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'Why, Miles, what a funny song! Did I teach you that?': *The Turn of the Screw*, Reading, Imagination, and the Uncanny

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Abstract

In this article I bring Henry James's novella *The Turn of the Screw*, Benjamin Britten and Myfanwy Piper's opera based on the novella, and elements of the 2011 Glyndebourne production of the opera into interaction with theories of the uncanny to wonder about the act of reading. This novella and opera thematize reading in connection with the uncanny and the ghostly, providing an opportunity to pursue what might be at stake and what might be possible when boundaries blur and meaning is put in motion. I begin to explore uncanny reading as a tool to unsettle binary logics and one-to-one mappings. I consider the uncanny as connective tissue between theoretical makings related to identity, relationships, and the potentialities of fiction. And I put these ideas into interactive practice as I self-consciously read this opera, to connect to and challenge normative and oppressive forces, impulses, and systems, including cultural scripts, social power structures, and ways of knowing and interacting.

> I don't want to have the terrible limitation of those who live merely from what can make sense. Not I: I want an invented truth.
>
> I am haunted by my ghosts, by all that is mythic, fantastic and gigantic: life is supernatural.[1]

As I read Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, this story *about* reading, in which my access to information is governed by a governess who is a reader of stories, children and ghosts, silences and absences, sounds and musics, I am, like the governess, dizzy and dazzled and desiring. And the governess, like me, is a maker of meaning.

There is so much to judge in this story, so much and so little to judge with, and, it seems, so much at stake. There is an unnamed woman, a governess, a reader, educating her two child charges, Miles and Flora, at Bly, a house in the country; an absent guardian/master who hired the governess; a housekeeper, Mrs Grose; two ghosts, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, valet and governess when alive at Bly, seen by the new governess, and who may or may not be physically

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1 Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, trans. Stefan Robler (New York: New Directions, 1973), 15, 22.

present and acting upon the children; and those children, who may or may not be in collusion with or 'corrupted' by those ghosts. There are unspecified potential crimes that loom, accumulating power in hidden spaces; communications, perhaps sincere and perhaps not, some secret, some imagined; words spoken and written, like 'bad' and 'horror', whose very vagueness wields power. And there is death, the death of Miles. What exactly has happened and what does it mean?

James Thurber wrote that James 'can set so many metaphors and implications dancing at the same time on the point of his pen that it is hard to make out the pattern in the fluttering of all the winged words'.[2] James's writing is exasperating and exciting to me. I am always missing things, and when I go back and find more, I am still missing something, something big, I think. I read for clues and find too many. Sentences are long and winding, with layers of subordinate clauses – they move and shift and morph, they lose focus and undo previous statements. Words return again and again; meaning accumulates and dissipates – it shifts, turns, reminding me that language is hazy, multiple, dependent, and insufficient.

And in his oft-quoted preface to the 1908 New York edition, which Thurber calls 'a glittery web around his intention, at once brightening and obscuring it', and which makes me feel tossed and teased, James says that it is the *reader* of his tale whose 'own experience' and 'own imagination' will fill in 'all the particulars'. He writes, 'My values are positively all blanks save so far as an excited horror, a promoted pity, a created expertness . . . proceed to read into them more or less fantastic figures', and 'Make him *think* the evil, make him think it for himself.'[3] And I do think. I suspect. I imagine. I generate. I read into. More or less. Shoshana Felman shows me that this text is overloaded with words and events that I can chain together, that I can read into, just like the governess does. I can read into the governess reading into, and thereby, I *move* into the text. Felman explains:

> The critical interpretation . . . not only elucidates the text but also reproduces it dramatically, unwittingly *participates in it*. Through its very reading, the text, so to speak, acts itself out. As a reading effect, this inadvertent 'acting out' is indeed uncanny: whichever way readers turn, they can but be turned by the text, they can but *perform* it by *repeating* it.[4]

Reading is turning and re-turning; reading breaks boundaries of narrative and identity; reading is uncanny. And I also read readings of the story, of the governess as reader, and then I read readings of readings of the story, and chains of readers swirl about me and I swirl into the uncanny dance too. In that preface, James calls his story 'an *amusette* to catch those not easily caught'.[5] Felman says that I am trapped no matter what. I cannot be right. I cannot know

2 James Thurber, 'The Wings of Henry James', *The New Yorker*, 7 November 1959, www.newyorker.com/magazine/1959/11/07/the-wings-of-henry-james.

3 Henry James, 'Preface to the New York Edition', in *The Turn of the Screw: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, 2nd edn, ed. Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren (New York: Norton, 1999), 128.

4 Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness*, trans. Martha Noel Evans and Shoshana Felman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 148.

5 James, 'Preface', 125.

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anything definitively. And neither is it enough simply to embrace ambiguity. T. J. Lustig suggests that the evil 'is not an essence or a core; it is the effect of a particular reading – a reading which takes on the responsibility of detecting and punishing sins and in doing so commits them'.[6]

And then I watch and listen, again and again, to the film of the 2011 Glyndebourne production of the 1954 opera *The Turn of the Screw*, with music composed by Benjamin Britten and libretto written by Myfanwy Piper, directed by Jonathan Kent.[7] I study the score and the words. I read how others read its musics and I wonder about ambiguities and multiplicities and the ways that people might make meaning, within and outside the diegesis, insofar as I can tell the difference and precisely when I cannot. I wonder about where and how the winged sounds of the music might flutter. I wonder about moving into this musical text and what I might repeat and how I might turn or be turned. I wonder what traps this opera and this production might set for me, what opportunities might be found if I could evade those traps, and what responsibilities I might take on.

What are the normative ways that I might take in and make with – read, listen, see, understand, feel, imagine? And what if the borders around these doings are fluid and unstable and the relationships between them multiple and tangled? And so I am thinking about interpretative mindset, about epistemological impulses.[8] Felman warns me that reading in *The Turn of the Screw* 'establishes itself as a relation not only to *knowledge* but equally to *power*; it consists not only of a search for meaning but also of a struggle to control it. Meaning itself thus unavoidably becomes the outcome of an act of violence.'[9] Felman says that it 'behooves' me to 'understand how a child can be killed by the very act of understanding'.[10] Cultural scripts and societal power structures might affect how I think and feel about and judge these characters and their situations. Philip Brett, in his writing about the opera, reminds me that stereotypes wield so much power and that an essentializing reading can exclude and marginalize – for example, homophobia and/or misogyny might drive an interpretation/experience of this opera and/or result from it.[11] Donna Haraway too tells me that a reading in accordance with hegemonic power structures can do violence, by repeating the violences of those structures: 'When the system of connections closes in on itself, when symbolic action becomes perfect, the world is frozen in a dance of death.' So Haraway rouses me to refuse to repeat, and

6 T. J. Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 169.

7 Stage and costume designer, Paul Brown; lighting designer, Mark Henderson. Jakub Hrůša conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Miah Persson sings the role of the governess; Toby Spence, the Prologue and Peter Quint; Susan Bickley, Mrs Grose; Giselle Allen, Miss Jessel; Joanna Songi, Flora; and Thomas Parfitt, Miles.

8 The phrase 'epistemological impulses' comes from Glenda Goodman, 'Joseph Johnson's Lost Gamuts: Native Hymnody, Materials of Exchange, and the Colonialist Archive', *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13/4 (2019), 487.

9 Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 207.

10 Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 205.

11 Philip Brett, 'Britten's Bad Boys: Male Relations in *The Turn of the Screw*', *Repercussions* 1/2 (1992), 18. Brett, in interaction with the prominent interpretative focus on whether the ghosts in the story really exist and corrupt the children or are imagined by a hysterical governess, points out the damaging results that accepting one of these two possibilities as truth creates.

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instead to 'rearticulate', to open out to alternative possibilities.[12] This story, this opera, this production, and the readings they contain and provoke make a space in which I can think about what kind of reader I want to be. And I want to think about what this opera *can* mean. I want to *turn*, in the sense that Haraway theorizes – to trope, trip, and swerve.[13]

This kind of turning could be uncanny, and it is to the unwieldy uncanny that I turn for guidance. How I define, understand, and interact with the uncanny matters. For now, I will suggest that the uncanny is a breaking of boundaries perhaps thought or constructed to be impermeable, in multiple senses and realms. This breaking can create fear and expose assumptions, and it can also point towards new possibilities, inviting wonder and making and change. I want to explore the power and nature of uncanny reading. Fueled in part by my personal and multiple reading experiences, I will proceed in the form of three waves or turns, finding, following, and forging pathways that might spiral and shadow one another.

My approach is flexible and multimodal. I interact with and am inspired by thinkerwriter-readers[14] doing feminist theory, queer theory, critiques of psychoanalytic theory, literary theory, disability studies, film sound studies, sociology, science and technology studies, and musicology. Haraway calls me to articulate (she tells me that 'the articulata are jointed animals', 'not smooth like the perfect spherical animals of Plato's origin fantasy'[15]) – to make connections, to put things together, to bring them into untidy relation. I bring things into relation across this article in a process of accumulation. I am not aiming to create a linear argument. I do not seek to find out what is really going on. I want to wonder about what could be. As I simultaneously and self-consciously theorize and practice uncanny reading, I hope to begin to open up worldmaking possibilities for this opera and for the act of reading.

Naming and Maloing

Lustig calls the governess 'a passionate interpreter'.[16] The governess's writing reveals her belief in a world buzzing and bursting with meaning that matters. She uses words such as 'prodigious' and 'portentous' – significance is everywhere. She is always *knowing* things, and reading is making knowledge. She absolutely believes; she feels an 'instant certainty'; she has a 'shock of certitude', a 'flash of . . . knowledge'.[17] When Mrs Grose has helped the governess to identify the man she saw on the tower and through the window as the dead Peter Quint, she experiences another burst of knowing.

> 'He was looking for little Miles.' A portentous clearness now possessed me. '*That's* whom he was looking for.'

12 Donna Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others', in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 109–10.

13 'I'm interested in tropes as places where you trip . . . Tropes are about stutterings, trippings.' Donna Haraway, 'When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?' Interview with Nicholas Gane. *Theory, Culture, & Society* 23/7–8 (2006), 152.

14 I create this mergeword to draw attention to the porousness of these positions.

15 Haraway, 'Promises of Monsters', 105.

16 Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly*, 170.

17 James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 42, 20.

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'But how do you know?'

'I know, I know, I know!' My exaltation grew.[18]

Felman says that the governess is on a particular '*reading-adventure*, a quest for the definitive, literal or proper meaning of words and of events'.[19] In the opera, this quest resonates with the pedagogy of the governess, which is rooted in naming. Miles must name his Latin masculine nouns and Flora her seas. Learning is memorizing, and knowing is remembering. Knowledge is never anything new. And in the end, it is a name that the governess wants from Miles – Quint's name, as confirmation of her own knowledge. Naming is power – power to banish and power to confirm and close. 'Say the name and he will go forever', she tells Miles. And naming is claiming. The governess is always exclaiming Miles's name, passion and possession mingling indeterminately. And all these namings constellate, tentacles twining into rigid formation.

In Act I, scene 6, during his Latin lesson, Miles churns out his masculine nouns in single-bar groupings, mostly one two-syllable noun per beat: 'Amnis, axis, caulis, collis / clunis, crinis, fascis, follis.' There is a kind of relentless propulsion here, but this naming by rote and rhyme is also awkward and unstable. The 5/4 meter feels especially out of balance to me because it seems the result of Flora's loud interruptive additions on the fifth beat, amplified by the snare drum and a small wall of pizzicato strings. The piccolo doubles Miles's line and adds tiny wispy bursts that seem to be veering out of control, and the quickly changing harmonies are not consistent across bars. But this performance of memorized knowledge ends with a clear cadence in F major, and the governess is very pleased because Miles 'learned that well'. I wonder how the governess is listening, what she is focusing on and what she is ignoring, what she has access to. This cadence feels like a containment force, imposed, perhaps by the governess, or perhaps it is a sign of how or what she is hearing. I'm just not sure. But those veerings and interruptions, undercurrents of other forces and possibilities, linger.

When the governess prompts Miles to tell her what else he remembers, the music seems to turn away from naming. Heavy harp triadic strums, viola, and English horn create a striking color and texture shift; motion slows; the meter smooths. Miles uses the opening notes as a generative node, and he builds a melody. His tune rocks and turns, in and out, up and down, every new phrase beginning on the final note of the previous phrase. The phrases are of inconsistent length. The English horn and the viola seem like expansions of the voice – the viola pedals always begin in unison with the vocal line and the English horn extends every phrase with a variation echo. Philip Rupprecht calls the viola the voice's shadow.[20] A shadow can be cast; it can be a kind of residue; it can point towards the existence of something I might not be aware of otherwise; it can haunt. And Miles sings: 'Malo Malo Malo I would rather be Malo Malo in an apple tree Malo Malo Malo than a naughty boy Malo Malo in adversity.'

18 James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 25.

19 Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 197.

20 Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 169.

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Rupprecht reads 'cryptic but unmistakable Edenic allusions' and unease, anxiety, and shame in Miles's words.[21] Brett hears 'awakening knowledge' and abjection in the rising and falling lines.[22] Lloyd Whitesell identifies 'unexpected seriousness and sophistication',[23] and Christopher Palmer notes the 'sombre, melancholic' sound of the English horn.[24] There are, indeed, clues here, but I am not sure what to do or make with them. I feel on the cusp of a shadow world.

My reading of this song might be colored by my memory of the letter dismissing Miles from school and the 'bad'ness that the governess posits vaguely and apprehensively as the only possible reason for such an action (Act I, scene 3). The opening notes of Miles's song include the same notes that sound in that earlier scene in the celesta's rising (025) wisp ($b\flat^1$, $d\flat^2$, $e\flat^2$) just preceding the report of this disturbing dismissal, which seems to cause a pitch slippage, as the e^2 of Mrs Grose's gentle optimism about the governess's arrival drops to $e\flat^1$ in the governess's line, like some kind of active premonition from another realm. And a bit later, in Act I, scene 4, this same celesta lilt, now extended and itself shadowed, sounds again as the governess sights Quint at the tower, at first mistaking him for the guardian she wishes she could see and who might see her do 'his bidding'. And this little figure that turns, or turns my attention, later still opens out into a vast shimmery soundscape in and maybe making that strange space in which Quint sing-calls to Miles (Act I, scene 8), voicing Miles's name. And so I might name this cluster of pitches, as Howard does, 'the Quint motif'[25] and place Miles and badness and Quint in a connective cluster too.

There is more. Quint's call itself, with its rhythmically and modally inconsistent climbings and droppings, seems a variation of a potential 'theme' also connected to the governess. In fact, this 'second' theme, as Brett refers to it, also named by others the 'y' theme/motive, the 'catalyst' theme, and the 'thread' theme,[26] sounds again and again and again, in close proximity to the governess *and* Quint, in an ever expanding and contracting constellation of incarnations and possibilities. It is difficult for me to resist a very strong urge to recount every single connection and potential significance I have heard and felt, read and wondered about, to map out a matrix of meaning, even as I acknowledge that, as Whitesell puts it, 'the motive is overassigned'.[27] I have been trained to seek out and value these connections, to treat them as clues that might lead me to some important pre-existing truth. But maybe these clues, and readings of these clues, might instead open up more questions, more gaps.

In Act II, scene 7, at the lake, when Flora tells the governess, who has seen the ghostly Miss Jessel, that she 'can't see anybody, can't see anything', the version of this motive that sounds in

21 Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 168.

22 Brett, 'Bad Boys', 11.

23 Lloyd Whitesell, 'Doubt and Failure in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*', *Indiana Theory Review* 13/2 (1992), 66.

24 Christopher Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Patricia Howard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 119.

25 Patricia Howard, 'Structures: An Overall View', in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Howard, 88.

26 Brett, 'Bad Boys'; Whitesell, 'Doubt and Failure'; Howard, 'Structures: An Overall View'; Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*. There is another 'theme', labelled by Britten in the score, to be discussed later.

27 Whitesell, 'Doubt and Failure', 77.

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the vocal line is the same as what sounds in the previous scene when the governess exclaimed her certainty that Miles was with Quint. Howard asserts, with certainty, that 'we know that we are hearing her through the governess's ears', that this sounding confirms the governess's suspicion that 'Flora is irredeemably corrupted'.[28] If this is the case, I hear only what the governess fears, what she knows. I hear a naming. The governess's reading is all I get, and I am wondering what I am not getting. Rupprecht tells me that after hearing Quint's call to Miles, I will read either the governess's earlier, similar lines as a 'prefiguring of supernatural visitations' or else Quint's calls 'as a projection of an hysterical governess's imagined fears for her charges' innocence'.[29] Here too the music I hear might come from a specific source, controlling the soundscape, but I cannot determine what that source is. And Rupprecht presents these two options as the result of Britten's 'thematic strategy', which 'maintains ambiguity'.[30] Yet this particular ambiguity seems constrained: here imagination and hysteria are coupled and together, they oppose a spectral reality.

I might want to find some kind of origin point in a linear experience of the opera, a first occurrence, or maybe a definitive version – I am used to doing this with reminiscence motifs and leitmotifs and tonal spaces in opera. There is a sonic and score-labelled billboard proclamation of 'THEME' in a strange space between the prologue and the first scene. As many have discussed, this THEME might be a generative source of the rest of the musical substance of the opera, including the second theme and the variations on the THEME between each of the sixteen scenes.[31] I could try to treat this THEME as a root of truth, as a symbol of a violent force in a closed world. I could also assign, as Whitesell does, a territory to Quint and Miss Jessel that the governess could then occupy.[32] And then a tonal territory might be read as a corruptive influence or a revealer of corruption. This could also be what Howard is doing when she names a Quint motif. Whitesell reads:

> Quint began as an intruder, a foreign presence; but as the story continues his musical identity becomes linked with that of the governess. The external threat to the young woman and her charge becomes confused with her own intentions and actions. We are no longer absolutely sure of the distinction between herself and the other. That depth of confusion is a condition of madness, and indeed, the governess voices such a

28 Howard, 'Structures: An Overall View', 84.

29 Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 177.

30 Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 177.

31 The THEME contains all twelve chromatic pitches, laid out in three groups of four notes, each a (0257) collection, a major third above the previous one, sounded by the piano in single, accented notes and then widening out into octaves, in a rising and rocking pattern of fifths and sixths (or their inversions), each accented pitch driving to the next with the propulsion of a semiquaver driving into a doubled-dotted crotchet. Pitch centers for the variations and subsequent scenes rise from A at the beginning to A♭ at the end of Act I and then fall in inversion of that rising sequence to A at the opera's conclusion. The 'second' theme seems built upon the opening notes of the THEME, inverted and filled in with passing tones. See Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*; Whitesell, 'Doubt and Failure'. Rupprecht calls the unified variation form 'a machine of obsession' and the effect of the domination of the THEME 'claustrophobic' (*Britten's Musical Language*, 141).

32 Whitesell, 'Doubt and Failure', 78.

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> fear (II. R38). Moreover, the corruption she has projected upon Quint contaminates her own image as well, preventing her from ever quite being in the clear.[33]

Whitesell's writing exposes or creates multiple confusions and collapsings. The confusion between Quint and the governess becomes for me a confusion between Quint, the governess, and myself. I cannot remain on the outside, in a position of power and authority; I cannot maintain narrative spatial borders. The governess projects and self-contaminates. Because I too experience 'that depth of confusion' in relation to musical identity, I might be mad. Am I projecting corruption? Contaminating my own image? Am I 'in the clear'? I think Felman might deem this an uncanny 'inadvertent "acting out"', as I perform this text by repeating it.[34] And there are so many intertwining binaries here. If a confusion of the distinction between self and other is a condition of madness, then rationality might be the ability to maintain that binary, that distinction, that order, that mastery, and the naming of what is good and what is bad.

Rupprecht writes of dramatic irony, of me hearing things that the characters don't, of the benefits of thus being able to discern truths that the characters are unaware of, to make determinations based on sonic connections.[35] This process might involve some assumptions – that I am hearing a truth, that I am hearing everything, that I know exactly what characters are hearing and not hearing, and that I am in interpretive control. And I find that I cannot ever be sure that dramatic irony is in play in this opera. In that letter scene, the celesta wisp sparks a striking textural shift as the governess wonders about the contents of the letter. Rupprecht says that the solo viola line 'gives the odd impression of voices being led (rather than "accompanied") by the Thread theme'.[36] This sounding might represent or be a powerful ghostly force. I hear, but I cannot situate. What if *I* am the object of dramatic irony, unaware of forces and truths and possibilities sounding and telling around me? What is the unheard sound of the forces leading me as I read? And I am beginning to feel the foundations of operatic communication crumbling.

Felman highlights, in contrast to unambiguous readings of the story, the '*movement* constitutive of meaning', 'meaning as a loss and as a flight', and the 'inherent silence' of language.[37] In James's story, the governess seems to hear meaning in motion, in silences, in hushes – nothings that point towards somethings. She refers to the time before her first sighting of Quint on the tower as 'that hush in which something gathers or crouches'.[38] And she describes that sighting: 'I can hear again, as I write, the intense hush in which the sounds of evening dropped.'[39] And afterwards,

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33 Whitesell, 'Doubt and Failure', 80.

34 Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 148.

35 Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 177. Here he refers to the melodic connection between Quint's call and the governess's earlier 'vows of shielding the children'.

36 Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 150.

37 Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 153.

38 James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 14.

39 James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 16.

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> prodigious palpable hushes occurred – I can call them nothing else – the strange dizzy lift or swim (I try for terms!) into a stillness, a pause of all life, that had nothing to do with the more or less noise we at the moment might be engaged in making and that I could hear through any intensified mirth or quickened recitation or louder strum of the piano. Then it was that the others, the outsider, were there. Though they were not angels they 'passed', as the French say, causing me, while they stayed, to tremble with the fear of their addressing to their younger victims some yet more infernal message or more vivid image than they had thought good enough for myself.[40]

This hush is a space in which things happen – connectings, communicatings; it is a motion that she can hear. The 'strange dizzy lift or swim' seems a kind of suspension, a threshold. And she cannot adequately describe. So there is more, beyond the words of the governess, beneath the sounds of the surface of their living and interacting. She hears that she doesn't hear, and she hears and feels and also fears that she is excluded. I could say that the governess hears things that are not there. But what if there are things hidden, moving, touching, in absences and beyond sonic surfaces?

In the opera, the governess responds to Miles's Malo singing: 'What a funny song! Did I teach you that?' She's not sure what she's hearing, or maybe she can't fathom him creating a song that she didn't teach him. She cannot name. Neither can I. The music might seem familiar, from somewhere we can't fully identify. The different and the familiar are not distinguishable. Because she clearly hears this as music, I feel invited to hear it that way too. And what then might I make of that (025) connection to the celesta sweep earlier? Once again, I cannot fix. And the governess's response is enveloped in Miles's song. The F-minor chord in the harp frames it on both ends. She sings over a suspended g^1 in the viola, passed from the English horn. She is woven into and suspended in this threshold space, this uncanny space, even as she is confronted and confounded by it. Inside, outside – I cannot tell the difference. The governess and I, listening to Miles, we are in a strange dizzy lift or swim. Miles's music is a hush. I sense something that I cannot sense; I hear that I do not hear. I am so conscious of my listening self. In the Glyndebourne production, Miles approaches the governess and they look with such intensity into each other's eyes. Miles reaches out to touch her face and she shies back, and the scene ends. I feel borders melting around me. Power structures become unstable. Movement is untethered. I hesitate and am unhinged.

Carolyn Abbate, writing about Claude Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, wonders about operatic sounds of uncertain origins – when a character might hear something that I don't; when words might ask me to imagine a sound that I don't hear; when music I do hear might be 'the phantom form of the concealed song'.[41] All these possibilities are in play, for the governess and for me. Abbate hears the possibility of a sound that 'is not subject to capture',[42] of spaces in which normative forces, such as gender essentialism, might be

40 James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 51.

41 Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 176.

42 Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 172.

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undermined and lose power. She helps me to loosen my grasp on singular listening positionings, on a singular truth. Abbate talks about the positioning of 'the audience's ears', after Pelléas dies, to hear 'the phantom voice, at last, but at a price: one sits in the place of the dead'.[43] I might take up a listening position of the dead. I might become ghostly.

In *Pelléas*, when Mélisande sings from the tower without orchestra, Abbate suggests that 'this hyperrealism . . . creates a shock effect that changes any perception of the orchestral music preceding and punctuating Mélisande's vocal lines, reanimating a deadened sense for a fantastic absence of verisimilitude endemic to operatic music'.[44] I love this writing. There are too many words too close together. The real and the fantastic turn in on each other; senses can be deadened and reanimated; absences can become present; binary thinking breaks down. Abbate's writing helps me to feel the uncaptured, to hear it, to be with it. There is so much that I can take for granted. And I want to listen in the way that Abbate writes.

Howard, discussing an iteration of the 'second' theme in the tower scene, with potential links to the governess's initial anxiety about her new position, her feelings for the guardian, and her Quint si(gh)ting, states, 'There is, of course, no uniquely right interpretation of these bars: only an infinite richness of resonance and association.'[45] When Britten gives me musics that feel so connected, so familiar, and does not provide me with the means to definitively categorize nor order nor decipher, he also denies me a real to contrast with a false, a ghostly in opposition to a not ghostly, a truth to negate a fiction, putting me in a state of perpetual uncanny hesitation. I could construct the oppositions myself, but I could also refuse binary thinking and consider the 'infinite richness' instead. How might I make space for realities and possibilities beyond what I know?

An uncanny interlude and some horror talk

The uncanny eludes me, I cannot contain it, I cannot explain it. I am in over my head.

The uncanny is an experience, a feeling. It happens inside a reader. It is a loss of certainty, a loss of control; it is a kind of haunting; it is a sensing that there is more, something hidden, something close. It is a hint of an existence of something you didn't think you were aware of, and yet you might recognize it. The uncanny is a hesitation space, a gap. It is an unsettling or loosening of something you might have taken for granted as fixed. The uncanny can threaten a status quo. Identity can dissolve, and maybe re-form. Your uncanny experience might involve or generate different reactions. You might feel strange or uneasy or confused; you might feel scared, or even terrified; you might feel awakened, aroused.

Your uncanny experience and your response to that experience might be affected and constructed by your worldview, your conception of your own identity, your place in a societal power structure, your feelings about that structure and that place, and all the forces that shape all these things. The uncanny is personal and political. Nicholas Royle reminds me

43 Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 178.

44 Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 175.

45 Howard, 'Structures: An Overall View', 87.

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that the uncanny is always created, felt, and analysed within a specific framework,[46] and that framework might dictate the borders and possibilities of that experience.

Reading Freud's 1919 essay on the uncanny, I feel the force of Freud's formulation of individual identity development and humanity development, of what is normal and what is pathological. Everything seems conceived within a strict hierarchy built on a singular linear progression to betterment. So then the uncanny seems always a haunting from some more 'primitive' past, with 'primitive convictions . . . closely linked with childhood complexes'.[47] An uncanny experience is triggered by the return of something unwanted, something repressed, something you thought you left behind, something 'bad'. And this return of the repressed is a regression.[48] Freud explains:

> It appears that we have all, in the course of our individual development, been through a phase corresponding to the animistic phase in the development of primitive peoples, that this phase did not pass without leaving behind in us residual traces that can still make themselves felt, and that everything we now find 'uncanny' meets the criterion that it is linked with these remnants of animistic mental activity and prompts them to express themselves.[49]

Hélène Cixous observes that Freud, in his essay, reads the uncanny in E. T. A. Hoffmann's story 'The Sandman' in accordance with his psychoanalytic framework. He assumes; he ignores; he excludes; he imposes. He ignores the woman, he ignores the automaton. He tries to maintain control. He sees what he is looking for and he uses epistemological tools that he has already created to do so. He seems to be working to establish a reality in which a fear of castration drives Hoffmann's story and, as Cixous argues, thus drives Freud's story.[50] Cixous and Sue-Ellen Case[51] discuss the ways that Freud's framework is sexist, heterosexist, and racist. And Royle too tells me that Freud's essay 'does a strange violence to its subject' by seeming to deny its relationship with 'issues of sexuality, class, race, age, imperialism and colonialism'.[52] Avery Gordon, thinking about Freud's telling and analysis of one of his own uncanny experiences, writes, 'There is no expectation that Freud could turn his attention to the colonialism that partially underwrites his distaste for the specter of primitive thinking inhabiting his civilized mind.'[53]

Michael Klein explains that for Freud, the uncanny is a sign that 'the ego has failed to master itself'.[54] Well Freud might fail to master his subject; he cannot maintain control over nor

46 Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 3.

47 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' [1919], in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 155.

48 Freud, 'The Uncanny', 148.

49 Freud, 'The Uncanny', 147.

50 Hélène Cixous, 'Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The "Uncanny")', *New Literary History* 7/3 (Spring 1976), 533–6.

51 Sue-Ellen Case, 'Tracking the Vampire', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Criticism* 5/2 (1991), 13–15.

52 Royle, *The Uncanny*, 22–3.

53 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 54.

54 Michael Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 78–9.

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contain the uncanny. Instead, the uncanny sweeps him up and swirls him in, as, in Royles's words, 'one uncanny thing keeps leading on to another'. He seems unable to stop adding examples, and some of them float, over and beyond the reach of his assertions. He seems sure and unsure all at once. Royle says that Freud perhaps cannot even control the uncanniness 'of the very process of writing'.[55] The uncanny exceeds his framework, and his own writing undermines that framework. Freud's essay 'keeps trying to lay certain ghosts to rest, but they keep coming back'.[56] The ghosts keep coming back.

Royle and Cixous and Case and Gordon and many others push me to pay more kinds of attention. I can move into the hesitation spaces, into the elsewhere. I can thinkfeel with the ghosts. I do not need to master this subject. Gordon shows me that one of these ghosts is the social, and that this particular ghost of connectings is entangled with conceptions of identity and ways of seeing and ways of knowing: 'The uncanny is the return, in psychoanalytic terms, of what the concept of the unconscious represses: the reality of being haunted by worldly contacts.' Gordon says that the experience of the uncanny is 'being haunted, a state . . . that is not simply one of cognitive doubt, or of the unknown, but something else'.[57] It unsettles the supposed settledness of rationality, multiplies the assumed singularity of identity, and exposes the sociality of everything.

In her essay 'Tracking the Vampire', in a single paragraph, Case creates an evocative cluster of connectings and I want to turn them over with care. She cites Tzvetan Todorov's classification of a supernatural tale as being driven by 'an atmosphere of proximity', 'a palpable atmospheric "touching"'. She connects this touching to twilight, citing Judith Mayne, who describes twilight in the film *Nosferatu* as a 'dangerous territory where opposing terms are not so easily distinguishable'. And then she asks a question that thrills me: 'But why is this proximate potential represented as horror by the dominant culture?'[58] This question beckons me to consider a new framework, in which a potentiality of a proximity need not be named a horror.[59] Gordon writes:

55 Royle, *The Uncanny*, 13.

56 Royle, *The Uncanny*, 51.

57 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 55, 31.

58 Case, 'Tracking the Vampire', 13. Judith Mayne, 'Dracula in the Twilight: Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922)', in *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*, ed. Eric Rentschler (New York: Methuen, 1986), 27. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975). Case identifies Freud's essay, 'a supernatural tale that unlocks the code of the prohibition again this proximity', as the answer to this question.

59 Anneleen Masschelein in her *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011) guides me through some of the ways that 1980s and 1990s theorists expand the concept of the uncanny by connecting it with other ideas and fields (131). She explains how the uncanny 'was not so much tainted by the criticisms against psychoanalysis and could be rediscovered and reclaimed in the wake of the post-structuralist predilection for the marginal and the forgotten' (127). She discusses debates and discomforts related to the theorizing and activating of the uncanny at the end of the century, including the potential for art to produce 'political and ethical changes' (146) and also the possibility of being subsumed by the very capitalist societal structures that are being criticized (147).

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> It seemed to me that radical scholars and intellectuals knew a great deal about the world capitalist system and repressive states and yet insisted on distinctions – between subject and object of knowledge, between fact and fiction, between presence and absence, between past and present, between present and future, between knowing and not-knowing – whose tenuousness and manipulation seemed precisely to me in need of comprehension and articulation, being themselves modalities of the exercise of unwanted power.[60]

Gordon is addressing the power of what Deleuze and Guattari call binary logic[61] and she is wondering about a twilight epistemology.

Freud states that 'an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary'.[62] Lisa Chinitz explains that Freud 'uses the reality principle to displace our notion of a single homogenous reality and expose it as, at least in part, a fiction of our own creation'.[63] Chinitz responds to this unintended interpellation and reframes this uncanny experience, this 'boundary confusion in relation to reality testing',[64] as an opportunity, as she links the uncanny to the act of making meaning in James's story:

> so must we stop evading and thwarting the logic of James's narrative. By fixing it into a mode of perceiving in which meanings are mutually exclusive . . . we still the transformative vision of the imagination. And like so many of James's characters, we thereby steel ourselves against the merging of ordinarily separate experiences to deny the imaginative life made accessible by the very boundary confusion we try so hard to dispel.[65]

This 'imaginative life' resonates provocatively for me with Haraway's choice to pursue fiction instead of fact because fact is 'already done', but fiction is 'still in the making'.[66] Tom Garner tells me that 'the imagination is not an opposition to reality, but is instead an integral element of it'.[67] What matters might be what I do with the uncanny, with my experience. This story and this opera ask me, 'How will you conceive of imagination? How will you use your imagination? And then how will you act?' Gordon calls for 'imagining beyond the limits of what is

60 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvii.

61 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 5.

62 Freud, 'The Uncanny', 150.

63 Lisa G. Chinitz, 'Fairy Tale Turned Ghost Story: James's *The Turn of the Screw*', *The Henry James Review* 15/3 (Fall 1994), 266.

64 Chinitz, 'Fairy Tale', 265.

65 Chinitz, 'Fairy Tale', 273.

66 Haraway, 'When We Have Never Been Human', 153.

67 Tom A. Garner, 'Bridging the Other-Real: Video Game Sound and the Imagination', in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Imagination*, ed. Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard, Mads Walther-Hansen, and Martin Knakkergaard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 794.

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already *understandable*'.[68] 'The transformative vision of the imagination' can undo common senses and binary logics constructed by normative forces and build new, less common senses, inspired by the hauntings of possibilities.[69]

I am watching and listening to the Glyndebourne production at my kitchen table, and I am in between scenes, where time is loosened. This is the ninth variation, leading into Act II, scene 2. I hear a bell. It sounds a single f♯[1] at a regular interval. The piano trills on f♯. This f♯–g♮ trill feels like a quiet percussive rumbling, a trembling. Strings and winds slip in, and set off more bells, pealing in a pattern of melodic fourths. I feel an irregular throbbing as the strings and winds repeat their sonority three more times. I hear a low F♯ pedal in this sound and I am feeling a solidish F♯ major here with added tones that then slide down and up to the fifth and octave of an F♯-major triad and then lift as the F♯ bell and piano trill resume with their tolling rumble. This motion/sequence takes two more turns, each time strings and winds sliding in, louder, pitches clustering more densely around pealing bells moving further and further away from F♯ major, and sliding back, always through the chord(s) of the previous turns, to the F♯ rumble.

A stained-glass window descends during the second turn and this invites me to situate the bells in a church. Mrs Grose comments on the bells later in the scene, and so does Miles, so they hear them too. But all the slipping and sliding brings me to deeper dimensions, shifting densities, like an expansion or extension of the piano trill, of bell overtones, haunting that F♯, there even when I don't hear them. I feel all of this as a strange backward or inward expansion motion; I feel a slow creeping awareness or emergence.[70] I feel a wobbliness, like reality is not singular, like a slow swerving in and out of focus, and when I am focusing there is so much more that I am not paying attention to.

During the third statement, Flora and Miles emerge from the side, slowly sliding across the stage on the revolving strip. They are kneeling atop a mound of soil, which I very quickly see is a freshly filled grave. There is a dense wreath of flowers on the grave. Miles is dismantling the funeral wreath, ripping off flowers, and they are whipping the petals at each other. Flora's doll also rests on the grave. They are atop the dead.

Flora and Miles seem to use the third landing on the bell as a cue and they begin singing in F♯ major: 'Oh sing unto them a new song.' This psalm text is followed by the text of the Benedicite and their vocal line here sounds to me like a hymn. The children sing lines of this canticle over the bell and piano trill, in alternation with the pealing bells, in a strange antiphony. They are smiling widely; their eyes are bright and mischievous; their movements are big. They perform prayerful poses in mock earnestness, mock piousness. Flora thrusts her

68 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 195. Gordon is talking here about writing the history of the present, inspired by the novels of Luisa Valenzuela and Toni Morrison who 'recover the evidence of things not seen'.

69 The concept of common senses comes from Savannah Shange, 'A King Named Nicki: Strategic Queerness and the Black Femmecee', *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 24/1 (2014).

70 This idea comes from Kate McQuiston's reading of Bartók's *Music for Strings Percussion and Celeste* in Kubrick's *The Shining*, where subsequent entrances of this piece in the movie each start further back, which McQuiston reads as an awakening of a consciousness. 'Mysterious Music with Invisible Edges and the Emergence of Musical Form in *The Shining*', in *We'll Meet Again: Musical Design in the Films of Stanley Kubrick* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

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doll high above her head, and when they sing, 'Let the congregation praise him', they jerk their bodies sideways, back and forth, like the accents on every syllable in their singing, the doll thrashing about wildly. Then Miles, arms thrust out, bows forward from his knees in adoration and worship of Flora's doll. The 'Lord', the worshipped, the adored, is now the doll, Hoffmann's automaton. Flora shoves her doll under her sweater and it becomes a dollbaby in her sweaterwomb. Flora does this in clear sheer delight. This was a quick impulse, a Great Idea. In fact, everything seems to happen suddenly. They are laughing. They are playing. They are improvising. That F♯ feels so flimsy to me now, one tiny thread amid a wild sea of possibilities. And it seems to me that Flora and Miles want to play in the sea.

The Benedicite is long list of bodies and beings that are called to 'praise and magnify the Lord forever'. The pattern consists of the entity being named, followed by the words 'bless ye the Lord'. Flora and Miles play with this song of praise, using their words, voices, and bodies. Sometimes they begin with their bodies hunched down, ready to rise up. They sing 'Bless ye the Lord' at warp speed; they scoop their voices, up and down. Their slipping and sliding around feels to me like a winding up, a shaking anticipation before a pounce, a dodging of fixedness, a dislodging of authority, an exuberant and defiant freedom. And Flora and Miles insert entities and musics of their own for blessing, from their own experiences, including Flora's exclamation of wonder ('O rivers and seas and lakes!') from her excursion to the lake with the governess and Miles's Latin lesson. I am starting to feel that the form can no longer contain the content. This prayer is loosening; something is being opened up.

When Mrs Grose and the governess first enter, the children freeze up a little and their subsequent 'bless ye the lord' seems a performing of exactly what they are supposed to be doing. But I know! And as Mrs Grose tries to reassure the governess, Flora and Miles continue their Benedicite cover, adding references to what seems to be a hodgepodge of things swirling around and within them – tombstones and trees, bells and towers, dragons and snakes, worms and feathered fowl, paths and woods. The reference to towers reminds me of the tower in which the governess thought she saw the Master but saw Quint instead and the paths and woods might come from the earlier waiting song of Quint and Miss Jessel in the bathroom twilight space.

Rupprecht says that the children's 'disrespectful rewriting of Anglican liturgy' is a sign of their 'naughtiness'.[71] Miles runs to Mrs Grose to say, 'Bless ye the Lord' and then back to Flora as both children sing with heavy accents, 'May she never be confounded!' The biblical text swirls around with the present. Who is this 'she'? The Lord? The governess? And confoundedness is never good in the Bible. And the children seem so pleased with themselves. And this seems to trigger a flash of knowledge in the governess, who exclaims: 'Dear God, Mrs Grose, they are not playing, they are talking horrors. Why are they so charming? Why so unnaturally good? I tell you they are not with us. But with the others.' And this is the horror, being with the dead, with the others, with the ghosts. A bell accelerates into a frenzy, like an alarm going off or a slow-motion vibration, revealing gaps, breaches.

71 Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 166.

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Jack Halberstam describes philosopher Jacques Rancière's conception of improvisation as 'a mode of breaking with the systems of recognition that keep us locked into the properly academic values of competency, legitimacy, and science'.[72] I feel Flora and Miles breaking with systems of recognition here, and their mode of breaking, their improvising, resonates so powerfully for me with José Esteban Muñoz's theorizing of disidentification. Disidentification is a mode of resistance; it is a performance; it is a form of identity mapping and building; it is an improvisation. Sarah Hankins explains that disidentification is an intersectional and indeterminate strategy that remaps 'ostensibly static configurations of power'.[73] Muñoz says that disidentification is

> a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology. Disidentification resists the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus. It is a reformatting of self within the social, a third term that resists the binary of identification and counteridentification.[74]

Muñoz's focus is 'subjects whose identities are formed in response to the cultural logics of heteronormativity, white supremacy, and misogyny', and especially queers of colour.[75] I experience Flora and Miles as minoritarian subjects because they are children. And the cultural logics of heteronormativity, white supremacy, and misogyny are diligently at work in and around this opera. Palmer writes, 'The children's *Benedicite* in effect hymns (and invokes) not the bounties of the earth and the heavenly hosts but all the hierarchy of evil'.[76] Innocent children or corrupted children – identity is more multiple, complicated, and unstable. When I make space for Flora and Miles to disidentify, I can make space for more than a binary logic. I can listen to confound. Hankins explains that 'disidentification makes use of social objects to gesture toward an unfixed subjectivity'.[77] I can read music and language and motion as social objects in use. Muñoz tells me more about how this can work:

> Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further

72 J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 144. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

73 Sarah Hankins, 'Queer Relationships with Music and an Experiential Hermeneutics for Musical Meaning', *Women and Music* 18 (2014), 90.

74 José Esteban Muñoz, '"The White to Be Angry": Vaginal Davis's Terrorist Drag', *Social Text* 52–3 (Autumn–Winter 1997), 83.

75 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 5.

76 Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', 116.

77 Hankins, 'Queer Relationships', 90.

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> than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.[78]

I am feeling Flora and Miles working to make a space for this unthinkable. They are using the Benedicite; it does not contain nor fix them (even as it also acts on them). They expand the everything of the prayersong. They mash it up. Its order and patriarchal moral authority are undermined even as and because the children stick to the structural pattern. They poke holes in this wobbly universal and open up pathways for what Deleuze and Guattari might call some lines of flight.[79] By incorporating musics and words of their experiences, I feel their identities in play and/as formation here, with/in the world. When they bring in what could be their wonder, their education by naming, the ghosts, and the governess's desire into their canticle, and respond with the warp-speed 'bless ye the lord', I feel not an absorption, but an exposing of the Benedicite as an exclusionary construction and a social performance, and also an awareness of the interconnectedness of a religious institutional ideology with so many other social forces and elements of identity. I feel the power of a pedagogy of naming, 'academic values of competency, legitimacy, and science', straight time, and heteronormativity. I feel ways of knowing and institutionalized objects of faith on the same plane of institutionalized control. I also feel a reaching out to Case's potentiality of a proximity, naming exploding into something else, worship becoming something else, and singing making something else. And I don't even know exactly what Flora's and Miles's unthinkable is, and they might not know either. I can make space for Flora and Miles to create, make with, and claim space for an unthinkable that is itself multiple and in formation.

Fictions, topics, uncanny bodies, uncanny reading

The governess is an intertextual reader. Lustig shows me how the governess seems to process her experiences through the lens of novels she has read, novels that I may have read too. The governess invokes fictions, making connections that she cannot quite control. She might see herself as Jane in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and hope to marry her employer, but the master is never there. When she thinks she sees the master on the tower, the ghost of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* interrupts, and it is Quint instead. When the role of Jane seems taken over by Miss Jessel, Miles, and Flora at various points, she then attempts 'to open up new narrative options' by choosing to read Henry Fieldings's *Amelia*, but again 'an unforeseen and perhaps uncontrollable play . . . undermines the governess's attempt to establish an orderly system of exclusive differences'.[80]

In James's story, music also participates in 'unforeseen and perhaps uncontrollable play', pivoting through and across words and senses. When the governess first arrives at Bly,

78 Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 31.

79 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

80 Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly*, 144–6.

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Flora gives her a tour. The governess calls Flora 'my little conductress' and refers to Flora's 'disposition to tell . . . so many more things than she asked' as Flora's 'morning music'.[81] Just a bit later, when she thinks she sees the master at the top of the tower, she describes it as the tower 'to which . . . Flora had conducted me'.[82] Music tells, moves, carries. Flora makes music and conducts the governess. This mild word play muddies music's behaviour and opens it up like a portal. And Miles's piano music also seems to conduct the governess:

> He sat down at the old piano and played as he had never played; and if there are those who think he had better have been kicking a football I can only say that I wholly agree with them. For at the end of a time that under his influence I had quite ceased to measure I started up with a strange sense of having literally slept at my post. It was after luncheon and by the schoolroom fire, and yet I hadn't really in the least slept; I had only done something much worse – I had forgotten. Where all this time was Flora? When I put the question to Miles he played on a minute before answering, and then could only say: 'Why, my dear, how do *I* know?' – breaking moreover into a happy laugh which immediately after, as if it were a vocal accompaniment, he prolonged into incoherent extravagant song.[83]

She loses her bearings, her sense of time, her sense of Flora, her sense of music, her sense of sense. Borders of utterance, genre, and function blur.

In the opera, music might conduct us too, me and the governess. I too might use my experiences of other texts to make meaning and I might seek to maintain control of those connections and I might or might not struggle to do so. Klein defines a topic as 'a semiotic code that associates a conventional label with a constellation of musical signs'.[84] My perception of a topic could influence the way I understand and respond to music, and that perception might contribute to an uncanny experience. Klein, using Michael Rifaterre's work on interpretation and intertextuality, explains how a reader might respond to an uncanny element or experience. If something doesn't make sense or seems strange, I might try to rationalize an 'ungrammaticality'.[85]

The piano material in Act II, scene 6 and the variation that precedes and merges with it contains many elements of eighteenth-century keyboard music, including Alberti bass figures accompanying a clear melody, ornaments, sequences, and sweeping arpeggios and scalar gestures. But the music also turns away from these allusions. In C major, tonic and dominant seventh chords oscillate unsteadily over a relentless e pedal to form a kind of harmonic foundation with an unstable harmonic rhythm. Ornaments fall inconsistently too, making definitive downbeats difficult to find. And sharped notes begin to slip into the right-hand melody. I hear a veering towards E major, but then a sudden accented $e♭^3$ leads to a downward swoop in C natural minor. A C-minor melody sounds in octaves, while C-major chords are plucked in the strings, and then pitches slide further still. The music from the variation moves fluidly into the scene,

81 James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 9.

82 James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 15.

83 James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 64.

84 Klein, *Intertextuality*, 56.

85 Klein, *Intertextuality*, 97.

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now sounded only by the piano – the piano that Miles plays. Then the governess and Mrs Grose begin to sing what I might hear as a Mozartian operatic duet in homorhythm in unMozartian parallel fourths in praise of Miles for his performance, which now also accompanies them.[86]

Brett calls Miles's music 'mock Mozart/Czerny' and Palmer calls it 'Rococo pseudo-Mozart' whose '"purity" . . . is quickly besmirched by polytonal clashes'. Palmer says that 'even in the very first bars . . . the hands don't really fit together properly'.[87] For Brett and Palmer the piano music of Mozart might act as a topic, and they read Miles's music as a topic interrupted or corrupted. A Mozartian style is pure; the false relations threaten that purity. My sense of mastery might depend on a reinforcement of the topic, of the constructed boundary around the meaning of the music. I might want to 'establish an orderly system of exclusive differences', and thus hear warped or false Mozart.

Klein says that a rationalization might cause me to lose some additional 'clues to meanings'.[88] How else might I read? Whitesell suggests that the twelve-note THEME can be heard 'according to the logic of a tonal center' or 'according to chromatic logic' as 'an expanded harmonic field', and thus 'houses a confusion between listening perspectives' that might defy stable orientation and promote slippage.[89] Rupprecht says that a mode slip can provide 'an instantaneous shift of perspective within a scene',[90] resonating with Felman's reference to 'the incessant *sliding* of signification'.[91] In this variation and scene, when the pitches keep swerving out of alignment, sharps and flats start to seem interchangeable, indistinguishable. I begin to have trouble determining what 'belongs' and what doesn't. I lose my bearings, I forget.[92]

Robert Spadoni, in his book on early sound film and the uncanny, thinks about slips of perspective and early sound film reception, about the ways that the addition of synchronized sound, with its newness and inconsistencies, affected the ways audiences responded to what they saw, making the filmic world seem ghostly. Then just a bit later, some early horror film moments could evoke those responses to create an uncanny experience. Spadoni describes 'a reception environment in which discursive elements are tending to slip easily onto diegetic entities' and the dual effect this created, making speaking bodies appear 'physically emergent' and flat at the same time, perhaps like 'a living human corpse'.[93] There is a

86 I feel touchings here to Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, to the duet between the Countess and Susanna – 'Che soave zefiretto' – which also involves a letter, deception, and performance.

87 Philip Brett, 'Eros and Orientalism in Britten's Operas', in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 248. Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', 118.

88 Klein, *Intertextuality*, 99.

89 Whitesell, 'Doubt and Failure', 53.

90 Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 149.

91 Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 215.

92 Richard Cohn, in his article on the uncanny and hexatonic poles, 'Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57/2 (2004), describes how a deep undecidability (317) in relation to a grounding orientation, a 'version of reality – the consonant triad or its consonant pole' (319), can represent the uncanny and create an uncanny experience, disrupting binary logics.

93 Robert Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 25–6.

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moment in *Dracula* (1931) when Renfield's laughter seems to be separated from his body, floating off screen: 'The laugh seems to us *near* Renfield's mouth, but not quite *in* it.' Viewers 'are suddenly put into contact with a cold and lifeless thing' and 'a man who is losing his soul produces a laugh that is not altogether his own'.[94] In *Svengali* (1931), proximity overload and the possibility of 'supernatural causality' result when a jump cut lands on an extreme close-up of the opening of Svengali's milky porous eyes and Svengali seems to take over the filmic discourse.[95] Spadoni theorizes this uncanny body as a marker of a shift of a viewer's perception. He says that I can 'think of the uncanny body as a form of reception interference or static'.[96] An uncanny body can cause a viewerlistener to ignore semantic content and to engage in other ways, for example, to acknowledge the very presence of something or to respond to elements of sensuous materiality.[97]

In the Glyndebourne production, the *mise-en-scène* seems built of thresholds and boundary interferences: there are so many windows and doorways and a multiply revolving stage; characters or singers move props between scenes, and sometimes things appear to move in on their own. Scenes emerge out of visible formation. It feels to me like what Spadoni says about *Frankenstein* (1931), for which James Whale uses jump cuts to extreme close-ups to 'punch his monster out of the screen and into the space of the theater'. Discontinuous editing could have a Brechtian effect on an audience, but instead, 'rather than awaken them from the dream of the film, [it] plunge[s] them deeper into it'.[98] I am plunged. I feel normative conceptions and experiences of time and space collapsing. There is always another space, always the possibility of someone watching, of supernatural causality and agency. During the variation before the piano scene, there is a moment when, behind the window, Quint, motionless, is all shadow, and the governess and Mrs Grose on one platform and Miles and the piano on another are shadows in motion, spiralling around before gently gliding into the room. And they all seem to be ghosts.

I might take the presence of the orchestra for granted in an opera, including the use of an instrument in the pit to stand in for a performance on the stage, but in this scene, the sound and sense of the piano float out of my grasp. I find myself in 'a reception environment in which discursive elements are tending to slip easily onto diegetic entities'. Miles plays the piano; the sound of the piano onstage comes from the piano in the pit even though I can't see it. But I don't feel an artifice of opera, nor even an operatic convention – I feel an uncanny reality; I feel Abbate's sound not subject to capture. If I suspend disbelief, what might I need to believe in?

The functions of the piano sounds seem so multiple, ever shifting, and difficult to identify with certainty. Miles and his piano roll into the scene long after I start hearing the piano. Then the governess and Mrs Grose begin to sing about Miles's playing as the piano accompanies them: 'Oh what a clever boy; why he must have practiced very hard. I never knew a little boy so good.' Miles's musical performance of cleverness and goodness accompanies an operatic duet

94 Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies*, 59–60.
95 Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies*, 44.
96 Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies*, 30.
97 Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies*, 18, 101.
98 Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies*, 111–12.

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that is strangely diegetic and not at the same time. Somehow Miles also accompanies their secret conversation, told in a hush so that he won't hear, about the letter the governess has written to the Master, reporting 'that his house is poisoned'. Miles interjects sparse figures between their lines, anticipating their pitches, and sometimes the piano doubles their lines, like a recitative accompaniment or a supernatural force. Even in the interlude variation, the piano anticipates melodic bits that Mrs Grose and the governess will sing during the scene. And their secret conversation reveals the possibility not only of the insincerity of the governess's praises of Miles's performance, but also of her reading of Miles's music as a false signifier of identity. In both cases, music is unreliable. Then Miles resumes the rhythmically confident rising and falling scalar motions as the governess praises that music again. At the reprise of 'I never knew a little boy so good', the piano tinkles decorative triplets an octave above the governess's line, swirling a delicate garland of feigned goodness around their words and voices.

Later in the scene, I feel an abrupt shift as Flora sings the same (025) lullaby command – 'Go to sleep!' – that she sang to her doll earlier by the lake (Act I, scene 7). Miles accompanies with the (025)-laden pentatonic sweeps of the celesta from Quint's bathroom calling (Act I, scene 8), and Miles is accompanied by the same gong stroke and the same F♯ in the double bass. At the lake, the governess told Flora, 'Sing to her dear, Dolly must sleep wherever you choose.' And Flora does sing, and Mrs Grose must sleep. Here singing casts a powerful magic spell. And Flora flies away. I am overwhelmed with reception interference, boundary confusions, 'unforeseen and uncontrollable play', uncanny bodies. I think I feel the children taking control of the operatic discourse. And I feel a sensuous materiality; I feel a presence of something, beyond mere signification.[99]

Klein discusses the uncanny as a topic and identifies some of its possible musical signs as including tremolos, enharmonicism, and 'strange uses of chromaticism'.[100] All these elements permeate this opera's soundscape, and tremolos, spirallings, shakings, and shimmerings sound on multiple scales. As Flora makes her escape and the governess performs her exclaiming over and naming of Miles ('Oh Miles!'), Miles and the piano gliss and gallop, landing with force on a (014) cluster tremolo doubled across both hands, amplified as if from the inside with a cymbal trill and shadowy low string tremolos on the bridge. This shadowed shaking could be a melodramatic horror trope, like a huge signpost for the uncanny, another billboard communication.[101] And it is utterly frightening, like I am on the crumbling edge of a cliff, and I think this is in large part because it might feel a little ridiculous at the same time, a cliché. It condenses all my experiences in the scene so far and dares me to take it seriously. I feel Miles anticipating and mocking the governess's horror by labelling it, naming it, via this uncanny topical move, a topical tripping, a parody of the uncanny. I feel the strangeness of an uncanny topic, a naming of the ineffectiveness of naming, and I feel the uncanny turning in on itself. I

99 Christopher Chowrimootoo discusses additional ways that Britten's music blurs boundaries between the symbolic and the literal, the obvious and the elusive, surface and depth in *Middlebrow Modernism: Britten's Operas and the Great Divide* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 112–13.

100 Klein, *Intertextuality*, 87.

101 Chowrimootoo (*Middlebrow Modernism*) discusses reception of the opera in relation to resonances with and perceptions of Gothic melodrama and modernism.

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feel a sonic signifier of the uncanny rubbing against the experience of a blurring of discourse and diegetic supernatural causality.

I can bring my experience with topical tripping and uncanny bodies back to Act I, scene 8 and the preceding variation, where I first heard Quint's singing, the celesta sweeps, and the gong. In the Glyndebourne production, the stage is dark except for a single spotlight as the scene rolls in. I see Flora's body, but her head is submerged in the bathroom sink. One leg is up because she is really leaning in, but she is motionless. I see a bathtub. There is another space to the right of the bathroom, separated by a glass wall – I'm not sure what it is. The space is hazy and blueish purply, a twilight. There is a shadow figure outside the back hazily transparent wall, holding on to the frame of a door as if wanting to get in. And then that figure seems to begin to sing. I see no mouth at all. It sounds as if this voice is emerging from the celesta, is part of it. The subtitles tell me that Quint is singing Miles's name, but I wouldn't be able to tell otherwise. Quint's call to Miles is fluidly unpredictable, as pitches and rhythms slip and slide and surge and sway, weaving across and through the celesta's chains of (025) pentatonic undulations. Miles's name is opened up and out. Slowly, hands emerge from the tub, and then Miles's head and arms. Miles stares ahead, as if transfixed. *Transfixed*: frozen in place and in motion all at once. I am transfixed too. Quint enters the bathroom only when Miles responds to him, like a vampire. And the entire time that Miles and Quint are interacting, Flora is frozen in the sink. This is queer time, ghostly time.

A single gong stroke, a (025) harp tremolo, those celesta sweeps, unruly melismatic singing – these elements have been read as exotic and orientalist tropes, pointing readers to a dangerous nexus of orientalist themes and functions, linking homoeroticism to corruption and threat.[102] And these sonic elements, and others, have been linked to Britten's exposure to Balinese gamelan-inspired music.[103] Brett reminds me that 'orientalism is one of the means by which desire unacceptable to or feared by the (Western) Subject can be projected on to the Other'.[104] So this topic of magical or supernatural otherness can participate in discourses of colonialism, racism, gender and sexuality oppression, and ableism haunting this story, these musics, these characters – including the ghosts, and past and present readers.

Linda Nochlin, in her discussion of orientalist painting in France in the nineteenth century, calls upon her readers to be canny, to see the orientalist discourse at work in the paintings of Gérôme, to see what is really going on, to see the truth. So naming the 'orientalist trope' in Quint's call to Miles might make us 'cannier readers'.[105] The governess too wants to be a canny reader. But what might be gained if I could be an uncanny reader? And what could

102 Rupprecht asserts that 'the orientalist trope, in the *Screw*, allows Britten symbolic access to a sexual discourse he could not, in 1954, openly address on the operatic stage' (*Britten's Musical Language*, 156). Palmer describes 'Quint's sinuous, seductive arabesques with their sybaritic oriental overtones' ('The Colour of the Music', 111). Brett identifies 'the demonizing of the homosexual through . . . orientalism' ('Eros and Orientalism in Britten's Operas', 250).

103 See Brett, 'Eros and Orientalism'. Brett calls them 'pseudogamelan sounds' (245). Also see Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', 104–11. Palmer describes the 'extraordinarily gamelanish sound of the cluster-chord for chimes reinforced by piano' in the churchyard scene (('The Colour of the Music', 117).

104 Brett, 'Eros and Orientalism', 245.

105 Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 45.

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this even mean? I am thinking back to Chinitz's warning about mutually exclusive meanings, about the potential trap of musical 'otherness', how this trope identification alone might still music that could be in motion.

Brett might go the furthest in leaving space for simultaneous possibilities in motion. Brett warns, and he also wonders. A 'gay-affirmative reading' might deny realities of Britten's own experience and essentialize.[106] Brett ponders the expression of 'fear, shame, and defiance all at once' and 'a rich if dangerous enhancement of life and art beyond the world that imprisons him (and Miles)'.[107] Brett makes room for tropes to trip, for disidentificatory relationships, for the uncanny spaces of tropic possibilities. And Haraway too tells me that I can use a trope to turn away from a master narrative.[108]

Brett reads Quint's vocalizing on the opening sound of 'Miles' as 'preliterate', as 'from Lacan's imaginary', the voice 'an instrument of pleasure, or the mother's voice'.[109] But my theorizing about a phantasmic identity space does not have to be rooted in genealogy, in what Case calls 'the heterosexist psychoanalytical model'.[110] Instead I can call upon Hankins, who ponders the possibilities of arousal 'as a state in which we may be uniquely attuned to musical meaning', as 'the ultimate failure of the subject/object boundary', as 'a psychosomatic process', as Mary Russo's grotesque body – a multiply open body '"connected to the rest of the world"'.[111] This connectivity is Gordon's social, and it can be Brett's all-at-onceness and enhancement of life and art. An aroused interacting with this music can make a space of creative power and play, nonnormative logics and relationalities, in which boundaries of the self can be loosened.[112] Quint's music might arouse and interpellate Miles and me, interpellate in the sense that Haraway describes, to call through interruption to a new subject position.[113] And this state of arousal can constitute and facilitate a queer relationship with music. Hankins writes that 'a queer relationship with music reveals musical meaning as the ever-shifting dynamic interface between multiple social objects on a field of social power'.[114] So I am wondering about uncanny reading as queer reading, as a queer relationship with music. Case makes this connection throughout her theorizing. She writes,

106 Brett, 'Bad Boys', 24–5. For a gay-affirmative reading, see Clifford Hindley, 'Why Does Miles Die? A Study of Britten's "The Turn of the Screw"', *The Musical Quarterly* 74/1 (1990). Brett calls for a facing of history and a new framework for telling this history, citing 'the oppression we have suffered as a result of the dominant transhistorical notion of male homosexuality that has served so well the purpose of controlling our lives' ('Bad Boys', 25).

107 Brett, 'Eros and Orientalism', 250, 249.

108 Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters', 65.

109 Brett, 'Eros and Orientalism', 245.

110 Case, 'Tracking the Vampire', 12. Case writes, 'The idea of this pre-Oedipal *jouissance* with the mother reinscribes Freud's patriarchal obsession with genealogy and sexuality as generative—part of the nineteenth-century proscription against homosexuality' (14).

111 Hankins, 'Queer Relationships', 85. Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1995).

112 Hankins reminds me that '*our arousals are constructed and conditioned* as well' ('Queer Relationships', 86) – that the social power structure is entrenched in and built upon (referencing Eve Sedgwick) a logic of sexual order, a 'binate, male-female "gender" topos' (86).

113 Haraway, 'Promises of Monsters', 70.

114 Hankins, 'Queer Relationships', 84.

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'The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny.'[115] Hankins reminds me that '"Queerness" itself is a construct, a holdover from imperial Europe's science of sex (a discursive manifestation of power structure if there ever was one), yet actual queer experience and queer relationality are always resisting that age-old codification, unfolding atavistically, with all of the indeterminacy, fluidity, and dynamism that exists before naming'.[116] This before naming is not a psychoanalytical before naming; it is other possibilities and connections that can haunt a naming.

At the end of this scene – the children in the centre of a nexus of calls from all the adults in ghostly and off-stage realms – there is a sonic and signifying overload. The THEME sounds in the winds, gradually expanding in density, colour, volume, and range through the cumulative addition of doubling instruments, all trilling by the end. The harp glides through a vast four-octave range in a single beat. The celesta (025)-laden sextuplet pentatonic sweeps return yet again, and the strings arpeggiate widely across the same pitches played by the celesta and the harp, in groupings of eight and six per beat. I feelhear these strings, as a delicate shimmering, a threshold of sound. The six vocal lines are staggered, each cycling, and each with a different number of beats, so the vertical sonorities are ever shifting. The gong and the F♯ pedal in the bass from earlier return too. This soundscape is static and in motion; it is transfixation. It is layers of cycling pulsations in a dense heterophony. Palmer calls this section 'an intensification to the nth power of the gamelan-like elements' found in variation seven.[117] This could be a trope implosion. The violence of orientalist tropes and impulses and normative structures are not obscured nor removed; but there is also more, so much more. This is a nexus, a vibrating portal to no singular destination. Lustig says that James's story 'focusses with such intensity on the way in which thresholds simultaneously divide and connect that borders seem to occupy the whole field, to prevent simple oppositions between the outer and the inner rather than making them possible'.[118] This soundscape is that whole field border zone intensity.

When I listen to this moment with my headphones, again and again, I cannot orient myself in space in a singular way. At first, I try to find a focal point, but there is too much. I feel the existence of spaces beyond what I already know and I feel my body in proximity of and relation to those spaces. I feel open, aroused. Iain Findlay-Walsh writes about immersive listening to digital musickings and the experience and creation of virtual realities. Findlay-Walsh reminds me that when I listen, I am in multiple and liminal relation to what and who I am hearing: 'The auditory experience of presence is at once spatial and transportational, social and self-reflexive.'[119] Listening can (re-)orient me. This can be a queer relationality. I am not separated from the social forces at work in this opera and in my own life; I am of and with the world and the possibilities touching it; I am in relation to these characters and these musics. And I do not need to assume that I know how Miles and Flora are listening or the nature of the relations they are experiencing.

115 Case, 'Tracking the Vampire', 3.

116 Hankins, 'Queer Relationships', 91.

117 Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', 105.

118 Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly*, 133–4.

119 Iain Findlay-Walsh, 'Virtual Auditory Reality: Inhabiting Digital Pop Music as Simulated Space', *Sound Effects* 10/1 (2021), 85.

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In James's story, the governess describes being on the threshold of Miles's room – she writes, 'I preternaturally listened.'[120] This strange sentence prompts me to imagine a threshold listening, listening in an inexplicable or extraordinary way. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson describes what she calls 'baroque staring' as 'unrepentant abandonment to the unruly': 'Unconcerned with rationality, mastery, or coherence, baroque staring blatantly announces the states of being wonderstruck and confounded.' And she asserts that, 'because baroque staring indicates wonder rather than mastery, it can lead to new insights'.[121] I want to baroque listen to this music, in multiple and liminal relationalities. May I be confounded.

Muñoz helps me to consider the potentiality of the proximities of virtual realities, of fictions, when he reads James Baldwin's *Just Above My Head*, in which multiple characters seem to connect to Baldwin himself, like Baldwin is mapmaking his identity in a fiction 'abounded with stand-ins'. Muñoz says I can understand fiction as 'a technology of the self':

> This self is a disidentificatory self whose relation to the social is not overdetermined by universalizing rhetorics of selfhood. The 'real self' who comes into being through fiction is not the self who produces fiction, but is instead produced by fiction. Binaries finally begin to falter and fiction becomes the real; which is to say that the truth effect of ideological grids is broken down through Baldwin's disidentification with the notion of fiction – and it does not stop here: fiction then becomes a contested field of self-production.[122]

Now I am listening to Miles's Malo song as a technology of the self. 'Malo' is a Latin word, with multiple possible meanings,[123] but here perhaps it is no longer chained to a conventional translatable meaning. It is loosened into sound. Miles repeats it again and again. In answer to the governess's question, Miles says no, she did not teach him the song, he found it, he likes it. And he sings more Malos. Perhaps the familiar words of his song are distracting me and I should listen to the Malos instead, 'in excess of grammatical signs'.[124] Klein suggests that assonance can allow for an interpretive strategy that maps the sonic similarities between words to other similarities. Identities can thus be transformed; subjectivities can be 'shredded'.[125] *Miles Malo Miles Malo Malo Malo*. I hear an unsounded assonance in these Malos. And as they repeat, with small repetitions, inversions, extensions, Malo can turn into something else, towards touchpoints not yet imagined. Miles turns to Malo turns to something else. The strummed harp triads of this final line are all major, and I experience another kind of sonic assonance, a kind of sonic fanning outward, pointing towards multiple dimensions. Maloing is not naming. Maloing is turning and touching. Maloing is becoming, wondering, making, self-producing. Perhaps Miles's identity is in flux, flexing. Miles is underway and in

120 James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 42.

121 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50–1.

122 Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 20.

123 See Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 168, and Valentine Cunningham, 'Filthy Britten', *The Guardian*, 4 January 2002, www.theguardian.com/education/2002/jan/05/arts.highereducation.

124 Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 176.

125 Klein, *Intertextuality*, 87. The song is Schoenberg's 'Song of the Wood Dove', from *Gurrelieder*.

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relation. Kiese Laymon says that I can reread a question to push myself to different answers.[126] Miles could be rereading a question and I can do it here too. Clarice Lispector tells me, 'So writing is the method of using the word as bait: the word fishing for whatever is not word.'[127] Miles could be fishing for whatever is not musicword, using sound or song as bait. This could even be what Muñoz calls a queer solo in Baldwin's novel, which 'is a lament that does not collapse into nostalgia but takes flight'.[128] This is a music, a fiction, a fishing, that connects and soars, listens and opens.

Jennifer Orme calls upon me to consider magic as another technology of identity, 'still in the making', and to read magic and magical storytelling in Del Toro's film *Pan's Labyrinth* as resistance, not in opposition to or as escape from reality, but as a disruptive disobedience to a monologic conception of reality. If I try to maintain a clear distinction between magic and reality, I might be like Vidal, the fascist patriarch who uses violence to destroy disobedience and dictate reality. Orme shows me how a 'juxtaposition of congruent realities produces critiques of monologic totalitarian discourses and endorses stories of magical transformation as forms of resistance and vehicles of hope'.[129] These stories could be and lead to queer worldmaking. And I am feeling a powerful connection with Muñoz telling me that 'disidentificatory performances and readings require an active kernel of utopian possibility', pointing to the should be.[130]

This opera throbs with the tensions and touchings between queer worldmaking possibilities and the repetition of the same. This story, this opera, this production absolutely provide a space in which I can be afraid, reaffirm my prejudices, solidify destructive boundaries, and impose binary logics and normative power structures. There are also pathways here through which I can acknowledge the social and cultural fictions that create realities. I can recognize and face a history of naming and violence and its influence on the ways readers construct and judge identities, on the ways readers read and know. And I can make room for the creation of additional meanings and realities. Licia Carlson asks, 'How might music serve to expand the moral imagination and transform the relationship between self and other?'[131] Again and again and again, like a magical incantation, Gordon tells me that a haunting is emergent, that it is a something to be done, that 'The ghost is not other or alterity as such, ever. It is . . . pregnant with the unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding'.[132]

I am so aroused by the uncanny as connective tissue between multiple theoretical makings that can challenge normative and oppressive forces, impulses, and structures, ways of being and knowing and interacting. Theorizing and practising uncanny reading can help me to

126 Kiese Laymon, 'The Radical Possibility and Democratic Necessity of Navel Gazing', Convocation address, Lawrence University, 28 January 2021.

127 Lispector, *Água Viva*, 15.

128 Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 20.

129 Jennifer Orme, 'Narrative Desire and Disobedience in *Pan's Labyrinth*', *Marvels & Tales* 24/2 (2010), 224.

130 Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 25.

131 Licia Carlson, 'Music, Intellectual Disability, and Human Flourishing', in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, ed. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil Lerner, and Joseph Straus (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 46.

132 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 183.

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be open to and use these connectings, and to respond to hauntings, and magic. And I am imagining how I might facilitate and practise uncanny listening and reading and making as a teacher and in all my everyday interactings. How I might not say, 'Don't tease dear', as the governess says to Flora when Flora demands that the governess look at her. How I might not ignore but instead pay my attention to and make space for improvisatory makings of those around me, like Flora's interruptive improvisations of sound possibilities connecting to Miles's Latin nouns or her co-opting of Miles's driving rhythm to try to move somewhere else. How I might listen for more than what I think I already know.

In the last scene, Flora refuses to participate. She leaves the haunted house, the haunted stage, and moves into the haunted world. What might I imagine for Flora? What might Flora do and make and become with or beyond my imagining? In the churchyard, the governess first decides not to write to the Master because, as she remembers, 'I was charged not to worry him.' 'Yes. He does hate worry,' affirms Mrs Grose. The Master does hate worry. Well Flora is coming and it might be time to get worrying. Flora! I will look at you. I will listen. I will see you in another story. And at the end of the opera, the governess sings the Malo song with Miles, dead, in her arms. I am reading this maloing as a fishing for what Haraway calls a non-ending,[133] and I can keep everything open, in play, in uncanny relationality. I can face, listen to, and make with ghostly presences and possibilities.

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133 Haraway, 'Promises of Monsters', 110.

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