between the servants” as a result of this unusual relationship between the master and Peter Quint (13). Giving Quint free rein over Bly, including the sexually predatory freedom that Quint has, leads to Bly's corruption by reversing the hierarchy and allowing the servants to lead. Bly is now a fallen world under the rule of a depraved man who, according to the social order, should be an

underling, not a chief. The result is a place in which innocence cannot live long and good is cast out.

Quint finds himself in a complementary pair that, like many in James's later works, is divided by class and occupation but not gender. The master initiates Quint but then leaves, allowing Quint to pass on his initiation to Miles, and likely to Miss Jessel, but only one of these pairs is divided by gender. This sets up a subtext of homoeroticism if not homosexuality throughout the text that informs both the initiatory sequence and Miles's death at its close. Quint's initiation follows James's pattern in that the staff sees a privileged intimacy between him and the master that does not in fact exist, since the master absents himself, having created not a partner but a substitute in Quint. Quint is therefore tainted, both resented and suspected of unnatural behavior. Both of the master's initiates, Quint and the governess, choose their positions knowing that they will gain a great deal of privilege, but both also face exile as a result. Quint cannot survive indefinitely at Bly, a society in which a lower-class man cannot simply supersede those above him, whether it be Miss Jessel or Miles, in large part because "the Victorian fear that unrestrained sexuality [and] sexual misconduct can destroy society" means that Quint cannot remain at Bly if he is considered perverse, particularly if this perversion is sexual (Killoran 13). Quint's exile from Bly and lonely death as he attempts to return are therefore inevitable.

Peter Quint's death, "the limit of [the] evil time" of his rule over Bly, suggests much about his life and his depravity. He was found by a "labourer ...stone dead ... [from] a visible wound to his head" apparently caused 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, *Turn* 27). The labourer contrasts with Quint, who appears not to have labored at all after the

master left Bly, but instead wandered unsupervised with Miles doing God knows what. Quint suffers a head wound, which raises two significant queries. First, since it allies him with George Corvick of *Figure*, are the questions of whether his initiation is true and complete, whom he has passed it to, and what will become of it in Quint's absence. Second, given the fairly heavy-handed association of this type of wound with knowledge, is the question of whether the knowledge he obtained brings about his death. We learn later that Miles was expelled from his school for "saying things," and the question here becomes whether Quint was killed because of things he said to others, and whether these others were willing to kill to avoid being tainted with the stain of initiation.

Quint's death raises questions about his life that seem to condemn him as sexually – perhaps homosexually – perverse: "The icy slope, the turn mistaken at night and in liquor, accounted for much – practically, in the end and after the inquest and boundless chatter, for everything; but there had been matters in his life – strange passages and perils, secret disorders, vices more than suspected – that would have accounted for a great deal more" (James, *Turn* 27). The governess accepts the evidence presented to her accounting for Quint's death as an accident, but she clearly doubts that this explanation covers the whole of the matter, perhaps realizing, as Robert Hill argues, that "Mrs. Grose knows or suspects enough to want to appear not to care where or why he died" (71). The governess "read[s] into" Mrs. Grose's account of Quint's death that he is worse "than suspected," so the initiated Jamesian Reader is alerted and adds his suspicions to those of the governess (James, *Turn* 27). Quint dies "on the wrong path," indicating that he has corrupted (or embraced) the initiation given to him by the master, or that his vices have become so bad that he can no longer function in regular society. Though Quint's perversions may be other or more than homosexual, Ernest Tuveson argues instructively that

“original readers seem to have taken for granted” that “Quint and Miss Jessel were evil, and that they did educate the children in some form of evil. The story appeared in 1898, just after the immense scandal of the Wilde trials, and only the most sheltered could have failed to see the significance of the fact” (790). It is certainly significant that Quint dies on the way back to Bly from the village. He is exiled from Bly because he is too powerful for his station and exiled from society at large because of his vices, perversions, and forbidden knowledge. Quint is caught between two worlds, belonging nowhere and fitting no rank or position.

The next initiation is also missing from the text, but nevertheless informs the entire plot, including the reader’s reaction. Peter Quint initiates at least Miles, if not also Miss Jessel, establishing the context of the governess’s story and providing the rationale for the climactic ending. Killoran argues that there was a widespread belief that “promiscuous sexual behavior of all varieties was commonplace among Victorian servants” and that it was an “open secret that connected servants to the sexual initiation of their master’s children” (13). Victorians believed that an introduction to sin would make the initiate “wish to engage in [it] again,” and Quint’s influence therefore perpetuates a cycle rather than merely tainting one boy, making Quint a Satan figure bringing sin to Eden instead of just one corrupt servant on one rural estate (Killoran 18). Quint continues the initiatory cycle within the text from the master to the reader, but he also symbolizes the larger cycle about which dozens of books warning against allowing servants to raise or even be alone with children were written in the Victorian period.

Quint’s initiation of Miles is sinister not just because of his influence on Miles, but because he precipitates the very cycle that will see Miles expelled from school for having passed on this information to innocent boys. Miles himself may still be innocent and merely repeating what he has heard, but it remains adult information and thus inappropriate for Miles and his

school fellows to have. Whether Quint merely reveals his taboo relationship with Miss Jessel or preys sexually on Miles himself – in fact, whether Quint is hetero-, homo-, or bisexual, all of which have been posited by many critics – Quint initiates Miles into knowledge the power and ramifications of which are beyond Miles’s ability to handle, and Miles does the same to his school mates. The reader, too, must face his own guilt when he judges Miles. When the governess realizes that “Miles’s unspeakable transgression is forbidden speech,” the reader must recall that “the writing and the reading of [t]his story are also solitary vices, potentially involving transgressive intersections of imagination and language, and thus no more innocent than the acts for which Miles is punished” (Matheson 725). Quint’s initiation of Miles also initiates the reader into an understanding of his own actions as both transgressive and corruptive.

Mrs. Grose’s silence assists Quint in his endeavors. Though she is the governess’s only source of information about Quint, she continually and purposefully withholds her knowledge about him. Describing the special friendship that existed between Quint and Miles, Mrs. Grose tells the governess that “it was Quint’s own fancy” to befriend little Miles, “to play with him ... to spoil him” (James, *Turn* 26). Both play and spoil here have darker, secondary meanings. They sound innocent at first, but placed in the context of what we learn subsequently about the relationship between Miles and Quint, these words set the stage for suspicions of sexual deviance. By initiating Miles, Quint becomes the superior, passing to Miles the forbidden knowledge that he received from the master. Quint is not just “free,” but dangerous, and his being free with Miles upends the social order in terms of age, class, and propriety. Mrs. Grose admits to knowing that Quint was “bad” but not telling the master because he dislikes “tale-bearing,” even though she tells the governess that she “couldn’t bear” the “effect” that Quint had on Miles (James, *Turn* 26). She kept quiet because she feared “the things that [Quint] could do”

and continues her silence because “on every side there were fears” that increase as the text progresses (James, *Turn* 27). Mrs. Grose’s reaction demonstrates the power of Quint’s knowledge. By saying that she feared him precisely because “Quint was so clever – he was so deep,” Mrs. Grose admits not only that she saw Quint as her intellectual superior, but also that he ruled the circle of intimacy at Bly (James, *Turn* 26). Quint possessed knowledge that Mrs. Grose did not, yet she knew enough to fear both Quint and his knowledge so much that she hid the truth from the master, thereby fortifying the circle of intimacy at Bly and, ironically, Quint’s hold over it, a pattern the governess will repeat with Miles.

Miss Jessel appears evil from Mrs. Grose’s account, but, unlike Quint and the master, she is care-laden and wasted. She pays dearly and continually for her initiation, while the men seem to walk much more freely through life. The governess “shows less hostility to this ghost, and less fear, but reveals instead an almost fascinated disapproval” of the ghost, who continually appears in what the governess sees as her place, whether in the schoolroom or with Flora (Bontly 730). The governess has made only one significant choice that differentiates her from Miss Jessel: she resists the ghostly Peter Quint’s seduction, turning against Quint immediately despite her initiation and her attraction to him. Miss Jessel, however, seems to have come under all aspects of his control, from becoming his sexual partner to countenancing his ascendancy over Miles. In contrast, the governess sets herself up as Quint’s rival, his equal opposite, and therefore puts herself in a position to criticize Miss Jessel. Bontly argues convincingly that the ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw* manifest the governess’s guilt over her own desires and that, because Miss Jessel has “dishonored herself, her profession, and her sex by submitting to the dominance of ... a mere valet [and] violated her trust as the feminine protector of the home by allowing Quint to associate freely with Miles,” the governess sees Miss Jessel as “vile” (Bontly

730). Ironically, the governess sees clearly that she could easily have walked Miss Jessel's path but that the very guilt she feels about her attraction to Quint, which she employs in judging "dreadful" Miss Jessel, saves her (James, *Turn 30*). The governess believes that Miss Jessel reacted to Quint with desire, yielding to it because an affair with Quint "must have been also what she wished" (James, *Turn 32*). Mrs. Grose's "face signified that it had been indeed, but she said at the same time: 'Poor woman – she paid for it!'" (James, *Turn 32*). This payment comes in the form of misery while at Bly, exile from Bly, and death.

Mrs. Grose defends Miss Jessel's character but admits also that much of Bly's corruption, in particular that of Miles, stems from her influence. Miss Jessel's reputation was unblemished before her initiation. "Douglas present[s] his picture" of Miss Jessel as "a young lady whom they had had the misfortune to lose" at Bly and who "had done for [the children] quite beautifully – she was a most respectable person – till her death, the great awkwardness of which had, precisely, left no alternative but the school for little Miles" (James, *Turn 5*). Miss Jessel's death perpetuates Miles's fall, and is connected to his initiation by Quint. I concur with Hill's contention that this fall turns Miles into a corrupter and that he spends the entire text trying to seduce the governess as he believes his uncle has, though Hill's assertion that Miles wants to consummate a physical relationship with the governess is difficult to accept. Hill posits that Miles got the idea to seduce the governess from Quint and Jessel, claiming that "it is not improbable that Miles witnessed Quint and Miss Jessel copulating, possibly on several occasions" (57). At the very least, the adults in the text, beginning with the uncle and continuing through various servants to the current governess, "have had pernicious effects on the children by exposing them ... to the complicated animosity of sexually involved adults" (Killoran 22). Miles therefore has an inappropriate pattern to follow in his attempts to seduce the governess

into his way of thinking about Bly and their relationship, and this pattern comes directly from Miss Jessel's actions while she was the governess at Bly. Mrs. Grose says that Miss Jessel was "careful" and "particular" "about some things" but not all (James, *Turn* 12). Mrs. Grose refuses to reveal what Miss Jessel was careless about because Miss Jessel is dead, implying that she was careful with the children but not herself and her own reputation, or rather that she was careful to follow the rules at Bly but that they were both perverse and perverting, obviating her potentially good influence.

Miss Jessel's death proceeds clearly from her initiation by Peter Quint. Mrs. Grose says she does not know what Miss Jessel died of, and "wanted not to know," which implies that she "had [an] idea" of the cause, but it was too shocking for her to want this knowledge (James, *Turn* 32). Mrs. Grose says that Miss Jessel "couldn't have stayed" at Bly, insinuating that her unbalanced affair with Quint became known. She was "taken ill ... in this house," but "went off" to die rather than staying at Bly, suggesting an exile resulting from her own shame (James, *Turn* 12). I agree with Hill and Matheson that pregnancy forces Miss Jessel to leave Bly and would argue that, like Eve, she is cast out and cursed with childbirth because of her relationship with Quint. Mrs. Grose comments that the deaths of Quint and Jessel occurred "last year," so the father of Miss Jessel's possible child could be either Quint or the master. Mrs. Grose's apparent slip in Chapter Two in which her use of the past tense indicates that she speaks of Quint and not the master as she pretends, leads me to argue that Quint, and not the master, selected Miss Jessel as his sexual object. Miss Jessel's initiation is tied securely to her mysterious illness, and since this illness manifests itself at Bly under Peter Quint's regime, I agree with Killoran that she was initiated and became pregnant by Quint rather than the master. Since Miss Jessel faces exile because of her sexual experience, it is almost certain that any child she bore would also have

died, whether from an abortion, as Hill supposes, stillbirth, or abandonment. Mrs. Grose's ignorance, then, appears to be feigned in order to protect the new governess from the same fate as the last one. Mrs. Grose, who does not have the governess's "initiated view," believes that she can still save her from becoming like Miss Jessel through her silence. This would not be the case if the master had caused Miss Jessel's fall since he is entirely absent, unlike Quint, who may still exert some control over the governess (James, *Turn* 64).

Critically, Mrs. Grose "heard from the master that [Miss Jessel] was dead," which argues that there is, despite Quint's primary role in Jessel's initiation, an ongoing connection between Bly and the master as the original initiator that the governess does not experience (James, *Turn* 13). Interestingly, the master apparently knows of Miss Jessel's death before even Mrs. Grose, who is in much closer proximity and who actively wants knowledge of events at Bly, unlike her employer. This suggests a hidden, continuous relationship between the master and Quint, who may have told him of Jessel's death, much like the relationship between Quint and Miles. Neither the master nor Quint has an ongoing relationship with the women in the text: the governess is not allowed to write to the master; Mrs. Grose writes to the master through a male intercessor, the bailiff, because of her illiteracy; Miss Jessel is cast out alone after her shame becomes apparent; and the ghosts do not even appear together. In fact, the only male-female pair that spends any significant amount of time together in the text is that of Miles and the governess. Mrs. Grose says that the master never told her why or how Miss Jessel died, demonstrating that he withholds knowledge, and therefore initiation, from her, much like Mrs. Grose withholds knowledge from the governess. In fact, Mrs. Grose almost certainly knows much more about Quint and Jessel than she reveals, and she even mentions separately of them that both Quint and Jessel made themselves unfit to remain at Bly through their corrupt actions. After sharing what

little she will, Mrs. Grose abruptly begs the governess to “please” allow her to “get to [her] work,” which indicates that she perceives a need to change the subject and perhaps conceal the truth, as well as a return to the traditional feminine work that separates her from Miss Jessel (James, *Turn* 13). Mrs. Grose screens her knowledge as a protective measure, whether to protect herself from initiation despite the knowledge she has, or to protect the governess (and thus the children) from following Quint and Jessel to the grave.

What little information she does share brings Mrs. Grose into a circle of intimacy with the governess that leads to her own initiation. Mrs. Grose says that Miss Jessel and Peter Quint “were both infamous” (James, *Turn* 31). This revelation, none too startling at this point in the text, leads Mrs. Grose to take the governess’s “hand in both her own, holding it tight as if to fortify [the governess] against the increase of alarm [that she] might draw from this disclosure” (James, *Turn* 31). Despite its failure to provide any new or specific information, this revelation strengthens their intimacy. They exclude Jessel, consolidating their own supposed goodness against her evil. After this conversation about Jessel, Mrs. Grose “took [the governess] to her motherly breast, and [the governess’s] lamentation overflowed” (James, *Turn* 32). The physical proximity of the women mirrors their relationship: they are paradoxically alone together, isolated from the others who live at Bly because of their shared knowledge, and they use physical touch not only to mark this intimacy but also to assert a paradigm for their relationship. It is maternal, not sexual as critics like Killoran assert, and clearly unequal, as well as being a space in which their emotions can flow freely if not their knowledge. Though both have knowledge, it differs greatly, and neither confides fully in the other. This gesture, however, indicates Mrs. Grose’s supremacy despite her class; she was at Bly first, and she is the mother to the governess’s crying child.

The governess is certainly initiated; there is too much evidence that she possesses forbidden knowledge throughout the text to deny this. She even describes herself several times as “initiated” or having “an initiated view” (James, *Turn* 64). James’s notebooks indicate that she is to be “an observer” but not the focus of the story, and he equates the observer with the “author” and the “knower,” thereby shedding some additional light on the agency he claimed to give her (James, *Notebooks* 179, 234, 148). She must be initiated to see truly and to record, which is why she is initiated successively by three people – the master, Quint, and Miles – in the course of the text. Like Douglas did to the narrator, each of her three initiators forces a specific bias on her before initiating her so that her view is sympathetic to his. Many critics follow Edna Kenton and Edmund Wilson in arguing that the ghosts in the story are nothing more than representations of her “sexual repression” in relation to these three initiators (Killoran 13). This ignores, however, her impossibly accurate description of Peter Quint and, in fact, James’s own commentary on the story, which show her as initiated, possessing knowledge that she cannot have had from any living source at Bly by the time she receives it, and her deepening paranoia as she moves further into the initiatory sequence. While Tuveson claims that “the general impression given by the governess, her clear marshalling of facts, the general air of common sense about her ... seem to make us trust her account,” she does demonstrate susceptibility to being “carried away” by all three of her initiators (792). The biases put on her by her initiators affect her view of the children. Though James himself gives her “authority,” and the governess records facts accurately, her interpretations must always be judged in light of the initiator who then has her in his power. The governess tells us that “to the uninitiated eye,” Miles is “all frankness and freedom,” whereas the reality she records is far different (James, *Turn* 64). The governess’s initiation is pivotal in the text’s initiatory chain and connects all of the pairings, old

and young, male and female, into one central point, as if she turned it from a chain to a wheel with herself at the center.

The governess is initiated by the master in Harley Street, and his work is carried to completion at Bly first through Peter Quint and then through Miles, who seeks to use her to get his uncle back to Bly and thereby fulfill the cycle of initiation. The master's initiation of the governess appears almost entirely in sexual terms, which Peter Quint and Miles both mirror as they further her exposure to forbidden knowledge, though each creates a separate effect in her. The master's initiation of the governess is sexualized, beginning with the description of the master himself. He is a "bachelor in the prime of life ... handsome and bold and pleasant, offhand and gay and kind ... [and] he struck her, inevitably, as gallant and splendid" (James, *Turn* 4). This somewhat overblown description reveals that the perspective of the text has shifted to the governess's reaction to the master; he is a gallant figure to a young, unmarried woman, though not to his orphaned niece and nephew. The governess is struck by his physical features, but more than this, he represents a classic fantasy for a girl like her, raised on *Jane Eyre* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*: "such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel, before a fluttered, anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage" (James, *Turn* 4). She knows, however, that he is not husband material, noting that he is "rich, but fearfully extravagant" and redolent of "high fashion, of good looks, of expensive habits, of charming ways with women" and that his house is filled with "the trophies of the chase" (James, *Turn* 4). She can see him clearly as a playboy, as we know from the textual shift to her viewpoint, yet she agrees to his every request and, by Douglas's account, falls in love with him, though she must know that her love is hopeless. The governess later admits to Mrs. Grose that she was "carried away" by the master, and the narrator calls the master's job offer to the governess a "seduction" (James, *Turn*

6). Mrs. Grose replies that the governess is “not the first” and “won’t be the last” to be seduced by the master (James, *Turn* 9). This allies the master and Peter Quint, suggesting that both are “hounds” pursuing primarily their own pleasures.

The governess’s own description heralds the master’s sexual initiation of her. While she is described as “young, untried, [and] nervous” as a governess, this characterization also indicates that she is virginal and sexually inexperienced (James, *Turn* 5). In fact, she does not just accept the job; “she faced the music, she engaged” (James, *Turn* 5). The governess does not merely accede to the master’s request but makes a commitment akin to an engagement, agreeing thereby to be initiated. Her innocence and virginity are now open to tampering by the master. Tuveson uses James’s notebooks to show that the commonplaces of folklore frame *The Turn of the Screw*, and, in this paradigm, “mortals” must “consent” to being taken by other beings, typically through speech (795). He argues that the governess is a medium who allows the ghosts access to the children, ironically through her efforts to protect them – that, in trying to be an obstacle, she becomes a conduit. In her assent to the master’s initiation, the governess follows the pattern set forth by Miles, who is also innocent and who must consent to being possessed by Quint through their many private conversations. Her own sexual feelings, mere virginal fantasies of her own Rochester or Valancourt, provide the gateway for the master to possess her, just as Quint and Miles will carry her away.

As the narrator sums up Douglas’s description of the governess’s seduction, he conflates her acceptance of the job with her acceptance of the master as a lover. “The moral ... was of course the seduction exercised by the splendid young man. She succumbed to it” (James, *Turn* 5). She took the job and was initiated by the master, though the text is markedly ambiguous about whether this seduction is sexual or merely sexualized, like initiation. The governess thinks

of the master as someone “to whose pressure [she] had responded”; she is the conquest, the initiate (James, *Turn* 15). After the revelation that the master has seduced the governess, “[Douglas] got up and ... went to the fire, gave a stir to a log with his foot, then stood a moment with his back to us” (James, *Turn* 6). This turning to the fire indicates a focus on the “passion” that the narrator gleans from the story, and Douglas’s refusal to give a direct answer is explained later by the suggestion that he loved the governess (James, *Turn* 6). Though there is no substantive evidence of a physical relationship between the governess and the master, Douglas’s reaction to revealing her feelings toward the master confirms that Douglas recognizes the sexualized nature of the governess’s initiation and that her words confirm her conflicting feelings about the changes it visits on her. Once she is initiated, the governess is entirely under the master’s spell. She feels “rewarded” when “he held her hand,” a tiny display of affection – perhaps counterfeit – on his part that counteracts any negative feelings she might have about his strict instructions never to contact him (James, *Turn* 6). The governess’s journey to Bly appears in sexualized terms: “a succession of flights and drops, a little seesaw of the right throbs and the wrong After rising, in town, to meet his demands, I had ... a couple of very bad days – found myself doubtful again, felt indeed sure I had made a mistake” (James, *Turn* 6). Her description of her journey in terms that also apply to her feelings about the master functions as a metaphorical account of her reaction to the sexualized nature of her initiation (James, *Turn* 6). Though she spends the journey reliving her experience and questioning her decision, she nevertheless stays the course and continues to Bly.

The governess’s fantasy regarding the master continues after her initiation, and living in this fantasy world is what keeps her in her position as governess, absolving him of any responsibility. The master initiates her, as he does Quint, to his worldview, and to a slavish

devotion to him that will simplify his life and complicate hers. She is kept going on the hope of something more, having “received at Harley Street a narrower notion” of both Bly and her position as governess, which makes her think of the children’s uncle as “more of a gentleman” and “suggested that what [she] was to enjoy might be something beyond his promise” (James, *Turn* 7). What he promises is nothing – absence. She feels that, by being a good governess, she is “giving pleasure – if he ever thought of it! – to the person to whose pressure [she] had responded” and she takes “comfort in the faith that [her good qualities] would more publicly appear” as she performs the task that the master “had earnestly hoped and directly asked” of her (James, *Turn* 15). She continues to fantasize that “someone would appear there at the turn of a path and would stand before [her] and smile and approve,” but does not “ask more than that – I only asked that he should know; and the only way to be sure he knew would be to see it ... in his handsome face” (James, *Turn* 15). In this fantasy, the master comes to Bly and is pleased with her performance as governess, which is entirely unlikely. However, it prefigures Quint’s appearance to her and his ability to gain power over her.

Though ostensibly the governess is a replacement for Miss Jessel, she is in fact the new Peter Quint, ruling as the master’s representative, a role that she interprets as if she were his wife. She is initiated, in charge; however, now that she has been sexually initiated, in her world, there is no other recourse but wifhood, and now she has power from the master’s hand, transmitted directly by his physical touch as he holds her hand while telling her not to contact him. She takes this as a mandate of power rather than a brush-off and intends to rule as Quint did, as the master would. In this way, she is the master’s counterpart, just as Quint was in becoming the master’s doppelgänger. Pearson rightly contends that the governess differs from Quint in the way she emulates the master and argues that while Quint, through Platonic

repetition, merely substitutes for the master, the governess, through Nietzschean repetition, increasingly gains initiated knowledge through her time at Bly and thus subverts the master's authority. She both has and lacks agency; though she is in charge, she is following the master's orders as his initiated representative. The heart of the narrative begins in the governess's voice once she is initiated. She can now speak because of her knowledge and power from the master, a power that both Douglas and the narrator seek to possess through their additions to her manuscript. She imagines the residents of Bly as "a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship" with herself "at the helm" (James, *Turn* 9). Because of this unprecedented agency, "the domestic circle at Bly is thus marked by the conspicuous absence of any adult masculine authority. It is a feminine world, presided over by a young, eager, naïve governess and an ignorant, aging housekeeper" (Bontly 725). Bly, functioning as Eden, is therefore subject as Eden was to the ramifications of a woman's decisions.

The governess sees herself as more than initiated, believing that she means far more to the master than she does. To her, the job of governess at Bly is "a vision of serious duties and little company, of really great loneliness," which implies more than a traditional position as a Victorian governess. Hers is no temporary vision, but a long-term commitment. On arriving at Bly, she immediately plays the role of wife and mother rather than governess. She refers to Flora as "my little girl" at their first meeting (James, *Turn* 7) and is already entirely motherly: "To watch, teach, 'form' little Flora would too evidently be the making of a happy and useful life" to her (James, *Turn* 8). She is willing to give her entire life to the master's family, and in fact comes to view Bly "with a sense of property," as though she lives the fantasy of being the master's wife (James, *Turn* 15). After Quint's second appearance, she learns of his death and has an intimation of how hard she must work to protect the children, not only from his pernicious

influence when alive, but also from his evil plans after death. The governess “now saw that [she] had been asked for a service admirable and difficult; and there would be a greatness in letting it be seen – oh, in the right quarter! – that [she] could succeed where many another girl might have failed” (James, *Turn* 27). Her reflection on how the master might react should he consider her performance reveals that she executes her duties for the master, not the children. She is now paired with him as Quint was and as the mistress of Bly would be.

Once the governess is established at Bly, Peter Quint takes up her initiation where the master left off. While the master’s initiation is highly sexualized, leaving her less innocent and virginal, Peter Quint deepens her initiation to include the spiritual consequences of the physical actions that she has fantasized with the master. Quint’s initiation leads to the governess’s exile not only from society but also from Bly. Quint’s is separate from the master’s initiation but similar in that Quint, as the doppelgänger of the master, continues the work in the master’s stead as he once took over the ruling of Bly and, presumably, as he also does with Miles. Peter Quint’s ghost is thus definitively allied with the master in the governess’s immature fantasy world. Quint’s first appearance to her occurs as she walks around Bly, imagining that the master will suddenly appear and praise her for her adjustment to her new role. The governess sees Quint at the top of the tower “to which, on that first morning, little Flora had conducted [her]” (James, *Turn* 15). As many critics, beginning with Edmund Wilson’s Freudian reading, have pointed out, Quint stands on a clearly phallic tower that is also “one of a pair” (James, *Turn* 15). Here, he represents a complement for the governess in her initiation and is allied with the property that she vainly desires. Quint’s appearance is sexualized; he even stands “very erect” (James, *Turn* 16) on one of the towers that date “from a romantic revival that was already a respectable past” (James, *Turn* 15). He appears perfect for the governess’s daydream, taking

over for the absent master in her Gothic vision. As she wonders whether Bly, like Thornfield, hides “a mystery of Udolpho” or “an insane, unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement,” Quint appears and replaces the master as the object of her desire (James, *Turn* 17).

Class consciousness strongly marks the governess’s reaction to Quint. At first, she thinks her daydream has come true, but she quickly sees that Quint is not the master but “an unknown man,” at which her thoughts turn immediately to sex as she remarks that such a man “in a lonely place is a permitted object of fear to a young woman privately bred” (James, *Turn* 16). Her attitude here reveals the common Victorian prejudice that a middle-class woman would be more sensitive to sexuality than a lower-class one, and demonstrates that the governess will misunderstand women “below” her, such as Mrs. Grose, throughout the text, and judge Miss Jessel, a woman ostensibly on her level, harshly for failing to react fearfully to sexuality. Quint even affects the world around her; “the friendly hour lost, for the minute, all its voice,” but “there was no other change in nature” (James, *Turn* 16). James bypasses the pathetic fallacy in favor of something more – a realization that the governess’s voice, which should predominate, will be swallowed up by Quint’s taboo knowledge. Quint’s appearance is frightening to her, making the rest of the scene appear “stricken with death” (James, *Turn* 16). This heralds his initiatory role, since, though the master has introduced her to sexual thoughts and primed her perhaps for Quint’s instruction, it is Quint who closes the circle of intimacy and assures her path to initiated death. Her vision of Quint follows the pattern of the Jamesian initiatory sequence, just like her initiation by the master did: she sees him in sexualized terms without actually consummating a physical relationship; they form a complementary pair in terms of class, social status, and gender; his appearance separates her from the other denizens of Bly; and he brings death with him.

Quint is established as the social and sexual hound that Mrs. Grose says he is, but, more than this, the change in the governess as a result of her initiation by the master becomes apparent. “The sinister and the erotic are very close to each other” in the governess’s Gothic reimagining of Bly, especially in Quint, and both appear in his initiation of the governess (Merivale 998). Quint fixes on the governess as his next victim – or conquest – and sets the stage for her intangible changes, the spiritual consequences of sex. Quint has a “strange freedom” and wears no hat, which the governess takes as a sign of “familiarity” (James, *Turn* 16). This outward sign reveals that Quint is still in charge of Bly, even after his death, and his physical appearance demonstrates both his lower-class status and his refusal to acknowledge the governess’s socially superior position. He takes over from the master as the husband figure and “fixes” the governess with his gaze just as Douglas fixes the narrator when he begins his story (James, *Turn* 16). This marks the beginning of the governess’s initiation. She and Miles alike show a willingness to be initiated, or “carried away,” and a susceptibility beyond mere ignorance. The governess’s fantasies and Gothic reading are pathways for Quint to use in his initiation, and they insure that she is already open to it.

Quint previews part of the sexual knowledge that he will impart to the governess through initiation and makes certain that she is aware of his intent during their first meeting. The governess says that Quint “passed, looking at [her] hard all the while” and that “during this transit he never took his eyes from me, and ... his hand, as he went, passed from one of the crenellations to the next” as if caressing her (James, *Turn* 17). She remarks that “even as he turned away he still markedly fixed [her],” which she describes as an “indiscretion” (James, *Turn* 18). His very gaze is sexual and makes her feel that she has transgressed simply by receiving it. Its effect is so strong that she “can see” Quint’s actions “at [the] moment” of her writing about

them. We must note that she plays an active part here. She does not just note that he looks at her but feels his gaze, sees what he is doing, and consciously allows what she calls an indiscretion to continue. The governess is now under Quint's control, and he has biased her toward his sexualized vision of Bly. Eventually, Quint "turned away" and "that was all [she] knew" (James, *Turn* 17). Suddenly, all that the governess knows is Peter Quint and his actions, and so it will continue for much of the tale until Miles takes over. At this point, however, Quint controls what and how much she knows, and she is now paired with Quint rather than the master. The master made the governess into his own female counterpart, taking Quint's place, but Quint will now mold her further so that she can continue his work at Bly, which is how she becomes his conduit to corrupt the children. Here, the "erotic" nature of the governess's vision of Peter Quint is a "perversion" of sexuality that also appears in the "ambiguously reciprocal seductions of child and adult" later in the text; in other words, this vision of Quint sets up her later imposition of sexuality on Miles (Merivale 993).

The governess's initiation prefigures enormous changes both in her and in her fantasy property, Bly. When she returns to the house after her vision of Quint, she describes the whole interior in terms of red and white, colors often associated with battle, from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to the Wars of the Roses. She sees Quint, and then even home becomes a battlefield. When she is paired with Quint, she concurrently submits to and fights him. The governess sees Quint as "a hostile aggressor in the domestic circle – an interloper challenging her authority in the home" (Bontly 729). While he fulfills a fantasy for her, he also represents the real danger of her sexual feelings which, were she to yield to them, would lead her to the same ruin that Miss Jessel faced. Instead of following Miss Jessel and submitting to Quint, the governess begins to fixate on him, spending long hours locked away in isolation to muse on his

appearance. The governess is surprised by her own uncharacteristic desire to hide what she sees from Mrs. Grose. The governess mirrors Mrs. Grose's reticence about Miss Jessel and also establishes her willingness to put her desire above the safety of Bly, especially since she has no idea yet that Quint is a ghost. She claims that her lies and secrecy are the result of an effort to "spare [her] companion," reinforcing the notion that Mrs. Grose, despite her wealth of information, is not initiated (James, *Turn* 17). The governess's lies to Mrs. Grose commence her isolation and show how much control Quint has over her knowledge. As she increasingly isolates herself "to think" about Quint, we see that he has become her whole focus (James, *Turn* 18). When the governess admits that "[she] could arrive at no account whatever of the visitor with whom [she] had been so inexplicably and yet, as it seemed to [her], so intimately concerned," she demonstrates that she has had more than a vision but has been initiated, and is intimately involved now with Quint as her complement (James, *Turn* 18). Her biblical "three days" in contemplation of Quint suggest that, at the end of that time, she will rise again, baptized into a new circle of intimacy with the dead (James, *Turn* 18). She believes that what she has experienced is real, and that "of whatever it was [she] knew, nothing was known around [her]" (James, *Turn* 18). She believes herself to be the sole living initiate at Bly and thus the one who must lead the resistance to Quint's influence.

Quint's taboo knowledge even interferes with the governess's religious life, which is especially notable since she is a parson's daughter. One Sunday, "when it rained with such force and for so many hours that there could be no procession to church," the governess enters the "temple of mahogany and brass, the 'grown-up' dining room" to retrieve her gloves (James, *Turn* 19). There, in the secular substitute for true worship, she sees Quint staring in the window. His appearance "with ... a nearness that represented a forward stride in our intercourse" indicates

that he has come to continue her initiation (James, *Turn* 20). He appears only “as he had been seen before, from the waist up,” implying that he is no longer a sexual threat (James, *Turn* 20). The sexualized portion of the initiatory cycle is over, and they move now into the transfer of knowledge. From this point in the text, the governess knows things in flashes of intuition that seem irrational and yet appear to lead her on the correct path. In discussing this event with Mrs. Grose, the governess says “no” twice to the question of whether Quint is “a gentleman,” and says that she knows neither who nor “what he is,” indicating that he is “a horror,” something inhuman (James, *Turn* 22). Mrs. Grose’s immediate reaction to this statement is to counsel that they “should be at church” (James, *Turn* 22). While the governess’s initiated reaction is to move toward Quint, further into the circle of intimacy, Mrs. Grose’s response is to flee to religious safety, to counteract an evil spiritual influence with a good one, as if she knows enough to resist initiation actively. The governess refuses to go, saying that she is “not fit for church” and allowing Quint to stand between her and God (James, *Turn* 22). The governess also chooses life at Bly over her nuclear family, who have been sending her “disturbing” letters about life at home, though she feels that, in comparison to Miles and Flora, they do not even matter. She creates a circle of intimacy that shuts out her fundamentals, family and God. She is rudderless, entirely under Quint’s control.

The governess describes and therefore defines the ghosts. Her text is the only authority on them, since neither Douglas nor the narrator has anything to say about them. Though a long tradition of criticism supposes that the governess creates the ghosts entirely, Bontly more precisely contends that the governess “invests the ghosts with their sexual significance. It is she who instinctively identifies sex with the powers of darkness and evil, and who conjures up the murky atmosphere of sexual perversity which infests Bly” (727). Peter Quint, now a mere

ghostly torso, no longer threatens sex, but the shadow of his influence hangs over Bly through the governess's interpretation of his danger and her reaction to it. While the master created the problem by initiating Quint and then putting him in charge of Bly, it is the governess who voluntarily becomes an unwitting conduit for the ghosts, or rather, the initiatory knowledge that they represent, ushering death into Eden. In fact, all of James's initiates manifest definite changes after initiation, and in *The Turn of the Screw*, these changes essentially lead to the end of Bly as it has been. When the governess next sees Peter Quint, the sight of him makes her "catch [her] breath and turn cold" (James, *Turn* 20), approximating the same death that we have seen manifested in the grounds of Bly. As we know, the governess does not die as a result of her initiation by Peter Quint; however, we can argue that this initiation is as yet incomplete, and furthermore that her true initiation here is from the vicarage to the secular world around her as she is awakened by the master, Quint, and then Miles, and her focus shifts from God to her successive initiators.

The governess becomes Quint's sexual and mortal conduit to Miles through her vision of him. The governess only gets a short view of Quint – "but a few seconds" – but this is "long enough to convince [her] he also saw and recognized [her]; but it was as if [she] had been looking at him for years and had known him always," a pattern that will repeat exactly with Miles (James, *Turn* 20). This time, however, instead of just looking at the governess, and though his stare is as "deep and hard" as it was the first time she saw him, Quint's eyes "quitted [her] for a moment" and "[fixed] several other things" (James, *Turn* 20). James again uses specific terminology; Quint does not look, he fixes. Bontly claims that this "fixed stare ... reinforce[s] our sense that the animosity between [Quint and the governess] is inherently sexual" (729). As we have seen, however, Quint's sexual threat to the governess was minimal and has disappeared.

He is instead an aggressor to the child in her charge, and the governess's fear of him is "based not so much on his ghostliness" as on his sexuality in respect to Miles (Bontly 729). She feels "a certitude that it was not for [her] he had come [to Bly]. He had come for someone else" (James, *Turn* 20). Quint's sexualized, penetrating stare moves past her to Miles, which produces a "flash of knowledge – for it was knowledge in the midst of dread" (James, *Turn* 20). Now that the governess has been initiated, she knows what Quint is thinking. She has seen him run his hands slowly and seductively over the crenellations of the tower, and she knows now what that prefigures for Miles.

This visitation by Quint reveals the exchanges of power in the complex relationships at Bly. The governess sees Quint, and then "instinctively" rushes outside. She claims that it is "confusedly present to [her] that [she] ought to place [her]self where he had stood" (James, *Turn* 20). When the governess moves to Quint's position, she acts out the power shift that takes place as she takes over from Quint to possess Miles, who will subsequently take over from Quint to complete the governess's initiation. Quint is entirely displaced from this point, and his influence will dwindle. Mrs. Grose acts out "the full image of a repetition" of the scene between the governess and Quint, and the governess says that Mrs. Grose "saw [her] as [she] had seen [her] own visitant," giving a physical demonstration of the governess's replacing Quint (James, *Turn* 20). Mrs. Grose, in continuing to withhold information and resist initiation, takes the governess's place both literally and figuratively, even reacting the same way she does to Quint. By standing in the position the governess held at first and displaying her fear, Mrs. Grose also shows that she knows enough to be "scared" of what the governess sees and perhaps willfully allows the haunting – of whatever kind – to continue because of the same fear she had when Quint was alive (James, *Turn* 20). Merivale argues that taking the same physical positions as the

ghosts demonstrates that the governess is complicit with the ghosts, and, in this case, Mrs. Grose must be as well (1000).

Mrs. Grose's admission that the man the governess has seen is dead cements their dependence on one another through their shared knowledge: "It took of course more than that particular passage to place us together in presence of what we had now to live with as we could – my dreadful liability to impressions of the order so vividly exemplified, and my companion's knowledge, henceforth – a knowledge half consternation and half compassion – of that liability" (James, *Turn* 23). Mrs. Grose has contributed to the governess's initiation into life at Bly by telling her Bly's true secret. Showing her the pattern of initiation – that Quint and Jessel are just fellow initiates passing that initiation, exile, and death to new residents of Bly – gives Mrs. Grose power over the governess, who is otherwise in charge and above her in power and station. They are now doubly isolated from the world, trapped within two concentric circles. Like the red and white interior of Bly, the governess and Mrs. Grose are locked in a circle of intimacy, but they will fight constantly for power within that circle. While the governess continually seeks knowledge, Mrs. Grose shrinks from it, knowing as she does the price it carries.

Now that the governess is isolated both with and from Mrs. Grose, her status becomes more important as an isolating factor. While "governesses normally occupied a class above servants but below family, and were often isolated and lonely as a result," Miles and Flora's governess has reached across class barriers and drawn Mrs. Grose into her initiated circle (Killoran 14). Immediately after the revelation, they go to the schoolroom alone together and have "a little service of tears and vows, of prayers and promises, a climax to the series of mutual challenges and pledges" that induced them to "retreat" together in the first place (James, *Turn* 24). Despite this circle of intimacy, the governess recognizes that, from Mrs. Grose's

perspective, “nobody in the house but the governess was in the governess’s plight” (James, *Turn* 24). She refers to herself in the third person to show that, because of her station, this is her problem to solve and they are her children to protect. She calls seeing Quint and being the one to save the children her “questionable privilege,” painting herself almost as a martyr (James, *Turn* 24). “She is persecuted for her doubtful privilege,” but nonetheless exults in her responsibility, becoming increasingly unwilling to share either information or power with Mrs. Grose (Tuveson 793). The governess is the only one initiated and therefore the only one who can see past the veil, while Mrs. Grose has information but not an initiated understanding. The two women “passionately ... came back together to the subject” of Quint and his supposed evil, furthering their intimacy and their isolation as they exhibit “rigid control” over their own speech from the day of their schoolroom conference (James, *Turn* 26). As they seek a solution to the problem of the ghosts, the governess and Mrs. Grose begin acting much like Gwendolen and Corvick puzzling over Vereker’s Figure, while the other servants remain ignorant and excluded.

The governess’s desire to save the children through knowledge leads to her reckless power play to sacrifice herself both to and for the children. After Quint’s second appearance and the creation of the circle of intimacy with Mrs. Grose, “a portentous clearness now possessed” the governess and she somehow knows that Quint is after Miles (James, *Turn* 25). When Mrs. Grose questions how she knows this, she replies, “I know, I know, I know” and her “exaltation grew” (James, *Turn* 25). The governess begins her quest to become the children’s messiah, using three repetitions and exulting in her own fantasies of martyrdom on their behalf. She “exalt[s]” herself by meditating on the children’s endangerment and consequent need for salvation. By insisting that she simply knows that Miles is Quint’s target, the governess reinforces both the intimacy and the isolation of Bly, becoming both source and receptacle of

knowledge, and therefore dangerously open to corruption. The governess hopes to be an “expiatory victim” so that the children are saved from Quint (James, *Turn* 25). In effect, she wants to be a barrier preventing their initiation, but she ends up being a conduit instead. Her plan is to see more of the ghosts in the belief that this will cause the children to see them less, which Bontly calls “naïve and melodramatic” (726). Her unjustified belief in her own ability to preserve the children simply by substituting herself for them leads the governess to make “their knowledge, rather than their physical or moral welfare, the crucial issue. She has equated innocence with ignorance and knowledge with corruption, and she has assumed, in the greatest non sequitur of all, that her exposure to corruption will in some manner make it impossible for the ghosts to corrupt the children,” though it is more likely “that the ghosts will corrupt the children through her” (Bontly 726). The governess’s desire to protect Miles from Quint’s pedophilic desire to appear – to expose himself – to the boy shows her trying to atone for the sins of others, but with no understanding of who has committed these sins or how she can pay for them herself.

The governess veers erratically between trying to suppress knowledge and taking control. On the one hand, she tries to protect the children from being initiated themselves, though it is likely that this has already happened or at least that she cannot stop it. On the other, she is the initiate taking over from Quint and the master’s new representative at Bly. The Jamesian Reader has seen the governess’s desire to be the master’s own woman as Quint was “the master’s own man,” and wonders whether this is why she guards knowledge, to exclude others from the circle of intimacy with the master (James, *Turn* 26). She appears to be sacrificing herself, but, in the long run, she hopes to gain more from this sacrifice than those she makes it for. The governess tells Mrs. Grose that Miles’s “having lied and been impudent are, I confess, less engaging

specimens than I had hoped to have from you of the outbreak in him of the little natural man. Still they must do for they make me feel more than ever that I must watch” (James, *Turn* 36). She seems disappointed that Miles has committed so little sin for her to take on and to be more interested in protecting her position and her fantasy future as the lady of Bly than the children. Her desire to be both scapegoat and savior for the children is, in the end, futilely designed for her own glorification in the master’s eyes.

Miles now takes over the initiation of the governess, but he has his own goal in mind. He admits that he is working only toward getting his uncle to return to Bly, though it seems unlikely that he desires the return of a relative he barely knows and who studiously avoids the barest knowledge of him. Miles desires instead the return of the social order that he believes should rule Bly. He wants the master in control to pattern how a man of his class – his “own sort” – takes charge, to return his own class to rule at Bly rather than a succession of servants, most of them corrupt. Miles desires the full power of the beginning of the initiatory sequence, the power to rule as a gentleman, as the true master of Bly, which neither the hatless Quint nor the hapless governess can teach him. Miles’s initiation of the governess is sexualized since he follows the method of the transfer of power from the master to Quint to the governess. Miles has already been exiled from school and is the one in charge, not the governess. She even admits this when she says that he has nothing more to learn from her. Miles’s completion of the governess’s initiation mirrors both Quint’s and the master’s. Mrs. Grose says that the governess will be “carried away by the little gentleman,” implying that Miles, a miniature version of his uncle, should have little trouble with this woman who has been so easily and repeatedly “carried away,” since she is very much open to his influence (James, *Turn* 26). Miles is a paradox, a “little gentleman,” both grown and not, both master and not (James, *Turn* 9). Though he is called

Master Miles simply because of his age, this nonetheless helps conflate him with the master and thereby Quint as his doppelgänger.

Like his uncle and Quint, Miles “likes them young and pretty”; this statement, in fact, is notoriously vague in the text and may apply to any or all of the governess’s three initiators since it clearly emphasizes her sexual quality in terms of her selection for initiation. When Mrs. Grose asks whether the governess is “afraid he’ll corrupt” her, she implies that Miles will initiate the governess just as the uncle has done, following the uncle’s pattern of using his appearance to create the illusion of goodness (James, *Turn* 12). Mrs. Grose makes Miles’s way smoother by influencing the governess’s opinion of him and focusing her on his physical appearance by telling her to “see” Miles before judging whether he might be guilty – be initiated first, that is (James, *Turn* 11). Mrs. Grose predisposes the governess to Miles just as Douglas predisposes the narrator to the governess and her version of the events at Bly, calling him a gentleman and praising his every characteristic, even turning past transgressions into mere shows of future good character. Mrs. Grose’s refusal to believe that he could be “an injury to the others” (James, *Turn* 11), as the governess assumes his school’s dismissal letter says, immediately gives Miles’s person and his words power over those who should have authority over him, and the governess prefers to “abjure [her] judgment” rather than believe anything detrimental to his reputation (James, *Turn* 32). Mrs. Grose reveals some of her hidden knowledge but uses it to bias the governess. Even her language compares him to the master, and Hill argues that “the governess, through Mrs. Grose’s initial discussion of Miles, is being introduced to him in language which is interchangeable with her own as applied to her romantic fantasies. These fantasies, nurtured from saturation in Gothic novels, will encourage her later to imagine Miles, however unrealistically, in a context conventionally reserved for suitors in such novels” (56). As master

presumptive of Bly, once Miles enters that realm, his view is privileged, and the Green World of Bly is rigged for him.

Mrs. Grose, in manipulating the governess's view of the children based on her own prior knowledge, unwittingly assists in their destruction, further reinforcing the sexual power of the fixed gaze throughout the text by using it as the link between knowing and not knowing the children. Mrs. Grose says that one "might as well believe [evil] of the little lady" as of Miles to prove that both children are utterly good, telling the governess to "look at her" for proof that Flora, like her brother, is innocent (James, *Turn* 11). Mrs. Grose's manipulation is successful; the governess agrees that the sight of the children is enough to impart knowledge of them, which further ties her susceptibility to her reading, since *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in particular is full of belief in and reliance on physiognomy. It is important to recall that the governess must be open to this gaze, too; she must consent, as Tuveson has argued. Moon illustrates the power of eye contact in James's work, claiming that a large part of the "initiatorial ritual" and its "uncanny, sexually disorienting effect" is the power of the initiator to "ravish and hold captive" the initiate through the "agency of a powerful gaze," which explains the constant "fixing" in *The Turn of the Screw* (Moon 453). By assisting and focusing that gaze, Mrs. Grose fairly pushes the governess into Miles's arms. Moon contends that James's exploration of perversion appears in "a series of visual and erotic captures and struggles to escape both into and away from a 'perverse' circle" (Moon 453). Mrs. Grose pushes the governess into the circle, damning her and the children and exacerbating the governess's impossible situation, one that will force her exile.

The governess succumbs to Miles in part because of his intelligence. "[Miles] was too clever for a bad governess, a parson's daughter, to spoil; and the strangest if not the brightest thread in the pensive embroidery" that was her silence about a new school for Miles and his

subsequent shows of cleverness “was the impression I might have got, if I had dared to work it out, that he was under some influence operating in his small intellectual life as a tremendous incitement” (James, *Turn* 38). This loaded sentence implies many things about Miles and his initiatory powers. It primarily reveals the governess’s belief both that Miles is more intelligent than she is and that he is beyond her ability to ruin, which makes Miles’s death at her hands more ironic. Mrs. Grose claims that Quint acted as if he were Miles’s tutor until his death, and the governess’s recognition that Miles, a clever, upper-class boy, appeared to submit to Quint as an intellectual superior demonstrates that intelligence is not linked to class or rank at Bly, and that the governess is not in fact superior to Quint, at least not intellectually. Intelligence is certainly a factor in initiation, as we have seen in *The Figure in the Carpet*. The truth is that, though the intellect is a pathway, the ultimate impact of the knowledge that initiates receive is life and death, not intellectual exercise. We further learn that Miles is under an incitement, which we assume is Quint himself, the secret force behind much of what Miles does and says. This “incitement” is “tremendous”; Quint is no weak shadow but a living force perpetuating the cycle of initiation.

Once Miles is at Bly and lessons begin, the governess is in bloom, and she is sexually open though she fails to recognize it. She “learned something . . . that had not been one of the teachings of [her] small, smothered life; [she] learned to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow” (James, *Turn* 14). Miles initiates her into the world beyond the vicarage, into the natural, Edenic world of Bly in which everything seems good until it is examined closely. For a young, unmarried Victorian lady, this is dangerous; Peter Quint is not the only object of fear that this privately bred lady faces. Miles initiates the governess into a permissive world in which the isolation of Bly makes the abnormal acceptable, much like the

country houses of James's texts offer removal of and from social norms and make the unthinkable both thinkable and doable. Her time at Bly is "the first time ... that [she] had known ... all the mystery of nature" because of Miles's tutelage of her (James, *Turn* 14). Miles manipulates the governess's willingness to submit to him in the natural order to initiate her into the social order that he hopes to reestablish by returning his uncle to Bly as well as a natural view of sex – that is, a secular and permissive one in which masters take advantage of their young, pretty servants.

Miles openly defies the social order like Quint does, while he paradoxically uses it to keep Mrs. Grose in line, manipulating the system like the master does. Mrs. Grose's only evidence of Miles's being "bad" in the past is that "Quint and the boy had been perpetually together." She had then "directly approached little Miles" and suggested to him that a "young gentlem[an]" should not "forget [his] station" (James, *Turn* 35). In his reply, Miles reminded Mrs. Grose of her own station in comparison to Quint, which slight she has forgiven him. The other part of Miles's response was the bad part: "he denied certain occasions ... when they had been about together quite as if Quint were his tutor" (James, *Turn* 35). The reader now must wonder which is worse: that Miles lies, that Miles breaks the social barrier to elevate Quint as his uncle does, that Miles creates such an obvious lie that he is practically daring Mrs. Grose to overstep her bounds and confront him, that he so flagrantly shows disrespect for Mrs. Grose and the Victorian social code, or that Miles forces Mrs. Grose to recognize that he is already initiated but can do nothing about it.

Miles and Peter Quint's behavior opens the door for many critics to assert that their clandestine relationship was sexual. We know, however, that in James's complementary pairs, the initiate is often falsely tainted by association with the initiator. Philip Horne insists that

“only a few of the things unnamable in the public world are homosexual” and that Quint’s forbidden knowledge may instead be “an effect of a particular situation or of an individual psychology” (458). Miles, then, may be nothing more than a boy reaching toward his only remaining parental figure in his plot to return the master to Bly. Nevertheless, Miles “covered and concealed” the relationship between Quint and Jessel as well as his own relationship with Quint, indicating both that he is complicit in their corruption and that Quint and Jessel made him no longer fit to live either at Bly or at school with innocent boys (James, *Turn* 35). Caught between two worlds like his initiator, Miles cannot live anywhere, and despite the governess’s efforts, he will join Quint in death.

While Quint’s ghost exists to further the initiatory process, at least in the governess and Miles, Miss Jessel’s appears to create the tension that will end the cycle. When she appears, the governess is sitting “with a piece of work,” a traditionally feminine pastime, while she plays with Flora. When the governess sees a third figure across the way, she has a flash of initiated knowledge and is “instantly sure” of who it is “still even without looking” (James, *Turn* 29). She describes the figure not as human but as “an alien object ... a figure whose right of presence I instantly, passionately questioned” (James, *Turn* 28). We should not underestimate Flora by focusing exclusively on Miss Jessel, since Flora is a willing partner with Miss Jessel in overthrowing the governess. Flora actually propels Quint’s initiation of the governess, much like Mrs. Grose paves the way for Miles, and predisposes the governess to her view of Bly by arranging “that it should be she, she only, who might show [the governess] the place” with the direct result that the two become “immense friends” (James, *Turn* 9). Flora thereby sets the stage for the governess’s initiation by showing her the tower on which Quint first appears to the governess (James, *Turn* 15). “Young as [Flora] was,” the governess is struck by her “confidence

and courage” and the way that she “led [the governess] on,” and she admits that she is being both instructed and led by Flora, who is not initiated herself until Jessel’s ghost uses her in a game to show the governess that she is powerless at Bly despite her position (James, *Turn* 9).

Flora uses her apparently burgeoning awareness of sexuality to win Miss Jessel’s game for her by turning away from Miss Jessel’s ghost and making a grossly phallic toy seemingly under her own direction: “She had picked up a small flat piece of wood, which happened to have in it a little hole that had evidently suggested to her the idea of sticking in another fragment that might figure as a mast and make the thing a boat” (James, *Turn* 29). This construction mimics the process of a little girl’s body experiencing sexual awakening and also demonstrates the initiatory sequence that Miss Jessel is beginning with Flora. “This second morsel [the mast], as I watched her, she was very markedly and intently attempting to tighten in its place” (James, *Turn* 29). This very suggestive “turn of the screw” shows Miss Jessel forcing the governess to watch how much power and corruptive influence she has over Flora. Miss Jessel “fixed the child,” signaling the privileged connection between the complementary pair that we also see between Douglas and the narrator and Quint and the governess as each biases his or her initiate toward a prescribed view of events. Miss Jessel looks at Flora “with a determination – indescribable. With a kind of fury of intention ... to get hold of [Flora]” (James, *Turn* 31). This moment has been suspended for a very long time, and Miss Jessel appears to have waited to initiate Flora until it will be its most effective against the governess and she will be her most powerless to stop it. The boat also represents freedom in demonstrating that the governess has no power to keep Flora away from Miss Jessel, and rowing it all the way across the lake alone shows Flora’s determination to be with her old governess. Only Flora could make that choice, and Miss Jessel makes it clear to the governess that Flora is initiated and therefore beyond salvation. This calls

into question the governess's reliance on simple shows to resist Jessel. Her embroidery and romance novels are the tools of little girls, and the governess needs stronger weapons to combat Miss Jessel's overt sexuality. This is another turn of the screw; Miss Jessel makes the governess watch.

Mrs. Grose interprets the governess's description of the scene between Flora and Miss Jessel only to mean that Flora is aware of the ghosts, but to the governess, the children's knowledge alone is enough to demonstrate corruption because they have knowledge that the governess, an initiated adult, has but that a prelapsarian child should not. The governess's biblical triple repetition that "they know" merely reinforces the depth of the corruption she sees inherent simply in possessing knowledge. The governess continues to use her flashes of initiated knowledge as a guide, claiming that she "was there – [she] saw with [her] own eyes: saw that [Flora] was perfectly aware" of Miss Jessel's presence and evil intentions (James, *Turn* 30). She claims that "Flora knows" Miss Jessel's plans and accedes to them (James, *Turn* 31). Her horror comes not from Flora's realization that the ghosts are there, that she sees them, or even that she hides her awareness, but that she knows that the evil ones are trying to get her and is apparently unconcerned. The governess attempts to "shield [the children] from knowledge rather than harm," which leaves them open to the real danger in which the governess's naïveté puts them (Bontly 727). Bontly claims that the governess represents "the Victorian conscience, with all its sexual self-consciousness and anxieties and repressions," and, thus, she sees what her society would see and draws the conclusions that it would (724). Because the governess focuses on the children's knowledge instead of the corruption that she projects onto them through her interpretations, the children fall into the very danger from which she tries to save them. The real

horror is therefore Flora's Fall – that, through her initiation by Miss Jessel, she has joined the governess and Mrs. Grose as an initiated keeper of secret knowledge.

The governess does finally initiate Mrs. Grose, which is ironic not only because of Mrs. Grose's precedence at Bly, but also because Mrs. Grose herself is the agent through whom Miles initiates the governess. Though a wave of critics like Killoran argues that the relationship between these women is homosexual, the evidence is cursory at best. They do kiss and embrace quite often despite their class divide, and even engage in a parodic wedding ceremony in the schoolroom, exchanging "vows" like bride and groom; however, this is a classic initiation, sexualized without being sexual (James, *Turn* 24). After the appearances of both ghosts, Mrs. Grose and the governess have a shared knowledge base – "our prodigious experience" – that informs their joint decision to "keep [their] heads" despite recent events (James, *Turn* 33). The governess realizes through this that she has passed her initiation to Mrs. Grose when she catches the housekeeper watching her and realizes that she has "made her a receptacle of lurid things" (James 44). Mrs. Grose displays "an odd recognition of [the governess's] superiority – [her] accomplishments and [her] function" after her initiation (James, *Turn* 44). The social order that Miles has sought to restore by bringing back his uncle begins to reestablish itself; the housekeeper no longer wields power over the governess. They begin to meet regularly alone together, at first "in [the governess's] room," in which circle of intimacy Mrs. Grose confirms the governess's beliefs about the ghosts (James, *Turn* 33). The governess now holds power over Mrs. Grose and uses this reversal to secure her support and confirmation of her new knowledge.

After the inhabitants of Bly are all initiated, a game begins in which each is involved and which will determine who lives and who dies. The game is primarily concerned with keeping and revealing information, and it relies on shared knowledge and an enforced circle of intimacy

since none of them can leave Bly. Specifically after both ghosts have appeared, Quint to continue the governess's initiation and Miss Jessel to prefigure the governess's fate after her fall, the game begins, separating characters from each other as they withhold information to get what they want. Matheson posits that this withholding of information, visible in every character from Douglas to the children, always indicates hidden desire on the part of the withholder. Thus, paradoxically, the characters both reveal and deny their objects of desire as they keep information from these very people. The resulting isolation leads to social death; the governess seems insane, the social gap between her and Mrs. Grose is constantly reinforced through Peter Quint, and the governess is separated from the children as they keep her forcibly in the dark.

A long critical tradition begun by Edmund Wilson accuses the governess of having created the ghosts entirely; however, James's preface makes it clear that they are both real and evil. The governess does not invent the ghosts, but she "interprets" them, reading their actions as sexual symbols and metaphors, and construing their intent as dangerous to the children (Bontly 32). Because she has an initiated understanding of the consequences of inappropriate knowledge and believes that she is the only one at Bly who does, she feels uniquely qualified to put her own bias on them; she becomes the critic reading a text, and just like Douglas and the narrator will append their ideas to her story, she will add a "prologue" to the ghosts as she reads them through her provincial, middle-class lens, making them even more real and even more sinister. Because the governess has interpreted the ghosts to the children as corruptive, she corrupts the children with this very knowledge, and "it is their awakened sense of guilt which enables them to feel fear, anger, hatred – which destroys their innocence and introduces them at last to evil" (Bontly 732). The governess uses her knowledge to perpetuate the cycle of initiation by "impos[ing] her imagination upon the children [and] creat[ing] that haunting which destroys the children as she

brings about the Gothic ending she is allegedly trying to prevent” (Merivale 998). Sadly, the governess herself hastens Miles’s death by adding corruption to his initiated state, and her exile of Flora is by no means certain to save the girl.

The children show classic signs of Jamesian initiation in being tainted by the false view of an outsider and punished as a result. Though they are initiated, the children are not corrupt before the governess imposes her view of the ghosts on them. In James’s original idea for the story, he planned that the depraved servants would “corrupt and deprave the children,” and that the children would be “bad, full of evil” (James, *Notebooks* 178). In the final text, however, Miles and Flora give no evidence of being corrupt before the governess’s interference, only initiated. Dorothea Krook’s understanding of the children’s state as being simultaneously innocent and corrupt is instructive for understanding the difference between initiation and corruption. She calls their corruption a “knowledge of forbidden things, disturbingly ... intimate and first-hand,” but this is more precisely called initiation (109). Theirs is not a sin of commission, but one of admission; they are open to and have gained knowledge that they should not have at their age, but that does not necessarily preclude their innocence. They understand that they are naked, as it were, but their nakedness is not the sin; disobedience, not awareness, causes Adam and Eve to be cast from the Garden. Miles and Flora become corrupt when they assume the governess’s view of the ghosts and do things like disobeying the rule to stay indoors after bedtime and crossing physical and class boundaries with the governess as Miles does. Before this, the governess suspects them constantly, but has little to pin on them beyond “having lied and been impudent,” neither of which fits Krook’s description (James, *Turn* 36). The governess expresses disappointment to Mrs. Grose that the children have committed so few wrongs, and Mrs. Grose agrees that there is nothing in them “that’s not nice now” (James, *Turn*

36). Miles and Flora are not perfect; they are human children, born in a postlapsarian world. They are, however, innocent before the governess's influence takes hold, and, like Mrs. Grose, they lack understanding despite their knowledge. Miles has no idea what to do with his initiated knowledge other than whisper it to some other boys until the governess shows him how to apply it (in his bedroom, no less), and Flora never utters the "horrors" that she repeats to Mrs. Grose until after the scene with Miss Jessel on the lake, though Mrs. Grose is sure that Flora heard them when Quint and Jessel lived at Bly (James, *Turn* 75). The governess tells the children that they are corrupt, and so they are.

The governess has called Miles an "actor" before, but now she and both children play the same game, using affection and "passion" to manipulate each other, reminding the reader of the original use by the master of this technique. Their apparent affection for her morphs into a weapon they use against her: as a way of showing affection and trying to please "their poor protectress," the children "got their lessons better and better" (James, *Turn* 37). They also use knowledge to manipulate, and are "secretly" learning "pieces ... by heart" to impress her and to distract her from the ghosts (James, *Turn* 37). Their secret knowledge grows while that of the governess is static, and the ghosts continue the initiatory process with the children. Glenn Reed's observation that, in the governess's view, the children's denial of having seen the ghosts "shows the extent to which [they] have been corrupted" is instructive, since their refusal to divulge information exposes their secret desire to be with the ghosts and their awareness that the information they possess is inappropriate (421). Instead of confessing or seeking explanation, the children do "their best to throw the governess off the scent of their perversions by apparently innocent diversions and silences," like Miles did when lying to Mrs. Grose about his time with Quint (Reed 421). Because both Miles and the governess were initiated by Quint, they are able

to play the same game; however, because they both focus on each other, the effect is that the children become lost.

The governess demonstrates the difference between having information and an initiated understanding by saying that she does not “change” but “simply make[s] it out” as she realizes the truth about Miles (James, *Turn* 47). The children never mention what is most important – Miles’s expulsion from school and his time with Quint – which highlights both as sinister. The governess, as a result of this marked silence, begins to see corruption in everything they do; Miles appears to be reading to his little sister, for example, but instead the governess imagines that they are “talking horrors,” which she identifies as the ghosts (James, *Turn* 47). She calls the children “victims” of her “lucidity” and claims that their “beauty” and goodness” are “a game ... a policy and a fraud” and that “they haven’t been good [but] absent,” belonging wholly to the ghosts (James, *Turn* 47). The governess discovers – or imagines – that “the world of Miles’s invention,” in which she has submerged herself, “had already been informed with carnal knowledge of a nature hardly hinted at in ... *The Mysteries of Udolpho*” (Reed 58). The governess sees past the appearances that took her in on her arrival at Bly, and merely seeing is no longer enough to convince her of truth. She does not recognize, however, that if she believes that knowledge corrupts the children, she, too, must be corrupt because of her knowledge, and that her corruption will now be transferred to the very children she is trying to protect.

The governess uses the game being played between herself and the children to try to wrest them away from the ghosts, who she believes have possessed the children. James comments in his notebooks that “the children may destroy themselves, lose themselves, by responding” to Quint and Jessel, and that to keep them from the ghosts is to save them, which is precisely what the governess claims to attempt (James, *Notebooks* 178). The governess,

however, instead of simply trying to free them from this possession, seeks to replace it with her own. She sees that they have been initiated into an evil that they want to continue, that the children still “love ... all the evil that” Quint and Jessel “put into them” and that the ghosts “ply them with that evil still” (James, *Turn* 48). This evil is its own reward, and the governess believes that the ghosts want the children to “come” to them and “perish in the attempt,” a reenactment of Victorian fears about corruptive servants (James, *Turn* 48). The ghosts seduce the children, influencing them to come to them willingly. The governess, unaware that she performs the same role as the ghosts, also tries to seduce the children to come willingly to her. Miles and Flora must consent – and have – to their initiation. Neither, however, will consent to allowing the governess to possess him or her anew.

The governess now must face her final exile and death, having been initiated and having passed on that initiation. She cannot face the master, but she will face her final two initiators, and both instances will approximate a confrontation with death. The sexualized nature of the governess’s initiation by the master is essential because it traps her at Bly and puts off her final battle with death. Because he has secured her to him as if she is his betrothed and seduced her affections with her consent, she is unable to break her promise not to contact him without risking his “derision” and “contempt for the breakdown of [her] resolution at being left alone and for the fine machinery [she] had set in motion to attract his attention to [her] slighted charms” (James, *Turn* 49). The governess accepts that she must take control of the ghostly events occurring at Bly with no help from the master, who will only see her contacting him as a desperate bid for his affection. When Quint appears on the stairs leading to the bedrooms, the governess is aware of three things, all of which suggest biblical changes: her candle has gone out, it is dawn, and this is her third encounter with Quint. She is alone on the dawn of her own resurrection day. She has

left her Gothic novels behind and has been reading *Amelia*, a novel by Henry Fielding about a faithful wife who must manage alone, as the governess must. Though the governess refers dismissively to its “deprecated renown,” *Amelia* is a novel about feminine intelligence and the question of whether women can be the intellectual equals of men (James, *Turn* 39). The governess’s interaction with Quint during her reading of this text highlights her submission to the master and Miles and her defiance of Quint, indicating that she submits to men based on class, not gender, and that she still desires to be paired with the master despite Quint’s influence over her.

Quint shows his ownership of the governess as he “fixed [her] exactly as he had fixed [her] from the tower and from the garden,” reenacting her initiation, but this time “he knew me as well as I knew him” (James, *Turn* 39). She experiences “no terror” because she has already learned what he wants to teach her, but this time they know each other – another biblical touch – so that Quint also knows that she has no fear (James, *Turn* 40). The governess feels that if she “stood [her] ground ... [she] should cease ... to have [Quint] to reckon with” (James, *Turn* 40). She must now fight him as an equal for possession of the children, unaware that this very battle will damn them, not save them. Facing Quint, she realizes that “there was nothing in [her] there that didn’t meet and measure him,” and that, because of her initiation, she is equal to death (James, *Turn* 39). Her secret weapon against Quint is Miles, and she wonders how best to use him to her advantage: “What if I should go straight in and march to [Miles’s] window? – what if, by risking to his boyish bewilderment a revelation of my motive, I should throw across the rest of the mystery the long halter of my boldness?” (James, *Turn* 43). She employs her boldness as a defense strategy as she and Quint “faced each other in our common intensity” (James, *Turn* 40). If she treats Miles as Quint has done, she may win him, but she will kill him in the process.

Quint, though dead in body, lives in spirit and continues his evil work in the game. “He was absolutely, on this occasion, a living, detestable, dangerous presence” as she faces him (James, *Turn* 40). Their final confrontation itself is a “thing ... as human and hideous as a real interview: hideous just because it was human” and makes her “doubt if even [she] were in life” (James, *Turn* 40). Quint and the children are all above mortal punishment; “like the cherubs of the anecdote,” they are spiritual beings involved in spiritual evil, and therefore beyond mortal laws (James, *Turn* 19). The governess, surrounded by silence as she considers her situation, begins to doubt whether she is alive. She cannot “express what followed [the moment of her confrontation with Quint] save by saying that the silence itself – which was indeed in a manner an attestation of my strength – became the element into which I saw the figure disappear ... straight down the staircase and into the darkness” (James, *Turn* 40). Silence is an actual thing, a symbol of her boldness or her strength, and it defeats Quint and exiles him from Bly. Quint “turn[s] as if on receipt of an order,” a servant in the governess’s eyes, even in death (James, *Turn* 40). Quint will face his final expulsion from Bly when he confronts Miles and the governess at the close of the text. He cannot be held to mortal laws, belonging as he does in no one place, so he must finally leave even the Fallen Bly.

The governess forces Miles through the same sequence as Quint shortly afterward; it is Miles’s turn to face his final exile and death. She admits to Miles’s being a “temptation” to her when, several days after her third encounter with Quint, she is prompted by Flora’s staring out the window during the night to consider whether she should enter Miles’s room and risk “to his boyish bewilderment a revelation of [her] motive” (James, *Turn* 43). She has just wondered whether she should enter a boy’s room alone at night and “reveal” herself in some way, yet she is completely sexualized without in fact making sexual advances on the boy. According to

Merivale, “Miles represents ... the temptation that beautiful, fragile youth places in the way of its elders,” but I would argue that the governess is tempted by his power as the heir apparent of Bly, not just his lovely person (998). She seems really to mean to lay the truth before Miles, but “the governess’s behavior gives Miles the idea that she would like him to seduce her” since she approaches him as if he were his uncle (Killoran 24). She may not be overtly sexual with him, but her actions are clearly inappropriate and perhaps highlight the difficulties of a position like hers in which an ill-trained middle-class girl is put in a professional and highly personal position of authority over those who will someday have authority over her. The governess routinely points out how unusual her situation is, especially when she waxes poetic about Miles’s consideration of the “inferior” sex in relation to both herself and Flora. The governess acts on her temptation to enter Miles’s room, and, discovering that he is missing, glimpses Miles outside the house. Miles acts out what he wants during this staged escape from the governess’s control: he stares up at the tower on which Quint first appears “which, in addition to its critically famous phallic symbolism, suggests also the dominance and power of the male set above the female” (Bontly 729). Miles acts out his desire to see his uncle return to rule Bly, even in his and Flora’s positions; she is inside while he is out, reaffirming their gender roles and setting the female safely indoors while the male prowls around his estate outside.

The next day, the governess recalls bringing Miles in from his vigil the previous night. As they entered his bedroom together after his midnight stroll, she finally “dropped, sank upon the edge of the bed from the force of the idea” that Miles must know that he has the upper hand at this point and does not bother to dissemble like Flora. Miles “had [the governess] in deed, and in a cleft stick, for who would ever absolve me, who would consent that I should go unhung, if, by the faintest tremor of an overture, I were the first to introduce into our perfect intercourse an

element so dire [as the ghosts]?” (James, *Turn* 45). A cleft stick was used to catch snakes, arguing that the governess herself is the snake corrupting Bly through her attempts to capture Miles. Paradoxically, she can say nothing for fear of corrupting him, but playing out the silent farce is precisely what does corrupt him since they hold vastly differing views of what actually transpires between them. The governess’s language discloses her position in relation to Miles: he “had” her and “he could do what he liked” with her (James, *Turn* 45). The governess’s language in her conversation with Miles in his bedroom is “heavily laden with sexual connotations, and these connotations intensify as the tale nears its conclusion” (Bontly 731). Miles begins to consent to her possession of him because of her use of sexuality to seduce him into her view of the events at Bly, but recoils when he discovers that they are after very different outcomes. He wishes to possess her as the master of Bly would, primarily because her actions toward him, as prompted by Mrs. Grose, suggest this. She, however, focuses on the spiritual, wishing to possess him to rid him of an arguably worse evil than herself.

The sexuality of the scene adds both to its horror and its effectiveness, and it also serves to divide the governess and Miles on the purpose of their meeting. While he envisions a return to the male-dominated Bly of his fantasy in which he is the heir apparent, she desires to take control herself in order to please the master, whom she does not wish to replace with Miles. The governess makes her encounter with Miles physical by placing “on his little shoulders hands of such tenderness as those with which, while I rested against the bed, I held him there well under fire” (James, *Turn* 45). Her attempts to seduce the truth from him, however, uncover information that she does not expect. Miles tests the governess as Douglas tests the narrator, asking whether she will “understand” if he tells her the truth, which he does. He answers her “persistent questionings” (Hill 59) by admitting that he wanted her to “think [him] bad . . . just

exactly in order that [she] should do this” – that is, hold him down on his bed (James, *Turn* 46). Hill’s contention that Miles “has few devices available” to get his way with the governess, who holds the reigns of Bly at present, and that “being ‘bad’ (or rather naughty) is logically the most appropriate” is instructive, because the reader must judge Miles’s actions carefully in this scene since they are presented from the governess’s point of view (59). Miles admits that he went outside to seduce the governess, to get her alone, and we know that ultimately he is using his uncle’s methods on her to get what he wants: the return of his uncle to Bly. Their exchange is sealed with a kiss that elicits an incredible emotional outpouring as well as a further caress for Miles from the governess. The governess presents an ironic danger to the children in that, though she constantly fears and guards against the ghosts’ ability to “participate in intimacies with the children, it is she herself who fawns over them, kisses and caresses them and seeks to possess them both emotionally and physically” (Bontly 730). The governess uses her own body to prevent Quint from projecting any additional sexuality on Miles, since she believes that Quint has molested him, whether physically or spiritually. Her own sexuality, however, is a substitute for Quint’s, and she replaces the possibility of sexuality being forced on Miles with the definite occurrence.

Miles’s death now begins to appear on the horizon as he and the governess play their concurrent seduction games. The governess, fearing for his health, says that he “caught [his] death in the night air,” not merely that he could have. Instead, however, “he literally bloomed so from this exploit that he could afford radiantly to assent” to the governess’s interpretation, which turns out to be horribly prescient (James, *Turn* 46). Miles makes the transition from mortal to spiritual being here, much as Quint does. He dies in one sense, but will be renewed in another; he dies as a pupil, as a nephew, as a child, and will be reborn as a free man, unable to be held

down. In fact, the power shifts between him and the governess. She says that he is beyond her, and that he appears “as accessible as an older person” to her (James, *Turn* 62). This “shift in roles” allows him power over her in that “she has become to Miles a ‘slavish idolater’ of a little boy” as she was once to her brothers and as Flora is to Miles (Hill 64). The power having shifted, Miles can no longer remain at Bly, being neither master nor child, neither pupil nor teacher. This shift of power is clear when they go to church and Miles, “turned out for Sunday by his uncle’s tailor,” shows that his “whole title to independence, the rights of his sex and situation, were so stamped upon him that if he had suddenly struck for freedom [the governess] should have had nothing to say” (James, *Turn* 53).

The tomb scene outside the church lays the groundwork for Miles’s death and shows how and why it must happen. Dressed like his uncle, Miles asserts his freedom just as the governess finally decides to face the truth: “I was by the strangest of chances wondering how I should meet him when the revolution unmistakably occurred” (James, *Turn* 53). Their extremely flirtatious and suggestive conversation, full of “my dear”s and winks, ends with his admission that he wants “[his] own sort” (James, *Turn* 53). Miles, however, takes the lead, “impos[ing] on [the governess] by the pressure of his arm” and keeping her away from the church as Quint had done, “alone among the old, thick graves” (James, *Turn* 55). Miles admits that “the way [he is] going on” is an act designed for his uncle in a striking example of a totem-and-taboo-style bid for power (James, *Turn* 55). Miles wants the power of Bly for himself; he wants to control Bly, the governess, and his own life, to become the master. To do this, he must displace his uncle.

The governess now sees that she and Miles are locked in a Hegelian battle for supremacy and that the price of loss is death. Miles challenges the governess’s ability to bring his uncle to resolve the issues of his schooling and his “unnatural” life at Bly, announcing that he will do it

himself and then “march[ing] off alone into church” (James, *Turn* 56). From this point, Miles “pays with apparent aging, with nervous illness, finally with death, for the governess’s manic fears, for her terrified, exhilarated sense of purpose and duty in the face of what she sees as evil, but chiefly for her smothering need to be everything to him” (Merivale 998). It is now November, and Miles is dying like the green world of Bly. This scene conflates sex and death just as the ghosts do, and the governess’s finding repose on grave markers and refusing to go to church are “not accidental relationships,” but show that the governess is taking over from the ghosts in possessing the children (Bontly 729). The governess sees that she has “surrender[ed] to Miles by failing to follow him into church, and that Miles can now “make use of [her] fear to gain, for his own purpose, more freedom” (James, *Turn* 56). She meditates on her and Miles’s shared exile, his “from school, for that was really but the question of the horrors gathered behind,” and hers from “worship” as she stands outside listening (James, *Turn* 57). Both are exiled, and one must push the other to his death first.

Miles and the governess return to his bedroom for their final showdown, where he takes the reigns of power, insisting that she “know[s]” his secret meanings and that she “can’t get off” feigning ignorance anymore. His “uncle must come down, and [the adults] must completely settle things” (James, *Turn* 63). Here, Miles insists that she fulfill her role rather than abdicate it to him. Though she sees him “almost as an intellectual equal,” he believes that he is superior to her and refuses to take on her subservient role (James, *Turn* 63). She warns Miles that the master will “take [him] quite away” as he carried her away, to which he replies that that is “exactly what [he is] working for” (James, *Turn* 63). Miles desires the original power of the master and has no reason to fear initiation anymore. The governess “threw [her]self upon him and in the tenderness of [her] pity [she] embraced him [Her] face was close to his, and he let [her] kiss him, simply

taking it with indulgent good humor” (James, *Turn* 63). He then says all he wants is for her to “let [him] alone” (James, *Turn* 63). This exactly reenacts the master’s initiation of the governess. Miles, like his uncle, makes an indelible impression of goodness on the governess and then pushes her away, which paradoxically brings her closer, focusing her mind on nothing but him. Through this passive aggressive treatment of the governess, both masters of Bly get precisely what they want from her, as does Quint, who uses her in his attempts to get to his true prize, Miles.

The governess still maintains Miles’s innocence despite her initiated understanding, insisting that even if “the imagination of all evil had been opened up to him: all the justice within me ached for the proof that it could ever have flowered into an act” (James, *Turn* 65). Miles seems to exist “in a setting of beauty and misery that no words can translate . . . never was a small natural creature, to the uninitiated eye all frankness and freedom, a more ingenious, a more extraordinary little gentleman,” and the governess constantly has to guard against “a wonder of contemplation into which [her] initiated view betrayed [her]” (James, *Turn* 64). To anyone but the governess, Miles would seem extraordinary only in his beauty and goodness, but to the governess, he is extraordinarily corrupt. To combat this corruption, she capitalizes on his moment of “consenting consciousness” to “seize once more the chance of possessing him,” since he seems willing for her to do so (James, *Turn* 64). Miles evades the governess’s possession, showing her that “it wasn’t for [her] to help him – it was for the thing [she] had met,” Peter Quint (James, *Turn* 62).

Miles exploits the governess’s overwhelming affection for him, playing for her as David played to Saul in 1 Samuel 19. In fact, “David playing to Saul could never have shown a finer sense of the occasion,” but the poor governess, despite being a vicar’s daughter, fails to recall

that David is actually calming Saul down in this story as Saul plots to kill David (James, *Turn* 65). The governess still believes that Quint is trying to kill Miles, when she is the real danger and Miles is keeping her under control as best he can. In the biblical story, David escapes after playing for Saul, and we can also see Miles's death as an escape from his impossible situation at Bly. The governess misinterprets this scene as an "infernal" plot to allow Flora to escape to Miss Jessel so that Flora will become initiated and therefore "not a child" but "an old, old woman" (James, *Turn* 68). When the women find Flora, however, she is holding "a big, ugly spray of withered fern," which, in the Victorian era, signified instead youth, independence, and defiance (James, *Turn* 69). This fern reminds the reader that Flora is still a child despite her initiated, adult knowledge. The governess has misunderstood again, but at least David has played long enough for her to allow him an escape.

The endgame between Miles and the governess takes place as she wonders about "the abrupt transformation of [her] office" in light of "what [Miles] would now permit this office to consist of" (James, *Turn* 78). Hill argues that Miles is "completely at ease and in control" at the beginning of his dinner alone with the governess after Flora and Mrs. Grose leave, having taken the reigns of power completely from her, though I would contend that Miles is more likely playing the part of the accomplished seducer as he attempts to take his uncle's place. The governess is trapped by "the will to shut [her] eyes as tight as possible to the truth that what [she] had to deal with was, revoltingly, against nature" (James, *Turn* 79). While she indicates the ghosts here, this terminology is also common Victorian code for homosexuality, arguing that the subtext of homoeroticism between the male characters contributes to the horror of Miles's death. She fights fire with fire, again matching Quint by trying to "reach [Miles's] mind" through the "stretch of an angular arm over his character," or by using the physical to affect the spiritual

(James, *Turn* 79). They now appear in the most sexually explicit relation to each other of the text: “We continued silent while the maid was with us – as silent, it whimsically occurred to me, as some young couple who, on their wedding journey, at the inn, feel shy in the presence of the waiter” (James, *Turn* 80). The governess appears to make a slip that demonstrates her investment in the fantasy that Miles has taken the master’s (and thus Quint’s) place at Bly. When she says that the waiter, not the maid, has left the room, she seems to have slipped irrevocably into the fantasy that she and Miles are a real couple of newlyweds. She even appears to submit to Miles as a Victorian wife or a servant, though she does so only to get the truth from him and finally to possess him. Miles believes, however, that she intends to do the reverse, to give him both her secrets and herself, and this misprision costs him greatly.

The governess, hiding behind the “hypocrisy of work” again, draws the “extraordinary impression ... from the boy’s embarrassed back ... that [she] was not barred now ... it was positively he who was” (James, *Turn* 80). This allows the governess some power. Miles simply does not know what to do with his new agency, but at the same time “he recognizes her promise that there was “nothing in the world [she] wouldn’t do for [him]” as a means to “get [him] to do something for [her]” (Hill 66). Miles is “afraid” and “resentful” of the governess, and the language in this scene strongly indicates Miles’s jealous desire to possess the governess as his uncle would, though he sees that she will only agree to a quid pro quo rather than submitting to his authority. The reader realizes, too, that Miles and the governess are reenacting his supposed transgression at school when the governess tells Miles, apparently falsely, that she stays at Bly “because [she] want[s Miles] to tell [her] something” (James, *Turn* 80). Miles merely said things to the boys at school to get expelled, and now the governess tells him that “there couldn’t be a better place or time” for him to tell her what he has been hiding (James, *Turn* 82). She pushes

him into a lie to avoid telling her what he has on his mind, thus trapping him. His secrecy is the only way he knows to get her to promise to stay with him, so he has only the prospect of pleasing (and so losing) her to induce him to speak.

Miles understands now that there is a terrible price to become master of Bly. He will not be free as he had hoped, but must choose which of two evils will possess him, a very adult decision for such a young boy. Miles seems to meditate on the window as an “image, for him, of a kind of failure” and the governess feels that she “saw him, at any rate, shut in or shut out” which she “took ... with a throb of hope” (James, *Turn* 81). While the governess believes that Miles is searching fruitlessly for Quint, he is instead meditating on Bly itself and perhaps his future as its master, saying that he is “glad Bly agrees with [him]!” (James, *Turn* 81). Bly, the Fallen garden, is a comforting place for Miles, who can no longer be an innocent child if he is to live there. According to James’s preface, the ghosts have made Bly comfortable only for their own kind as “agents ... causing the situation to reek with the air of Evil [and] capable ... of everything – that is of exerting, in respect to the children, the very worst action small victims so conditioned might be conceived as subject to” (James, *Preface* 185). Miles is “conditioned,” or initiated now. He is the master’s heir, and Bly is in his image. The governess, however, merely hides behind her embroidery, as if to deny her own culpability in Miles’s destruction.

Miles “picked up his hat,” and watching him twirl it gives her “a perverse horror of what [she] was doing” in forcing the truth out of him – or rather, forcing a realization of her perception of the truth on him (James, *Turn* 82). Miles’s hat allies him with the master over the hatless Quint and shows his pretensions to the throne. He invites the governess to stay in his fiefdom, promising that they “shall both be all right” if she does and that he will tell her everything she wants to know, offering knowledge for her obedience and acceptance of her place

in the social order (James, *Turn* 82). Quint then comes “into view like a sentinel before a prison,” and the governess feels that she is “fighting with a demon for a human soul” (James, *Turn* 83). She asserts her right to possess Miles over Quint’s, but she is no better for the child than Quint. Her reaction to Miles’s confession, which she believes will save him, is sexualized. She lets out a “moan of joy” and “drew him close,” and while she “held him to [her] breast, ... [she] could feel in the sudden fever of his little body the tremulous pulse of his little heart” (James, *Turn* 83). All the while, she voyeuristically keeps her fixed gaze on “the thing at the window and saw it move and shift its posture ... [like] the prow of a baffled beast” (James, *Turn* 84). Her fixed gaze is now on Quint, and she has turned the tables on her initiator in a bid for his prize. The governess believes that Miles can be “saved from this visitation ... but first, as the governess no doubt had learned from her clergyman father, there must be honest and voluntary confession. Miles must tell exactly what he has done, or at least make sufficiently explicit admission of guilt” (Tuveson 794). Miles must be willing to be corrupted, and he must also be willing to be saved, but what he does not realize is that he has only two choices and neither of them is salvation: possession by Quint or possession by the governess. Neither will let him live, so he must die. His heart as he dies is “dispossessed” and becomes free (James, *Turn* 86). He chooses neither, and can thus no longer live with either.

The governess attempts to seize power once and for all; she sees that “the air was clean again and – by my personal triumph – the influence [of Quint] quenched” (James, *Turn* 84). Miles seems “detached and almost helpless” as he confesses why he was expelled from school, and the governess wonders again about “his being perhaps innocent. If he were innocent, what then on earth was I?” (James, *Turn* 84). She recognizes her complicity, that Miles is “breathing hard ... confined against his will” under her destructive questioning. Miles admits that he has

unwittingly carried on the cycle of initiation at his school, at which the governess, looking to blame “his judge, his executioner” rather than Miles, “spr[a]ng straight upon him. 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 felt a sick swim at the drop of my victory and all the return of my battle so that the wildness of my veritable leap served only as a great betrayal” (James, *Turn* 86). The governess has tried so hard to protect the children, to substitute herself for them throughout the text, and yet here she introduces the children and the ghosts to each other. She has been a conduit all along, whether the children saw the ghosts or not, but here she removes all pretense and Miles sees that he has been playing a game that he never could have won.

Miles “gave a frantic little shake for air and light” to get away from the governess and searches vainly for the “presence” that “filled the room like the taste of poison” (James, *Turn* 86). Miles meets the governess’s “challenge” to specify “whom [he meant] by ‘he’” with the most memorable line of the tale: “Peter Quint – you devil!” (James, *Turn* 86). Though reams of paper have been devoted to this one line, suffice it to say that Miles may refer either to Quint or the governess as a devil, but either way, he repudiates them both as his possessors, grasping what power he can and defying Quint and the governess equally. Quint initiates Miles into adult secrets that give him power, but Miles never indicates that he would allow Quint to rule Bly for him as his uncle did. The governess, however, chooses to hear Miles’s cry as a last sad grab for his old corrupter and frenziedly insists that Quint will never matter again because “I have you” and Quint has “lost you forever” (James, *Turn* 87). Sadly, “the governess indeed does have Miles, and ... it is her jealous grasp which is strangling him” (Bontly 731). Miles, struggling against the governess’s attempt at possession, has

“already jerked straight round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day. With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall. I caught him, yes, I held him – it may be imagined with what a passion; but at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was that I held” (James, *Turn* 87).

The governess has now fundamentally changed Miles into another Peter Quint, and, like Quint, he is now a thing, not a person – a horror, not a boy. He would not allow her to take over the space she had emptied of Quint, so he had only one choice left. The children were doomed once they were initiated, but we see that the governess hastens their deaths through her corruptive influence, made all the more ironic by her overwhelming affection for them and her desire to atone for their sins herself.

The poor governess, who has tried so hard and gone so close to madness to stop what has happened, must accept that she herself “frightened [Miles] to death” by possessing him herself, and that Miles can only rid himself of this possession “through death” (Killoran 23). His death is a “ghastly consummation” in that she is finally able to possess him as she envisions in the dining room when their grotesque “honeymoon night” begins (Merivale 998). The consummation is two-fold, but it follows a pattern that we have seen throughout the text. Each pair strives to achieve consummation, both sexually, to create life, and as Hamlet sought the “consummation devoutly to be wished.” “James’s balanced pairs” must be joined completely so that “the voyeuristic, twisted, vicarious sexual and artistic satisfactions” of the initiators can occur (Merivale 999). This in turn is what takes the lives of the initiates; like vampires, the initiators have consumed what was good and pure in them. The pairs are necessary to consummation, and consummation is the desire of each party, though for different reasons. The initiation that Miles

experiences has been handed down, like original sin, from generation to generation, a sin of the fathers for which all children must pay. Miles, an eldest son like his uncle, believes himself to be immune to corruption, able to master it, as his uncle believes himself to be the master of Bly even while he abdicates his power to a succession of servants. Neither his class nor his governess could have saved Miles from his fate, but the governess ignorantly continues to try throughout the text. All initiates are eventually victims of “unappeased desire” like the narrator in *The Figure in the Carpet*, but Miles’s youth and promise give an extra turn of the screw to the close of the tale.

Henry James’s abrupt endings motivate the reader’s transition to Jamesian Reader. The reader is left with no “moral of the story” or helpful summation, and must therefore become judge and jury himself; in other words, the reader must perform the actions of the author. In *Daisy Miller*, for example, James lays relatively little groundwork for creating a Jamesian Reader. The unnamed narrator in this text rarely refers to himself, and his influence on our judgment is slight, usually restricted to insinuations about Winterbourne’s pursuit of women (James, *Daisy Miller* 4). The ending of this tale is sudden but not wholly abrupt, and the transition from Giovanelli’s assertion of Daisy’s innocence to Winterbourne’s apparent regret is less than a page. In this brief space, the reader must judge whether Winterbourne is changed by his relationship with Daisy, or whether his return to Geneva signals only a brief backward glance and then a return to his old ways. The reader’s judgment hinges on his interpretation of the narrator’s report, which skips to the following summer, noting Winterbourne’s refusal to answer his aunt’s query of whether Daisy “would have reciprocated one’s affection” (James, *Daisy Miller* 51). Since our protagonist will not give us the “answer,” we must supply it ourselves. The narrator tells us that Mrs. Costello “initiat[ed]” Winterbourne “into many of the secrets of

[her] social sway” (James, *Daisy Miller* 13). By the end of the tale, Winterbourne appears to agree with Mrs. Costello, repeating her very words as he admits that he has “lived too long in foreign parts” to negotiate social situations successfully (James, *Daisy Miller* 51).

Winterbourne, however, does not specify his “mistake,” and his regret of both his treatment of Daisy and his separation from his own nationality suggest that his mirroring of Mrs. Costello’s words is not an agreement but a perfect opposition to the view of Daisy that she pressed on him the previous summer (James, *Daisy Miller* 51). Daisy’s influence on Winterbourne is undeniable, since he has spent a year thinking about her and regretting his treatment of her, but, since accounts of his behavior are “contradictory,” the reader can only use his judgment of the narrator to decide whether he believes in Daisy’s innocence and its power to transform Winterbourne (James, *Daisy Miller* 51).

The narrator of *The Figure of the Carpet* gives the reader much more information to consider, but much of this is distracting and self-serving. He is a more developed character who casts aspersions on those who succeed where he has failed. The reader must therefore judge the narrator and his biases in order to judge the characters themselves. The narrator reports that Vereker calls him “acute” and singles him out as his first initiate, but the reader subsequently notices that the narrator both worships and derides Vereker’s Figure, casting doubt on his own initiation. By the end of the text, the narrator is alone, apparently cut off entirely from a riddle that is right in front of him but that he cannot solve. The reader’s task is to decide which path to take: the narrator’s or Corvick’s. Though Corvick dies, he has also clearly lived, whereas the narrator clings to a mere half-life of doubt and disappointment. The text ends abruptly, almost fading to black as the narrator completes his initiation of Deane and sums up his life afterward in two sentences, both of which gleefully extol the pleasures of his “revenge” (James, *Figure* 35).

But against whom does the narrator have revenge? The Jamesian Reader's ultimate task is to discover the Figure for himself, and, to do so, the reader must do precisely what the narrator does not. He must not scoff defensively when he fails; he must remove himself from his normal surroundings; he must live and love; and, above all, he must go to the text, take it to his heart and let it truly sink in so much that it can affect him even when he is separated from it by an ocean. The reader must, in short, repudiate the narrator and reevaluate each character by ascertaining what he can of them through the narrator's biases. This is a form of the Figure itself, and the process will create and polish the initiated Jamesian Reader.

The Turn of the Screw is notorious for its abrupt ending. Readers can hardly help but wonder at the myriad unresolved questions, chief among them who is the "devil" of Miles's final utterance. Though James described this tale as a "shameless potboiler," it has doubtless caused more argument than any of his other texts, primarily because the answers he does give his reader are maddeningly ambiguous (James, *Letters* 88). The governess tells us that Miles's heart stopped because it was "dispossessed," but the reader then merely wonders who possessed it in the end and whether Miles is free in death (James, *Turn* 87). James's shocking ending is also among his most abrupt and the one in which the Jamesian Reader must work the hardest to understand the text. The reader must judge the entirety of the tale through the governess's eyes, and even this action is steeped in the reader's own bias through which he must struggle to see clearly. Though James gave her authority, he did not free his governess from partiality; instead, her manuscript reveals that she is predisposed toward Bly and its inhabitants because of her affection for its master. Since we read the governess's story primarily in her own words, it is easy to forget that she cannot necessarily be trusted, and our unnamed narrator points this out when he focuses on her love of the master and Douglas's love of the governess to show the

layers of influence under which the truth is hidden. The Jamesian Reader therefore faces a monumental task at the end of *The Turn of the Screw*: the reader must re-read, this time stripping as much bias as he can from the narration to reveal what truth he can find. When he sees that the governess, who seems to love the children so much, has almost unwittingly sacrificed them to her aspirations, corrupting and aging them, the seemingly shocking ending becomes truly appalling.

The cycle of initiation in the Jamesian text exists on two levels: the literary and the real. James's characters are initiated in the literary world, but this process is an example to his reader of what he should do in his own life. Like the narrator's search for the Figure in the carpet, the reader sees that he must find James's Figure, but must go about it in his own way. James has thus used the literary to affect the personal. Through reading several of James's texts, the initiated reader sees a pattern emerge. It exists in the formal elements of the text as well as in the content. As Vereker himself notes, each "page and line and letter" contributes to the meaning of the text (James, *Figure* 10). Each initiate must gather details, scrutinize them, and then stand back from them to see the larger picture they present. This is true both in the text and in the reader's own life in that the literary and the literal work together to initiate the willing into the secrets of the text. The Jamesian Reader's final judgment of a text makes him more than a reader; he is an author and critic as well, no longer paired with Henry James, his initiator, but prepared to initiate someone new. *The Turn of the Screw* shows the reader how dangerous this can be. While the narrator of *Figure* inspires the Jamesian Reader to start immediately but in his own way, the governess in *Turn* reminds him that forbidden knowledge has a price and that, though he may be willing, a new initiate will pay that price. Like Vereker, James must be read in full, not in pieces, and at the most detailed level for the Figure to emerge.

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