

# Narrative Failure and the Fall in Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw"

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In the first chapter of "The Turn of the Screw," the governess refers to "a succession of flights and drops" which she experienced at the beginning of her time at Bly. Critics have often seen this as an indication of the woman's emotional instability, and have therefore argued that her version of the events in the novella is unreliable.<sup>1</sup> Without denying that this reading is possible, I would like to point out that the quotation has wider connotations for the understanding of a book where instances of falling have a particular resonance. Not the least of the plunges in the text is that of Quint, the principal villain, who is described as having died of "a fatal slip." Although the governess refers several times to the children as angels, the concluding paragraph describes the death of Miles in a way which seems to echo Biblical descriptions of Lucifer's more spectacular plummet from grace, while his expulsion from school repeats the original expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Without suggesting that Miles is either Satan or Adam, it can be argued that the text may be situated at

<sup>1</sup> For the so-called non-apparitionist readings of the text, see especially the articles by Goddard, Kenton, and Wilson which are reprinted in *A Casebook on Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw'* (ed.) Gerald Willen, 2nd ed. (New York, Crowell 1969), pp. 244-72, pp. 102-14, and pp. 115-53 respectively. Apparitionist critics (i.e., those who believe the ghosts are real) in the same volume include Evans, Heilman, Hoffman, and Jones. Tzvetan Todorov, by contrast, argues that the textual uncertainty is deliberate, and that we can never decide whether the hosts are real or just a product of the imagination. See his *The Fantastic*, trans. Richard Howell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

least partly in a Scriptural framework, positing moral uncertainty and difficulty as the aftermath of Satan's rise and fall and the banishment from Paradise. So rather than seeing ambiguity solely as a product of its narrating consciousness, it is possible to consider it as conditioned by the premise of post-lapsarian existence. In this paper, I therefore examine the consequences of this premise on the construction of narrative, concentrating in particular on the role of the governess, and seeing her, not simply as an isolated character, but primarily as an isolated, inner narrator confronted by a discrepancy between her own flights of fancy and a submerged story of infraction and retribution.

It needs to be acknowledged however that the image of dramatic descent may further operate as an allusion to the myth of Icarus, and that the creative imagination is therefore implicated in the failure which it connotes. The implications of the final image are dizzying in their complexity, for the echo of Satan's fall can operate as a commentary on the fall of Icarus: one simultaneously negates and explains the insufficiency of the other. In this paper, I argue that it is because of Satanic trespass that the Romantic project of imaginative mastery over the disparate elements of experience is doomed to failure. And the failure of the imaginative enterprise as it is located in the figure of the governess is accompanied by a parallel failure of the redemptive project undertaken by her. This implies that religious and artistic problems converge to some extent in the person of the governess. The fact that the latter is never named other than by her position means that it is precisely her occupation which is the main concern of the text. I propose to show how, in a series of roughly similar encounters, the governess is confronted with the difficulty of ordering or mastering experience in a world where the compelling logic differs from the one she has been led to hope for by her society and by her recent meeting with a male figure who initially resembles other powerful masculine characters in 19th century women's fictions. In particular, she is faced with the problem of reading and recounting a series of events which are in themselves resistant to her normal strategies of interpretation and narration. But it has to be said that the reader is immediately implicated in the text's reversal of expectations, and that the figure of the narrator is used by James to problematize not only certain preconceptions held by the narrator but by the 19th century audience.

The "succession of flights and drops" therefore constitutes a basic structural paradigm for the text as a whole. Again and again, a discrepancy arises between what the governess expects and what actually happens, between desire of one sort or another and the disappointment of that desire. Of course, the desire and disappointment are to some extent dependent: in other words, it is the nature of the expectation that results in its recurrent frustration. But the governess is clearly so concerned with the act of writing, or with textualizing what she sees, that her activity can be related to a fraudulent expectation about language which extends to the concept of literary production. And the literary paradigms most favored by her are those provided by novels where a central, female figure is confronted with evil or difficulty of some sort and then overcomes it. Fielding's *Amelia* is one such instance, and both Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are others. It is possible to argue, then, that the governess adopts the same strategies as her literary heroines in first identifying and then attempting to overcome what she perceives as evil in the world of Bly. According to one critic, "she constructs the drama of the plot for their souls and her romantic redemption of them from it."<sup>2</sup> The outcome of her struggle to maintain order, to govern experience, therefore tells us something about the attitude of James to these same texts. In a sense, "*The Turn of the Screw*" revises these stories in a critical way, and is therefore concerned with the way in which culturally constructed expectations about acts of literary creation and interpretation are deconstructed by the illegibility of a primary experience which answers to other, unknown imperatives.

This is evident when the governess receives a letter from her employer enclosing another, unopened letter dismissing Miles from school. This statement of expulsion is accompanied by a brief note, but otherwise no explanation either from the school principal or from the child's guardian. The promise of discourse is first deferred and then displaced by a message which is different and more disturbing than the one anticipated. Similar reversals of expectation occur elsewhere in the story, but this is thematically one of the most important, since it results in an interpretive crisis which is never resolved. And it is not resolved precisely because no-one intervenes in the text to replace speculation with the knowledge of its accuracy. As a figure of the artist, then, the governess is haunted at

2 Adrian Poolc, *Henry James: New Readings* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 149.

crucial intervals not only by ghosts but by the absence of a central consciousness capable of fully authorizing her actions. And of course the reader of "The Turn of the Screw" is haunted by a similar sequence of absences, having the story told to us by an unknown first-person narrator recalling the dead Douglas's reading of the dead governess' manuscript. There are contradictions too: as David McWhirter points out, "when Mrs. Grose identifies Peter Quint on the basis of the governess' description, we are likely to assume we are dealing with real ghosts; but when Mrs. Grose later fails to see Miss Jessel by the lake, we are forced to reconsider, and thus to reinterpret events we thought we had mastered."<sup>3</sup>

As I have indicated, the process whereby disclosure is imagined and then disrupted it is typical of the whole. Indeed, the story itself begins by referring to another story, and the one narrated by the governess is postponed until it is forwarded by mail from town. This deferral typifies the process of desire and disappointment in the text. For even though Douglas is said to "read with a fine clearness that was like a rendering to the ear of the beauty of its author's hand" when the manuscript finally arrives, nevertheless there are some discrepancies between the expected document and its performance.<sup>4</sup> Especially, the assertion that Miss Jessel "was a most respectable person" is not borne out by the rest of the story.<sup>5</sup> And despite the promise that the cause of Jessel's death "will come out," this turns out not to be the case.<sup>6</sup> Like the letter in the story, the story in the letter promises disclosure of a kind but fails to deliver it. One immediate consequence is the disrupted textual programs of both Douglas and the framing narrator, both of whom wrongly anticipate that the story will be essentially about romantic love.

This suggests that, contrary to critical opinion which insists on her unreliability, the governess is not entirely alone in her assumptions about what patterns experience should and should not observe: these assumptions are shared, inherited, and social. Therefore, her own programs (whether they are to do with religion, psychology, gender, genre, or class) are often disrupted in a way which has relevance beyond

3 David McWhirter, "In the 'Other House' of Fiction: Writing, Authority, and Femininity in 'The Turn of the Screw,'" in *New Essays on Daisy Miller and The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Vivian R. Pollak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 122.

4 *The Turn of the Screw* (1898; Wisconsin: W. W. Norton, 1966), p. 6. All subsequent references are to this edition.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

6 *Ibid.*

her own personality. The disruption of her pretenses has implications for Victorian literary performances in general, however. Millicent Bell is surely right when she claims that "Jane Eyre is unquestionably James's principal intertext for "The Turn of the Screw";" but this is an intertextuality that denies its model, compelling us to see the dreams of the governess at Bly as illusion and futility."<sup>7</sup> This self-conscious and revisionary aspect of "The Turn of the Screw" is evident in the fact that, although she is introduced to the gentleman in Harley Street, "a figure who as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel" through correspondence, she meets him only twice before they are parted forever.<sup>8</sup> On arrival at Bly, a letter from her master offers romantic possibility only to displace it by a deeply unsettling tale of transgression and punishment. Again, just before the first sighting of Quint on the tower, the governess imagines that "it would be as charming as a charming story suddenly to meet someone."<sup>9</sup> The fact that she then does see someone, though not the person she wants to see, is usually cited as evidence for the theory that these visitations commence as unconscious desires.<sup>10</sup> But more significantly, perhaps, the fantasy of a benign and superior presence is deflated by the intrusion of a figure from a previous, more disturbing palimpsest which takes the transgression of Divine authority as its subject and suggests a reason for the possible existence of evil in the world at Bly.

It's worth pointing out that the disruptions in the text have implications for literary language as well. Quint is appearance without substance, a frightening sign whose significance is unknown and unknowable. He never speaks, and is never spoken for. Jessel is also mute, for although the governess comes across her writing a letter in the dining room, the contents of this letter are never revealed. Even Mrs. Grose refuses to speak about her, and significantly, the unwillingness or inability to do so is linked with the indecipherable barrier put in the way of understanding by death: "'Well, Miss—she's gone. I won't tell tales,'" she says. And even when pressed about the circumstances of Jessel's death, she admits

7 Millicent Bell, *Meaning in Henry James* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 224-25.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 15

10 See Edmund Wilson's essay "The Ambiguity of Henry James" for the classic statement of this view. It is reprinted in *A Casebook on Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw,'* pp. 115-53.

that the master "never told me!"<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the uncle himself is someone who expressly proscribes writing: his main condition of employment was that the governess "should never trouble him—but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything."<sup>12</sup> Instead of a comforting masculine presence, the master becomes a forbidding absence who denies all attempts at communication instigated by those who work for his good and it is possible to argue that he allegorizes a forbidding Calvinistic deity who similarly withdraws his presence from the fallen universe.

A series of encounters at Bly therefore alert us to a discrepancy between the "charming story" and a previous history of rebellion and fall, with their aftermath of sin and death.<sup>13</sup> This suggests a process whereby a discourse of good is shown to be partially if not totally insufficient to the complexities of a post-lapsarian moral experience. The children are by extension thoroughly implicated in this process, identified as benevolent presences whose disappearances at night reveal the inadequacy of their representation. From the very beginning, attention is drawn to an exaggerated seraphic status. The governess recalls "the radiant image of my little girl [and the vision of her] angelic beauty,"<sup>14</sup> and she detects in the girl's brother something similar. Of course, Victorian society actively promoted the ideal of childhood innocence, an ideal which is relentlessly pursued by the governess, albeit in different forms. I depart here from Millicent Bell's argument that she imposes a Calvinist duality of absolute good and evil on the world: it seems to me that the opposite is the case. This duality is imposed upon her from without, and James wants to show that to assert absolute goodness is to leave yourself open to the assertion of the opposite.<sup>15</sup> When sin and death intrude on the world at Bly, she attempts to restore that world of goodness through a series of interventions which are governed by the possibility of humanly accomplished redemption through the acknowledgment and expression of guilt. Before the final interview between the governess and Miles, she makes it clear that if "he confesses he's saved."<sup>16</sup> Once more, the fantasy of assigning and saving presence through language emerges.

11 *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 13.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

13 Quint is described as having died of "a fatal slip." *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 28.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

15 Bell writes of the governess that "her romance or Calvinist view of life causes her to postulate in little Miles and Flora an undeniable absolute, whether of evil or of good." See *Meaning in Henry James*, p. 232.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

The existence of evil is seen to pose a problem to the authority of the protagonist and to the kind of stories she has about the world. After seeing Quint at the window, the governess is reported as looking "as white as a sheet."<sup>17</sup> The observation is significant, for what she sees wipes out the fiction of a world where evil does not exist. Indeed, part of the point of having the governess reading before visitations is to show the gap between her store of words and the state of the world at Bly. Again, the governess seems to realize this when she asks if Bly wasn't "just a story-book over which I had fallen a-doze and a-dream? No; it was a big ugly antique but convenient house, embodying a few features of a building still older, half-displaced and half-utilized, in which I had the fancy of our being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship."<sup>18</sup> The building itself is a symbol for the conflict enacted within it, where one story is superimposed on another without being entirely integrated. The governess is caught between romance and another, Biblical version of the world, not yet forgotten, which insists that humanity is fallen and essentially depraved.

In fact, "The Turn of the Screw" is the site for a number of competing narratives. Again, the children pose particular difficulties, for they seem pure but are capable of schemes of deception. They are forever involved in "reading her passages, telling her stories, acting her charades." Even the curtains around their beds implies that their innocence is a theatrical disguise.<sup>19</sup> The novella involves a series of puzzles which add up to a crisis in representation which is not only textual but painterly. When first seen, the little girl is like one of Raphael's holy infants. Both the children and the ghosts enact equivocal and seemingly illegible messages. The governess reports of the former that "their own letters were but charming literary exercises. They were too beautiful to be posted."<sup>20</sup> The illiterate housekeeper is also implicated in the dialectic of silencing and uttering in the text, for when asked about Jessel, she replies that she "won't tell tales."<sup>21</sup> But by the close of the story, the utterance of Jessel's name becomes a "breach of the silence like to the smash of a pane of

17 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

19 See the beginning of Chapter 10, for instance, where "the white curtains had been deceptively pulled forward." *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 42.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

glass."<sup>22</sup> The myth of cherubic innocents is shattered at the same time as the myth of linguistic transparency: instead of providing immediate access to the meaning(s) beyond it, discourse is caught up in the world of sin, the world of ambiguity and opaqueness. Jessel is not only dead, but deviant, and these things therefore exist in the text as gaps in meaning, a rupture in the dream of angelic presences. In Chapter 17, the governess again sits "for a long time before a blank sheet of paper" before going into the boy's bedroom and beholding his "clear listening face, framed in its smooth whiteness."<sup>23</sup> Once more, there is a link between the question of reading or understanding the child and the issue of understanding in general. Problems of perception are replayed at the level of presentation, which is why Quint twice appears framed behind a window, and why Jessel's second showing takes place near "a sheet of water."<sup>24</sup>

With the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, sin and death are introduced into the world. These concepts are thematized in the figures of Quint and Jessel, both of whom are dead, and both of whom are said to have led sinful lives. Indeed, when the governess first sees Quint on the tower, she writes that "the scene had been stricken by death,"<sup>25</sup> a description which announces the fall of nature in the world of the novella. Remarking later that autumn has fallen upon Bly, she imagines that the "place, with its grey sky and withered garlands, its bared spaces and scattered dead leaves, was like a theatre after the performance all strewn with crumpled playbills."<sup>26</sup> The drama of course is that of the Fall. And its consequences are ruined programs and the litter of good and evil rather than the literature of the good. Soon after this, the governess says that "I shut myself up audibly to rehearse...the manner in which I might come to the point. I approached it from one side and the other while, in my room, I flung myself about, but I always broke down in the monstrous utterance of names."<sup>27</sup> Again, the effect of sin is to prevent discourse as well as disclosure.

But the textualization of sin and death lies in the absence of a *logos* in the story. Especially, authority is constantly threatened by the intrusion

22 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 53.



of death. The gentleman in Harley Street is given authority over his nephew and niece because of the death of their father, his brother. This responsibility is then passed on to Jessel, who also dies. Finally, Bly itself becomes the location for a power struggle between the governess and the ghosts of the dead servants. Death also destroys authority on the textual level. The governess has her manuscript read out by Douglas after her death, and after his death, the document left in his charge is transcribed by the "I" narrator. Indeed, one of the functions of the preface is that it replays the difficulty of producing texts in a world of death.

Making sense of good and evil in the world, and distinguishing between them, is the predicament of both the narrator and the artist. "I scarce know how to put my story into words that shall be a credible picture of my state of mind," says the governess at one stage.<sup>28</sup> As a consequence of temptation (both that of the children and that of the pre-lapsarian couple the children recall), artistic representation in its entirety is made uncertain and enigmatic. This suggests that the drama of innocence and iniquity in the text is replayed at the level of narrative as a drama of interpretation and inscription. In the fallen world, manuscripts become severed from their authors, and subjects become divorced from authority.

The assignment of ordering, like the ordering of signs, therefore becomes deeply problematic. At the start of the novel the governess thinks to herself of having "everything, to be right ... fenced about and ordered and arranged [so that] the only form that in my fancy the afteryears could take them was that of a romantic, a really royal extension of the garden and the park."<sup>29</sup> This vision of a future that restores the pre-lapsarian past is couched in Romantic discourse. But by the end of the novel, there is a description which both duplicates and differs from Satan's overthrow from Heaven. "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."<sup>30</sup> These lines effectively refer us back to the text and explain the reason for its complexity. The satanic trespass against the authority of the Word results in the absence of any verbal authority about the world.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

This religious dimension to "The Turn of the Screw" is hinted at it by its beginning on Christmas Eve, and by the fact that it is told by a twenty year old woman who is the youngest daughter of a country parson. The setting establishes the time of year as one of the most important in the Christian calendar, and its actual narrator and protagonist is identified as a person of religious upbringing. Of course, the very existence of ghosts depends on a belief in existence after death, and therefore implies a religious dimension. Moreover, "the private source of "The Turn of the Screw", " the then Archbishop of Canterbury, suggests that the narrative has a theological dimension, or at least that it examines the influence of various theological givens on consciousness and, by extension, on the construction of narrative.<sup>31</sup>

Although a governess is evidently not an Archbishop, their functions are not entirely dissimilar. An Archbishop acts as a representative of a Divinity who is not actually present in the physical world. And the governess is in a similar position, acting as the agent for a person of authority who is not present in the world of the novella. Again, the Archbishop lives with the consequences of the Fall, dispensing moral guidance in a world where the ultimate guarantor of that guidance is silent. And the governess too lives with the consequences of the expulsion from an idyllic world of her predecessors. Finally, the setting of the novella itself, which moves from June to September, is additionally interesting, since it follows the movement from Spring to Fall. Instead of the later Romantic belief in the perfectibility of man, the governess is confronted with "a bewilderment of vision of which, after these years, there is no living view that I can hope to give."<sup>32</sup>

The story of the governess who acts on behalf of a displaced master suggests the problem of inscribing the self when there is no central source of authority. The religious context of this question becomes clear when the protagonist is twice prevented from reaching church, once by the sight of Quint at a window, and once by Miles's desire to return to his school. Symbolically, the church exists as the source of religious authority, and it is therefore significant that it cannot be reached. The fact that Miles communicates his will in defiance of the governess

31 See the New York Preface which is reprinted in the Norton Critical edition of *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 181.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

becomes, at the allegorical level, "a rebellion" or "a revolution"<sup>33</sup> which potentially parallels the demonic mutiny at Bly, itself an image of Satanic dissent and transgression. Indeed, the symbolic import of this episode is stated when the narrator tells us that "the curtain rose on the last act of my dreadful drama and the catastrophe was precipitated."<sup>34</sup> Here, the concern with sacred, social, and sexual authority converges when Miles makes a rhetorical appeal to his uncle, the master, asking how he can be made "to come down."<sup>35</sup> His request undermines the ability of the governess to command obedience as well as to compose order. But all of these concerns intersect at the level of narrative to constitute a problem of interpretation, a predicament expressed at the beginning of Chapter 15 when the protagonist sits on her "tomb and read into what our young friend had said."<sup>36</sup> Sin and death disrupt meaning, making language itself disparate and inchoate.

In this paper, I therefore argue that the foregrounding of acts of composition is deliberate because the text is centrally concerned with the construction and reception of narrative in a world where all texts are licensed by an absent (and mute) authority. The very story begins when Douglas reads out a manuscript given to him, and written by, someone other than himself, someone who is additionally not present at the reading. And he in turn passes this document on to the "I" narrator, who takes a transcript. Perhaps more importantly, the apparent source of the story, the governess, is the one most often concerned with the difficulties of authorizing her experience. Her letter to the master, intercepted by Miles, represents an attempt at achieving approval for her point of view, and the failure of this gesture is therefore crucial. Ambiguity extends to, and implicates, not only the experience which is recounted but the experience of recounting. The uncertainty of the governess reveals a similar uncertainty about the ability of language to govern or order experience in a world where there is no controlling consciousness. Therefore when she says of Quint that "I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page," the reader's attention is drawn to parallels between her activity and the activity of literary representation.<sup>37</sup> And the struggle

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

36 *Ibidem.*

37 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

to differentiate between appearance and reality in the tale indicates the primary difficulty of establishing a position within language which enables perspective.

Through the figure of the governess, James tests the ability of a discourse of the positive to account for experience. What she discovers is that sentimental figuration is inadequate to a sub-text of sin and death. It is therefore interesting that her fear is likened to an empty page. Quint's intrusion into what had previously been "a castle of romance" exists at the level of narrative as the threat of disorder and chaos. It additionally disrupts "the romance of the nursery," because it destroys the Romantic faith in children as well as the childish faith of the Romantic.<sup>38</sup> Again, Quint's appearance on the tower interrupts the juvenile fantasy of sentimental love and symbolizes another story beneath which is threatening precisely because it is indistinct. Thinking about the incident some days later, she "could arrive at no account whatever of the visitor."<sup>39</sup> Both death and sin cancel the belief in goodness and shatter the Romantic fiction of perfectibility and representation.

This disjunction between the idiom of goodness and the appearance of evil is precisely what upsets the governess most. It produces a breakdown, not in her mind, but in her language. Chapter 13 in particular is full of references to a kind of speech disorder caused by the arrival of the ghosts and the suggestion that the children are aware of their presence. "Speaking to them proved ... beyond my strength," admits the narrator.<sup>40</sup> Speech is disturbed by silence, writing/righting by "the hideous author of our woe—the white face of damnation."<sup>41</sup> Of course, the narrative impulse is essentially a desire for pattern, organization, and (ultimately) control, but the governess finds herself in an impossible situation, at the helm of "a great drifting ship" where the master has relinquished all command.<sup>42</sup> In making the governess the center of consciousness and the center of composition in the text, James questions the ability of Romantic idioms to represent the world. Writing of the events she recounts, the governess says that "it reminds me now of all the art I now need to make it a little

38 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 88. The phrase "white face of damnation" occurs also earlier in the chapter, p. 85.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

distinct."<sup>43</sup> Given the indeterminacy of perception, art enables only a self-conscious and partial process of reconstruction and inquiry. Again, when the governess asserts that Quint "was as definite as a picture in a frame," she points out that the world is only as real as the means with which we represent it.<sup>44</sup>

As a version of the artist, the governess shows that the writer is never free from a problematic reality, but is always immersed in it. Representation can only perform its own failure to yield answers, a failure to which James attributes a fundamentally religious cause. At the close of the novella, disclosure is disrupted and prevented by the intrusion of both sin and death. Indeed, meaning is disrupted again and again by their appearance. The belief in the essential innocence of children is destroyed by the letter of dismissal from the school. Quint's appearance posits the presence of another story which disrupts the codes and coherence of faith. Again, in the preface, Douglas makes partial statements which have to be concluded by the "I" narrator, so that without the authorization of a central presence, meaning is seen to be accidental, provisional, always deferred rather than arrived at.

Significantly, the story ends as it began—by referring to another story. The description of the boy's death deliberately echoes the myth of the Fall and therefore points to a structure outside the text which may explain its circumstances but does not ultimately guarantee its significance. In a sense, the tale returns to the absence of its sources, for the allusion to the Bible echoes the relay of narrators in the preface, where each tale imperfectly revised and recalled a lost original. In the figure of the governess, too, James replicates the difficulty of producing texts without the presence of a transcendent being who can legitimate presentation.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 16.