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2011

# "Almost a Sense of Property": Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, modernism, and commodity culture

Guy R. Davidson

*University of Wollongong*, [guy@uow.edu.au](mailto:guy@uow.edu.au)

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## Publication Details

Davidson, G. R. 2011, "Almost a Sense of Property": Henry James's *The Turning of the Screw*, modernism, and commodity culture', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 53, no. 4, pp. 455-478.

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“Almost a Sense of Property”: Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*,  
Modernism, and Commodity Culture

Metaphorical, if not literal, homelessness has seemed to many to be a defining condition of the life and work of Henry James. His friend Edmund Gosse, for instance, wrote that James was a “homeless man in a peculiar sense,” one who was never truly settled either in England, his adopted country, or the United States, his country of origin.<sup>i</sup> More recently, John Carlos Rowe has related James’s deracination to cosmopolitanism, outlining how the concerns of his fiction foreshadow recent efforts within the humanities to renovate the cosmopolitan ideal of respect for international and intranational differences.<sup>ii</sup> And John Landau has argued that James’s complex late style both highlights and attempts to compensate for a general sense of cultural “homelessness”—that is, the increasingly unstable “grounds” of belief and knowledge in late-Victorian and Edwardian culture.<sup>iii</sup> In this essay I relate James’s experience of metaphorical homelessness to *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), the longest and most terrifying of his many ghost stories. I proceed from the contention that homelessness is this text’s founding narrative and semantic condition. Homelessness here refers to the textual instability in late James that other critics have characterized in terms of groundlessness or fluidity, and I go on to consider the interpretative potential of these alternative descriptors. Considering the text in relation to homelessness, however, makes possible an understanding of how the text’s treatment of property is connected to the interrelated phenomena of sociocultural modernity and literary modernism. As a haunted house

story, *The Turn* is concerned with claims to property: its sense of homelessness is paradoxically, uncannily contained within the home. The text's representations of house, home, and homelessness, I suggest, enable an exploration of cultural uncertainties concerning the relations between property and identity at an historical moment in which the established model of such relations—liberal masculine selfhood—was in conflict with the emerging model of the feminized consumer citizen. These conflicting conceptions of property are perhaps most strikingly negotiated in James's figurations of authorship both within the text and in its ancillary documents, and consequently I conclude with a discussion of the author in and outside *The Turn*.

#### Authorial Identifications

*The Turn of the Screw* begins with a framing prologue in which an unnamed first-person narrator relates how guests at a country house entertain themselves one Christmas Eve telling ghost stories. In response to a tale involving a "visitation . . . fallen on a child," one of the guests, Douglas, states that he knows of a story involving *two* children that is unmatched "for general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain."<sup>iv</sup> The story, he says, was written down by his sister's governess, who had given the manuscript to him before she died, some twenty years ago. In response to the clamor of interest from the other guests, Douglas sends to London for the manuscript, which, a few nights later, he reads to those of the party still there. The rest of the novella is taken up by the governess's first-person narrative. She relates how she was put in charge not only of two young orphans, Miles and Flora, but the entire household of Bly, a large country residence. The governess is given this position of "supreme authority" (8) because the children's guardian, their uncle, who lives in London, sends her to Bly under the strict

provision that she “should never trouble him—but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything” (9).

Soon after her arrival at Bly, the governess encounters, or believes she encounters, the apparitions of two recently dead former members of the household at Bly: Peter Quint, a manservant who had previously been left in charge of the house by the uncle, and Miss Jessel, her predecessor as governess. The housekeeper Mrs. Grose, the governess’s interlocutor and sounding board, tells her that both Quint and Miss Jessel were “infamous” and that Quint had “done what he wished” and been “too free,” not only with Miss Jessel, but with “everyone”—including the children (37). The governess becomes convinced that the ghosts desire the children, and that the children, corrupted by them, welcome their presence. That the children give no hint of knowledge of the ghosts is, in the governess’s suspicious view, confirmation of their turpitude. During a scene in which Miss Jessel appears, the governess attempts, in vain, to force Flora to admit that she sees the ghost. But to the surprise of the governess, and perhaps also the reader, Mrs. Grose, who is there as well, says she cannot see the apparition either. Flora, distraught by the experience, demands to leave, and does so in Mrs. Grose’s charge. The governess, left behind with Miles, determines to “save” the boy from the ghosts (108). In the final scene Quint appears to the governess at the window of the room in which she has installed herself and Miles. As the governess insists to Miles that Quint is there, he falls; the governess catches him and holds him with “a passion” but finds that “his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped” (122).

But is his death due to fright at the sight of Quint or because the governess, in her “passion,” has crushed the life out of him? In one of many instances of narrative

uncertainty, the text does not make it clear. Also uncertain is what Quint and Miss Jessel's "freedom" and "infamy" consisted of (sexual depravity seems to be suggested by "infamous"—but with each other, with the children, or both?). Uncertainty clouds the issue of Miles's expulsion from school (under interrogation by the governess, he says it was because he "said things" to "those [he] liked," though the nature of those things remains unspecified [119, 120]). Most centrally and famously, the text equivocates on the reality of the ghosts.

It is for its ambiguity—or, as a later critical idiom would have it, its indeterminacy—that *The Turn of the Screw* has come to be most well known to James scholars. Many of the twentieth-century commentaries on the novella constituted sorties in a battle between so-called apparitionist and anti-apparitionist critics to settle the text's uncertainties. The apparitionists maintained that the novella's ghosts are real and that the governess is engaged in selflessly heroic protection of her orphaned charges. The anti-apparitionists argued that the ghosts are imagined by the governess, probably as the result of her sexual repression, and that her "protection" of the children is in fact the destructive obsession of a madwoman, which culminates in her murder of little Miles.

The terms of the apparitionist/anti-apparitionist debate were increasingly called into question from the late 1960s, with several critics arguing that the question of the ghosts' reality was irresolvable.<sup>v</sup> In a germinal essay of 1977 Shoshana Felman argues that critics or readers who seek to master this text by locating in it *any* determinate meaning fall into a trap laid by the masterly James. Paradoxically, "James's very mastery consists in the denial and deconstruction of his own mastery."<sup>vi</sup> As is so often the case, James can be seen to have anticipated a sophisticated critical account of his own practice.

In his preface to the volume of the New York Edition of his work in which *The Turn* appears, James declares that the novella is “ a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an *amulette* to catch those not easily caught (the ‘fun’ of the capture of the merely witless being ever but small).”<sup>vii</sup> He also concurs with Felman and other critics by claiming that the tale’s effectiveness lies in its lack of specification.

Disavowing any responsibility for the particular meanings attributed to it by readers, he states, “my values are positively all blanks save so far as an excited horror, a promoted pity, a created expertness . . . proceed to read into them more or less fantastic figures” (177). Felman draws a parallel between James, known to his acolytes as “the Master” in his late career, and the uncle, referred to in the novella as “the master.” Both of these masters exercise power by apparently withdrawing it: “Like the Master in his story with respect to the children and to Bly, James assumes the role of Master only through claiming, with respect to his literary ‘property,’ the ‘licen[c]e,’ as he puts it, ‘of disconnexion and disavowal.’”<sup>viii</sup>

Commenting on Felman’s deconstructive reading, Allan Lloyd Smith points out, however, that while *The Turn of the Screw* is “set up to . . . baffle, like an Escher print, it is nevertheless contained within a certain frame and pushes interpretation in a particular direction.”<sup>ix</sup> That direction, which critics after Felman have largely followed, entails the involvement of the governess in the uncanniness and horror of the *mise-en-scène*. While this criticism has moved away from the crudely accusatory representation of the governess-as-hysteric apparent in much of the earlier anti-apparitionist scholarship, it nevertheless suggests that the governess is, through verbal echo and narrative parallel, aligned with the ghosts to whom she is ostensibly opposed, so that, as T.J. Lustig puts it,

“the novella ultimately shows that there is something spectral about the spectator, something haunting about the haunted and something appalling about the appalled.”<sup>x</sup>

But if *The Turn*, as one of the classic examples of “unreliable narration,” can be shown to undermine its own (primary) narrator, the text also depends for much of its terrifying effect on fostering the reader’s identification with the governess. Although James adopts a characteristically detached attitude towards his protagonist in his preface, he also seems to have been caught up in this identification, at least at the time of the novella’s composition, when he wrote to Gosse, “I had to correct the proofs of my ghost story last night and when I finished them I was so frightened that I was afraid to go upstairs to bed!”<sup>xi</sup> While James’s response invokes the specific affective force of *The Turn*, his implicit alignment with his female protagonist is also congruent with the unorthodox gender identification that he adopted early in life, which informed his entire career as a novelist, and which was particularly evident in the so-called “experimental phase.”<sup>xii</sup> This period in James’s career, lasting roughly from 1895 to 1900, produced a series of texts centered on girls and young women—including *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Awkward Age* (1899), as well as *The Turn*—in which, David McWhirter argues, authorial identification across gender lines enables a radical probing of epistemological and ontological certainties, a “suspense,” simultaneously, “of knowledge, authority, genre, and gender.”<sup>xiii</sup>

I want to suggest that we can understand this suspense of certainties in *The Turn* not only in terms of James’s unorthodox gender identification but also as based in part on the condition of “homelessness” that he shared with his protagonist (though James’s experience of this condition, I must reiterate, is metaphorical rather than actual). Late in

life James made definite allegiances to nation and to place, taking up British citizenship, as well as moving into Lamb House, a handsome eighteenth-century residence in Rye, a picturesque town near the Sussex coast; *The Turn* was the first work completed after moving into his new home. James took the lease on Lamb House—and a couple of years later bought it—with the explicit intention of finally settling down after many years of peripatetic existence, in which, while based in London, he had been accustomed to spending months abroad. But for James the idea of home was always ghosted by the potential of unsettlement. The restlessness that the acquisition of Lamb House was meant to alleviate in a sense began in his childhood, in which he moved frequently with his family from America to Europe and back again; and the adult James's sense of the necessarily temporary nature of settlement was compounded by his identification with an ideal of cosmopolitanism. Even after “settling” in Rye, James spent considerable periods away; he stayed in London for every winter after 1911, for instance (and in fact died there in the winter of 1916).

While James's experience of homelessness describes a state of feeling rather than an actual condition, women who became governesses in the early and mid-nineteenth century really were homeless more or less by definition—“distressed gentlewomen” forced out of their familial homes by straitened circumstances and domiciled in the homes of better-off families only under sufferance as employees. However, in *The Turn* the governess's homelessness is complicated by her peculiar relation to her employer's property—the country house of Bly. She is notionally in charge of Bly, indeed notionally in possession of it, and her sense of this “supreme authority,” combined with her sense of her class status, propels her attempt to “master” the situation at Bly; verbally aligning



herself with “the master” within the story (the uncle) and “The Master” outside it (James), the governess proclaims at a crucial point in the narrative: “I seemed to myself, for the instant, to have mastered it, to see it all” (108).

The governess’s narration regularly recurs to notations of her own authority, legitimacy, and propriety. Soon after arriving at Bly, for instance, she indulges in pleasing reflections on the good job she is doing that are palpably informed by her erotic attraction to the Uncle—which, the text suggests, is the reason she took the job in the first place: “By my discretion, my quiet good sense and general high propriety, I was giving pleasure—if he had ever thought of it!—to the person to whose pressure I had yielded” (22). Her actions are powerfully motivated by her desire for him, and she frequently imagines his admiring reaction to them: the situation, she feels, demands of her an “extraordinary flight of heroism,” and she is swelled by the sense that “there would be a greatness in letting it be seen—oh, in the right quarter!—that I could succeed where many another girl might have failed” (39). Desire shades into identification: it is, she writes, “almost with a sense of property that amused and flattered me” that she can, in the early weeks of her residence at Bly, “take a turn into the grounds . . . and enjoy the beauty and dignity of the place” (22).

But the “almost” is crucial here. The governess has no right to a sense of property, and only the most tenuous right to the sense of her own authority.<sup>xiv</sup> In an essay primarily concerned with *The House of the Seven Gables*, but also including within its ambit *The Amityville Horror* and *Poltergeist*, Walter Benn Michaels notes that haunted house tales “usually involve some form of anxiety about ownership” and the questions that accompany this anxiety: “Who has title? What legitimates that title? What

guarantees it?”<sup>xv</sup> On this account, the haunted house tale is a drama of competing claims to title; and this is certainly how *The Turn* can be read—in terms of a struggle between the governess and the ghosts not only for the children but also for Bly. But the governess’s claim is more clearly illegitimate than the claim of, say, the married couple in *The Amityville Horror*, who, having put a deposit on the house in question, are, by the lights of contemporary market society at least, legitimate contenders for title.

The governess herself is almost as likely to register the precarious nature of her authority—“[her] more than questionable privilege”(35)—as she is to insist on the legitimacy of her actions. Soon after her arrival at the house, for instance, the Governess figures herself as “strangely at the helm” of “a great drifting ship” (15), an image that captures what McWhirter calls “the impossible position of unauthorized authority” that she occupies as the result of the uncle’s abrogation of his power over Bly.<sup>xvi</sup> In fact, the governess’s insistence on the legitimacy of her position (and hence of her actions) soon starts to sound like protesting too much—an inadvertent registration of the fine line between her self-proclaimed status as “a young woman privately bred” and the disdained (and feared) status of the “base menial” that she assigns (twice in two pages) to her nemesis Quint (*Turn of the Screw*). Despite the fact that Quint is, as the governess emphatically puts it, “never—no, never!—a gentleman” (34), he was, after all, put in charge of Bly, just as she has been; and the governess of course occupies an uncomfortably amphibious class position—necessarily a gentlewoman but in practical terms a servant.

As Marianne DeKoven argues, the plot of *The Turn* is generated by the governess’s “battle to bridge, by an eroticized self-assertion, the distance the master has

imposed between her and his world of hereditary masculine upper-class privilege. Peter Quint and Miss Jessel always appear to the protagonist in relation to episodes or situation that make this self-assertion problematic.”<sup>xvii</sup> Exemplifying the tendency of recent criticism to align the governess with the ghosts, DeKoven notes that the illegitimacy of the governess’s claim to authority is conveyed in moments in which she and her ostensible opponents are doubled. For instance, in one of the governess’s encounters with Quint, he appears looking in at the dining room window so that “like [the governess], he is . . . positioned as the excluded . . . in the classic posture of the disenfranchised, outside . . . looking in.”<sup>xviii</sup> Compounding this effect of identification, the governess feels, with uncanny affect, that “it was as if I had been looking at him for years and had known him always” (29); she then runs out onto the terrace where Quint stands, finds him gone, and “places [her]self where he had stood,” thereby scaring Mrs Grose, who now comes to stand at the spot in the dining room where *she* had stood (30). Later, when she sees Miss Jessel sitting at the schoolroom table, in a typically over-emphatic reference to her own superiority, the governess tells us that she “should have taken [her] at the first blush for some housemaid who . . . had applied herself to the considerable effort of a letter to her sweetheart” (81). As DeKoven notes, the governess’s mistaken perception is “an echo of [her] own hopeless erotic position” vis-à-vis the uncle, as she cannot bring herself to write a letter to him advising him of the strange turn things seems to have taken at Bly;<sup>xix</sup> in thus echoing her own situation, her mistake also draws attention to her own “menial” position, which the condescending reference to the housemaid’s effortful letter-writing disavows. In fact, during this encounter, positions are reversed, as the governess’s “vile predecessor” stands and is

transformed, in her perception, from housemaid into her superior. Like Quint earlier, Miss Jessel fixes the governess with a “look” “long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers,” so that the governess experiences “the extraordinary chill of a feeling that it was I who was the intruder” (81).

In making his protagonist a governess, James refers not only to the historical actuality of a particular plight besetting the distressed gentlewoman of the earlier nineteenth century but also to literary convention, as the governess was a stock figure whose desperate situation was dramatized in many early and mid-century “governess novels.” In this popular genre, the governess’s problematic social status as a gentlewoman forced to earn a living was frequently resolved through a conclusion in which the governess receives an unexpected fortune and marries a lord (often her former employer).<sup>xx</sup> While governess novels are now generally forgotten, their legacy lives on in the popular imagination due to the enduring status of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), which reworked the conventions of the genre by marrying them to Gothic settings and events. As several critics have argued, James’s story of haunting is itself “powerfully haunted” by *Jane Eyre*, “borrowing openly its gothic aspect, influenced more covertly by its themes of class and femalehood.”<sup>xxi</sup> Indeed, *The Turn* is a self-consciously “literary” work that acknowledges its antecedents in implicit and explicit allusions. After seeing Quint for the first time atop one of the house’s towers, the governess wonders whether there “was . . . a ‘secret’ at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement?” (26). This passage, with its explicit reference to Anne Radcliffe and its implicit reference to Brontë, typifies both the Governess’s tendency to understand her experience in literary terms as well as the novella’s

intertextuality or even its metafictionality. The novella is studded with similar allusions to predecessor-texts, as well as with references to fairy-tales, story-books, and stagecraft—a congeries of intertextual intimations that is one manifestation of the novella's proto-modernism.<sup>xxii</sup>

It is because the governess fantasizes the master's reciprocation of her love that Millicent Bell maintains that *Jane Eyre* "is the story [James's] heroine herself dreams of having."<sup>xxiii</sup> But in line with the text's more general allusiveness, the governess's literary indebtedness extends beyond the single example of *Jane Eyre* to the older Gothic tradition that Brontë's novel itself draws upon. Sustained by her determination to carry out "a service admirable and difficult" (39) by ridding Bly of moral contamination, the governess's actions recall not only the scenario of Brontë's novel, but the entire "feminine," "insider," or "Radcliffean" strand of the Gothic novel. This strand, as Kate Ferguson Ellis explains, centers on the efforts of the heroine to "purge [an] infected home and . . . establish a true one," and is distinguished from "masculine," "Lewisite," or "outsider" Gothic, which centers on the lone, wandering outsider, as in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* or William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*.<sup>xxiv</sup> The feminine Gothic is the Gothic of confinement; and *The Turn of the Screw* in the enforced isolation of its "cut off" (*Turn of the Screw*, p. 39) setting presents a typical or perhaps even an extreme instance of the genre.

The novella departs from the template of feminine Gothic, however, in that its protagonist has no legitimate claim to the house and to the role of purifier. Moreover, while the typical feminine Gothic concludes with the heroine's triumphal restoration of the perverted home to its proper familial and marital order, *The Turn* ends with a

deepening of domestic chaos. “[Miles’s] little heart, dispossessed, had stopped” (122): the last words of the novella present a “stop” that is less as a moment of closure than a continuation of suspense. In failing to achieve a concluding image of the restored home, as its resemblances to the genres of feminine Gothic and governess novel might have led its initial readers to suspect it would, *The Turn* keeps in play the narrative’s founding condition of homelessness. Readers are left suspended in a moment of terror that entails, collaterally, the ontological and epistemological suspense that McWhirter identifies as the central effect of the novella. The text breaks off without returning to its framing narrative; thus, as McWhirter argues, it “eludes any final possession or understanding by its characters . . . its readers, or its author” and “leav[es] us enwound in an endless spiral of speculation and interpretation”—the sense of unstable meaning that has come to be recognized as one of the salient characteristics of modernism.<sup>xxv</sup>

My reading of the relations between homelessness and modernism in the novella draws on the substantial tradition of commentary that identifies homelessness as the defining condition of modernity. Referring specifically to the literary field, for instance, in *The Theory of the Novel* (1916) Lukács famously defines the novel as an expression of “transcendental homelessness.” In the novel the “problematic individual” is homeless because he is ranged against a social situation from which he is to some degree alienated.<sup>xxvi</sup> Lukács’s unthinking masculinism notwithstanding, the modern feeling of homelessness is hardly the sole preserve of the male novelistic hero. Distaff illustrations of his thesis are afforded, for instance, by *Jane Eyre*, as well as by many other “classically” realist works, including ones by James, such as *The Portrait of a Lady*.

But if homelessness is, as Lukács argues, the defining condition of the modern

realist novel, the sense of homelessness expressed by that other modern novelistic form, the Gothic, or more specifically the “feminine” Gothic, differs in that it is located as uncannily residing *within* the home. Explicating the distinctively modern affect and aesthetic of the uncanny, Anthony Vidler has proposed that it can be seen as a “quintessential[ly] bourgeois kind of fear”: first appearing during the eighteenth century, it articulates the “fundamental insecurity” of “a newly established class, not quite at home in its own home.”<sup>xxvii</sup> But if *The Turn*, in its uncanniness, exemplifies the common sense of homelessness that defines modernity, its experimentalism—the experimentalism of James’s “experimental phase”—involves not simply engagement with the sociohistorical circumstance of modernity, broadly conceived, but anticipation of the lineaments of literary modernism. The generic derangements of *The Turn* mean that the space of home remains unstable and that the tale’s uncanny energies remain unleashed rather than being contained by the kind of closure that typifies both the “classic realist” novel and the conventional Gothic fiction alike.<sup>xxviii</sup> Despite its appearance of solidity (“a big, ugly, antique but convenient house” [15]), Bly, a chaotic perversion of “home,” is, in the governess’s experience, more like “a great drifting ship.”

This image—which returns in the governess’s premature claim towards the end of the narrative that “it was in short just by clutching at the helm that I avoided total wreck” (109)—is compatible with what critics have identified as the persistent representation in late James of an “unstable” world or a condition of “groundlessness.” I’ve already referred to John Landau’s argument that James in his late career attempts to construct a home in art as a means of “express[ing] and contain[ing] a sense of deep instability”—an attempt complicated by the acknowledged sense of its “imperfection and

inconclusion.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Similarly, Michael Trask proposes an argument about the “groundlessness” of James’s later work, evident in his ambivalent treatment of “place”: “‘Places’ in late James] are less the means of determining where one belongs (as in knowing one’s place) than footholds from which one might gain only ‘moment[ary]’ purchase on an increasingly tractionless world.”<sup>xxx</sup> For both critics, proto-modernist textual instability is both produced by and a means of negotiating cultural instability. I want in the next section to suggest that the governess’s peculiar relation to property, which both complicates and affirms her own homelessness, engages one particular cultural instability—the instability of relations between property and owners that is a key feature of late nineteenth-century commodity culture.

### Gendered Properties

Although a substantial body of recent James criticism has drawn attention to his work’s engagement with commodity culture, this context is hardly an obvious one for an understanding of *The Turn*, which, with its self-conscious literariness and its unconcern with the great world of contemporary metropolitan civilization, seemingly bears little resemblance to the works more commonly related to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century capitalism by James scholars.<sup>xxxi</sup> But while *The Turn* is not overtly engaged with the getting and losing of money, or with the seductions and treacheries of the commodity, in the way that, say, *The Wings of the Dove* or *The Ambassadors* are, it is, as we’ve seen, centrally concerned with the interrelated phenomena of property, ownership, and gendered identity. This concern, I want to suggest, may be read as a negotiation of the uneasy



coexistence in the late nineteenth century of two models of the relation between personhood and property: the model that the political scientist C.B. Macpherson calls possessive individualism, which dominated the earlier phase of market capitalism, and the emergent model of consumer citizenship.

Macpherson locates the emergence of possessive individualism amid the social upheavals of seventeenth-century England: “The relation of ownership, having become for more and more men the critically important relation determining their actual freedom and actual prospect of realizing their full potentialities, was read back into the nature of the individual” so that the individual came to be seen “as essentially the proprietor of his own personal capacities, owing nothing to society for them.”<sup>xxxii</sup> This is the classic model of liberal selfhood, paradigmatically set out by Locke in his second *Treatise of Civil Government*. Here Locke argues that “every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*” that “no Body has any right to but himself.” All subsequent manifestations of property are defined by a man “mixing” his labor with anything external to the self’s corporeal boundary.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Although founded on the social fact of property ownership, the liberal understanding of the individual designates him as prior to and independent of the social—as autonomous and self-actualizing. But the notion of liberal identity is also premised on the internal division and commodification of the self. Macpherson notes that for Locke the idea that “*Labour* [is] the unquestionable property of the Labourer” is not at all inconsistent with the notion that labor is alienable: “For property in the bourgeois sense is not only a right to enjoy or use; it is a right to dispose of, to exchange, to alienate.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> But if for Locke there seems to have been have been no contradiction

between bourgeois identity and the alienability of labor (the right to property through labor for Locke, after all, refers not only to “my” labor but also the labor of “my servant”), by the time of fully flourishing capitalism this alienability had become a source of anxiety in the male bourgeois imaginary.<sup>xxxv</sup> During the Victorian period, while a multitude of cultural and institutional forces worked to affirm the idea of masculine self-sufficiency, that idea was also continually threatened by the unpredictable dynamics of the market. As Mary Poovey observes, “Because his labor could be expropriated (or alienated) for someone else’s profit and because a man’s gain was subject to both the dictates of other people and the vicissitudes of the economy, the individual could experience himself as hostage to incomprehensible forces and frustrating restraints.” Poovey argues that “the alienation written into” the Lockean “proprietary self” was “symbolically resolved” by “emphasizing not the difference written into the proprietary subject, but the difference *between* that subject and another figure who was not so divided. This figure was woman.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> Consequently, as Jeff Nunokawa and Tim Dolin have argued in relation to the mid-Victorian novel, the notionally private sphere of the home, the domain of woman and family life, was “held up as the one space protected from the contingencies of market capitalism and the commodification of the subject.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> However, the mid-Victorian novel often also derives a considerable quantum of its thematic energy from the violation of this protected space by ever-encroaching commodification. Although the married woman may be fetishized as a form of “secure property,” she is, in fact, the novel shows, always potentially “subject to the restless fate of capital.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> There is always the quite likely chance that a reversal of middle-class

fortune will see the domestic woman cast out of the (already precarious) haven of home to be blown about willy-nilly by the eddies of market society.

The Victorian novel's representation of the susceptibility of women to the force of commodification dovetailed with the move towards "consumer society" or "commodity culture" throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. The classic formulation of possessive individualism was a conception of identity from which women (as well as men who did not own property, like Locke's servant) were effectively excluded. From mid-century on, by contrast, women are the favored exemplars, across a wide range of fictional and nonfictional discourses, of the increasing tendency to understand identity as constructed through the consumption of commodities. For instance, a much-quoted speech by Madame Merle in James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) may be read as announcing the arrival on the cultural scene of the consumer citizen:

There is no such thing as an isolated man or woman: we are each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our "self"? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us in—and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for *things*! One's self—for other people—is one's expression of oneself; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps—these things are all expressive.<sup>xxxix</sup>

In a formulation that echoes Madame Merle's description of the person as "a cluster of appurtenances," Rachel Bowlby describes the constitution of the modern consumer citizen's self as "depend[ent] on "the acquisition . . . of all the appurtenances

of a 'lifestyle' which can be recognized by other members of the society."<sup>xi</sup> While the possessive individual is supposedly self-contained, the consumer citizen's self, as Madame Merle puts it, "overflows" into the things it nominally owns so that it becomes difficult to estimate where it begins and ends. Longstanding cultural tradition associates fluidity with femininity, so Madame Merle is an appropriately gendered spokesperson for this liquid notion of the self.<sup>xli</sup> And the feminization of the self concomitant with commodity culture is compounded by the "clear sense," as Bowlby puts it, "in which the consumer citizen is not so much the possessor of as possessed by the commodities which one must have to be made or make oneself in the form objectively guaranteed as that of a social individual."<sup>xlii</sup> The subordination of the individual to the commodity contrasts with the characteristics of control and ownership that putatively define the liberal self, defining the consumer citizen as feminine "object" rather than masculine "subject."

But while on first sight an alternative model of identity to that of possessive individualism, the notion of the consumer citizen is also in a sense an extension of it, in that it makes apparent the dependence upon property that the older model disavows.<sup>xliii</sup> Madame Merle's view of the self points to the way in which property helps to found identity, rather than suggesting that the things one owns are the mere trappings of an already fully formed individual. The increasing perception that people are owned by rather than owners of commodities threatens the longstanding sense of bourgeois masculine self-containment underwritten by possessive individualism. Very often in late nineteenth century writing, the sense of self-dissolution experienced by men in commodity culture is displaced onto women; but although the commodification of masculine identity is continually disavowed, it is also acknowledged, if often reluctantly

or inadvertently.<sup>xliv</sup>

Centering on a female whose relation to property ownership is a kind of pretence, *The Turn* can be read as an imaginative exploration of the ambivalence towards property that marks late nineteenth century market culture for men —the way in which “a sense of property” may overpower the subject at the same time that it affords an illusory sense of empowerment. Supposedly endowed with “supreme authority,” the Governess is instead defeated by the challenges presented to her stewardship. Unlike her predecessors in the Gothic novel, she fails to make over the house of Bly into a home; the demands of property defeat her. In remaining a house rather than a home, in resisting the governess’s attempts to assimilate it to a narrative of familial reconstruction, Bly remains a piece of property with its own kind of autonomous identity. It is in this sense, I suggest, that Bly resembles the infamously independent commodities of late nineteenth-century culture, and that a particular kind of property with its own particular historical and cultural associations—real estate— can be thought of as standing in for property in general.

Exemplifying the operation of gendered displacement I’ve described, the governess may be thought of as bearing the burden of anxieties suffered by bourgeois men in relation to property. But James does not simply displace onto a woman these anxieties; as we’ve seen he also *identifies* with her. This identification might be seen not simply as repeating the identification with “woman’s lot” that is a persistent feature of his work but also as articulating the sense of feminization that the new relations to property entail. Women have not only been regarded in important respects *as* property; they have also, as a consequence of this construction, been excluded from the legal and cultural

recognitions attendant upon property-ownership (whether they were in fact property owners or not). It is not only because she is the master's subordinate but also because she is a woman that the governess's situation so powerfully images a relation to property that was becoming increasingly apparent—though also increasingly disavowed—by men.<sup>xlv</sup>

### The Unsettling Labor of Authorship

The novella does not simply turn the governess into a scapegoat for unsettling cultural developments, however, nor simply dismiss her claims to authority. As is the case with practically every other narrative and semantic issue, both large and small, the novella equivocates with regard to her claims to status. In *The Turn* uncertainty is generated to an important degree by the flickering in and out of focus of alternative or mutually exclusive possibilities, the ultimate effect of which is the blurring of borders between ostensibly opposed categories. As an uncanny text, as we have seen, the novella blurs the line between the ghostly and the living, and the strange and the familiar. And critics have also noted, for instance, the blurring of the literal and the metaphorical, and at the level of narrative detail, the uncertain divisions of day and night, up and down, in and out.<sup>xlvi</sup> The definitional instability of terms undermines the idea of stable meaning and hence of authoritative statement, as is made strikingly evident in the text's treatment of the issue of authorship. The narrator of the prologue tells us that when Douglas reads aloud the governess's narrative it was "with a fineness that was like a rendering to the ear of the beauty of his author's hand" (9). As Lustig points out, the governess is positioned as a kind of ghost, a voice from beyond the grave: one of the many ways in which she is aligned with the abjected figures of Quint and Miss Jessel.<sup>xlvii</sup> But on the other hand, the

prologue also in fact may be read as “emphasi[zing] the authorial prowess of the protagonist.”<sup>xlviii</sup> The mediumistic channeling of her voice by Douglas seems to her affirm her status as textual authority; there is even an echo here in the reference to the governess as “*his* author” of the etymological associations of author with origin and ownership. At one moment, then, the text hints that the governess shares the abject status of the ghosts; at another, it implies her authority; at still another, it pulls that authority away from her through the technique of unreliable narration. Thus the treatment of authorship epitomizes the lack in the novella, as James puts it in the preface, of an “eligible *absolute*” that ties down certain meaning (176).

The governess’s uncertain authority in relation to her text resembles James’s account of his own authorial relation to *The Turn*, characterized as this is by an oscillation between control and loss of control. According to his notebooks, James was provided with the suggestion for the novella (the “germ” in his terminology) by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward Benson, who had heard from an unnamed “lady” a “mere vague, undetailed faint sketch” of a story involving children being threatened by the ghosts of servants who had corrupted them.<sup>xlix</sup> In the preface, James represents himself as a shrewd entrepreneur, who, aware of “the marked and sad drop in the general supply, and still more in the general quality” of ghost-story “commodities” sees the opportunity presented by the “fragment” of a tale related by Benson. When asked by “the promoters of a periodical dealing in the time-honoured Christmas-tide toy” of the ghost story, James exploits his opportunity, “wonder[ing] . . . why so fine a germ, gleaming there in the wayside dust of life, had never been deftly picked up.” James’s account is replete with the idiom of commerce, including a double-edged reference to the germ’s

“value,”” where value overtly refers to the “disquieting” affect generated by the haunted-children scenario, but, given the tenor of the passage, also suggests the economic value generated by James’s exploitation of the germ (the “germ” “gleaming” as it does “in the wayside dust” also suggests its orthographic near-relation, a gem) (170).

James’s account of his deft management of creative and commercial possibilities seemingly attests to the controlling power of the liberal self. As in Locke’s narrative of the creation of property, the germ or fragment becomes James’s alienable (and valuable) property once he has mixed his labor with it. But once composed and sent into literary and commercial circulation, the tale takes on a life of its own. James eschewed elaboration of his tale’s “blanks” as much outside of the novella as he did within it. In a letter to the spiritualist F.W.H. Myers, for instance, he wrote in reply to a request for further specification: “I’m afraid I don’t quite *understand* the principal question you put to me about ‘The Turn of the Screw.’ However, that scantily matters; for in truth I am afraid . . . that I somehow can’t pretend to give any coherent account of my small inventions ‘after the fact.’”<sup>1</sup> As Felman argues, James’s “mastery” in and with regard to *The Turn of the Screw* (and indeed with regard to his fiction *tout court*) is in fact self-dispossession: “Dispossessing himself of his own story, James . . . at the same time dispossesses his own story of its master.” Unable to account for *The Turn*’s effects, James, as much as its readers, is its “dupe.”<sup>li</sup>

This process of self-dispossession reverses the Lockean paradigm of self-possession that informs James’s account of his canny mastering of the fragmentary material provided by Benson in the preface. In the preface, in fact, the tale takes on the



self-consciousness, independence, and self-sufficiency accorded to the liberal masculine self: “This perfectly independent and irresponsible little fiction rejoices, beyond any rival on a like ground, in a conscious provision of the prompt retort to the sharpest question that may be addressed to it. For it has the small strength—if I should n’t say rather the unattackable ease—of a perfect homogeneity” (169). James’s account of his relation to his tale, we could say, swaps the attributes of property and owner: the ghost-story “commodity” is personified as canny and independent, while the author suffers a helpless unknowingness that renders him little more use, when it comes to the vexed question of his story’s meaning, than an insensate object. The exchange of properties here calls up what Emily Apter calls “the famous Marxist chiasmus of double alienation,” in which, in market society, social relations are like object relations, and commodities (such as ghost-stories) are endowed with the lineaments of personality.<sup>lii</sup>

But if James virtually personifies his tale here as a homogenous, self-identical entity (and hence, in the terms of the prevailing cultural stereotypes of gender, as a masculine one), critics have subsequently pointed to the way in which the novella’s lack of “an eligible *absolute*” can instead be understood to position it as a kind of fluid or “feminine” writing.<sup>liii</sup> Again anticipating his critics, James himself raises the notion of fluidity in the preface. Referring to the possibilities for improvisation provided by his fragmentary material, James points out the danger of the over-indulgence of this capacity in an extended metaphor of story-writing “get[ting] into flood” so that “the waters . . . spread . . . violating . . . our sense of the course and the channel, which is our sense of the uses of a stream and the virtue of a story” (172). James presents himself in the preface as having successfully contained the flow of improvisation—and certainly *The*

*Turn* is nothing if not succinct in terms of its narrative materials. The unsettling equivocations of its *meanings* are another matter, however, and in this respect the novella perhaps deserves the epithets of “the long and loose, the copious, the various, the endless” that James attempts in the preface to quarantine it against (171).

It is in the flux of its meanings that the novella recalls the arguments of various feminist theorists relating fluidity and the feminine. Luce Irigaray, for instance, associates woman with “a transgression and confusion of boundaries” and describes feminine speech as “flowing, fluctuating. *Blurring*.”<sup>liv</sup> Hélène Cixous describes woman thus: “She doesn’t hold still, she overflows.”<sup>lv</sup> And Elizabeth Grosz suggests that in the modern West “the female body has been constructed . . . as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid . . . as a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order.”<sup>lvi</sup> James’s claims for the formal self-containment and perfection of his tale is undermined by its own “leakiness,” the tendency for binarized terms to cross with one another and to cancel one another—a tendency towards semantic disorder hinted at in James’s characterization in the preface of the novella as “an excursion into chaos” (172).

Irigaray and others oppose feminine fluidity to “the proper,” with its connotations of stable meaning and ownership. In her impossible relation to property, the governess indicates the impossible position of women in relation to property in general, and in this respect it is significant that the governess lacks a proper name. But it is not just the governess whose identity is unstable and precarious. The stability and solidity suggested by the appearance of Bly (“a big, ugly, antique but convenient house”) is also dissolved, unmoored in the image of the house as a drifting ship, an image that calls up the lack of

control associated with the fluid. Both properties and identities lose their definitional stability, so that the novella recalls the liquidity of commodity culture in which relations between owners and owned become unstable as in Madame Merle's speech about the self "overflow[ing] into everything that belongs to us in—and then . . . flow[ing] back again."

In the novella the shimmering in and out of focus of various possible interpretations that emerge as one moves through this text mark it as modern. This literary modernism or proto-modernism is caught up with James's relation to capitalist modernity—which can be variously figured in terms of groundlessness or fluidity, or, as I have also suggested, as a kind of homelessness: a sense of not standing or belonging in any one place that may be experienced a kind of affirmation of identity (as in James's cosmopolitanism) or as an uncanny anxiety (as in the account of property relations in and around *The Turn*). Property relations are unsettling in *The Turn* and elsewhere in James's late work to an important degree because of their unsettling of gender identities. In expressing his anxieties around the status of property through feminine identification or feminine writing, James attests to the challenges to established conceptions of masculinity that commodity culture ushers in. The text deals with these anxieties by attempting to contain them within the experience of a female protagonist; but it is also haunted by the suspicion that property may feminize even as it supposedly establishes manhood, that property—and, beyond this, the new cultural world associated with new relations to property— may not only attest to identity but displace, confuse, or overpower it.

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<sup>i</sup> Edmund Gosse, “Henry James,” *London Mercury*, 1 (1920): 680.

<sup>ii</sup> John Carlos Rowe, “Henry James and the United States,” *Henry James Review*, 27.3 (2006): 228-229.

<sup>iii</sup> John Landau, “James’s Home Ground,” in *Home and Homelessness in the Victorian Imagination*, ed. Muray Baumgarten and H.M. Daleski (New York: AMS, 1998), 258.

<sup>iv</sup> Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Allan Lloyd Smith (London: Everyman, 1993), 3. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

<sup>v</sup> For an account of changing critical understandings of the novella see Neil Cornwell and Maggie Malone, “Introduction,” in *The Turn of the Screw and What Maisie Knew*, ed. Cornwell and Malone (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998). Important early discussions of the irresolvable narrative issues of the novella (apart from Felman’s, which I discuss here) include Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric Of The Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 128-229; Shlomith Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity—The Example Of James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 116-166; and Charles Thomas Samuels, *The Ambiguity of Henry James* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 11-22.

<sup>vi</sup> Shoshana Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” *Yale French Studies* 55-56 (1977): 205.

<sup>vii</sup> Henry James, *The Art of the Novel* (1934; Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984), 172. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

<sup>viii</sup> Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” 205.

<sup>ix</sup> Allan Lloyd Smith, “Introduction” in James, *The Turn of the Screw*, xxvi.

<sup>x</sup> T.J. Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 188.

<sup>xi</sup> Edmund Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, quoted in Fred Kaplan, *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 413.

<sup>xii</sup> James himself refers explicitly to his unorthodox childhood gender identification in his autobiographical writings, stating for instance that, by comparison with his female cousins, he couldn’t help “feeling that as a boy I showed more poorly than [the] girls” (*Autobiography*, ed. Frederick W. Dupee [London: W.H. Allen, 1956], 217). James’s “feminine” tendency has long been seen by both sympathetic and

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unsympathetic critics as having informed his career as a writer of novels, which are, after all, often concerned with the quandaries of middle-class female experience; see, e.g., Martha Banta, "Men, Women, and the American Way," *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, ed. Jonathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Alfred Habegger, *Gender, Fantasy and Realism in American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 256-259; Richard Henke "The Man of Action: Henry James and the Performance of Gender," *Henry James Review* 16.2 (1995): 227-241. But James also sought, somewhat anxiously, to define novel-writing as a properly masculine business, differentiating his work from that of his female contemporaries and from a popular taste often defined in feminine terms; see, e.g., Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 260; Alfred Habegger, *Henry James and the "Woman Business"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>xiii</sup> 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), 128.

<sup>xiv</sup> Placing the novella in the context of English property law, John Carlos Rowe argues that "the Uncle's originating transfer of his authority" to the governess is "a complicated strategy for maintaining his power while keeping it from exposure," as her representation of his guardianship at Bly "enables him to maintain his 'right of possession' without requiring his physical presence." See *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* (London: Methuen, 1984), 127, 133.

<sup>xv</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, "Romance and Real Estate" in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, ed. Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 157, 158.

<sup>xvi</sup> McWhirter, "In the Other House of Fiction," 146 n.27.

<sup>xvii</sup> Marianne DeKoven, "Gender, History and Modernism in *The Turn of the Screw*," in *The Turn of the Screw and What Maisie Knew*, ed. Cornwell and Malone, 145.

<sup>xviii</sup> Marianne DeKoven, "Gender, History and Modernism in *The Turn of the Screw*," 148.

<sup>xix</sup> Marianne DeKoven, "Gender, History and Modernism in *The Turn of the Screw*," 152.

<sup>xx</sup> Millicent Bell, "Class, Sex, and the Victorian Governess: James's *The Turn of the Screw*" in *New Essays on Daisy Miller and The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Pollak, 95.

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<sup>xxi</sup> Bell, “Class, Sex, and the Victorian Governess,” 100. The relation of *The Turn* to *Jane Eyre* is also discussed, for instance, in Linda Kauffman, *Discourses Of Desire: Gender, Genre, And Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), 210-14; Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly*, 138-44; E.A. Sheppard, *Henry James and The Turn Of The Screw* (Auckland: Auckland UP, 1974), 50-60.

<sup>xxii</sup> For instance, Douglas tells his audience in the prologue that the uncle is “such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel, before a fluttered, anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage”; and the governess wonders, once she arrives at Bly, whether this “castle of romance” is “just a story-book over which I had fallen a-doze or a-dream” (7, 15). The several references to theatricality include: “my little pupils would play at innocent wonder”; “Flora . . . smiled as if her performance was now complete”; “[Bly] 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”; “the curtain rose on the last act of my dreadful drama” (80, 96, 71, 75). Allusions to Brontë and Radcliffe are supplemented by a reference to Henry Fielding’s *Amelia* (56).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Bell, “Class, Sex, and the Victorian Governess,” 100.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), xii.

<sup>xxv</sup> McWhirter, “In the ‘Other House’ of Fiction,” 133.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin, 1971), 78, 41.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 1-2.

<sup>xxviii</sup> In making this argument, I do not wish to reinstate a largely discredited, or at least vigorously contested, division between the ideological containment of “classic realism” and the comparative “freedom” of modernism. I accept that closure does not necessarily contain the subversive energies that may be activated in more traditional forms, but would still insist on the differences narrative architecture may make to the readings that may plausibly be developed.

<sup>xxix</sup> John Landau, “James’s Home Ground,” 257.

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<sup>xxx</sup> Michael Trask, *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003), 44.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>i</sub> See, for instance, Jean-Christophe Agnew, "The Consuming Vision of Henry James" in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, ed. Richard Wrightson Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 65-100; Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990); Michael Meeuwis, "Living the Dream: Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and *The Golden Bowl*," *Henry James Review* 27.1 (2006): 61-74; Richard Salmon, "The Secret of The Spectacle: Epistemology and Commodity Display in The Ambassadors" *Henry James Review* 14.1 (1993): 43-54; Fotios Sarris, "Fetishism in *The Spoils of Poynton*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51.1 (1996): 53-82.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>ii</sub> C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 3.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>iii</sub> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, quoted in Macpherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 214.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>iv</sub> Locke, quoted in Macpherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 214; Macpherson, 215.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>v</sub> Macpherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 215.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>vi</sub> Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988), 76.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>vii</sub> Tim Dolin, *Mistress of the House: Women of Property in the Victorian Novel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 7.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>viii</sub> Jeff Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), 10, 13.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>ix</sub> Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Geoffrey Moore (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 253.

<sup>x</sup><sub>l</sub> Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 28.

<sup>x</sup><sub>li</sub> Klaus Theweleit provides an influential and provocative account of this association in Western and other cultural traditions in *Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway in collaboration with Erica

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Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987), vol. 1 of *Male Fantasies*, 229-362. I refer to other arguments about the association between femininity and fluidity in the next section.

<sup>xlii</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 28.

<sup>xliii</sup> “Possessive individualism” has come to be used, inaccurately in my view, as *equivalent* to the notion of the consumer citizen. In fact, in liberal thought the self is supposedly a self *before* it owns anything rather than a self *constituted* through ownership. My point here is that this supposition is a *misconstrual* of the actuality of relations between property and identity. For a complementary argument treating rather different historical and cultural materials, see Lynn Festa, “Personal Effects: Wigs and Possessive Individualism in the Long Eighteenth Century,” *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 29. 2 (2005), esp. 48-49. Festa argues that cultural significance of the wig exposes the dependence of the notionally autonomous eighteenth-century bourgeois individual on his possessions.

<sup>xliv</sup> For a discussion of this operation in relation to other work by James, see Guy Davidson, “Ornamental Identity: Commodity Fetishism, Masculinity, and Sexuality in *The Golden Bowl*,” *Henry James Review* 28 (2007): 26-42, esp. 34-35. See also Brent Shannon’s examination of the ways in which “the growing acceptance of male consumption and display created cracks in [gender] taboos and norms . . . and changed late-Victorian definitions of normative manhood in fundamental ways” (“ReFashioning Men: Fashion, Masculinity, and the Cultivation of the Male Consumer,” *Victorian Studies* 46.4 [2004]: 600).

<sup>xlv</sup> Women’s relations to property have of course been central to much feminist thought and activism, as evidenced by the importance of married women’s property rights to nineteenth-century campaigners for female emancipation. While married women’s property rights were achieved in England in 1882 and while this was undoubtedly a landmark for women’s rights under the law, the cultural characterization of women *as* property rather than owners of property persisted (and persists) despite such legislative changes. It is this persistent characterization that I’m suggesting *The Turn* responds to. The governess’s self-perception as an independent actor who can heroically restore Bly is linked to her stewardship of the house and thus mirrors “the liberal idea of property as a ‘right to action’” (see Dolin, *Mistress of the House*, 8). But her putative independence is compromised from the start and her gender is fundamental to that compromised status.



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<sup>xlvi</sup> On the wavering line between the literal and the metaphorical in the text, see Sheila Teahan, "The Literal Turn of the Metaphorical Screw," *Arizona Quarterly*, 62.3 (2006): 63-82. On *The Turn's* many confusions of positional and temporal binaries, see, for instance, Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, 165-166; Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly*, esp. 128-136.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly*, 189.

<sup>xlviii</sup> DeKoven, "Gender, History and Modernism in *The Turn of the Screw*," 143.

<sup>xlix</sup> Henry James, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 109.

<sup>l</sup> Henry James, *Letters*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1984), ed. Leon Edel, 88.

<sup>li</sup> Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," 206, 205.

<sup>lii</sup> Emily Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 12.

<sup>liii</sup> Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly*, 184; McWhirter, "In the 'Other House' of Fiction," 130.

<sup>liv</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 106, 112.

<sup>lv</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986), 91.

<sup>lvi</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994), 203.

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