

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Trauma in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw***

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in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of  
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This thesis entitled "Trauma in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*"  
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Research Committee.

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## I. Life and Works of Henry James

The American author Henry James, who was born in America in 1843, was one of the major novelists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His childhood was spent in the city and in Albany and then, between the ages of 12 and 17, in Europe. He was privately tutored in London Geneva, and Paris. This American education began at school in Newport. James entered Harvard Law School in 1862, leaving after a year. In 1864 his family settled in Boston and then in Cambridge. That same year he published his first story and early reviews.

James published his first novel, *Watch and Word* (1870) in Cambridge. This novel talks about American life in a specifically American setting, the upper-class world of Boston, its suburbs and Newport. Also in 1875, *Transatlantic Sketches*, *A Passionate Pilgrim*, and *Roderick Hudson* appeared. *Transatlantic Sketches* is a travel book, *A Passionate Pilgrim*, which anticipates the theme of the European impact on what James repeatedly identified as the "American state of innocence"(526). *Roderick Hudson* is fiction on the same theme. His works deal largely with the "impact of Europe and its society on Americans"(Hall 526). James's disengagement from America was a long process. He wrote:

I saw my parents homesick, as I concerned, for the ancient order, and distressed and inconvenienced by many of the more immediate features of the modern, as the modern pressed about us, and since their theory of a better living was

from an early time that we should renew the question of the ancient on the very first possibility I simply grew greater in the faith that some how to manage that would constitute success in life. (527)

The impact of his short novel *Daisy Miller* (1879) brought James fame in Europe and the United States. It was his first popular success. He explained the novel in this way:

The whole idea of the story is the little tragedy of light, thin, natural, unsuspecting creative being scarified as I were to a social rumpus that went on quite over her head and to which she stood in no measurable relation. To deepen the effect, I have made it go over her mother's head as well. (Beach 234)

James repeated the same effect, and intention, in several other novels and stories. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, for example, the effect is similar but more intricate. James mentions his "Americano-European legends" (236) as one of the impulse of his work.

Between 1879 and 1882 James produced his first major series of novels. They were the *Europeans*, *Washington Square*, *Confidence*, and *The Portrait of a Lady*. By 1886 a 14- volume a collection of his novels and tales were published. He wrote *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima* in 1886, while living in London. Both are social dramas. *The Aspern Papers*, the short novel *The Reverberator*, and "A London Life" appeared the following year. *The Tragic Muse*, one of his most ambitious novels, was serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1890. During

his tales career (1898), James wrote *The Two Magics* (1898), a collection of stories that includes his novella *The Turn of the Screw* and the short novel *In the Cage*. Afterwards he produced great works. They include *The Awkward Age*, *The Sacred Fount*, and *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*.

### **Style and Themes of Henry James**

James is one of the major figures of trans-Atlantic literature. His works frequently juxtapose characters from different worlds—the Old World (Europe), simultaneously artistic, corrupting, and alluring; and the New World (United States), where people are often brash, open, and assertive—and explore how this clash of personalities and cultures affects the two worlds.

He favored internal, psychological drama, and his work is often about conflicts between imaginative protagonists and their difficult environments. As his secretary Theodora Bosanquet remarked in her monograph *Henry James at Work*:

When he walked out of the refuge of his study and into the world and looked around him, he saw a place of torment, where creatures of prey perpetually thrust their claws into the quivering flesh of doomed, defenseless children of light... His novels are a repeated exposure of this wickedness, a reiterated and passionate plea for the fullest freedom of development, unimperiled by reckless and barbarous stupidity. (11)

His earlier work is considered to be realist because of the carefully described details of his characters' physical surroundings. However, throughout his long career, James maintained a strong interest in a variety of artistic effects and movements. His work gradually became more metaphorical and symbolic as he entered more deeply into the minds of his characters. In its intense focus on the consciousness of his major characters, James's later work foreshadows extensive developments in 20th century fiction.

The prose of James's later works is frequently marked by long, digressive sentences that defer the verb and include many qualifying adverbs, prepositional phrases, and subordinate clauses. James seemed to change from a fairly straightforward style in his earlier writing to a more elaborate manner in his later works. Biographers have noted that the change of style occurred at approximately the time that James began dictating his fiction to a secretary.

Henry James was afflicted with a mild stutter; he overcame this by cultivating the habit of speaking very slowly and deliberately. Since he believed that good writing should resemble the conversation of an intelligent man, the process of dictating his works may perhaps account for a shift in style from direct to conversational sentences. The resulting prose style is at times baroque. His friend Edith Wharton, who admired him greatly, said that there were some passages in his works that were all but incomprehensible. His short fiction, such as *The Aspern Papers* and *The*



*Turn of the Screw*, is often considered to be more readable than the longer novels, and his early works tend to be more accessible than his later ones.

*The Turn of the Screw*, however, is itself one of James's later works. Generalizations about the "accessibility" of James's fiction are difficult, at best. Many of his later short stories—"Europe", "Paste" and "Mrs. Medwin", for instance—are briefer and more straightforward in style than some tales of his earlier years.

For much of his life James was an expatriate, an outsider, living in Europe. Much of *The Portrait of a Lady* was written while he lived in Venice, a city whose beauty he found distracting; he was better pleased with the small town of Rye in England. This feeling of being an American in Europe came through as a recurring theme in his books, which contrasted American innocence (or lack of sophistication) with European sophistication (or decadence)—see, for example, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*.

He made only a modest living from his books, yet was often the houseguest of the wealthy. James had grown up in a well-to-do family, and he was able to enter into this world for many of the impressions and observations he would eventually include in his fiction. (He said he got some of his best story ideas from dinner table gossip). He was a man whose sexuality was uncertain and whose tastes and interests were, according to the prevailing standards of Victorian era Anglo-American culture, rather feminine. William Faulkner once referred to James as "the nicest old lady I ever met." In a similar vein, Thomas Hardy called James

and Robert Louis Stevenson "virtuous females" when he read their unfavorable comments about *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in Percy Lubbock's 1920 collection of James's letters. Theodore Roosevelt also criticized James for his supposed lack of masculinity. When James toured America in 1904–1905, he met Roosevelt—whom James dubbed "Theodore Rex" and called "a dangerous and ominous jingo"—at a White House dinner. Oddly, the two men chatted amicably and at length, as if they were the best of friends.

It is often asserted that James's being a permanent outsider in so many ways may have helped him in his detailed psychological analysis of situations—one of the strongest features of his writing. He was never a full member of any camp. In his review of Van Wyck Brooks' *The Pilgrimage of Henry James*, critic Edmund Wilson noted James's detached, objective viewpoint and made a startling comparison:

One would be in a position to appreciate James better if one compared him with the dramatists of the seventeenth century—Racine and Molière, whom he resembles in form as well as in point of view, and even Shakespeare, when allowances are made for the most extreme differences in subject and form. These poets are not, like Dickens and Hardy, writers of melodrama — either humorous or pessimistic, nor secretaries of society like Balzac, nor prophets like Tolstoy: they are occupied simply with the presentation of conflicts of moral character, which they do not concern themselves about softening or averting. They do not indict society for these situations: they regard them as universal and inevitable. They do not

even blame God for allowing them: they accept them as the conditions of life.

It is possible to see many of James's stories as psychological thought-experiments. *The Portrait of a Lady* may be an experiment to see what happens when an idealistic young woman suddenly becomes very rich; alternatively, it has been suggested that the storyline was inspired by Charles Darwin's theory of sexual selection. The novella *The Turn of the Screw* describes the psychological history of an unmarried (and, some critics suggest, sexually repressed and possibly unbalanced) young governess. The unnamed governess stumbles into a terrifying, ambiguous situation involving her perceptions of the ghosts of a lately deceased couple—her predecessor, Miss Jessel, and Miss Jessel's lover, Peter Quint.

The novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, has generated an extraordinary amount of critical responses from a number of critics since its publication in 1898. Hinting at the tormented state of the mind of the governess, Peter B. High comments on the novella, "The nurse is sure the children are being haunted by ghosts, but it is not clear to the reader whether these ghosts are real or only in the nurse's mind" (94).

Viewing the novella as having the hidden sexual connotation, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury say, "Sexual secrets are hidden in the labyrinths of the *Turn of the Screw*, but here the ghost story form obscured the obscurities . . ." (27).

Frank N. Magill takes the novella more than a ghost story when he remarks:

Of all James's work *The Turn of the Screw* best exemplifies his power to understand and depict moral degradation. The real evil lies not in the horror of the apparitions themselves, but in what is happening to change the children examples of sweetness and innocence to flagrant liars and hypocrites. (1061)

Taking the novella as an effort of James to explore the man's unconscious level, Murdock Kenneth B. says, "*The Turn of the Screw* illustrates admirably how determinedly James sought as an artist to come to grips with the murkiest recesses of the unconscious, the irrational, and the most profound 'inner life' of a man and women (X).

Marilyn C Wesley relates the novella with our neuro-cognitive identity in society. In this regard he observes, "*The Turn of the screw* foregrounds identity by making it problematic, displays a central purpose of literature and well exemplifies the related process of fiction and mind that should guide our inquiries into the similar functions of narrative and consciousness. (Par 1)

As all these above mentioned critics have hinted at the need of the exploration of the protagonist's unconscious mind, this researcher will try to explore the unconscious level of mind of the protagonist, which has troubles her.

So, the present research studies the text, *The Turn of the Screw* from psychological point of view. It examines how a female character suffers from traumatic experience due to sexual repression. The ghost she falsely believes haunts the house where she works is the creation of her own

traumatic mind. The first chapter is an introduction to the work. The second chapter makes the study of trauma theory to interpret the text. The third chapter analyzes the text to prove the hypothesis – the ghost is the creation of the governess' own traumatic mind. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the work.

## **II. Trauma Theory: A Psycho-Historical Study**

The word "trauma" refers to the action shown by the abnormal mind to the body. Trauma becomes problematic when it is reflected in the repetitive action. Trauma shows the direct reaction in abnormal phenomena. The abnormality is mostly psychic but is manifested in the physicality which becomes more uncommon and stressful. The stress to the mind occurs due to various causes.

Trauma is a medical term of Greek origin denoting a severe wound or injury and the resulting aftereffects. A grave injury to the head, for instance, might induce delirium or even a gradual enfeeblement of the victim. The devastating shock of an automobile accident has been known to cause the onset of diabetes or heart disorders in a person who has a latent weakness.

Relating to the Medic, *The American Heritage College Dictionary* defines trauma as "a serious injury or shock to the body, as from violence or an accident," and relating to Psychiat the dictionary defines trauma as "an emotional wound or shock that creates substantial lasting damage to the psychological development of a person" (1439). Trauma may be in the form of natural and technological disasters, war, or individual trauma. Emotional trauma occurs when "the psychological pain of a traumatic event involve damage or threat of damage to an individual's psychic integrity or sense of self" (Carlson 29). Various stress-related disorders may result from the trauma experience, e. g. PTSD, depression, phobia attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, anxiety disorders, somatization

disorder, attachment disorders, and conduct disorder, dissociative reactions, eating disturbances, and substance abuse (Pynoos 96). Trauma effects may also be evidenced as: "multiple personalities, paranoia, anger, and sleep problems; tendencies towards suicidality, irritability, mood swings, and odd rituals; difficulty trusting people and difficult relationships; and general despair, aimlessness, and hopelessness" (Root 229). As defined by Roth Leys, the scholar who has done the most to trace trauma's genealogy since its birth as a psychological category in the 1890s and to analyze its defining career in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, trauma was defined as mimetic trauma by Charcot and others as:

Trauma was therefore understood as in experience of hypnotic imitation or identification – what I call mimesis – an experience because it appeared to shatter the victim's cognitive- perceptual capacities, made the traumatic scenes unavailable for a certain kind of recollection. (8-9)

The traumatized subject is in this account of mimetic trauma like the hypnotized subject and to an extent subjugated by the aggressor or event.

Ley's work draws significantly upon Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's deconstruction of Freud, in particular his early reading of the foundational role played by mimesis in the formation of the subject. Briefly, Borch-Jacobsen argues that the subject is rather constituted according to a principle of mimetic identification. In blunt terms, the subject can only come into being by identifying first with an other. This model of the birth

of the subject is strongest in hypnosis, where "the subject of hypnosis becomes the other, comes to be like other, who is thus no longer an 'other,' but 'himself'" (qtd. in Leys 39). The subject is thus labile and uncannily subject to others; and one might well wonder at the borders defining the subjugating state of hypnosis. And, as Borch-Jacobsen explains, the process of identification produces a desire in the subject.

But if on the one hand trauma was seen by Charcot and others as mimetic, and even examined as such by Freud, it has also been seen as precisely its opposite, and antimimetic. Trauma is external to the subject and stays in the consciousness like shrapnel, undigested and unintegrated into the consciousness of the individual. The antimimetic theory also tends to make imitation basic to the traumatic experience, but it understands imitation differently. Charcot writes:

The antimimetic theory is compatible with, and often gives way to, the idea that trauma is a purely external event that befalls a fully cultivated subject. And in contrast to the mimetic theory's assumption of identification with the aggressors, the antimimetic they depict violence as purely and simply an assault from without. This has the advantage of portraying the victim of trauma as in no way mimetically complicated with the violence directed against her, even as the absence of complication as regards the reliability of the testimony shares up the notion of the unproblematic actuality of the traumatic event. (299)



In contrast to the labile subject of mimetic trauma, the subject here remains intact and removed from the scene, a spectator. These two models of trauma correspond to the traditional way of reading the story: either the Governess is imagining thing or she isn't. The former represents the Governess as complicit in her representations, the other as not, and essentially innocent. This research is more to understand James to be positing these possibilities and playing out the problematic of trauma, mimesis, and desire.

Mind-body research has opened up many new vistas in the study of trauma – among which are psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) and concept of cellular memory. Relative to trauma research, PNI and cellular memory help to explain the somatization of trauma. Pert writes that

memories are stored not only in the brain, but in a psychosomatic network extending in to the body, particularly in the ubiquitous receptors between nerves and bundles of cell bodies called ganglia, which are distributed not just in and near the spinal cord, but all the way out along pathways to internal organs and the very surface of our skin. (143)

Conger asserts that traumatic events are recorded in "contracted musculature and energetically withdraw tissue" (xvi). Eckberg describes traumatic events as being "laid down as perceptual, somatosensory experience or as implicit memory" (23). Through somatic therapy, the traumatic experience can be reorganized neurophysiologically, emotionally, and cognitively.

Adlwin writes: "Stress refers to that quality of experience, product through a person- environment transaction, that through either overarousal or underarousal, results in psychological or physiological distress" (22).

Root expresses the qualitative difference between stress and trauma:

Negative stressors by which we come to know self, others, and the environment, traumas leave an individual feeling 'put out,' inconvenienced, and distressed. These experiences are eventually relieved with the resolution of the stressor. In contrast, traumas represent destruction of basic organizing principles by which we come to know self, others, and the environment; traumas wound deeply in a way that challenges the meaning of life. Healing from the wounds of such an experience requires a restitution of order and meaning in one's life. (229)

Thus trauma brings the aftereffects of the emotional upheavals. The types of the trauma are different. Mental trauma is described as the neurosis as a disorder. Freud describes it as a disorder which has its roots in some experience long since consciously forgotten and repressed, and which later on manifests itself in nightmares, overwhelming anxieties, and motor disturbances. Therefore physical and the psychological disturbances, arising from the unconscious remaining aftereffects of trauma upset the patient.

The physical trauma is taken as the response to the physical injury which depends on the degree and the suddenness of the injury and the

previous physical condition of the victim. Physical trauma is related more to physical hurts and damages which affect vital organs leading to the serious condition of the patients. Though the body reacts against the physical stress, these defenses are believed usually to increase the tissues' functional resistance to damaging stress, but they may overreact to trauma and cause early physical exhaustion. The physical trauma is *medic* that is serious injury or shock to the body, as from violence or an accident. Trauma theoretically is a real psychological disorder. Trauma comes with the individual feeling and subjective assessment of victims of how threatened and helpless they feel. The extra ordinary events closely affect the victims and that comes fundamentally as the trauma itself.

Judy Kelly views the 'psychiat' type of trauma as the emotional wound which hampers the psychological development of a person. He writes: "An emotional wound or shock that creates substantial lasting damage to the psychological development of a person. The emotional trauma occurs when the psychological pain of traumatic events involves damage or threat of damage to an individual's psychic integrity or sense of self" (1).

Various stress-related disorders may result from the trauma experience such as disorder, attachment disorders, conduct disorder, dissociate reactions, eating disturbers etc. Trauma effects may also be evidenced as multiple personalities, paranoia, anger, and sleep problem, and difficulty trusting people and difficult relationships. Trauma theory has opened up many new vistas in the study of mind-body relation.

Trauma is concerned with psychosomatic network extending into the body. Traumatic events are laid down as perceptual, somatic-sensory experience, or as implicit memory.

Sigmund Freud finds the dynamic of trauma, repression, and symptom formation as the matter of hysteria. The overpowering event is revealed in the form of somatic symptom or compulsive, repetitive behavior. Studying the trauma theory related with Freud, James Berger reads that the neurotic symptom are related with the repressed drives. He comments, ". . . initial theory of trauma and symptom becomes problematic for Freud when he concluded that neurotic symptoms were often the result of repressed drives and desires than of traumatic events" (1). The traumatic event and its aftermath again become central to psychoanalysis. Further, the theory of trauma for Freud because the account for the historical development of entire culture. And he develops the elaboration of the concept of 'latency' Berger defines the term as "a memory of traumatic events which can be lost over time but then regained in a symptomatic form when triggered by some similar events" (3).

All Freud's views on trauma manifests the ambivalence regarding the significance of the historical event. Regarding this late twentieth century time, the world is indeed defined by historical catastrophe. The different types and sizes of war have led the turmoil's of all kinds. The events and the usual representation of these events have in large part shaped contemporary modes of viewing the world. The world develops according to the upcoming challenges and the changes. The trauma, based

upon Freudian interpretation of mind, is somehow developed by the inner psyche of mankind. The result of trauma has become as a tool of literary and cultural analysis. According to Freud, the trauma analysis pays the closest attention to the representational means through which an event is remembered and yet retains the importance of the event itself, the thing that did not happen. The idea of trauma also allows for an interpretation of cultural symptoms -- of the growth, wounds and scars on social body, and its compulsive repeated actions. The theory of trauma in addition suggests ways of reconceptualizing important directions in critical theory itself. It fulfills the requirement of study about how events in the past return to haunt the present. Theory of trauma intersects with other critical aspects crossing the limits of the certain discourses. The traumatic symptoms are not only somatic, nonlinguistic phenomena; they occur also in language. The role that culture plays in the provision and / or withholding of support from individuals is described by Vries:

"Culture may in many ways be viewed as a protective and supportive system of values, lifestyles, and knowledge, the disruption of which will have a deleterious effect on its members [. . .] Cultures are powerfully resilient to the stresses of the environment and resistant to change. Culture thereby buffers its members from the potentially proving identities in terms of norms and values, and supplying a shared vision of the future [. . .] provided that the individual does not interfere with the group's capacity to reproduce or

remain viable in its niche, cultural social roles, shared values, and historical continuity will acts as key stress managers. If the individual does not fit, social extrusion and extrusion and stigmatization may result as a culture defense reaction to the unwanted information or behavior. (400-401)

Root posits that "the interpersonal and political context in which a trauma is experienced further determines how blame is attributed, the support one receives, and how the survivor is able to reconstruct his or her life following trauma" (244). According Root, the revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s may be viewed as a "generational posttraumatic stress response" emanating from the "experience of profound betrayal by authority figures (the' establishment') of a generation of young people crossing the threshold of adulthood" (231).

Root provides a construction of trauma theory from a feminist perspective, emphasizing its sociopolitical, phenomenological, and psychosocial components. Root argues that the development of trauma theory has been largely based on the experience of white males and does not represent those of women and minorities. Likewise, Root asserts that he APA's classification and diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder describes a single syndrome representation of specific male experiences. Recently, however, the study of trauma has expanded to include a more diverge group of trauma experiences and syndromes, such as: the battered women syndrome, the rape- trauma syndrome, the post sexual abuse syndrome, and the bettered child syndrome (Root 235). Root

suggests that what is labeled as a single trauma may actually reflect a constellation of multiple traumas. Root reframes and redefines trauma. Rather than categorizing trauma as direct, indirect or and technological disasters, war, or individual trauma, Root classifies trauma according to natural insidious. In this scheme, direct trauma includes "certain forms of maliciously perpetrated violence, war experiences, industrial accidents, and natural disasters" (229). In contrast, direct associated with the devaluation of an individual resulting from an intrinsic identity characteristic that differs from which the dominant culture values (e.g. color, sexual orientation). By opening up the definition of trauma, Root argues that traumas would have remained unrecognized are made visible.

The feminist perspective attempts to "depathologize normal behavior" (Root 248). In this light, Root identifies the following processes as trauma survival patters, rather than pathological behaviors: self-referencing behavior, egocentrism, perseveration, anger, withdrawal and shutting down, and spiting. Root proposes that we construct out world in terms of "dimensions of security" (physical, emotional- psychological, and spiritual) and that the destruction of a single dimension constitutes a trauma. The dimensions are categorized as follows: physical ( stimulus deprivation, pain, injury, permanent injury, starvation, psychological ( confrontation with morality, loss of significant others(s), perceived malicious intent, isolation, helplessness/ loss of control, witness / participant to death or destruction, crushing of spirit, dislocation),and interpersonal ( betrayal, abuse of power, violation of personal space,

rejection, invisibility, loss of significant other (s) ( Root, 227). The effects of trauma are profound. Root writes that:

"Trauma permanently changes a person. In contrast to a stressful experience, which challenges an individual's capacity to cope, trauma destroys multiple dimensions of security and exceeds the limits of human capacity to process and integrate horrible experiences into a coherent perception of self and self- in- relationship to others and the world. The disorganization created by this upheaval motivates the individual to attempt to find meaning in the experience so that she or he can reorganize the experience and integrate it into her or his perceptions of self, and self in relationship to others and the world. The greater the number of dimensions of security that is shattered, the bigger the task of reorganization. (409)

Dominick Lacapra, representing the Holocaust History, theory, and trauma has two related goals: to intervene in and clarify some of the recent public controversies regarding Holocaust representation; and to elaborate a theory of historical trauma and its transmission. Lacapra's theory of trauma focuses on three psychoanalytic topics: the return of the repressed; acting out versus working through; and the dynamics of transference.

A traumatic historical event, Lacapra argues, tends first to be repressed and then to return in form of compulsive repetition. Lacapra is concerned primarily with the return of the repressed as discourse, rather



than with physical returns, and he outlines two symptomatic possibilities for the return of historical trauma as discourse.

Lacabra emphasizes more in trauma's nature which denies compulsively fixated but accept the role of paradox and 'aporia.' In this regard, Berger writes: "Lacabra wants to create a position that avoids both redemptive narrative and sublime acting out. He sets out to describe a way to work through trauma that does not deny the irreducibility of loss or the role of paradox and 'aporia' but avoids becoming 'compulsively fixated" (4).

The most pervasive of Lacabra's concern is transference. The failure to come to terms with the discursive returns of some traumatic event usually signals the failure to recognize one's own emotional and ideological investment in the event and its representation. Transference in psychoanalysis is itself a return of the repressed, a rather a more conscious summoning of the repressed; transference repeats or acts out a past event or relationship in a new, therapeutic setting that allows for critical evaluation and change transference is the occasion for working through the traumatic symptom. It is imperative therefore to recognize the symptoms and the trauma as one's own, to acknowledge that the trauma still is active and that one is implicated in its destructive effects.

Lacabra describes two important implications of his view of historical trauma; first, trauma provides a method of rethinking postmodern and post- structural theories in a clearer historical context. Lacabra believes: "the postmodern and the post-Holocaust become

mutually entwined issues that are best addressed in relation to each other"(Berger 1). Secondly, Lacapra provides an original rethinking of the debates over the literary canon though he has raised the issue of canonicity; he has not examined the relations between historical trauma and any text. Literature might be the site of symptomatic acting out combined with critical, playful working through that he seeks to describe.

Cathy Caruth in his book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, is concerned principally with questions of reference and representation: how trauma becomes text, or how wound becomes voice. Caruth sketches a theory of trauma as instigator of historical narrative which describes the intersections traumatic narrative. Caruth argues that trauma as it first occurs is incomprehensible. Traumatic narrative, then, is strongly referential, but not in any simple or direct way. Berger cites Caruth where he claims that the historical narrative arises from traumatic repetition. Caruth argues that "the historical narrative arises from such intersections of traumatic repetitions, which history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (5).

Caruth presents de Manian reference as a literary symptom, an unconscious, inevitable imprint of events all texts in the form of verbal ticks, or tropes; and she quite effectively reinterprets de Man's blindness and insight model in terms of traumatic impact and later inscription.

The impact of major traumatic events is never identical to any two people and those trauma manifests where political and psychological

forces fuse. On this point Deborah M. Horvitz cites Cathy Caruth, who has written extensively on psychoanalysis and trauma theories, states:

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect with the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet.

(5)

Kali Tal, in *World of Hurt: Reading the literatures of Trauma*, takes an approach entirely different from those of Lacapra and Caruth: Tal is hostile to psychoanalysis and bases her views of trauma on cognitive psychology and of feminist politics that identifies strongly with the testimonies of rape and incest survivors. Tal's main discussions deal with recent critical approaches to the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, literature produced by American Veterans of the Vietnam War and testimonies of women survivors of incest and child abuse. Tal's chief concern is the social appropriations of individual testimonies. Differing quite emphatically from psychologically oriented writers like Caruth and Lacapra, Tal argues that the literature of trauma consists only of the writings of victims and survivors of trauma.

Berger defines Tal's view on literature of trauma as identity of author in relation with traumatic experience where he writes, "Literature of trauma is defined by the identity of its author. The weak of the critic of

the literature of trauma is both of identify and explicate literature by members of survivor groups, and to deconstruct the process by which the dominant culture codifies their traumatic experience" (6).

Tal's emphasizes on the individual survivor's account of trauma and her opposition to all interpretive "appropriations' prevent her from seeing trauma in broader social and historical forms. Tall has no sense of traumatic return of the repressed, of widespread cultural symptoms and fetishes, of the role of trauma in ideology. Her political diagnosis seems simplistic: essentially that men are symptomatically inquiring and dominating women, and women should rise up and stop them.

Kali Tal defines trauma as a life threatening event that displaces one's preconceived notions about the world; Tal stresses that the event must be experienced first-hand, and not vicariously perceived as mediated through any textual conduct. In other words trauma is known as threat to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death.

Root expresses the qualitative difference between stress and trauma. Stress leaves the distress whereas trauma leads to the destruction and gives more challenges in the meaning of life. Judy Kelly quotes Root:

Negative stressor leave in individual feeling 'put out' inconvenienced, and distressed. These experiences are eventually relieved with the resolution of the stressor. In contrast, traumas represent destruction of basic organizing principles by which we come to know self, others, and the

environment; trauma would deeply in a way that challenges the meaning of life. Healing from the wound of such an experience requires a restitution of order and meaning in one's life. (15)

Further, Root provides a construction of trauma theory from a feminist perspective, emphasizing its sociopolitical, phenomenological, and psychosocial components the perspective attempts to 'depathologize' normal behavior.' In this context, Root identifies the following processes as trauma survival patterns, rather than pathological behavior: self-referencing behavior, egocentrism, perseveration anger, withdrawal and shutting down, and splitting. Root proposes that we construct our world in terms of dimensions of security as physical, emotional psychological, and spiritual; and that the destruction of a single dimension constitutes a trauma.

Certainly, traumas are profound. Trauma brings changes to the individual and s/he reorganizes the experiences for the integration. Kelly cites Root as saying:

Trauma permanently changes a person. It contrast to as stressful experience, which challenges an individual's capacity to cope, trauma destroys multiple dimensions of security and exceeds the limits of human capacity to process and integrate horrible experiences into a coherent perception of self and self- in- relationship to other and the world. The disorganization created by this upheaval motivates the

individual to attempt to find meaning in the experience so that she or he can reorganize the experience and integrate it into her or his perception of self, and self in relationship to others and the world. (3)

There has been surprisingly little research conducted in the area of birthmother trauma. That relinquishing a child is a traumatic experience is alluded to over and over again throughout the literature, unresolved grief, guilt, and shame are signatory of many birthmothers. Unresolved grief has been cited as a major component of the relinquishment experience. Some of the social and psychological factors were identified as contributing to unresolved grief among birthmothers the factors are as absence of social recognition regarding the loss, perceived absence of social supported from family and friends and perception of coercion by family, friends or professionals relinquish the child, to the same extend, trauma may be the product of sadomasochism. Sadism is a psychological mechanism in which the sadist events and gratifies unconscious erotic fantasies by inflicting pain and violence. Masochism sometimes mistakenly understood to mean the enjoyment of pain, is, in fact, a complex psychodynamic in which powerlessness becomes eroticized, there entrenched within the victim's self- identity.

Certainly psychoanalysis believes that crucial to recovering from an experience of trauma is the capacity and willingness to incorporate that traumatic event inside one's self as an indispensable piece of personal history and identity. Psychoanalysis theoretically developed with the

theoretical presentation of Sigmund Freud. The research on psychic Trauma, which has been historically entwined with psychoanalytic theory, has increased in the past decade. The psychoanalytic feminist theorists like Cathy Caruth, Kali Tal, Elizabeth Waites, focuses on cultural or political trauma that is an officially sanctioned, sadomasochistic system of oppression in which a targeted group, perceived by the dominant culture as an obstacle to the goals of the existing hegemony are tortured, imprisoned, or killed. Trauma may cause the psychological damages and such victims can be reached by psychoanalysis.

Symptoms of hysteria among middle and upper class women prompted the first extended study into trauma. Freud also had an announcement at his revelation that 'at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience.' Freud's study does not escape from the sexual trauma, though his research focuses upon psychoanalysis, sex and instinctive impulses. The exploration on sexual trauma is widely seen in the present literary phenomena. The trauma victims are somewhat the victims of the sexual trauma, Because of the severity and nature of trauma, however, the survivors evoke the defense coping mechanism of denial of repression in which the memories are avoided or repression in which the memories are avoided or forgotten and, under ordinary circumstances, not accessible to cognition.

The experience of sexual jealousy and trauma alert us before we reach the point of no return. The victims of sexual jealousy are thus cast into the role of detectives, confronted with the task of imagining

themselves to have been where they were not. There are both striking similar differences between sexual jealousies and trauma. By definition, the latter defines experiences that, for a wide variety of reason, are so powerful as to overwhelm the capacity for comprehension of those who live through them. Like the victim of sexual jealousy, in other words, the initiating experience that becomes the relentless preoccupation of those who have been traumatized must be recreated after the fact. A significant difference, of course, is that person who has been traumatized truly has had an experience whereas the victim of sexual jealousy only wishes he or she had. And this difference points to another which is that the repressed event that gives rise to trauma narratives potentially can be retrieved whereas the event that triggers the narrative of sexual jealousy cannot.

The next chapter will focus on the mimetic logic of a distinctly sexualized trauma in *The Turn of the Screw*, less to show how story reflects *fin-de-siècle* conceptions of identity, mimesis, and trauma than to suggest the story's relation of the identificatory functions of traumatic narrative, of which *The Turn of the Screw* is my example. Indeed, as I argue, "trauma" is but an extreme instance of a prevailing logic of mimetic identification and desire that courses through the story. Its importance lies in its function as staging an initiation into a narrative of mimesis and desire and to highlighting the problematic of reading the story given the unstable field of trauma and its effects. I'll suggest that my reading of the story replicates the identificatory logic of the initiating trauma, but it does



so not in traumatic terms but by suggestion and recognition. To put it another way, "trauma" here is an instance of subjugation that sets in motion further subjugations. But what is traumatic about *The Turn of the Screw*? Most obviously, it is Quint, or rather the Governess's initial encounter with him. But trauma should not be understood as a sharply delimited field; rather, it situates the debate and suggests a way of reading the story that takes into account its historically fraught instability.

### III. James' *The Turn of The Screw*: A Study in Trauma

Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* is a ghost story. The protagonist is an unnamed young governess to the children of her employer, a handsome young man who kindles her passion. When she learns of the illicit sexual affair between her predecessor, Miss Jessel and the employer's valet who are already dead, her mind becomes occupied with the sexual feelings which cause her trauma and hallucination. This tormented state of her mind drives her to see the ghosts of Miss Jessel and the valet, leaving an adverse effect on the children as well. So, the governess' unnecessary fear and obsession with the ghost that she believes haunts the children too is the product of her own sexual repression which causes her severe trauma.

In contrast to the labile subject of mimetic trauma, the subject here remains intact and removed from the scene, a spectator. The two models of trauma discussed in the second chapter correspond to the traditional way of reading the story: either the Governess is imagining things or she isn't. The former represents the Governess as complicit in her representations, the other as not and essentially innocent. My own position here is more to understand James to be positing these possibilities and playing out the problematic of trauma, mimesis, and desire. For it is understood that the characteristic traumatic event for women deployed by *fin-de-siècle* psychologists such as Freud and Charcot was the scene of sexual aggression, and that some of the consequences of that trauma was an

hysteria. Here I will basically confine myself to the former structure of mimetic identification.

The scene of the Governess's first encounters with Quint and draw it out a little. The scene and the effects James represents is a typically a traumatic one. The Governess, who finds herself "strangely at the helm" of the household, has gone out for a stroll one afternoon; the children are tucked away. And she recalls her desire for approval from the Master, whose "handsome face" she imagines before her when she encounters Quint: "What arrested me on the spot--and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for--was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real" (16).

Expecting the Master, she gets Quint; expecting approval tinged with admiration for a job well done, she gets instead someone who brazenly challenges propriety. What is more, Quint's uncanny presence directly challenges that desire and turns it into something horrible; the twilight garden becomes "a solitude." What is more, in terms that echoes typical accounts of traumatic experience, in which the past is iterated as present,

To me, at least, making my statement here with a deliberation with which I have never made it, the whole feeling of the moment returns. It was as if [. . .] the scene had been stricken with death. I can hear again, as I write the intense hush in which the sounds of evening dropped.

(16)

She doesn't just remember the scene, she re-experiences it. And the consequence of this original seeing that is then restaged (as is everything in the novel) is an unconscious movement.

The Governess, after her terrifying shock of first seeing Quint ("An unknown man in a lonely place is a permitted object of fear to a young woman privately bred" (16), finds that she has improbably, incredibly, stayed out of doors, in the dark where a strange man is quite possibly lurking: "Agitation, in the interval [since seeing Quint and re-entering the house], certainly had held me and driven me, for I must, in circling about the place, have walked three miles" (17). Quint induces what seems like an, hysterical tropism. And this remarkable effect has seemingly less to do with her belief that he's a fearsome ghost (she doesn't at first know he is and when she does, that datum only seems to make her more volatile), but because he is an unknown man who might threaten a "privately bred" woman and, perhaps most important, who implicitly presents a threat to her "supreme authority" at Bly (5). The trauma that he stages produces her unconscious effects and even movement; it also decidedly reminds her that she is not unlike Quint, in being but removed from being a nobody by the grace of her position at Bly.

For, from the Governess's perspective, to be like Quint is to be the opposite of somebody; Quint, as the Governess describes to Mrs. Grose before she knows about him, but after she has seen him, is "like nobody" (23). By this, she means, presumably, that Quint doesn't look like anybody at Bly or in the village (he's "very much" a "stranger" (22); but she quickly goes on to define being "like nobody" as being something like a tramp,

certainly no "gentleman," and more like a red-haired "actor" dressed in "somebody's clothes" (22, 23-24). Quint, Mrs. Grose tells the Governess, "never wore his hat, but he did wear--well, there were waistcoats missed!" (24). Those waistcoats were the master's, and when the master left, Quint was left "alone with us," "[i]n charge" (24), a scandal both to Mrs. Grose and the Governess (who, of course, is recording this), largely because Quint was, or is, too familiar, given his social standing.

Quint takes on identity, meaning he steals it; he has only his "queer" looks (he's also "remarkably" "handsome" (24). Being like Quint, in short, implies *losing* that which makes us "somebody" and gaining an uncanny familiarity (as a "nobody" looking in). It means, that is, to be a lot like the Governess herself, who is herself a nobody, lacking even a name. But the difference lies in that the Governess can claim a fixed gentility (she is "privately bred" (16); Quint, on the other hand, is, in death as in life, nearly a tramp ("so dreadfully below" (33) and, as it were, breeds publicly. It is this crucial difference that enables the Governess to authorize her narrative, and it is this difference that is threatened by the silent communion between the children and the ghosts, or, to put it more simply, by the figure of Quint, who never speaks (the reader speaks for him, as James hints in his Preface), but whom the Governess can nevertheless call "The author of our woe" (89).

It's an authorship that she directly challenges. If Quint excites an hysterical tropism in her, she responds, decades later, with a writing that brings Quint before her. Quint exists in the ceaseless present of a trauma:

In her writing of the event, the Governess can *see* him, "as I see the letters I form on this page" (17). But her statement also suggests that the mobilizing effects of Quint--his subjugating effects--are still present, contained in the letters she writes. This is as much to suggest that the narrative, which is an accounting of Quint's doings and her battling them, embodies Quint's effects, the automatism and nervousness, that he induces in her and subjugates the complicit reader. The inductive quality of the text is a well-known characteristic. In his 1908 Preface, for example, James insists upon the "pictorial" and "mechanical" qualities of the text, and takes pride in the way the story induces a kind of belief (about the "evil" in the text) in the reader. The story not only proceeds according to a "merely" mechanical logic, it inducts the reader into it. And in her extraordinary 1975 article--monograph, really--on the tale, Shoshana Felman describes a similar property of the text. Thus, in her argument, the story necessarily includes the reader within it:

No one, . . . is left on the "outside" of the story, except the story's inside. Like the circle round the fire, the story's frame thus encloses not only the story's content, but, equally, its readers and its reading. For has it not become obvious that the chain of narrative voices which transmits *The Turn of the Screw* is also, at the same time, a chain of readings? Readings which re-read, and re-write, other readings? In the chain transmission of the story, each narrator, to relay the story, must first be a *receiver* of the story, a *reader* who at once

records it and *interprets* it, simultaneously trying to make sense of it and *undergoing* it, as a lived experience, an "impression," a reading-effect.(Felman 124)

According to Felman, the story includes its readers and makes them re-writers of the tale, and induces them thus to pass the story along. But where Felman essentially sees the process as content-free (the story as fictional narrative is its content), and as descriptive of the force of literature as such, I read the story as registering *fin-de-siècle* anxieties (common to both sides of the Atlantic) over the way in which persons might easily become (inducted into) members of classes rendered illicit (illicit, that is, in the gaze of normalizing lenses, such as the Governess deploys). In this regard, and perhaps more famously than any other story, but in a manner particular to the *fin-de-siècle*, *The Turn of the Screw* exemplifies the double logic of a moralistic governmentality that seeks to contain the very logic of induction it sets in motion.

In other words, and to return to the language with which I began, "Quint" comes to be understood as a figure for a combination of uncanny desire and mimetic identification that is disruptive of the normal. At stake is the lure of coming to be like and to like Quint. Thus, the narrative, rather than controlling Quint's hystericizing effects, only seems to continue them by a process of mimetic identification: by enabling Quint to be personified by the readers. The Governess's story works antiphonally to Quint's silent effects.

But, why does she write? She need not write. The Governess could, like the Master, and like the schoolmaster, say and write nothing at all about the matter of corruption. Yet she turns the events into a narrative of

control, of government, and does so in a manner that reproduces the uncanny desire and mimetic identifications Quint figures. The Governess speaks, writes, and transmits her narrative as a gesture, even proof, of liking, even love. The Governess, we recall, tells her narrative to Douglas only, and she does so, he concludes, as a gesture of her "liking" him:

I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she liked me too. If she had n't she would n't have told me. She had never told any one. It was n't simply that she said so, but that I knew she had n't. I was sure; I could see. You'll easily judge why when you hear.

"Because the thing had been such a scare?"

He continued to fix me. "You'll easily judge," he repeated; "you will."

I fixed him too. "I see. She was in love." (2)

The story is both a thing of love and a thing of fright, and these two are merged, in the act of relation. The Governess gives her handwritten narrative to Douglas as an index of her liking for him. It is also an "unspoken" sign of her love for the Master--and, in lieu of him, for Douglas. Neither she nor Douglas speaks of her love for the Master: "I saw it, and she saw I saw it; but neither of us spoke of it" (3).

The text functions as a sign of affection--liking--and, I want to argue, as a likening: it induces a kind of uncanny liking that suggests a complicitous identity. I want briefly to touch on Miles's "likes," which, I suggest, are as much evidence of Quint's uncanny effects as the



Governess's narrative, in that both articulate the uncanny desire let loose by Quint. In the Governess's case, I have been arguing that that sets in motion a writing that continues an erotically colored mimetic identification. And from the Governess's perspective, as we are all familiar, the liking Miles' voices is also more than a little tainted by an unstated trauma affecting him and which she fatally strives to have him speak.

But, what do I mean by the Miles's "liking"? As everyone surely recalls, Miles doesn't get expelled from school for stealing, as the Governess long suspects. Rather, he gets expelled for saying "things" to his friends, or at least "[t]hose [he] liked," who evidently repeat them to "[t]o those they liked," and who must tell them, ultimately to the school masters (87). A serial linkage (or, in the language of the story, a "circle") of boys who like each other is thus formed, connected by the "things" repeated. Thus, for example, the story itself begins with the geometric description of how the story "had held us, round the fire" (1), and the small community at Bly is a "circle" into which the master might come (53). Communities form into circles via the shaping influence of narratives.

What I find interesting here, however, is not only that it is the serially repeated speech act that conjoins the boys into a circle of defined by their shared likes, but that "like" takes on a quality that at once suggests identity and is identificatory. What the boys tell the ones they like makes them like them; affection becomes identity, becomes a way of

identifying. Like implies a likening, and vice versa. The boys, in effect, form what Miles, elsewhere in the story, desires: "my own sort," a circle of his own kind animated and constructed by the mimetic logic of "likes" (56).

But where do these likes come from? According to the Governess, Quint, if the Governess first thinks of Miles, before she has met him, as being "really bad," an "injury to the others," with those others being "his poor little innocent mates!" (11), and a corrupter and contaminator, she later changes her mind, and holds it until the end, that Miles (and Flora, and Miss Jessel) has been himself contaminated, corrupted--possessed--by Quint, who is, for the Governess, the *real* source of the contagion. As we come to understand, the corruption proceeds from Quint to Miles and from there to the boys via the double mechanism of liking, which is also a likening: as much as Quint likes Miles, Miles becomes like Quint; as much as Miles likes the boys, they become like him, which is to say, like Quint. In this sense, we might follow the Governess and think of Quint as the author of their woe.

But Quint isn't really the "author" of the woe; following Felman, we might think of the Master as the *real* author. That would be a mistake; as Douglas, who initiates the retelling of the story in the framing prologue, informs his audience, the Master was but a "type" that "never, happily, dies out. He was handsome and bold and pleasant, off-hand and gay and kind" (4). A bachelor, his type never dies out but not because his type produces families and children. Rather, the Master stands as one (if a

defining one) in a series of male identifications that are also desires (like/likening) that *The Turn of the Screw* plays out in the woman's narrative.

The Governess's linear narrative of control effects the circles of desire only places them within the logic of the uncanny. Douglas reads the story--and violates the privacy of the Governess by allowing the story to be subsequently read--in a way that almost literally continues the phenomenology of the Governess's writing: "Douglas [. . .] had begun to read with a fine clearness that was like a rendering to the ear of the beauty of his author's hand" (6). Douglas begins reading just as the narrator of the prologue (call him James) chimes in with a title for the story (6). We don't know what the title is that James suggests, but it is a little odd that James weighs in before the story is actually read. In short, he can only suggest his title on the basis of knowing the scantiest but tell ingest news of the Governess and her struggle; he has no knowledge, that is, of Quint; only of the death of the fatally respectable Miss Jessel. James's title is thus a leaping to judgment that characterizes the suspicious logic of the story and of, as Miller argues, the sensation novel, where suspicion is valorized over clear judgment. His voice is like the Governess's hand ("letters on the page"), and it is the Governess who is "his" "author." In voicing the material writing, he continues the subjugating work of the uncanny authoring, or Quint.

The story means something different for the men of the circle than for the women; it in fact seems to pass the women over (who feel the thrill of the horror but that is all). But it includes both "James" and Douglas in its judgmental scope. In Douglas's telling, the story becomes a thing that he uses to affirm an understanding with "James," whom he "fixes" with his

gaze (and who returns that fixity of gaze), but whom, as we see above, he substitutes in his sight with what he has seen, a vision granted him by the Governess's narrative. In a sense, the process of uncanny substitutions has begun already.

The exchange of looks, which is enabled by the promise of the Governess's uncanny narrative, stages a scene revolving around the logic of "It takes one to know one" that tends to the homoerotic and certainly homosocial. The men, seemingly bachelors like the Master himself, identify each other. The looks, the identifications, come as prelude (but also conclusion: the prologue enacts both in its circular logic) to the telling of the Governess's authorizing tale, as if the tale itself only confirmed what was already known, and as if the significance of the tale were only available to those men already possessed of that knowledge. So, when Douglas, "before his death--when it was in sight--commit[s] to [James] the manuscript" (4), he expands the circular logic of serial identifications and desires as well as the extending the mechanism for the authoring of the queer subject as already within the anxiogenic field of the uncanny. The woman's text that is the Governess's narrative embodies what is otherwise silent between the men--a secret knowledge. The text as it is authored by the Governess (recording the doings of the author of her woe) and bequeathed by her to Douglas to James figures a reiterable trauma whose origins begin with an absence that traumatically perpetuates itself both as an uncanny negation of identity (a nobody, an absence) and as a desire: a likening, a like.

The narrative suggests a desire that is now seen to be tending toward a homoeroticism; but more directly, it is a desire that passes into identity, and in so doing, it articulates a mimetic logic. At every moment, however, James plays with the question of complicity: that the subject of trauma is somehow available to that trauma; the trauma is never fully external to the subject, it rather reads the latent subject of trauma into being.

James's play of complicity in the telling of trauma and the problem of understanding this complicity or more accurately, the relation of trauma to the subject, has directly affected the way *The Turn of the Screw* has been understood and debated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: to what extent is the Governess complicit in the production of the ghosts. And that debate, as Leys's genealogy suggests, is the debate over trauma's nature, which, as the story suggests, is also a debate over the reader's own complicitous relation to the text.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The Study shows the mimetic logic of a distinctly sexualized trauma in *The Turn of the Screw*, of which the governess becomes the victim. The scene of her employer's valet, Quint's ghost and its effects on the governess and the two children Flora and Miles represents is a typically a traumatic one because her employer's 'handsome face' triggers a sexual desire in her, which drives her to see the ghost of Quint who, the governess learns, had sexual relationship with the former governess. Thus, Quint exists in the ceaseless present of a trauma as she sees him as she can see the letters she forms on the pages as a narrator. For her, Quint comes to be understood as a figure for a combination of uncanny desire and mimetic identification that is disruptive of the normal.

## **Abstract**

Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is a traumatic narrative of the young governess who has become the victim of the sexual repression. Her sexual desires traumatize her and she frequently sees the ghost of her employer's valet. The study reflects the 19<sup>th</sup> century conception of identity, mimesis and trauma. Here, trauma is but an extreme instance of a prevailing logic of mimetic identification and desire that course through the whole story.

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