Ghostly Repetitions: Between Interpretive Violence and Hysteria

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〈Contents〉

1. Introduction
2. Turning the Screw
3. Felman Turning the Screw of Interpretation
4. Wilson's Reading of James's Novella
5. Textual Trap
6. Double-Reading
7. Critique of Felman's Double-Reading
8. Conclusion

【Abstract】

In this article, I focus on literary interpretation, and more particularly excessive, "strong" or "interesting" interpretations. The emergence of an overwhelming amount of divergent literary theories throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries suggests that there is no authoritative reading model that is able to cover everything significant in the literary text. Each theory may be said to have its strong and weak aspects. It is

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even possible to argue that it is a virtue of a literary theory to exert a certain amount of self-criticism, perhaps even abandoning the claim on a "final" reading which closes the debate. In some sense that is why literary studies continue: there is always more to say about the literary texts—and, by implication, previous readings. In this article, I discuss various literary scholars, including Jonathan Culler and Harold Bloom. The main part of this article, however, will be devoted to a critical discussion of Shoshana Felman's reading of Henry James' ghost story *The Turn of the Screw.* Felman explores other, prior readings of James' text in order to argue that the literary text creates a textual trap in the sense that it lures readers to fixate meaning, which remains elusive; a meaning which ultimately can only be fixated and mastered as loss—like the death of the boy Miles in James' text. Felman constructs a literary theory that allegedly avoids this textual trap. But the risk of this interpretive effort, I argue, is interpretive hysteria, the potential fate of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, a world in which there are meanings everywhere—and nowhere.

Key words: Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, Edmund Wilson, Shoshana Felman, Psychoanalysis, Interpretation, Hysteria

1. Introduction

In the book *The Implied Reader*, the literary critic Wolfgang Iser talks about a literary text's "indeterminacies" or "empty spaces"—*Leerstellen*—which the reader must fill in to make sense of a text; in other words, gaps in the text the presence of which the reader must

conjure up via the act of interpretation.[1] Filling in the indeterminacies of a text often involves a rather extensive task because literary texts in fact typically provide us with very sparse information about the fictional universe it creates. A film adaptation of one's favourite novel is often a disappointing experience—precisely because the director must necessarily fill in the empty spaces, the indeterminacies, of the text, thus leaving very little work to the reader's imagination. In the literary text, the reader often quite simply takes blind spots and gaps for granted. For example, a novelist like Henry James takes for granted that the reader is familiar with certain social and cultural codes—so that James can play with these notions, subvert or deconstruct them. The textual universe of the literary narrative thus *invites* the reader to interpret, consciously and actively; the problem is, however, that everything can —potentially—be interpreted, ad infinitum. Like the psychoanalyst who in the consulting room was advised by Freud himself to listen to the patient's rambling with equal attention—*gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit*[2] —the reader must similarly proceed throughout the literary text with the assumption that everything may hold significance in one way or another. Whereas the psychoanalyst pays attention to every single detail the patient says (or does not say), the literary text potentially consists of a collection of traces among which even the most insignificant detail may have very important significance in another sense.

Literary interpretations typically open up and reorganize the text's collection of traces and signals. Quite often, these interpretations are guided by a pre-given set of values, or principles, according to which

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1) See Iser (1974).

2) See Freud (1999): 377.

the text's meaning is decoded. To the literary critic Jonathan Culler, however, one of the dangers of literary interpretations operating on the basis of an overall set of values—e.g. Marxism - or feminist literary criticism—is dogmatism. A dogmatic reading looks for aspects in the text that correspond to its pre-defined set of values, rather than looking at the singularity of the text itself. It is in this sense, Culler argues, that it is rather the extreme interpretation —the over- interpretation— which is interesting, because it destabilizes and questions what we take for granted, what we consider natural: "Many of the most interesting forms of modern criticism ask not what the work has in mind, but what it forgets, not what it says, but what it takes for granted" (1992: 115). Culler's notion of over-interpretation brings back old, unconsciously naturalized habits into the conscious mind again. Thus, Culler believes that any given literary theory must always be able to engage in over-interpretation—it's *theory-ness*, as distinct from the "truth."

Another similar concept to Culler's notion of over-interpretation is Bloom's idea of "misprision" insofar as both concepts question the possibility of reading "correctly." The notion of misprision refers to misreading or mistake; according to Bloom, it is fundamentally impossible to "read correctly"—the closest one may get to a "correct" reading is what Bloom calls "strong misreading," or a "creative misprision." Bloom writes: "There are no interpretations but only misinterpretations, and so all criticism is prose poetry" (95). According to Bloom, "misprision" designates the unavoidable misreading or misinterpretation that always occurs in the textual transference between the poet and the younger poet, the critic and the text and so forth. Bloom argues that if the process of transference is not identical with misprision, it must be identical with a repetition. Thus, the relation between, say, a critic and the text, must

essentially consist of a kind of difference. The more difference, that is, the more the critic or poet misreads the other poem, the stronger is his/her own text. For Bloom the difference is necessary because it signifies freedom and life—the liberation from earlier influence. Literature and criticism are, according to Bloom, essentially misprisions themselves, i.e. misprisions of other (anxiously) influential texts. To Bloom, there are no "original" works, and a poet's "meaning" is yet another poem or the misprision of another poem. Vincent Leitch comments: "the theory of misprision deliberately and perhaps desperately sets limits to the dissemination of poetic meaning. Meaning, in Bloom's work, is ultimately restored in disruptive and tattered intertextual forms" (138).

According to Jonathan Culler, an "interesting" literary theory—that is, a theory that allows for over-interpretation and misprision, and not blind repetition—is one that both distorts and clarifies at one and the same time. Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) illustrates this paradox: the painting portrays two Renaissance ambassadors, but the foreground is distorted by a strange object. It is only possible to see what the strange object actually represents when one is placed far to the right; it is an anamorphosis of a human skull. In his analysis of the painting, Jacques Lacan argues that the geocentric position we normally inhabit when we look at paintings leads to an illusory belief that we are capable of seeing everything.[3] As the anamorphic figure shows, however, there are other positions from which one may see something else. From the geocentric position, the strange object represents a blind spot, or a misprision—but from another perspective it signifies death itself. Culler's "interesting" literary theory works in a similar fashion: it creates another perspective on a literary text—a text which

3) See Lacan (1977); pp.85-89.

is always-already covered in or surrounded by meanings, interpretations, and readings. An “interesting” theory thus allows us to see that the “geocentric” readerly position is illusory, that it does not allow us to see and understand everything; it reminds us that there are always other perspectives.

Jonathan Culler and Harold Bloom both—each in their own ways—explore the boundaries of interpretation, or hermeneutics, a tradition which dominated literary criticism and cultural-philosophical analysis during the first half of the twentieth century.[4] Ever since the 1960s, however, the discipline of interpretation has gradually been replaced by a wealth of literary theories critical of hermeneutics. Umberto Eco proposed the idea of the “open work” by which he referred to the literary work as a field of meanings, which replaced the idea of a text with a single authoritative meaning.[5] Others, Roland Barthes in particular, announced the “death of the author” as well as the obsolescence of notions of literary texts as “works”; whole, unified textual objects that one could interpret.[6] For someone like Michel Foucault, the notion of the “author” essentially involved a power construction, whose purpose was to control and contain meaning.[7] From a different perspective, Susan Sontag rejected the obsession with interpretation in the famous essay “Against Interpretation” from 1966, while instead arguing for an erotic, sensual approach to art. Perhaps the most significant critical approach since the 1960s has been outlined in the works of Jacques Derrida whose deconstructive approach proselytized the idea of the

4) See in particular Gadamer (1997).

5) See Eco (1989)

6) See Barthes (1978). In this connection, one could also mention Stanley Fish’s influential reader-response theory as outlined in *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1982).

7) See Foucault (1984).

literary work's semantic uncertainty—the literary work being a system of signs whose referential meanings derive, not from the external world, but from within the sign system itself; the text's meaning can thus never be fixed, but is deferred, infinitely.[8] Another influential anti-hermeneutic approach was offered in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Theory of Minor Literature* (1975), in which they rejected the hermeneutic approach to Kafka's works (psychoanalytic, existentialist, Marxist), while instead seeking to liberate his writing from interpretive categories such as genre, style, traditions. More recently, the German-American literary critic Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has launched an ambitious anti-hermeneutic theoretical framework that stresses presence, tangibility, and atmosphere —in works like *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (2004), and *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* (2012).

Harold Bloom, Jonathan Culler—along with their Nietzschean fellow, the pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty—are scholars who attempt to investigate the limits and off-limits of interpretation in a post-1960s theoretical landscape. Implicit in their approaches to the text is the recognition that the issue of interpretation is a persistent one, a concrete problem that contemporary literary criticism has failed to solve adequately. In a contemporary global context, this problem has become even more pertinent. One of the more interesting recent attempts to move beyond the problem of interpretation is offered in Franco Moretti's "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000) in which he argues for a discipline of "distant reading"—at the expense of the traditional interpretive discipline of close reading; instead of reading single works, Moretti suggests, understanding world literature necessitates an entirely new approach which involves readings of a broad range of works in order to capture

8) See Derrida (1974).

macrostructures of meaning that cover the global field. Implicit here is a concern that relates to the fear of meaning loss—that we, situated in one particular literary context, fail to understand the meaning of a literary text stemming from a radically different literary context.[9] In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak thus outlines a series of concerns regarding the methodologies and objectives of Comparative Literature in the 21st Century. "Anyone who believes that literary education should still be sponsored by universities," Spivak writes, "must allow that one must learn to read. And to learn to read is to learn to dis-figure the undecidable figure into a responsible literality, again and again" (71-2). By "responsible literality," Spivak means returning to some of the "old skills" of close reading as a way of preserving the singularity of the literary while it crosses borders in the global world. Spivak thus proposes a New Comparative Literature that involves an ethics of reading whose ultimate goal is to preserve literary singularity and specificity, its foreignness, its power of the "uncanny" (74)—as opposed to a reading strategy that imposes sameness everywhere. There are numerous of dangers and pitfalls in such an approach, but it testifies to the persistence of the issue of interpretation. In the following I want to revisit one of the more notorious acts of interpretation—Shoshana Felman's essay "Turning the Screw of Interpretation" (1989)—because it constitutes a watershed in the history of modern literary interpretation; one that outlines both the potential, the necessity of literary interpretation, but also the dangers and hazards—the consequences of which still haunt the contemporary discipline of Comparative Literature, as Spivak and Moretti, each in their own way, emphasize.[10]

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9) See also Damrosch (2003) for reflections along these lines.

10) It should be mentioned here that I am not going to discuss the specificity of

2. Turning the Screw

Henry James' novella *The Turn of the Screw* created considerable controversy among critics and scholars when it was published in 1898. One critic called it "the most hopelessly evil story that we have ever read in any literature, ancient or modern." The critic continued wondering how any person could ever have concocted such a terrible story.[11] Some thirty years after the story's publication, Edmund Wilson wrote a famous critical essay in which he argued that the text was in fact a story about hysteria, not—as previously assumed—a ghost story.[12] More recently, Shoshana Felman has read the text through its critical readings arguing that James text creates a trap for the critic, especially the clever critic who attempts to see through the snares of the text.[13] Felman's purpose is to demonstrate a more general interpretive principle about literary texts, one which according to her is amply illustrated in Henry James' deceptive text.

The Turn of the Screw is a frame narrative. A man called Douglas reads a manuscript in front of a group of people; the manuscript recounts a first-person narrative of an unnamed governess who has left her papers to Douglas after her death. The governess' story is about an

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Henry James' novella, a project which would require a very different approach than the one I pursue in this article; rather, my aim is to close-read Felman's critical text as a way of repeating her own theoretical maneuvers regarding Henry James' text.

11) "The Most Hopelessly Evil Story," *The Independent* January 5, 1899 (Norton Critical Edition of James's The Turn of the Screw, eds. Esch & Warren, 156); also quoted in Felman 96-7.

12) See Wilson (1999).

13) See Felman (1989)

incident during her early career, at an estate called Bly. At Bly, the governess takes care of two children, Flora and Miles. After a while, strange things begin to occur; she sees people whom she later learns are in fact dead but who apparently still haunt the place. The kids start to act strange as well. The governess, gradually more and more convinced that the kids, and in particular the boy Miles, are possessed, feels compelled to save the children. However, it is apparently only the governess who can see the ghosts; when she asks the children, they deny everything. Eventually, in the final scene, the governess wrestles with Miles, forcing him to confess that he indeed can see the ghosts, which results in the boy's death. Here, the governess' first-person narrative ends, and the frame narrative is not taken up again.

3. Felman Turning the Screw of Interpretation

Shoshana Felman's deconstructive reading of Henry James' novella —"Turning the Screw of Interpretation," published in 1977—is a good example of what Jonathan Culler calls an "interesting" form of criticism, one that above all is characterized by excessive self- reflection; that is, a kind of criticism which reflects on itself and other, prior critical readings. In a similar way to Harold Bloom's interpretive perspective, Felman is sceptical of the distinction between "true" and "false" readings, adhering instead to Bloom's distinction between "strong" and "weak" readings. Her reading of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* is "strong" precisely in the sense that later readings cannot avoid it—they must go through Felman's reading in order to approach a reading of James' text.

The Turn of the Screw has produced a remarkable number of divergent

readings over the years—something I will come back to—which according to Felman is not only due to the fact that the text contains an overwhelming amount of ambiguous elements, but also because the story in a certain sense forces the reader to become part of the narrative dynamic. What is meant by this, as Felman writes, is that "there is no such thing as an innocent reader of this text" (97) because innocence itself is what is questioned in the story.[14] To Felman, the controversies revolving around the interpretation of the story uncannily repeat the actual plot dynamic of the story. As readers trying to understand and make sense of what is going on in the story, we re-enact or echo the text's story, the plot dynamic, and thus in a sense are forced to become part of the story. As such, through reading, Felman argues, "the text, so to speak, acts itself out" (101). The text is, in other words, a kind of trap that is designed to dupe readers—and especially sophisticated readers, readers who refuse to be duped by the text's ambiguity. One of the most sophisticated readers, as Felman is keen to stress, is of course the psychoanalytic reader who would never take a text's manifest level for granted, but is always trying to look for the text's latent, hidden level of significance. Felman writes that while *The Turn of the Screw* tests every reader, it is "a text particularly apt to catch the *psychoanalytic* reader, since the psychoanalytic reader is, *par excellence*, the reader who *would not be caught*, who would not be made a *dupe*" (186). Since James' text attempts to trick the reader, and in particular the psychoanalytic reader, Felman becomes interested in the relationship between text and theory, one that she tries to turn upside down by

14) The story has often been read as one in which innocent children are, literally, possessed by evil spirits, and, in a more figurative sense, discovering their sexuality.

asking—not what psychoanalysis has to say about literature, but rather the other way around—"what literature has to say about psychoanalysis" (102). This enables her to investigate psychoanalysis by asking the same questions it typically directs at the literary text: "What is it *made to miss*? What does it have as its functions to overlook? What, precisely, is its residue, the *remainder* it does not account for?" (117).

4. Wilson's Reading of James' Novella

According to Felman, *The Turn of the Screw* provides an example of a powerful comment on the interaction between text and reader. It is thus a fertile background against which Felman develops her reflection on what a psychoanalytic reading does to a literary text. The most well-known psychoanalytic reading of James' text is Edmund Wilson's interpretation from 1934,[15] which Felman discusses at length. Wilson's text voices the psychoanalytic reader's stance par excellence, according to Felman, one that fleshes out all the typical manoeuvres of psychoanalytic literary criticism: "The Freudian critic's job … is but to pull the answer out of its hiding place—not so much to give an answer *to* the text as to answer *for* the text: to be *answerable* for it, to answer *in its place*, to replace the question with an answer" (105).[16]

In contrast to earlier critics, Wilson attempts to interpret the story as

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15) See Wilson (1999).

16) Wilson's reading is, however, not the first psychoanalytic reading. Already in the early 1920s, Harold C. Goddard proposed a psychoanalytic reading of the story (Norton Critical Edition of James's *The Turn of the Screw,* eds. Esch & Warren, 161-8).

a kind of psychoanalytic case story. According to this line of interpretation, the governess is unconsciously in love with the uncle of the children, an inappropriate desire that she refuses to admit to herself. Thus, she projects her desire onto her surroundings—which in turn becomes hallucinatory, a world inhabited by ghosts. As the title of Wilson's essay suggests—"The Ambiguity of Henry James"—*The Turn of the Screw* contains an ambiguity that is never quite resolved within the text itself; only in Wilson's psychoanalytic reading.

Edmund Wilson did not believe that James was actually aware of this other reading—that James had in fact written a story about madness, instead of a ghost story. James, according to Wilson, fully intended to write a ghost story, albeit ended up writing one in which other ghosts —the hysterical ghost of the governess—eventually took over. Wilson's reading of James' text was, however, itself enough to invoke horror among many of his contemporaries. It constitutes a "strong" reading, in Harold Bloom's sense, because subsequent readers cannot avoid Wilson's reading before coming to an understanding of James' text. After the publication of Wilson's article, critics of James' text were generally divided into two main groups—the psychoanalytic camp and the metaphysical-religious-moral camp. The latter read James' novella as a narrative about a brave woman's attempt to save innocent children threatened by some kind of evil force. These critics believed that Wilson's psychoanalytic reading was vulgar, reductive, and exaggerated—indeed, "hysterical."

Armed with Freud's psychoanalytic text, Wilson was convinced that he had discovered the "trap" within the text, which he, being a sophisticated psychoanalytic critic, was the only one to have avoided. But if Wilson confronted James' novel with a text that he believed to be superior or at least supplementary—namely the psychoanalysis of

Freud—Felman makes the intriguing argument that this in fact merely proves that Wilson indeed has been outwitted by James' novel. Felman emphasizes the somewhat obvious point that while both camps—the psychoanalytic and the metaphysical-religious-moral camps—fiercely dispute what James' text means and says, no one seems to question the textual authority of Freud's corpus; it appears, strangely, clear and unambiguous. This is of course problematic for an astute deconstructive critic like Felman; according to her, Freud is just as ambiguous as James —in both instances we can only reach the text through a process of interpretation. Indeed, Felman claims that it makes no sense to talk about a "correct" or "false" Freudian reading, since we "do not yet even know what a Freudian reading really is" (117). The Freudian reading, according to Felman, can be both true *and* false at the same time.

5. Textual Trap

But what does this textual trap in James' text more specifically consist of? The trap, Felman explains, is that it seems to force the reader to choose between either the governess' story, whereby one reacts like the naïve Mrs. Grose—or one may dismiss her story, in which case one reacts like the suspicious governess herself. As the sophisticated psychoanalytic reader, Wilson of course chooses the last option, whereby he "point for point (192), as Felman emphasizes, repeats the symptoms of the governess, albeit unconsciously. In James' novel, the governess is indeed the suspicious person, who constantly attempts to interpret something that lies deeper than the surface allows her to see. Wilson's way of treating the text reminds Felman of the doctor's answer to the ill

patient: he gives a diagnosis hoping that this will silence the ambiguity of the text. Much psychoanalytic criticism suffers from the belief that it must "cure" the text. In so doing, however, the psychoanalytic is not only attempting to "explain" the text, but also to "master" it:

> In seeking to 'explain' and *master* literature, in refusing, that is, to become a *dupe* of literature, in killing within literature that which makes it literature … the psychoanalytic reading, ironically enough, turns out to be a reading … which represses, paradoxically, the unconscious which it purports to be 'explaining'. (193)

Felman subsequently strives to demonstrate how *The Turn of the Screw* constructs a remarkable chain of narrators and listeners, echoing one another—a chain which anticipates later readings, by Wilson and others, who in turn merely repeat a dynamic we already find in the "original" text itself.

While Wilson believes that he is analyzing James' text—pulling out its true meaning, so to speak—he is according to Felman merely a victim of the strange mechanism of transference that the text produces. Wilson, in other words, repeats the same reading already performed by the governess. As the governess forces Miles to "confess"—i.e. that he can see Peter Quint—Wilson in a sense forces the text to "confess" that it really is a madness story, and not a ghost story. What Wilson apparently fails to notice, Felman argues, is that the novel is also a detective story. James' text tells the story of the governess' zealous attempt to solve the mystery surrounding her; and like other detective stories, the explanation is "revealed" at the end of the story. The paradox of James' text is, however, that the "crime" in fact also occurs at the

end—and that the "criminal" is identical with the "detective"; when the governess is confronted with what can be seen as "the final solution" —the final resolution of her mystery—she manages to force out a confession of Miles, his pronunciation of the name "Peter Quint," while in fact suffocating him.

The detective-criminal-constellation reminds Felman of King Oedipus in the sense that Oedipus is the very criminal he is looking for, the one who commits the crime that Oedipus is investigating—like the governess. According to Felman, Oedipus constitutes the prototype of a "good reader." In the act of interpretation, the good reader "creates" his or her own crime, as Felman argues: "At its final, climactic point, the attempt at *grasping* meaning and at *closing* the reading process with a *definitive* interpretation in effect discovers—and comprehends—only death" (174-5). As a good reader, the governess plays the role of both detective and criminal, which in Felman's view is an ironic comment on readers of James' text; readers of *The Turn of the Screw* are in a sense both criminals and detectives at one and the same time. To the extent that readers attempt to find a "deeper" meaning in the text, by forcing upon the text the meaning of another text (e.g. Freud's psychoanalysis), they become perpetrators of an "act of violence" (191) on the text—like the governess' suffocation of the child. This is what Wilson's reading according to Felman does; when Wilson describes the governess as mad, he is essentially invalidating her perspective, cancelling out her interpretation (like the governess invalidating all other interpretations than her own). This is a typical, perhaps even normal, interpretive practice—what makes the interpretation of a literary text "function as a *whole*, as a system at once *integrated* and *coherent*" (195). Wilson's interpretive perspective believes that it can see everything —

which, according to Felman, "in reality [is] to *exclude*; and to exclude, specifically, the unconscious" (194). But the literary unconscious—the endless flow of literary semiosis—comes back to haunt Wilson's text, Felman argues.

6. Double-Reading

Felman's critical essay "Turning the Screw of Interpretation" outlines an attempt to demonstrate how literature, or rather the endless flow of literary semiosis, on a rhetorical-formal level always anticipates the gestures and dynamics of literary criticism—and in that sense deconstructs a critical attempt to close off the signifying process, i.e. precisely that which is in need of interpretation. Although Felman's main example is Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, the points she makes are directed at literature more generally. In Felman's view, literature can never be reduced to a homogenous text possessing a uniform, stable and fixed meaning; literature is "essentially impermeable to analysis and to interpretation" (207). The impossibility of literature consists in interpreting and explaining what its ambiguity signifies. Insofar as one attempts to do this, like Wilson, and readers similar to him, we fall into literature's trap of repeating its rhetorical-formal dynamic. In reading James' story, Felman thus cannot claim to close off the long debate on James' text with a final "master reading." Rather, Felman's aim is to show how other readers—prior readers—all tend to fall into the textual trap. Essentially, Felman understands fiction as always-already being meta-fictional—fiction containing a dynamic that essentially enacts its own reading, and only allows to be read in this way. One could object here that

while this may apply to complex literary styles like James' writing, it is perhaps more questionable whether one could say something similar about less complex literary styles. Felman seems to indicate that all ambiguous, self-conscious texts are "strong" readings, in Harold Bloom's sense.

Reading is to Felman a kind of archaeological excavation that attempts to trace all the textual layers existing between the reader and the text; between the literary text, its readings, and Felman's own reading. It is in fact impossible to distinguish clearly between the literary text and its readings, Felman argues, because we only read through the text's readings. We can never approach the text directly, the text has always-already read itself before we encounter it; thus, we can only approach the text through what Felman calls the text's "reading-effects" (102). Thus, Felman cannot explain "what" the text means, but only "how" the text does what it does. She pursues a reading of James' text "which will at the same time be articulated with a reading of its readings." This schizophrenic reading, Felman argues further, asks these questions: "What is the nature of a reading-effect as such? And by extension: what is a reading?" (102).

It is in this sense that Felman—in her reading of James' text—necessarily must attempt to avoid reducing the ambiguity of the text; in fact she must attempt to situate her own reading in the midst of the text's ambiguity, one that is played out in the literary text itself, and between the text's different readings. Felman employs a strategy that she calls "double-reading"—one reading that falls into the trap (e.g. Wilson's reading), and one reading that observes how the first reading works. The reading which falls into the trap is ambiguous in the sense that it consists of opposing and mutually exclusive (sub-) readings—

the psychoanalytic reading and the metaphysical-religious-moral reading; these two canonical readings of James' text are both "true" to the extent that such a notion still makes sense, yet they also exclude each other —that is, they cannot both be true at one and the same time. Felman's point is that these two canonical readings of the texts have already read the text *as it wants to be read*—that is to say, walked straight into the text's trap of ambiguity; the two readings being equally "true," yet mutually exclusive. Simultaneously, the two canonical readings have laid James' text bare, split it open, so that Felman—without falling into the textual trap herself—can discover or detect the deceptive dynamic in it.

7. Critique of Felman's Double-Reading

At the same time, one might argue that Felman's interpretive approach necessarily avoids some of the central thematic questions which the psychoanalytic and metaphysical-religious-moral readings focus on. The latter readings attempt to clarify the thematic questions that the text itself seems to ask its readers. Some critical interpretations suggest that Mrs. Grose is in fact the manipulating person behind it all,[17] or that Douglas is actually the boy Miles.[18] These fanciful interpretations can easily be dismissed as—quite simply—too speculative, and with too little textual evidence. But the critical interpretations that attempt to answer the questions that James' text *itself* seems to leave its readers —e.g. whether the ghosts are real or perhaps merely a figment of the

17) See Eric Solomon (1964) and C. Knight Aldrich (1967).

18) See Louis D. Rubin, Jr. (1963-64).

governess' lively imagination—are harder to dismiss. Yet, Felman believes that since the psychoanalytic and metaphysical- religious-moral readings have already answered these questions as plausibly as possible (and thus walked straight into the textual trap), her own reading can avoid this. This is, of course, indeed her point—but the question remains whether an interpretation that seeks to avoid clarification on these issues may be called interpretation at all.

Eschewing the larger thematic questions, or at least avoiding answering directly, Felman's interpretive perspective seeks out a wealth of details and minor aspects in James text that are often overlooked, taken for granted. She endows these often with new and surprising significance —e.g. letters, masts, keys, the frame narrative device, Flora's boat, and the gesture of grasping. One could here argue that some of these elements are hardly more mysterious or significant than they would have been in any other ghost story of that time. The ghost story as a genre creates certain expectations of desolate places, mysterious manuscripts, fireplace, keys, and so on; to give them further significance is in some sense to commit an act of interpretive violence—to impose the significance of that of another text. By another text I refer to the theoretical discourse that informs Felman's interpretive endeavours, in particular Jacques Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis.[19] In the texts of Derrida and Lacan, for example, the screw or phallic mast "constitutes for the governess a *key to meaning*, a *master-signifier*: the very key to what the Other knows" (171), as Felman argues. Here, one could object that this may very well be the

19) One of Felman's sources of inspiration is the famous debate between Lacan and Derrida regarding Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter." See Muller (1988).

case insofar as we see James' text through the texts of Lacan and Derrida; but whether this is the case in terms of James' text alone is another question. In a further sense, one could argue that Felman's reading is an elaborate and wide-ranging Lacanian-Derridean restoration of the vulgar-Freudian reading, rather than the meta-critique of literary interpretation that she purports her reading to be. Moreover, the two readings of James' text—the psychoanalytic and the metaphysical- religious-moral readings —are perhaps hardly as homogeneous as they appear in Felman's text. James' text is one of the most thoroughly analyzed and discussed texts in the English language, and to homogenize these readings in the way Felman does can also be seen as an act of interpretive violence. It is, of course, clear, albeit somewhat ironic, that Felman necessarily must homogenize the many divergent readings of James' text into two mutually exclusive and opposed readings—in order to make the point that the existing criticism fall into a textual trap by reducing the ambiguity of the text's literary ambiguity; a more heterogeneous body of readings would undermine the deconstructive strategy that Felman employs, one that precisely seeks to dismantle binary oppositions. One could thus say that Felman actually repeats (unwillingly and unconsciously), not (only) the text's figures, but (also) the figures of criticism.

Insofar as Felman fails to respond to some of the larger thematic questions that James' text asks its readers—and which both the psychoanalytic and non-psychoanalytic readers try to answer—one could argue that these come back to haunt her own text; as elements without a clear meaning that continue to trouble us. Without "exorcising" these elements —by labelling them with a meaning—they roam as unsettled ghostly figures that throw suspicion over the validity and worth of all of Felman's interpretive efforts. The over-suspiciousness of everything

—which characterizes the psychoanalytic reader, but perhaps even more a psychoanalytic- deconstructive reader like Felman—potentially turns on its head and simply becomes ridiculous, hysterical. The opposite of hysteria is common sense, and in fact many of the interpretations that emerge from Felman's text seem to balance along the border that divides hysteria from common sense. To Felman, elements that other readers would overlook or see as integral to the genre paradigm of the ghost story—e.g. desolate places, mysterious manuscripts, fireplace, and keys—*demand* interpretation; nothing is innocent in her interpretive perspective —and it is this attitude that makes it impossible to refer to a discourse of common sense, a more sceptical approach according to which her powerful interpretations would appear hysterical, exaggerated.

8. Conclusion

Interpretive hysteria seems to be the danger that Felman exposes herself to in her attempt to yet again turn the screw of interpreting James' deceptive text. Felman wants to preserve the ambiguity of literature, and she does that by archeologically exploring the readings of literature, its reading-effects. She wants to prevent the fixation of the movement of signifiers into one particular signification. She accuses Wilson of attempting to fixate the text's meaning, like the governess: he attempts to fixate meaning (via Freud's text) into one specific representation—for example Flora trying to penetrate a piece of wood with a stick. Felman, on the other hand, wants to dismantle this vulgar- Freudian reading by employing a Lacanian-Derridean strategy to reopen the flow of significance. To Felman, it is only possible to "master" significance as loss—the death

of Miles, which also constitutes the point at which the text ends, oddly unresolved, and without returning to the frame narrative that began James' text. It is an ending which according to Felman is precisely a signification of meaning-as-loss.

In turning the screw of interpretation yet another time, Felman wants to stress what she sees as a fundamental paradox in psychoanalytic literary criticism—that it attempts to interpret literature, but also, in the very same gesture, falls into the trap of literature: "in *seducing* the psychoanalyst … literature … only lures psychoanalysis into its necessary self-subversion" (196). When psychoanalytic literary criticism attempts to reduce the ambiguity of literature in order to avoid being tricked, Felman argues, "psychoanalysis, in reality, is *doubly duped*: unaware of its own inescapable participation *in* literature and *in* the errors and the traps of rhetoric, it is blind to the fact that it itself exemplifies no less than the *blind spot* of rhetoricity" (199-200). Here we are at the final point that Felman's reading makes—that psychoanalytic literary criticism is at its core just as mystifying and ambiguous, haunted by ghosts, as the literary text itself. This is of course paradoxical since psychoanalytic literary criticism defines itself as an attempt to demystify literature. In *The Trial*, Franz Kafka writes that literature "turns lying into a universal principle" (124). One could extend this thought by suggesting that literature is deceitful, and that it universalizes this act of deceit precisely by seducing us to continue its deceitful game, to become co-authors of the text through our readings, our attempts to master its meaning, to sustain its illusion—all of which, when we have indeed been seduced, turn out to be re-enactments of the initial deceit that occurs in the literary text itself. Thus, the act of reading our readings reveals how we ourselves inevitably participate in the text's production of

ambiguity, the ghosts that haunt the text and its readers.

As James' text shows in particular, and as Felman's reading of the readings of James' text shows more generally, literature illustrates that there is no innocent place from which one can capture its meaning, at least not without committing an act of violence. There is, in other words, a blind spot that we in our interpretive eagerness are keen to occupy in order to demystify. To occupy a blind spot, Felman argues, "is not only to be blind, but in particular, to be blind to one's own blindness; it is to be unaware of the fact that one occupies a spot *within* the very blindness one seeks to demystify" (199). Felman concedes that it is impossible to avoid the text's trap entirely—by which she thus includes herself, at least to some extent—because "the very act of trying to escape the trap is the proof that one is caught in it" (199). However, by exploring other, prior readings of the text—which already have been outwitted by *The Turn of the Screw*—Felman creates the basis for her own reading, and more specifically her own reading's attempt to escape mastering the meaning of, in the engagement with, James' text. It is in this sense that Felman seeks to establish a theoretical perspective that detects the ambiguity inherent in all literary texts, and whose potential reversibility is "the very value—but equally the risk … its insightfulness but equally its blindness" (197). The risk, as I pointed out before, is interpretive hysteria; a world in which there are meanings everywhere—and nowhere.

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유령적 반복: 해석상의 폭력과 히스테리 사이

일리 박 소렌슨

본고에서는 문학적 해석에 대해 논의하나, 특히 과도할 정도로 "강력" 하거나 "흥미로운" 해석에 초점을 맞춘다. 20세기와 21세기에 걸쳐 나타난 방대한 문학이론의 출현은, 역으로 문학텍스트의 중요성을 총망라할 수 있는 권위적 이론의 부재를 시사한다. 각각의 이론은 강점과 약점을 갖고 있다고 볼 수 있으며, 문학이론은 일정부분 자기비판과 "최종"적 해석에 대한 권한 포기에 영향력을 미치기도 한다. 이런 점이 어떤 면에서는 문학연구가 계속되는 이유이며, 문학 텍스트는 암시와 선행적 읽기에 의해 항상 새롭게 해석할 수 있는 여지를 남겨둔다. 본 논문에서는 조나단 컬러(Jonathan Culler)와 헤롤드 볼롬(Harold Bloom)과 같은 여러 학자들에 대해 논의하지만, 헨리 제임스의 유령 소설인 『나사의 회전』에 대한 슈산나 펠만(Shoshana Felman)의 비평적 논의를 중점적으로 다룬다. 펠만은 제임스 작품에 대해 선행적으로 이뤄진 다양한 해석을 연구하면서, 문학 텍스트가 독자를 고착화된 의미로 현혹하는 텍스트적 올가미를 생성한다고 주장한다. 제임스 작품 속의 소년, 마일즈의 죽음처럼 의미는 결국 상실로 고착되는데, 펠만은 이런 올가미를 피하기 위해 자신의 문학이론을 구축한다. 하지만, 의미가 도처에 존재하면서도 동시에 부재하는 『나사의 회전』 속에 등장하는 가정교사의 잠재적 운명처럼, 필자는 펠만의 시도가 해석적 히스테리라는 위험성을 내포하고 있다고 본다.

주제어: 헨리 제임스, 나사의 회전, 에드먼드 윌슨, 쇼사나 펠만, 정신분석, 해석, 히스테리

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