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A Study of Psychological Realism in the Nightcomers (1971)

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Abstract

This article studies The Nightcomers (1971) from the perspective of psychological realism and analyzes this cinematic adaptation of "The Turn of the Screw" via semiotics, images and symbols deployed in the light of psychological realism. Henry James's novella The Turn of the Screw has variously been adapted into several films. Even though The Nightcomers (1971) was described as a particularly listless and greedy parody of James's novella on its American premiere in 1972, it can still be justified when its context of production has also been taken into consideration. As a prequel to The Turn of the Screw, Michael Winner's The Nightcomers (1971) stepped in as a bold move away from merely ambiguous. Due to the popularity of the horror genre at the time of this adaptation's production and the possibilities the text presented for the exploration of sexual transgression, the post-censorship seventies saw a revival of interest in the novella. Due to the deployment of extra elements in this horror remake, it does appear to be well suited to be studied comparatively from the perspective of psychological realism.

Keywords: *Psychological Realism; The Nightcomers; Adaptation; The Turn of the Screw*

1. Introduction

Even though Martha Banta has identified only eight James's stories "in which apparitions appear or are thought to appear", along with Bierce, the key American writer of horror-themed literature in the late nineteenth century was Henry James. Among them is *The Ghostly Rental* (1876), in which a female character impersonates a ghost, thus providing yet another important example of the explained supernatural in American literature (Rhodes 2018, p.30).

James's most famous work in the area is his novella *The Turn of the Screw*, published in1898 in the book *The Two Magics*. In 1903, *The Independent* praised it as being "perhaps the most awful ghost story ever written in America," proof that the "power of writing ghost stories was not confined to the romanticists; that the realist, by his arduous training in portraying facts as they are, had a certain advantage when he advanced into the spiritual world" (31).

Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* presents the adapter with endless possibilities; it is a slippery, ambiguous text that lends itself to a wide range of interpretations. However, unlike realist novels

of the nineteenth century, a literal translation of its content presents the most problematic option. Are the ghosts real or imaginary? Is the governess the bastion of moral virtue or a psychologically disturbed hysteric? Are the children innocents or demons? James presents the conundrum without the solution, and in so doing leaves his readers and would-be adapters free to interpret his enigmatic tale as they see fit. Its one common and enduring feature is its capacity to disturb and disrupt, whether in a Victorian or a contemporary cultural context, and it is this thread that continues to unravel as the novella is reworked, re-imagined and revised.

One of the principle attractions of this adaptation and its screenwriter Michael Hastings as Laurence Raw states in *Adapting Henry James to the Screen Gender, Fiction, and Film* lies in its portrayal of a dysfunctional family Despite *The Nightcomers'* being unexpectedly explicit and even with Marlon Brando's presence as Quint, it challenges the audiences' belief in the credibility of the plot. He might speak with an Irish accent, but he eschews any depth of characterization in favor of conforming to his screen persona of a social misfit, at once repellent yet brutally attractive (Raw 2006, p. 67).

Due to the popularity of the horror genre at the time of this adaptation's production and the possibilities the text presented for the exploration of sexual transgression, the post-censorship seventies saw a revival of interest in the novella. Winner's adaptation was released shortly after the uber-violent *Straw Dogs* (1971); it lacks the menace and the psychological edge of a film like *Straw Dogs* and remains a film that functions for many as pure voyeurism even though it reflects a similar seventies desire to push cinematic boundaries in this post-censorship era. This tendency, in the case of the horror genre, is as Andrew Patrick Nelson asserts in "Traumatic Childhood Now Included: Todorov's Fantastic and the Uncanny Slasher Remake**"** fed "not only by a propensity for remakes but also a preponderance of sequels and, more generally, sets of expectations based on familiarity with the genre and its conventions" (Nelson 2010, p.104). All genres have conventions, certainly, but there is a fair amount of truth to the old cliché that there is always an audience for horror—the notion that there exists a particular audience that frequents horror movies on a consistent basis. None of this is particularly groundbreaking, of course, and so a more interesting question is how to productively examine and articulate the similarities and differences between remakes and originals while maintaining a degree of generic specificity (ibid). Due to the deployment of extra elements in this horror remake, it does appear to be well suited to be studied comparatively from the perspective of Tzvetan Todorov' s "seminal 1970 study The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre".

2. Objective and Scope of the Study

Since literature and cinema belong to two different forms of art, this comparative study is interdisciplinary. It is through interdisciplinary studies that the information and theories of various branches of art and science are interweaved. This essay, as its aim, endeavors through interdisciplinary approach to study this cinematic adaptation in the light of psychological realism and goes through the devices comprising it. Second, since demonstrating the focal character's psyche is of prime significance for attaining insight into the psychological process she goes through, the audio-visual art deployed presenting gestures; facial expressions and a symbolically suggestive mise-en-sce-ne are analyzed.

3. Significance of the Study

What differentiates between this study and those related to other cinematic adaptations based on "The Turn of the Screw" is that none of them has delved this closely into things occurring before the events of the original story as this prequel do; the film explores the relationship between Peter Quint and Miss Jessel at a time they were still among the living, together with their influence upon Flora and Miles during their residence at Bly. As a prequel, Whereas both the novella and *The Innocents* describe the relationship between the valet and his lover in imprecise and euphemistic terms, *The Nightcomers* shows it to be of a what as Tydal asserts in "Bringing Out Henry James's Little Monsters: Two Film Approaches

to *The Turn of the Screw*," "sado- masochistic nature—explicitly so. This is not to imply, however, that the film is a sexploitation affair; rather, it is somewhat more complex than what it initially seems since it actually engages with both James's novella and *The Innocents* in intriguing ways" (Tydale 2015, p. 151) and consequently makes it appropriate enough for another study of the deployment of psychological realism.

4. Review of Literature

"The Turn of the Screw" has interested the reading public since its publication. Various adapters have also displayed their interest in adapting this novella to the screen. From an adapter's perspective, as Griggs asserts " it is the narration (or the 'how' of storytelling) rather than the narrative (or the story events) that makes this such an intriguing and complex piece of writing" (_Griggs 2016: 143). The ambiguities of James' prose can be read in several ways, it is the psychological unravelling of the governess that has won the majority's appeal for long hence its fundamental Jamesian form.

From among works written by Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw" is his most adapted story: since the late fifties, ten film and television adaptations produced together with a number of films appropriating it in part. It has even been considered by some as 'unfilmable'. As Director, Jacques Rivette, observes, his work is "perhaps unfilmable because his stories can be translated to screen diagonally…but never literally" (Rivette qtd in Mitchell 282).

"The Turn of the Screw" has continuously attracted the attention of filmmakers who have managed to deal with the difficulties of representing ghosts. "In their translating the complexities of the tale into a ghost narrative that fits the horror genre template", as Griggs observes, some screen adapters take the literal path,. Others, on the other hand, explore the psychological complexities embedded in James's prose, though most retain its period detail (Griggs 2016: 143).

Due to its ambiguous nature, "Turn of the Screw" can provide various interpretations. Despite all these qualities, the governess's being subjected to several unknown occurrences under unprecedented circumstances magnifies her role and how she copes with it as an independent woman enacting on her own. Apparently, James has not provided any clear-cut answers for any of these queries, but has instead presented ample opportunity of treatment for both the readers and the adapters. Its "one common and enduring feature" according to Griggs, "is its capacity to disturb and disrupt, whether in a Victorian or a contemporary cultural context, and it is this thread that continues to unravel as the novella is reworked, re-imagined and revised" (Yvonne Griggs 2016: 146).

Although a number of cinematic adaptations of this story stay as fidel as possible to the main tale, there are others that have transformed the setting, the action and even the gender of the protagonist. "Adaptation is" as Hutcheon observes, "a survival strategy, in this case ensuring that an author's stories, characters, and name do not die out and are selected as fit to speak to another generation. Adaptation of a literary work should generally be welcomed, indeed sought, by its admirers as a means to maintain the work's vitality and cultural importance" (Hutcheon 2014: 31–2, 176–77). The cinematic adaptation based on "The Turn of the Screw" analyzed in this study from psychological realism perspective is *Presence of Mind*, a Spanish film directed by Alloy in 1999.

5. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Comparative literature itself does not have a single definition and does not rely on a specific theory, approach and method. Basically, the vitality and the secret of the survival of comparative literature among the multitude of theories and criticism approaches and literary research methods, especially in the contemporary era, is due to its being dynamic and flexible (Aushiravani 2012, p.3). This study is based on two theoretical bases: Remak's theory about interdisciplinary studies and Hutcheon's theory of adaptation. According to Remak's "Comparative Literature: Its Definition and

Function", comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts [in this case a cinematic adaptation], on the other (Remak 1961, p.1-57).

As Linda Hutcheon argues in *A Theory of Adaptation*, "Neither the product nor the process of adaptation exists in a vacuum: they all have a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture" (Hutcheon 2006, p. xvi). Since adaptations occur in different places with their own customs and cultures, the adapted and the original works may vary significantly. Holland's film adaptation of Henry James's *Washington Square* goes through the process of "Repossessing and ... creation to the adaptation's context of reception" (xvi). This is why Holland's cinematic adaptation of *Washington Square* is different from James's text, for the adapted work in its being contextualized, has been "reinterpreted" and then "recreated" (8) in order to delineate her own conception of the focal character's psychological process of self-development.

6. Cinematic Presentation

Michael Winner's *The Nightcomers* (1971) is one of those films that as Tydal states in "Two Approaches *to The Turn of the Screw"* may strike the viewer as more interesting than necessarily enjoyable. As a prequel, occurring before the events of the original story, the film explores the relationship between Peter Quint and Miss Jessel at a time they were still among the living, together with their influence upon Flora and Miles during their residence at Bly.

Whereas both the novella and *The Innocents* describe the relationship between the valet and his lover in imprecise and euphemistic terms, *The Nightcomers* shows it to be of a what as Tydal asserts in "Bringing Out Henry James's Little Monsters: Two Film Approaches to *The Turn of the Screw*," "sado-masochistic nature—explicitly so. This is not to imply, however, that the film is a sexploitation affair; rather, it is somewhat more complex than what it initially seems since it actually engages with both James's novella and *The Innocents* in intriguing ways" (Tydale 2015, p. 151).

Despite their being apparently disparate, Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961) and Michael Winner's *The Nightcomers* (1971) both act as insightful manifestation of James's novella and in their own method contribute to the critical discourse of the text. Whether the terrors of the original text lie in supernatural forces or in the imagination of the governess witnessing and narrating them has for long been under discussion. *The Nightcomers* gives credence to the children's (Christopher Ellis and Verna Harvey) contributions to the governess's (Anna Palk) terror, while simultaneously examining in greater depth the lives of Peter Quint (Marlon Brando) and Miss Jessel (Stephanie Beacham), who become the story's ghosts (156). *The Innocents*, on the other hand, supports both readings; by highlighting the evil of the children (Martin Stephens and Pamela Franklin), the governess (Deborah Kerr) watching over, new facets of insight have also been provided.

Techniques of ambiguity and of the manner in which each adaptation seems to treat the subject have by no means been overlooked in either case. Obviously, the animal motif deployed in Winner and Hasting's *The Nightcomers* has been picked up from *The Innocents* and attempts have been made to take it a step further through inserting disturbing images of animals and animal torture to the film. Whereas in Clayton's film, the children's possible malevolence is introduced as before the appearance of the ghosts and thus before questioning governess's sanity, the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, starts to observe that the children are acting strangely only after she has witnessed the ghosts.

What *The Nightcomers* has done goes far beyond introducing shockingly disturbing images of torture and more; in the relationship between narrative chronology and dramatic effect, as Fredrik Tydale observes, it take us back to the fin- de-siècle context of James's original novella, where the Victorian idealization of the child was being increasingly challenged by emerging ideas in evolutionary anthropology about childhood as the savage state in human development. Scientifically, the idea found

support in Ernst Haeckel's theory of recapitulation, which stated that, in the course of evolution, "the individual organism goes through the same stages as does the species." (qtd. in Tydale 2015, p. 151). By the end of the century, the child- savage analogy had turned into a popular commonplace. It was, for instance, invoked by William Dean Howells, that other great American novelist of James's generation, who in 1890 wrote: The Young People may have heard it said that a savage is a grown- up child, but it seems to me even more true that a child is a savage. Like the savage, he dwells on an earth round which the whole solar system revolves, and he is himself the center of all life on the earth. It has no meaning but as it relates to him; it is for his pleasure, his use; it is for his pain and his abuse. Howells' topic is childhood memories, and so the tone is predominantly jocular and nostalgic. But the mention of pain and abuse here could be seen to Part III. The Adoption Papers (Adaptations) stick out and disrupt the mood, suggesting that what had become a popular commonplace still contained something disturbing underneath. Credit must thus be given where credit is due: rather than bastardizing the original novella, *The Nightcomers* seems to accurately dramatize a particular anxiety about childhood that was very much present in Henry James's own time. In fact, there is a disturbing element in the film that suggests a clear familiarity with the child- savage analogy (Tyndale 2015, pp. 155-6).

Even though Quint's dominance over the children is stressed in the film's opening sequences, apparently from both Winner's and Hastings's view, the children's uncle is also responsible for the corruption befalling them, for he is the one delegating responsibility to Quint, advising him that he might have to look after the governess as well as the children. The initial step of Quint's corrupting influence upon the children can well be noticed in the scene he is placing a cigarette in the mouth of the children's pet toad, informing them as he does so that it loves to smoke. The toad eventually bursts into pieces. The children who have seen the scene from Quint's perspective, decide about it likewise:

Miles: You see, the toad likes it. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 10: 30-31)

Quint say that Flora. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 10:32-4)

That it has to have it all (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 10:34-7)

Flora: Horrible! Not really. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 10:37-8)

Miles: It loves the smoke so much. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 10: 10:38-40)

That it kills itself for that. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 10:40-2)

Flora: I don't understand. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 10:42-4)

Miles: But that's the truth. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 10:45-6)

Learning about killing oneself for liking/loving something/somebody initiates in this conversation and even before that when Quint performs it in their presence. It develops like a tree in the story where they feel no need to refer to "Quint says so" (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 09:11) "He's always right" (*The Nightcomers* 1971,: 9:12).

6.1. Dominance over Children

As Michael Winner has observed in a 1978 interview, the inspiration for *The Nightcomers* came from "two or three strong hints" in James's novella "that Quint was responsible for the children's turn of mind." Such hints include Mrs. Grose's recollection that "Quint was much too free . . .With everyone!" ; the governess's observation that Quint and the boy have been perpetually together"; and her later statement that the ghosts wanted to possess the children "For the love of all the evil that, in those dreadful days [when they were alive], the pair put into them" (Raw 2006, p.70). *The Nightcomers* depicts this evil in two forms—in the children's fondness for the deadly games and in an unhealthy obsession with sex

(shared by all the principal characters). At one point, Miss. Jessel and Mrs. Grose have to dash to the top of the tower to prevent Miles from Throwing Flora over the edge. But Flora is far from happy at being rescued; she screams at Mrs. Grose that the game she was playing had to end with her death and that the housekeeper had ruined it. The children interpret Quint's statement, to love is to die, quite literally. Having seen how attracted Quint and Miss. Jessel are to one another, they believe it is their responsibility to kill them. In one scene, they are shown standing on either side of the frame, with two chamber pots in front of them. They take the corn dolls of Quint and Miss. Jessel (which Quint has made for them) and set them alight, watching them turn to ashes in the chamber pots. This foreshadows Quint's death scene as Miles shoots him twice with a bow and arrow. As he pushes the corpse into the lake, Miles observes that Miss. Jessel is waiting for Quint (the governess having already drowned when her boat sank).

Quint's dominance over children trespasses his manoeuveing over his treatment of some animals claiming to be treating as they themselves really like it, for in the scenes regarding her quite very intimate relationships with Miss. Jessel , he goes as far as torturing her even though he realizes that Miles is there watching them through the keyhole of the bedroom door. He ties her hands and feet to the bed and subsequently tosses her up like a chicken with a rope around her neck and beats her. Quint indulges himself sexually, with Miss. Jessel's willing participation and no one to restrain him at Bly. With orchestral music as an accompaniment, the scene is presented in a series of dissolves and Miles imitates what he sees in a series of his own little sequences with Flora. As he puts a rope around her neck, she squeals with pain and he replies that the ritual should be as painful as possible as Quint has said this in the only way of discovering the truth behind it:

Miles: There, how does that feel? (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:16-7)

Flora: Absolutely dreadful! (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:17-9)

Miles: Why? (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:20)

Flora: I can't move. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:21)

Miles: Well, that's the idea of it. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:22-4)

Flora: It is? (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:25)

Flora: It is just possible? (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:26-7)

Miles: That we've been doing it all the wrong way. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:27-9)

Flora: MILES! It huts! (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:30-1)

Miles: I think it's meant to. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:32-4)

Flora: Oh. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:35)

Miles: I think we're going to have to start all over again. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:38-41)

Flora: Miles! (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:43)

Miles: No use shouting, Flora. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:43-5)

Miles: It's got to be as absolutely painful as possible. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:45-7)

Flora: Ow! (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:48)

Miles: Quint says if it hurts, it is the truth. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:48-50)

6.2. The Reversal of Dominance: Monstrous Children Taking Rule

Even though the identification of the children with the monstrous has also been supported in the original story by James, both cinematic adaptations, have taken up the idea even further and in their own turn played it out for shock. Beside being adaptations, both *The Innocents* 1961 and *The Nightcomers* 1971 act as forms of interpretation open to various critical debates. Quint's child-like quality embedded within him has not been overlooked in his portrayal in *The Nightcomers* as the prominent figure holding his own domineering attitudes, Yet soft-spoken to the children, for it does pave the way for him on his maintaining a strong tie with them. Moreover, his playing hide- and-seek with Miles and Flora and also helping them in flying a kite, bring them closer to each other to the extent that he keeps entertaining them with stories some of which have been taken from his own life story. If we, as Tyndale observes, view *The Nightcomers* in the context of the fictional world into which it inserts itself, then Quint simply appears to be misunderstood, as his supposed depravity only seems based on his unconventional yet by all accounts consensual relationship with Miss Jessel (Tyndale 2015, p.152) .

When Quint tortures a toad and tries to convince the children that it is something liked by the toad itself, his upcoming sadistic treatment of Miss. Jessel is in a way foreshadowed. In fact, the time we see Quint's sadist tendencies expressed outside his affair with Miss Jessel bespeaks more of the child-like aspect of his mentality when confronted with the children which is much unlike his semi-brutal treatment of the governess when they are in their intimacy. Contrary to expectation, then, the horror of *The Nightcomers* does not reside with Quint; rather, as the narrative unfolds, it comes to be placed with the children. This idea is built up slowly, so that the viewer is almost ambushed by its realization at the end. At its core, the reversal of expectations hinges on a subtle but crucial difference from both James's story and Clayton's adaptation. In *The Turn of the Screw,* Quint and Miss Jessel are described as being careless and irresponsible in their relations. "Quint was much too free," Mrs. Grose comments at one point; later, she adds that he and Miss Jessel "were both infamous." (James 1889, p.14) In *The Innocents,* it is the governess who pressures Mrs. Grose into revealing more about the affair:

Mrs. Grose: Miss, there's things I've seen … I'm ashamed to say (*The Innocents*, 55:52-5).

Miss Giddens: Go on! (*The Innocents*, 55:56).

Mrs. Grose: Rooms… used by daylight as though they were dark woods (*The Innocents*, 56:00-07).

Miss Giddens: They didn't care that you saw them? (*The Innocents*, 56:10-3).

Mrs. Grose: [shakes her head] (*The Innocents*, 56:14-5).

Miss Giddens: And the children? (*The Innocents*, 56:16).

Mrs. Grose: I can't say miss; I don't know what the children saw (*The Innocents*, 56:21-2).

While the novella is perhaps too vague on the issue, *The Innocents* quite clearly suggests that there was something suspicious about the couple. But in *The Nightcomers,* it is Miles who actively seeks out Quint and Miss Jessel as they are engaged in their private activities. At first, he is simply curious, asking Quint: "What do you do to Miss Jessel when you love her, and what does she do to you?" (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 26:33-6)

Quint's response to Miles's question is deliberately a vague one as if decidedly refusing to give more details on that to someone who is not an adult yet:

"We just trick around… (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 26:39-40). That's all" (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 26:44-5). Miles, apparently not convinced with Quint's answer later in the middle of the night, sneaks out to see what he means for himself. Miles, through Miss Jessel's window, observes the

two adults "tricking around" until the early morning and subsequently, informs the already curious Flora of all he had witnessed while peering there. In going explicitly in depicting the intimacy occurring, this cinematic adaptation goes beyond what has almost been implicitly portrayed in Clayton's *The Innocents* 1961. What makes the issue more interesting is that Miles' curiosity has not even been included in James's tale either. The same case is true about how the children's being corrupted by both Quint and Jessel's irresponsible behavior; what can well be noticed in both adaptations can hardly be traced at least this explicit in the original story.

Even though in Clayton's *The Innocents* 1961, the monstrous effect of Quint in corrupting the children has been depicted in the words deployed by them in hurling insults at the governess ("creature," "hound," "wretch"), in *The Nightcomers* 1971, the situation shifts on the behalf of Quint to some extent, for the two adults at least try to be very secretive about their relations. Miss Jessel, for instance does not even allow Quint to address her by first name in public. The effect of bringing Quint's child-like manner to the surface does make him appear less monstrous than the one portrayed in Clayton's adaptation to the extent that the viewer dose not place the source of horror solely on him. If in *The Innocents* 1961 when insulting words like "creature," "hound," and "wretch" are hurled at the governess by children, they are not to be blamed in the first place. In *The Nightcomers* 1971, however, Quint's character has not been displayed as to be generating terror and horror, most specifically when compared with the children and the outcome of their actions despite both Quaint and Miss. Jessel's being responsible for the corruption occurred. With Quint's being portrayed as less monstrous than he is made out to be in the novella and Clayton's adaptation, the monstrous is inevitably located elsewhere, for it is a horror film, after all. With the expected ambiance and stylizations of the genre (eerie score, quick jump cuts, sudden close- ups, disturbing imagery), a question arises as Tydal states, so, where is the actual horror, if not with Quint? This is where *The Nightcomers* is actually faithful to James's Two Approaches *to The Turn of the Screw's* original story—in that it carries over that lurking sense of dread, rendered all the more powerful by the obscurity of its source (Tyndal 2015, p.153).

Considering this realist advantage, Peter G. Beidler has written, "It is almost as if Henry James wrote two stories," one being a "thrilling narrative about evil ghosts" and the second "makes the story a thrilling psychological study of a deluded governess." (Beidler 1989, p.68). In 1899, the *New York Times* published one reader's letter on this very subject: There is not a word or a line in the book to show that the author assumed, or wanted his readers to assume, that the spirits of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel haunted the old house and its grounds. There is not one act performed or word spoken to indicate that the children saw or communed with ghosts. The teacher simply misconstrued the perfectly natural conduct of her charge and forced it into harmony with her own subjective experiences (Rhodes 2018, p.31). One of the significant elements of *The Nightcomers* 1972 is that there is no question of ghosts there in this prequel. If it is chiefly Quint and Miss. Jessel's irresponsible behavior that leads to the corruption of the children, Miles and Flora extend the corruption to the utmost, so that Miles with an arrow shoots Quint dead and Flora plans the drowning of their Governess in order to ensure that these two beloved adults would stay with them forever at Bly.

As Rhodes observes, it is difficult to determine how many readers of the era interpreted the novel in the same way, but the following year a critic for *The Bookman* covered similar ground. He noted that the distinguishing feature of the horror story of to-day from the horror story of the past was its ability to use realism to create ambiguity, to make it difficult to comprehend where the commonplace and the probable ends and the impossible and the supernatural begins. If ambiguity became the crowning achievement of horror-themed literature in the second half of the nineteenth century, influenced as it was by Poe's earlier usage of the same, the sheer number of publications hardly meant that the explained and unexplained supernatural no longer had their adherents (Rhodes 2018, p.31).

It should not be overlooked that even though there's no mentioning of the ghosts intruding in this prequel, the issue of ambiguity has been dealt with not much unlike the previous adaptations. It is not

even horror produced by and through Quint's actions, but rather how the children's corruption incurred by him and also to some extent by Miss. Jessel's succumbing to passion leads to their horrible actions eventually. One can witness Quint in one of the opening scenes, teaching the young children how to torture and kill a frog with a cigar, and that is no wonder to subsequently find Miles delightfully torturing Flora's pet turtle. To intensify the catastrophic consequences of subjecting innocent children to the world of the adult, *The Nightcomers* 1971 takes the steps further to be bold enough to portray the horrible scene of reenacting Quint and Mis. Jessel's actions in a games that forces Ms. Grose to ask God's forgiveness for the children for she can see how deeply they have wallowed into an abominable game. That Michael Winner also took great "liber ties" in regards to portraying Miles and Flora's relationship as re−enacting Quint and Jessel's private experience as a game in their childhood world casts a shadow of an imminent corruption endangering others culminating in the upcoming murder of the two beloveds by their hands unknowingly, for they naively do it out of compassion and goodwill for the two.

6.3. Torture

6.3.1. Animal Torture Culminating in Human Torture

The animal motif inserted into the tale by Michael Winner, the director, and his screenwriter, Michael Hastings, has in fact been picked up the animal motif from *The Innocents (1961)*, but has also extended it further to encompass a shocking series of disturbing images of animal torture culminating in the case of human torture, for instance Miss. Jessel:

(Quint finishes fastening a rope completely around Miss. Jessel's legs) (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 31:05)

Quint: Like a chicken on a spit (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 31:16-7)

Quint: You're just a dog in the street. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 31:30-2)

And later Flora:

Flora: Miles! It hurts! (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:30-1)

Miles: It's got to be as painful as possible. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:45-7)

Miles: Quint says if it hurts, it is the truth. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 44:48-50)

6.3.2. Instances of Experiencing Trauma

What both Miss. Jessel and subsequently Flora go through does not appear to be much unlike experiencing an instance of trauma, both physically and psychologically, for a psychic trauma is caused when an intense, often extremely violent situation disables the ability of a consciousness to integrate an experience within the narrative, linear memory of an individual. Negative impulses and stimuli overwhelm the psyche to a degree that it cannot react adequately' As it seems, trauma,is unrepresentable and unspeakable and its frequent consequence is manifested as a representational void and lack of memory. A trauma process on the level of both the individual and collective, may take place – usually accompanied by a variable latency phase – sometimes leading to a repetition of the traumatizing situation on another level or in a disguised manner (*Wiederholungszwang*, Sigmund Freud). As part of the circular structure of violence-void-visualization, events that traumatized individuals or collectives – after a varying period of time – appear as medialized objects: a body influenced by the psyche. (Köhne et al 2014, p.4).

7. The Significance of Religion

Amid the unexpected scenes of corruption hovering over the children, the clergyman's words do appear to add the missing remedy of believing and taking refuge from which even Quint fails to negate and is absorbed:

Ring bells (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 46:34)

The priest: In the midst of life we are in death (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 46: 37-40).

Of whom may we seek for succor (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 46: 40-42).

But of thee, O lord, who for our sins are justly displeased? (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 46:42-5).

Yet, O Lord, God Most Holy, O Lord Most Mighty (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 46: 46-50),

Deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 46: 51-3)

Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 46:54-7);

Shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 46:57-47:01).

Lord Most Holy, O God, The Most Mighty (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 47:02-5),

O Holy and merciful savior, though most worthy judge eternal (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 47: 06-10),

Suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death…" (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 47:11-15).

If James's fiction uses the language of religion to give value to a secularized world, but without ever stepping over into religious conversion or belief, this adaptation also in the absence of a firm belief in the corruption-stricken innocent children deploys elements of a religious framework to contribute to the generation of narrative form so as to create life values in the face of death and the passing of time. As for *The Turn of the Screw*'s being bound with death, as Shoshana Felman observes, it is thus *death* itself which moves the narrative chain forward, which *inaugurates* the manuscript's *displacements* and the process of the *substitution* of the narrators. Each of the deaths *Death in Henry James* contributes to the legendary ambiguity of the tale" (qtd. in Cutting 2005, p.6). *The Turn of the Screw* uses framing devices and ambiguity to lure the reader into wallowing in morbid fears that trade off fin-de-siècle interest in the supernatural, revival of romance forms of fiction.

8. The Significance of Symbols

8.1. The Color White

According to Ian Patterson's *Dictionary of Colors*, the color white, the color of snow, is a color associated with peace and purity In English folklore the color white is associated with innocence although it also symbolizes death and bad luck (Patterson 2004, p.411). That the scene of Mrs. Grose's putting the white flowers in order comes right after Miss. Jessel's conceiving of her intimate relationship with Quint as "what a shame" is highly suggestive of purity and innocence's being put out of order on one side and that it needs to be restored under the supervision of a wiser side that in this particular instance occurs to be Mrs. Grose who decidedly steps in when Miss. Jessel is about to willingly fall for Quint's whims:

Miss. Jessel: You think I will scream (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55:33-4).

Miss. Jessel: You see? (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55:37-8)

Miss. Jessel: I will not. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55: 40-1)

Miss. Jessel. Peter. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55:42-3)

Mrs. Grose: No! (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55:43)

Mrs. Grose: Not Peter. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55:44-5)

Mrs. Grose: He is not coming. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55:47-8)

Mrs. Grose: He is told. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55: 49-50)

Mrs. Grose: He cannot. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55:51-2)

Mrs. Grose: What he wants of thee? (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55: 53-54)

Mrs. Grose: He has you like a puppet. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 55: 56-8)

Mrs. Grose: You dance. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 58-9)

Miss. Jessel: I was asleep. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 56:00)

Mrs. Grose: And you would have allowed him. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 56:01-3)

Mrs. Grose: Anything that he does to thee. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 56:04-06)

Mrs. Grose: Any vileness. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 56:07-8)

Miss. Jessel: I was dreaming. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 56: 08-9)

Mrs. Grose: You feed off him. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 56: 10-12)

8.2. Dolls as a Symbol

The doll, as a symbol, appears more often in psychopathology than in the main stream of traditional symbolism. It is well known that in a number of mental diseases the patient makes a doll which he keeps carefully hidden. According to J.-J. Rousseau the personality of the sick person is projected into the toy. In other cases it has been interpreted as a form of erotomania or deviation of the maternal instinct: in short, a hangover from, or regression to an infantile state (Cirlot 2011, p.84).

Quint: Mrs. Grose. Now I put a few pins in her like this. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 25:37-40)

Miles: It does look like her. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 25:41-2)

Flora: But will Mrs. Grose die now? 25:43-44

Miles: Only if Quint says so. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 25:46-7)

34:28: White flowers displayed.

Flora: Does she want to die? (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 25: 47-9)

Quint: Well, I can tell you she's coming close to it. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 25:50-2

Quint: Let's have a pin. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 25:54-5)

The children start burning the dolls: (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 1:31:33-32:36)

Miles throws a dart at Quint: (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 1:33-41)

Miles: I'm sorry Quint. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 1:34:01-3)

Quint groaning: (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 1:34:03-4)

Miles: Please keep still. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 1:34:05-6)

Miles: It won't be long. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 1:34:08-9)

Miles: Miss. Jessel's waiting. (*The Nightcomers* 1971, 1:34:12-3)

9. Exposure to the Evil

James wrote to Fredric Myers that depicting the exposure of the children to evil was his primary purpose in writing *The Turn of the Screw:* "The thing that, as I recall it, I most wanted not to fail of doing, under penalty of extreme platitude, was to give the impression of the communication to the children of the most infernal imaginable evil and danger—the condition, on their part, of being as *exposed* as we can humanly conceive children to be.

This was my artistic knot to untie . . . and if I had known any way of producing *more* the image of their contact and condition I should assuredly have been proportionately eager to resort to it

I evoked the worst I could." (qtd. in Cole 2010, p.210). Not naming what exactly is the worse is by itself one of the factors capable of evoking the worst possible thought and feeling. Also, there are various scenes during which the children have been exposed to the presence of evil. Apparently, the children of the tale have been left to the company of others, mostly social inferior to them whether they be Quint, Miss. Jessel or the governess, from their early childhood. They, as argued by several critics, have been exposed too young to sexual knowledge and experience. Beside James's hinting of a particularly depraved nature there in the tale, Cole has observed that as "Indian orphans," they have witnessed the evils of imperialism. Their knowledge of all these evils, James makes clear, has imbued the children (and in turn, the governess, as included in his argument) with what the governess calls a "secret precocity (or whatever I might call the poison of an influence that I dared but half to phrase)"; for "the image of all evil *had* been opened up" (March 26, 1898: 21, 22) to them (Cole 2010, p.210).

It cannot be stated that the adults of the tale have been the sole source of evil and depravity in the story, for also the two children in "The Turn of the Screw" are anything but ordinary children. Being left to the custody of an uncle already absorbed in his own affairs, they have actually been emancipated from close observation when they found themselves being cared for by the servants and the governess of the country house at Bly. That these children's story has been subjected to a various criticism has mostly been due to its not being straightforward.

9.1. The Figure of the Governess: Abusing or Being Abused?

Whether the nineteenth-century governess was a mocked dogbody as has been depicted in the character of Miss. Jessel both in James's tale and Winner's *The Nightcomers* 1971, Lustig approaches this issue through referring to the tradition of stories where governesses were at the center. That even before that in the portrayal of Miss Merry in *Daniel Derronda* (1876), or a Cinderella who managed to defeat her Bluebeard before marrying him, it has also been deployed by Jane in Bronte's Jane Eyre. Lustig also mentions the picaresque adventuress like Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1847), or a figure of pure malevolence, like Flora de Barral's governess in Conrad's Chance (1914) in his argument that the governess was of course potentially all these things, and the very openness of her role was itself a source of anxiety. James, according to him, addressed conflicts which went to the heart of nineteenth-century culture [Governesses]. In the governess of *The Turn of the Screw*, governesses tended to develop in

opposite directions: either they could abuse or be abused, drain or be drained. Both in *The Turn of the Screw* and in Victorian society at large, the figure of the governess focused, intensified, and ambiguated these polarized possibilities. An outsider within the family, the nineteenth-century governess belongs neither above nor below stairs, neither exclusively with the children nor with the adults, neither amongst women nor with men (Lustig 1992, p. xxiii).

It is worth stating at the outset that Jamesian death is not as Andre Cutting asserts in *Death in Henry James* endlessly polysemic (Cutting 2005, p.8). James's fiction in all its modes and phases, with no fear of generalizing broadly, can be assumed as being concerned with showing both the reality of death and the blurring of boundaries between death and life. Science and religion, fundamentally define death on opposing grounds and inevitably such was the case in James's lifetime regarding scientific and religious ideas on death. If death be regarded as an extinction of the physical body, and the release of the soul from the body in order to enter a new form of life in a new world, James, as a literary realist, as Andrew Cutting asserts, obviously leans towards this position and that this inclination prevails beneath the variations of specific texts and stages of James's career. James is not a religious novelist, and even in his most romantic, melodramatic, gothic, or ghostly representations of death there are layers of irony that provide implicit criticisms of the idea that death might ever be transcended (ibid).

9.2. The Inclusion of Bodily Details

James's fiction consistently avoids bodily detail that can noticeably be found in others' realistic novels, and his novels and tales lead their characters into conditions determined by social and material realities with which they must cope. In James's fiction, death is represented as an inescapable reality both felt and mediated. As in the case of *The Nightcomers* 1971, Winner's adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw*, however represented, this reality of death is again highly mediated and totally inescapable, "filtered by a self-conscious style and by a point-of-view technique whose primary concerns are to register social, mental, and affective relations rather than the unmediated encounter with death" (Cutting 2005, p.8). As such, the relationships and the death plans in *The Nightcomers* 1971 have all been meditated. Even when deployed as a shock tactic, at the end of *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) for instance, encounter only rarely breaks through, as when it is deployed, where the hero's body is discovered lying on a bloody bed. Even here, we will find, the encounter is described as if through half-averted eyes (8). As witnessed in *The Nightcomers* 1971, death doesn't step in abruptly at the end of a character's life and goes through a gradual process. Death in James's fiction is also a gradual and partial process not just a single, absolute event occurring at the end of a character's lifetime. As James writes in his late essay 'Is There a Life after Death?' (1910) 'While "we" nominally go on those parts of us that have been over darkened become as dead,'. We lose those we love, we deteriorate physic *Introduction (*James 1910, p.9) and so we die 'piecemeal.'(13) This doesn't necessarily mean that such an insight has been acquired solely during late years of his life and career, for there is no clear separation between life and death even in his earliest works either. Across his career, as Cutting observes James's endings often "strain to show how characters have experienced an emotional, moral, or social trauma comparable with physical death" (Cutting 2005, p.8).

As far as various interpretations are concerned, from the Freudian to the politically correct ones, these can aptly be deployed in *The Turn of the Square*'s prequel *The Nightcomers* and the more recent adaptation titled *In a Dark Place.* According to Jaszay, James surely knew little, and probably thought less, of how witnessing Freud's "primal scene" can leave a deep imprint on children as illustrated by the former, or how being sexually abused can even more deeply traumatise teenage girls as hammered home by the latter of these two films. In that light, such practices of filmic updating may seem very fishy to those who go to the cinema in order to encounter the *real* Henry James (Jaszay 2016, p 57). And indeed, Henry James, one of the most critically self-reflexive novelists of all time, left behind more than enough comments on his ghostly novella for the filmmaker to go by. But there, precisely, is the rub: he left us with *more* than enough commentary. In a private letter, he referred to "The Turn of the Screw" as a

simple money-making venture – "a pot-boiler." This he later made public in a preface to the story where he referred to "The Turn of the Screw" as "a fairy tale, pure and simple" (qtd. in Orr 21).

His other remark in the same preface, however, contradicts this evaluation, for he describes his gothic tale as an "excursion into chaos" and then as a "piece of ingenuity" meant "to catch those not easily caught" (21). As far as an adapter is left with such mutually contradictory statements on the part of the author, they find themselves trying to figure out what the author really intends.

The Jamesian scholar appears to be right: "James was happy to sow genre-confusion" (Orr 20). Even If genre-confusion is there, the adapter can still go on his own way and method to create their adaptation based on their own interpretation, for no single definitive interpretation can be offered on either part which is by itself reminiscent of the Foucauldian maxim that "[t]here is absolutely nothing primary to interpret, for after all everything is already interpretation" (qtd. in Straumann 2015, p. 251).

10. Conclusion

The present study has endeavored through interdisciplinary approach to study this cinematic adaptation in the light of psychological realism going through the devices comprising it . It has also demonstrated that the focal character's psyche is of prime significance for acquiring insight into the psychological process she goes through, in order to better display presence vs. absence. The audio-visual art deployed presenting gestures, facial expressions and a symbolically suggestive mise-en-sce-ne have been analyzed in order to provide clues of her psychic unfolding revealed.

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