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Literary Theory and Writing  
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### Feminist Analysis of James' *The Turn of the Screw*

#### Overview

Feminist theory states that women are constantly forced to submit their own passions or identity for the sake of pleasing the patriarchal society. Women must impose identities of themselves that are socially acceptable, such as a housewife or some other type of 'feminine' identity that serves men. In Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess is continuously forced to create her identity based off of the perception of the others around her that submit to patriarchal institutions.

**My Thesis:** The governess character in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* searches for a sense of true identity despite the oppressive social forces acting upon her throughout the novel.

#### Outline

- A. The governess is forced to keep her job as the main aspect of her own identity. The governess and her value is evaluated in terms of her ability to take care of others around her, rather than praised for her own autonomy.
  - a. Overview of nineteenth century analysis of governess jobs for women, along with overview of feminist movements at the time
  - b. "She was the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position." In terms of her usefulness as a caretaker.

**Commented [1]:** Idea has potential but the statements are general--"true identity" is vague. You need to make concrete claim about how the governess is refused those roles that society has deemed make a woman--a wife, mother, etc. Is that what you are after?

**Commented [2]:** Look at the material on the governess in our Bedford case book

- c. Only referred to as the governess throughout the entire novel, is only referred to as The Governess, giving all of her identity to her profession and not to her own individuality.
- B. The governess begins to find identity in her autonomy when she is given the ability to lead the household of Bly. The governess believes that she may have full autonomy of herself when she first begins her job at the house of Bly. The governess is surprised with the opportunities that she is given.
  - a. Refers to the house of Bly as a ship where she “was strangely at the helm!” (James, 15)
  - b. Governess is given the ability to take leadership of the home since the uncle is never around.
  - c. Mrs. Grose’s worry that the governess is taking too much authority within the household
- C. Flora and Miles begin to craft the governess’ perception of herself through their interaction with her.
  - a. Flora begins to hate her as she begins to have dominance over her
- D. The ghosts within the novel become a blockade in the governess’ path to finding self-identity and to gaining higher power
  - a. The ghosts represent the patriarchal forces that keep her oppressed and she cannot gain a perception of herself that is empowered or liberated.
  - b. Spirits are constantly causing the governess anxiety, distracting her from her own search for self.
  - c. Ghost causes her to “kill” Miles, therefore she cannot gain higher power

**Commented [3]:** topic sentences need to be more critical. there's still a sense that you are being led by the plot of the story.

- i. Women are shown to be incompetent
- ii. Scapegoat complex that women are simply delusional/hysterical

### **Abstracts of Secondary Sources**

Nelson, Lori J., and Sandra B. Shanahan. "Power, Empowerment, and Equality: Evidence for the Motives of Feminists, Nonfeminists, and Antifeminists." *Sex Roles*, vol. 37, no. 3–4, Aug. 1997, pp. 227–249. *EBSCOhost*.

The definition of feminism is stated in order to refute different interpretations that define feminism as a sense of misandry rather than equality. A research study describes the trends in which men and women evaluate the feminist movement and lack a distinct grasp on the concept. Focusing on the misinterpretation of the feminist concept and the results that men are more likely to not identify themselves as feminist, a new clarification of feminism as 'gender equality' is produced. This article can prove useful in my paper because it gives a very clear definition of feminism from which I can analyze the gender barriers and gaps within the novel.

Newman, Beth. "Getting Fixed: Feminine Identity and Scopic Crisis in 'The Turn of the Screw.'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1992, pp. 43–63. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/1345604](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1345604).

Lacan's Mirror Stage is applied to the identity formation that the Governess goes through within James' novel, specifically relating to the lack of the female identity due to its social oppression. Additionally, the female identity and its role within the employment as governess is analyzed in the context of the Victorian area. This source directly applies to feminist theory in regards to

James' novel, so I can use this source to spring off some ideas and interpretations in my own reading of the novel.

Stone, Donald D. "Victorian Feminism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel." *Women's Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, Dec. 1972, p. 65. *EBSCOhost*.

A study is conducted into the foundations behind the pattern of female oppression during the Victorian area, considering the different ways in which women are given value and have value taken away from them. An overview is provided of the different movements for gender equality that occurred during the Victorian era. The works of Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte are also considered in relation to the feminist movement, as their writings worked against the cultural suppression of female autonomy. This source can help me understand the gender norms and efforts to combat these norms within the scope of the Victorian era, which is when the Turn of the Screw was written.

**Commented [4]:** sources are on target so far.

### **Timeline**

Proposal for Paper: 10-21-19

First Blog Post: 10-21-19

Rough Draft: 10-23-19

Peer Review Submission- 10-24-19

Submit First Draft: 10-28-19

Revision One Submission- 11-1-19