The Turn of the Screw Study Guide

The Turn of the Screw by Henry James

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* has inspired a divided critical debate, the likes of which the literary world has rarely seen. When the short novel was first published in 1898, it was published in three different versions, as a serial in *Collier's Weekly* and in book form with another tale, in both American and English editions. James later revised the story and published it in 1908 in the twelfth volume of the New York Edition of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*. It is the 1908 version that the author preferred and to which most modern critics refer. However, no matter what version readers encounter, they may find themselves falling into one of two camps supported by critics to this day. Either the story is an excellent example of the type of ghost story that was popular at the end of the nineteenth century or it is a psychoanalytic study of the hallucinations of a madwoman.

As a ghost story, then the tale details the classic struggle between good and evil and dealings with the supernatural. If one takes it as a psychoanalytic study, then the story emphasizes sexual repression and the sources of insanity. In either case, *The Turn of the Screw* has delighted readers for more than a century and continues to serve as one of the many examples of James's literary artistry, among such other notable works as *The American*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Author Biography

James was born on April 15, 1843, on the edge of Greenwich Village in New York City. Born into a wealthy family, James was exposed to a traveling lifestyle. Less than a year after James was born, his parents took him and his brother, William, to London. A little over a year later, they visited Paris and then returned to New York, where they stayed for a decade.

As a child, James was not interested in school, and his education came periodically at day schools or from in-home tutors. People constantly surrounded James; his house was filled with an assortment of family, governesses, friends, and other visitors. Among the more distinguished visitors were writers Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Makepeace Thackeray. In 1856, James and his family moved to Europe, where he eventually fell in love with Paris and the French language. In 1858, the family returned to America, to Newport, Rhode Island. The stay was not long, and the family moved back to Europe again in 1859. However, a year later they once again moved back to America, this time to indulge brother William's desire to study art in a Newport studio.

In 1861, the Civil War broke out in America, and two of James's brothers left to fight. James, however, had injured himself severely—although scholars do not know how exactly—and could not fight. Instead, he attended Harvard Law School for one year, apparently so that he could get access to Harvard's library, literary social scene, and literature lectures. For the five years after Harvard, James stayed with his parents at home, which at this point was Boston, since his parents had followed him to Harvard. During this time, James, who had long harbored ideas of a writing career, began to produce his own literature.

His early writings consisted of short stories, reviews of other books, and critical notes. In 1869, James traveled to England, where his family's connections put him in touch with such notable British thinkers as Charles Darwin, George Eliot, and John Ruskin. He toured much of the rest of Europe, favoring Italy most. In fact, he started writing his first novel, *Roderick Hudson* (1876) in Florence.

James was such a prolific writer—important in the development of the modern novel—that critics have divided his literary career into three phases, based on the level of development in his craft. At the end of the middle phase, in the 1890s, James decided to experiment in a number of ways. One of these experiments, *The Turn of the Screw*, published in 1898, is a ghost story that has kept critics guessing as to the story's interpretation and James's original intent for more than a century.

During James's final phase, known as the "major phase," he produced the novels that most critics—and James himself—consider the novelist's best works. These include *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Although James was born in America, England was his adopted home for much of his life, and in 1915 he became a British citizen. James died of edema on February 28, 1916, in London.

Plot Summary

A Terrible Tale

The Turn of the Screw begins on Christmas Eve during the 1890s, in an old house, where a group of men and women friends are gathered around a fireside telling ghost stories. When the book starts, somebody has just finished telling a particularly gruesome tale involving a ghost and a child. Later in the evening, a man named Douglas comments on this tale, saying that he agrees that since the tale involves a child, it magnifies the horrific effect, which he refers to as "another turn of the screw." He proposes to top this tale with a ghost story involving two children, but when pressed to do so, he says that he must read the tale from the account of the person who has experienced it and that the account is in a book in his home in the city.

Over the next couple of days, while the group is waiting for the book to arrive, Douglas gives a short prologue to the tale. In this preview, he reveals that the story involves a young governess in the mid-1800s, who has been hired by a young man to take care of his niece and nephew. The one condition that the governess must adhere to is that she can never trouble the man about anything involving the children. Some of the other major characters are introduced, including Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper who is currently watching over the house and children; Miles, the ten-year-old nephew, who was sent away to school after the death of the previous governess; and Flora, the eight-year-old niece. When the group presses Douglas for more details, such as how the previous governess died, he is very guarded, preferring to let them make their own interpretations as he reads the account verbatim—which he does when the book arrives.

The Governess's First Days at the Estate

From this point on in the book, Douglas and the guests disappear, and the reader hears only the firsthand account of what the governess has written about her experiences at Bly, the country estate. When the governess arrives at Bly in the spring, she is a little nervous, since this is the first time that she has had so much responsibility. The governess wonders why Mrs. Grose seems to hide her eagerness to see the governess. The governess is delighted when she meets charming Flora. Her first night at Bly, the governess hears noises but does not think anything of them. When she goes to pick up Miles two days later, she is apprehensive, since she has received a note from his school saying that he is being sent home and can never return. When the governess presses Mrs. Grose as to whether Miles is a bad boy, the housekeeper is cryptic, as she is about the details surrounding the death of the previous governess. The governess meets Miles and cannot understand why anyone would dismiss such a charming boy.

Several weeks later, the governess sees a strange man while she is walking in the garden one evening. The man disappears, and the governess assumes he is a

trespasser. The next Sunday, as the governess and Mrs. Grose are preparing to go to church, she finds the same man staring at her through a window. She runs outside to confront him, but he is gone. When she describes the man to Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper says that the governess has described Peter Quint, their employer's deceased valet, who was not a very nice person when he was alive. The governess feels that Quint has come for Miles and charges herself with the moral task of trying to save the two children's souls from being corrupted. Shortly thereafter, while the governess and Flora are in the garden, the governess sees a woman, whom she later guesses is Miss Jessel, the former, deceased governess. Although the governess swears Flora has seen her, too, the little girl shows no sign that she has.

The governess presses the housekeeper for more information about the two apparitions and discovers that the two were lovers when they were alive, and that Quint had questionable dealings with Miles while Miss Jessel had suspicious dealings with Flora. Several days pass, and still the children do not betray that they have seen any ghosts. One night, the governess sees Quint again, upon the stairs. She stands her ground, unafraid, and he disappears. That night, the governess finds Flora peering out of her window, but when the governess confronts her, Flora denies seeing anybody. One night, as she is doing her now routine sweep of the staircase, the governess sees Miss Jessel looking very sad, but she disappears after an instant. Shortly thereafter, the governess catches Miles out of his bed and wandering on the lawn, presumably to speak with the ghosts, although the children still deny any wrongdoing. The governess takes up the matter with Mrs. Grose, who encourages her to contact their employer. However, the governess is reluctant to break her vow not to disturb him.

Autumn

Summer passes into autumn, and although the governess searches for the ghosts around every corner, they are not apparent for many weeks. One Sunday, while they are walking to church, Miles asks the governess if he can be sent away to school and threatens to complain to his uncle if she does not let him. The governess is so stricken by this that she walks back to the house, intending to leave it for good. When she sees Miss Jessel sitting at her desk in her classroom, she resolves to stay. She also decides to write to their employer about the suspected behavior of his niece and nephew. Before she writes the letter, she goes to talk to Miles, trying to find out his experiences at school before he was sent home. When she pries too deeply, she suddenly feels a blast of cold air and the candle goes out, although Miles tells her that he blew it out.

The next day, Miles is very happy and offers to play piano for her. The governess is delighted at the music, until she realizes that Flora is not around. Miles feigns innocence over Flora's whereabouts, so the governess seeks the aid of Mrs. Grose. Before the two women leave to search, the governess places the letter to her employer on the table for one of the servants to mail. The governess and Mrs. Grose go to the lake, where they find the boat missing. After walking around the lake, the governess finds Flora and, for the first time, asks her bluntly where Miss Jessel is. The ghost appears to the governess; however, Mrs. Grose sees nothing and sides with Flora, who also says that

she sees nothing and never has. Furthermore, she asks to be taken away from Bly, away from the governess.

Sickness and Death

The next morning, the governess finds out from Mrs. Grose that Flora was struck with a fever during the night and that she is terrified of seeing the governess. However, Mrs. Grose does say that the governess was justified in her suspicions of Flora, because the child has started to use evil language. The governess encourages Mrs. Grose to take Flora to her uncle's house for safety and also so that she can try to gain Miles's allegiance in his sister's absence. Before she leaves, Mrs. Grose says that the governess's letter never got sent and that it has mysteriously disappeared.

When the governess is alone with Miles after dinner, she asks him if he stole her letter. Before he can respond, she feels the presence of Quint and shields Miles from seeing the ghost. Miles admits that he stole the letter so that he could read it. When she presses him to talk about his experiences at school, he says only that he said bad things to others. The governess holds him tightly to keep him from the window, and he asks her if it is "she." She tells him no, it is "the coward horror," and the boy finally names Quint. When Miles looks to see the ghost, Quint is gone. Miles screams and falls into the governess's arms, dead, his heart having stopped.

Introduction

Introduction Summary

The introduction to *The Turn of the Screw* introduces us to the un-named author and the storyteller-to-be, known only as Douglas. A group has gathered by the fire in an old house to tell stories on Christmas Eve, and an unknown participant has just finished a gruesome story, deemed by the narrator to be fitting to the time and setting. The story just told involves a child, a contributing factor to its grotesque description, and the group quietly ponders the tale, until Douglas offers the possibility of a story even more horrible involving not one, but two children.

The gathering is interested, and one woman declares the idea to be "delicious" and urges Douglas to tell the story. He reveals that he is the only one that has heard the story before, and that, to the dismay of the group, he shall have to send to town for the manuscript, currently locked away.

Douglas says that the story was recorded not by him, but by his sister's governess, a "most charming person" ten years older than himself. He implies that the audience will judge why she hadn't told the story when they hear the tale, and then admits that it is because she was in love. After more questioning, he agrees to tell more the following day and retires to bed. The audience discusses that he was likely in love with the governess and retires for the evening as well.

The following day, he sent the key and letter to obtain the manuscript, which reaches him "on the third of these days" and which is read on the fourth. The narrator notes that Douglas gave him this same manuscript before he died death, and the narrative, "from an exact transcript of my own made much later, is what I shall presently give." The narrative also requires some introduction, and Douglas provides a bit of background on the governess.

Douglas says that governess has responded to an advertisement, meeting on Harley Street in London a handsome, single gentleman who is gallant, splendid, and most important to the governess, grateful for her favor of accepting his employment. The man had received, on the death of his parents, two children of a younger brother that had died two years earlier. He had sent the children to a well-staffed house in the country, Bly, relinquishing some of his own staff to take care of them. The first governess that cared for them had died, and the boy, Miles, had to be sent to school. The new governess would be responsible for the girl, Flora, and would look after the Miles during the school holiday as well.

The governess, though wary of her predecessor's dire fate, succumbed to the wiles of her new employer and took the position despite his single odd request: she was not to contact him under any circumstances. Other applicants not agreed to his terms, but the

governess accepted, and received the reward of having her hand held while the man expressed his gratitude for her "sacrifice."

Finally, Douglas opens a "thin old-fashioned gilt-edged album" to begin the story. A curious woman asks for the title of the story, but Douglas does not have one. The author, or original narrator, says that he does, but does not disclose what it is. Readers and audience alike are left to settle in to hear the story.

Introduction Analysis

The introduction to *The Turn of the Screw* introduces us to characters we will never meet again, including Douglas and the narrator. It also introduces us to the main living characters of the tale itself: the governess, Mrs. Grose, Flora, Miles and the gentleman on Harley Street. While the gentleman does not appear again, he is critical to the story as the object of the governess's infatuation. As the initial group of listeners, and Douglas and the narrator, do not return at the end of the book as one might expect, the introduction seems to have the purposes of establishing the tale as a story within a story, told through several filters. The governess has written down her tale. Douglas is telling it to the group by the fire. The author is writing of the tale as told by Douglas, as written by the governess.

Several themes, questions and tones are introduced right away. First, James contrasts the innocence and beauty of children with the horror of the supernatural. The idea that ghosts would appear to children is deemed truly grotesque. He raises the question of how love impacts the actions of the governess, including the act of actually telling the story. Additionally, James hints at events and ideas, but rarely outright states them. This is repeated throughout the story, and when a thought is stated rather than implied, it has a shocking effect.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The governess was apprehensive of her new position, but a pleasant drive through the country air to her new place of employment strengthened her. Her first view of the country home further quelled her concerns as she was met with a friendly façade with "open windows and fresh curtains and the pair of maids looking out." She determines on her initial meeting with her younger charge that the child is charming and beautiful, and she also finds that she gets on well with Mrs. Grose, the head of the establishment.

The governess experiences uncertainty only twice. First, Mrs. Grose was overly happy to see her. Second, that night, she heard a child's faint cry and a soft footstep outside her door. Neither recalled her initial apprehensions, and she instead focused on the opportunity to teach the lovely Flora, who was to begin sharing her room the following evening.

Over supper, the governess and Mrs. Grose conversed about the boy, Miles, who Mrs. Grose declared was quite remarkable. The governess admitted to being easily taken by people, implying she had also been carried away in London at her meeting with her employer. Mrs. Grose assured her she isn't the only one.

Conversation returned to Miles, who was scheduled to arrive on Friday by coach and met by carriage. The governess suggested that she and Flora meet Miles on the carriage, and Mrs. Grose agreed. The following day, Flora showed her the rooms and secrets of Bly. The governess was impressed by the girl's knowledge and lack of fear. In contrast, she felt they were lost on a great ship, and she was "strangely at the helm!"

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 marks the beginning of the governess's tale, told from her point of view as she wrote it after the events occurred. At times through her story, she offers some interpretation as seen from hindsight.

This chapter offers a hint of the ominous events to come. The governess has grown comfortable with her post, delighted by the charming appearance of Bly. Two small occurrences mar her comfort. Neither is sufficient to change her mind, but both prefigure future developments.

James re-emphasizes the themes from the introduction here. The governess tells us that Flora is beautiful, and Miles is said to be even more remarkable, setting the stage for the contrast between beauty and evil. Mrs. Grose and the governess's reference to their employer reminds the audience of the governess's infatuation. Mrs. Grose's comment, however, implies that this infatuation is hardly unique. In that conversation,

neither person directly mentions the gentleman by name, reinforcing the use of subtlety in style. In fact, neither the governess nor the gentleman is ever named.

One new theme is introduced with the governess's portrayal of herself as steering a ship. Throughout the book, we see the governess with varying degrees of control, which have varying consequences.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The governess's image of steering the ship hits home in the second chapter when she received a letter from her employer containing a brief request to handle the issue contained in a second, unopened letter sent to him from Miles' school. The school letter contained the unpleasant news that Miles has been expelled, stating that he was 'an injury to others.' Having opened the letter just before bed, she spent a second sleepless night pondering its consequences and confronts Mrs. Grose about it the next day.

Imparting the news to Mrs. Grose, the governess caught a quickly masked look from the latter that she found remarkable. Mrs. Grose was taken aback when the governess read part of the letter to her, and responded with indignation that Miles could not harm anyone. She later admitted that Miles has been known to be bad, but noted that a perfectly good boy is not a boy for her. The governess agreed.

The following day, prior to her drive to meet Miles, the governess questioned Mrs. Grose about the fate of her predecessor. There was an odd exchange in which Mrs. Grose said *he* preferred them young and pretty, and quickly qualified that she meant the master. The governess asked who she first meant, Mrs. Grose reiterated that she meant the master, and the governess continued with her questions about the governess.

When the governess asks if her predecessor died at Bly, Mrs. Grose initially responded vaguely, stating, "No – she went off." After further questioning, the governess determined that the previous governess had left for a short holiday, replaced temporarily by a nursemaid. When Mrs. Grose expected her return, she received instead notice from the master that the governess had died.

Chapter 2 Analysis

We determine from this chapter that Miles, while he may be remarkable, has done something terrible at his school and cannot return. Mrs. Grose's comment on Miles implies that a perfectly good boy is as unnatural as an evil one. Additionally, the governess is immediately confronted with an issue that re-establishes that she is in charge, and that the master cannot be bothered about anything to do with the children.

There is a mysterious reference to how *he* prefers them young and pretty. Mrs. Grose states that she means the master, but for a moment, one wonders if she had meant Miles. This insinuates that he may be more mature than initially thought. Finally, we determine that the governess's predecessor had died away from Bly. This reveals nothing about the mystery of the former employee, but sets the stage for more questions on her disappearance from the estate.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

In Chapter 3, the governess arrived late to pick up Miles, and her first glance of the boy caught him "looking out wistfully" for her. His beauty immediately removed any doubts that he could deserve expulsion. She returned with him to Bly and later discussed with Mrs. Grose her bewilderment at the letter. She decided to say nothing to the school, the master, or the boy in response and Mrs. Grose said she will stand behind her.

The governess reflects back on that moment with some amazement at her own ignorance, failing to remember if she had any plans regarding Miles' education after the holiday. She also reminisces about the peaceful days before the storm, noting the good behavior of the children and stating she was off her guard. She remembers her favorite time of day as her hour, the hour after the children have gone to bed and she enjoys the remaining daylight before her own retirement.

It was in this hour that the governess encountered the first portent of changes to come. On her walk of the grounds, imagining that she might meet someone on the road who would approve of her work, she turned back toward the house to see a man on one of the towers. She initially believed the man to be the same man of her imagination, but quickly realized he is not that gentleman, nor any person she had met before. As she looked at him, a hush fell over them and she was reminded of death. The man stared at her as he moved from one corner of the tower to the other and then left the tower.

Chapter 3 Analysis

On the governess's initial meeting with Miles, she immediately assumes from his appearance that he could not commit a crime worthy of expulsion. As she writes the story, she reflects that their beauty and good behavior put her off guard, causing one to question the superficiality of appearances. In short, this supports the adage that one cannot judge a book by its cover.

This chapter also shows us the governess's reflections on her own actions in two ways. As she writes the story, she recalls her own ignorance. In the story itself, she had been imagining someone admiring her work. The two reflections contradict each other, demonstrating this character's growth from the time of the story to the time of her record of the story. The person of her imagination, though never stated, is likely the gentleman from Harley street.

The chapter also introduces us to another villain, though the reader may not yet be aware of it. The aura of death certainly implies an evil aspect to the character, and his boldness may reinforce it given the preference for subtlety.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The governess recalls that she lost track of time as she contemplated her vision, and it was dark when she returned to the house. Mrs. Grose expressed just enough relief to indicate that she was anxious for the governess' return but was unaware of any more fearful circumstances. The governess opted not to tell her about the mysterious man and returned to her room.

The governess remained concerned, and though her anxiety was not yet beyond what she thought she could bear, she feared it would reach that point. She considered that the staff may have played a joke on her, but quickly dismissed that idea. She decided the only sane conclusion could be that a stranger had trespassed and challenged her with a bold glare when discovered. She did not expect to see him again.

The governess returned to her charming charges, describing her work as "the romance of the nursery, and the poetry of the school-room." The children were so beautiful she had not grown tired of them, as often governesses did of their charges. She continued to wonder at the charges brought against Miles and concluded that he had simply paid a price for being too innocent for the harsh world. She saw the children as "unpunishable," impersonal and, in the case of Miles, without history. She could not mention the letter to him and chose instead to simply bask in their loveliness, using their charm as an antidote to the pains in her life, including difficulties back home.

The governess progresses in her story to a Sunday in which rain prevented the household from attending church in the morning. She arranged with Mrs. Grose to attend the evening service should the rain cease. The weather cooperated, and they prepared to leave when she recalled a pair of gloves she had mended during tea with the children in the formal dining room, and went to retrieve them. As she entered the room, she immediately sensed the man from the tower looking in the window. He gazed at her with both intensity and recognition, but this time he removed his stare from her to gaze around the room, as if seeking something.

With the recognition that the apparition had come for someone other than her, the governess bounded out of the room, out the door and around the house to view the window from the outside. The man had disappeared, and she walked to the window and looked in as he had, seeing the room from his point of view. At that moment, Mrs. Grose entered the room as she had earlier and blanched in shock. She too bounded out of the room and around the house, leaving the governess to wonder why Mrs. Grose had looked so afraid.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The children are again portrayed as beautiful and good, but oddly flat. They are now "impersonal" and without history. The governess also lacks history. This chapter references some personal pain from her home, but it does not offer any detail, and her life outside Bly is mentioned only once more in the story.

Here we are also first introduced to the governess's use of logic to determine what is going on, which peppers the tale from here on. She considers different angles, including the possibility that the staff is playing a joke on her, but decides that the only logical conclusion is that the man is a trespasser who will not likely return. This first use of logic fails her, for we learn shortly after that the man has returned in search of something. Her logic at this point binds her in its inability to consider the supernatural. The man has not only returned, but he is now much closer, moving from his position at the tower to one just across a room and outside a window.

Note again that the governess reflects on her own courage in a self-gratifying manner. She does this often in her manuscript.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Mrs. Grose revealed she had been frightened by the governess's appearance, and the latter decided she must confide in her. She told of seeing the man in the tower and again at the window. Mrs. Grose asked if she had seen him at any other time, and if he was a gentleman. The governess immediately replied that he was not, and that he was not from the village either. Mrs. Grose tried to move them on to church, but the narrator would not leave the children, fearing he would return.

Mrs. Grose questioned the governess more, stating that she would not have come out after seeing him as the governess had. The governess replied that she would not have done so either, and yet there she was, as duty required. Mrs. Grose asked what he's like, and the narrator replies "he like nobody." She also said that he had no hat, and seeing that this struck a chord with Mrs. Grose, continued on to say he was handsome with curly red hair, a long pale face, odd red whiskers, and eyebrows darker than his hair. She reiterated that he was certainly not a gentleman. Mrs. Grose recognized the description as that of Peter Quint, the master's former valet. Unfortunately, the man was dead.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Class plays a defining role in this chapter. Mrs. Grose asks if the man is a gentleman, and the governess emphasizes that he is not. He wears no hat. He's like nobody, yet someone who is handsome, like an actor. We learn that the man is the ghost of Peter Quint, the master's valet, and we are now faced with two dead employees of Bly. The revelation of the man's identity raises the tension in the story. The fact that he is a common man will add another layer of horror to the tale in future chapters. One wonders if it would have been less concerning to the woman had he been a gentleman.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Mrs. Grose and the governess skipped church to continue discussing their new dilemma. Though Mrs. Grose had not seen any evidence of Quint's ghost, she believed the governess with "an awestricken tenderness, a deference to [her] more than questionable privilege." The two agreed to share the burden of their discovery, though the governess, believing herself capable of the task, felt some doubt as to the abilities of her companion.

The governess reflects that she and Mrs. Grose were steadied in their task by the idea of saving the innocent children, for she had determined Quint was after Miles. Mrs. Grose said Quint was free with Miles, that it was his fancy to play with him. In fact, he was too free with everyone. Mrs. Grose also stated, in response to the governess's question as to whether or not he was "definitely and admittedly bad," that she had known he was, but the master had not. She had not told him because he did not like complaints, and because she was afraid of Quint. The governess said that she would have told him.

The governess asked Mrs. Grose if she hadn't feared the effect Quint had on the children in her charge, and Mrs. Grose protests that they she was not responsible for them. The governess pressed on her how she could bear listening to him have his say about everything, including the children, and Mrs. Grose burst into tears, exclaiming that she couldn't.

After contemplation overnight, the governess felt that Mrs. Grose held something back. Quint's stay at Bly had been long, terminated only when he died from a head wound that might have been acquired from a slip on the icy road on his return from the public-house. While the icy road, combined with liquor, provided some explanation, the governess implies that secrets and vices in his life may have explained more.

The governess goes on to write that she found joy in her own heroism. She found pleasure in the thought that she could rise to the challenge of protecting the innocent where others had failed. She believed they had only her, and she watched them so closely that she may, given enough time, have gone mad. She was saved from madness by actual proof of the horrors around her.

The proof arrived on a day when the governess and Flora left Miles at the house to play by the lake. As they walked to their destination, she reflected that the children had a pleasant habit of leaving her to her thoughts without abandoning her. Her job was not to entertain them, but to watch them as they entertained themselves.

At the lake, the governess became aware of someone watching from the opposite bank. Unwilling to look directly at the new presence, she looked instead at Flora, expecting a

cry of fear. Instead, the child had grown silent, turned her back to the lake and exaggerated her play.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 emphasizes the feeling of superiority the governess has over Mrs. Grose as she states that she has confidence in herself, but not in the housekeeper. Additionally, we see again the governess's use of logic as she deduces that Quint is after Miles. She is also self-aggrandizing in her belief that she has been entrusted by the children's uncle to rise to the task of protecting them. Of course, the uncle does not realize the danger at Bly, and therefore doesn't realize he is entrusting her with anything out of the ordinary. Her belief in being entrusted has no foundation, and her heroism may be an overly romantic view of her work.

The chapter informs the reader that Flora, like Miles is not perfect. Though beautiful, she is capable of deceit, and this seems more horrible than the ghost she is pretending to ignore.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The governess found Mrs. Grose, threw herself into the woman's arms and cried out her new discovery. The children knew what she and Mrs. Grose knew, and probably more. She had deduced from Flora's sudden change in activity that the girl saw the presence across the lake and had chosen to protect her governess by pretending that she did not see it. Furthermore, the presence across the lake was not Quint, but a woman. Demonstrating to Mrs. Grose that she had thought over the matter, she told her that she believed it was Miss Jessel.

Mrs. Grose wanted to know how the governess could be so sure, and she replied that she should ask Flora. She quickly retracted this statement with the recognition that Flora would simply lie. She recognized the complexity they faced, and stated that she feared what she did not know more than what she knew. She believed the children would continue to see the spirits and not tell them. Mrs. Grose thought that Flora, in her innocence, might like seeing the spirit, and the governess responded that they should cling to the notion of innocence as a saving point.

At Mrs. Grose's urging, the governess described the woman as a horror, who had a look of intense determination fixed on the girl. The governess also described the woman as beautiful, but wearing shabby mourning clothes. Mrs. Grose responded that both Miss Jessel and Quint had been infamous.

The governess pressed Mrs. Grose for the cause of her predecessor's death. Mrs. Grose confirmed her guesses that there had been something between Miss Jessel and Quint, despite the difference in their stations. The governess deduced that Quint had been a hound, and Mrs. Grose confirmed that he had his way with everyone. She said he had not had his way with Miss Jessel against her wishes, but the woman had paid. She had left her post out of necessity, and Mrs. Grose imagined a dreadful ending for the lady, though not as dreadful as what the governess imagined. The governess appeared defeated, exclaiming she could not save the children, for they were already lost.

Chapter 7 Analysis

We see more evidence of the importance of logic as the governess deduces that the second vision is Miss Jessel. Again the idea that the children are hiding such horrible visitations from their keepers is more horrible than the unnatural visitors themselves, and saving the innocent is the primary concern. The governess notes that Miss Jessel is beautiful, and Quint was described earlier as handsome. This twists the contrasts from innocent beauty vs. evil to simply innocence vs. evil. Surface beauty can apply to either side.

The lines between classes are emphasized in how the governess and Mrs. Grose talk about the two ghosts, but they are blurred in the ghosts' representation. The narrative reveals that Miss Jessel is a lady, though she had been dressed in shabby clothes. Quint, in contrast, had been a common man dressed above his station in his master's clothes. Additionally, Miss Jessel and Quint had engaged in a relationship that is only hinted at, and the reader is left to guess that perhaps the relationship was a sexual one. One could guess that Miss Jessel left Bly to return home to have a baby, and she died either from childbirth or an abortion. We are left with the governess mourning that the children were already lost, for their innocence had already been corrupted.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The governess and Mrs. Grose again discussed the situation that night, and the governess claimed Mrs. Grose again fully believed her. Any doubts were dismissed by her ability to describe Quint and Miss Jessel in detail. Mrs. Grose wanted to dismiss the whole thing, and the governess assured her that her primary goal was escape. She further professed that her own personal danger was the least of her worries.

The governess returned to her charges and was renewed at their loveliness, further exemplified by Flora's ability to see her pain. The beauty of the two forced her recall the signs of their deceit, and this exercise gave her a few comforts she might have missed otherwise. First, she was certain she had not betrayed herself. She also wouldn't have used the opportunity to force the last bit of knowledge from Mrs. Grose. She forced from the woman what she had meant when she had said earlier that she had known Miles to be bad.

Mrs. Grose revealed that Miles had been bad by spending time with Quint. Mrs. Grose had approached Miss Jessel about the matter, but was told to mind her own business. She then confronted Miles directly and told him to remember his station. It was his answer to her that was bad. He also denied times that he spent with Quint, times that Miss Jessel had allowed. He also denied any relation between Quint and Miss Jessel. While this wasn't the revelation the governess sought, she felt it would have to do, and that she would have to watch and wait.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The fact that Mrs. Grose believes her seems important to the governess. Toward the end of the story, we again see that Mrs. Grose's beliefs are a saving factor for the governess. Class again blurs as the upper class governess finds validation from the beliefs of the lower class house mistress. Class lines faded when Miles spent time with Quint, but they are redrawn in Mrs. Grose's judgment of that time as bad and her admonition for Miles to act appropriately for his station. There is the question of Miss Jessel allowing it, and of Miles knowing of the relation between Quint and Miss Jessel. Again, the idea that the innocent may be exposed to something inappropriate, and that they were deceitful, is portrayed as horrific.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

For a period, the governess watched the children closely and with great affection and wondered how they could not notice they she suspected strange things of them. They responded with their own affections and remarkable performances at their lessons. As they continued to surprise and impress her, she opted to remain silent on the matter of Miles's expulsion with what she described as "unnatural composure." She also described occasions when one would distract her while the other slipped away.

The time proceeded peacefully until the governess sensed a movement in the house one night. She quietly rose from her reading, left her room and locked it from the hall. She walked along the hall until she reached sight of a tall window at the staircase. Her candle blew out, and she became aware of Quint on his way up the stairs. He fixed her again with his stare, recognizing her as she recognized him. She thought of him as a dangerous, living presence, but she was more impressed that could meet him evenly and without fear. They confronted each other in silence, and then he disappeared down the staircase.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 continues to establish the children as delightful and deceitful at the same time, and more distinctions are blurred. The days proceed without event until one night when she hears a noise in the night and finds Quint on the stairs.

The governess continues to be self-congratulatory. She describes herself as exhibiting exemplary composure when dealing with Miles's explusion. The incident with Quint on the staircase reinforces her belief in her own courage. While she claims that saving the children is her only goal, she is constantly aware of her own ability to reason out what is happening and face it bravely. She seems to have another goal of performing her job well to impress the children's uncle. This becomes more apparent in later chapters.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The governess returned from the stairs to find Flora missing from her bed. After a moment of distress, she found the child behind the window blind. Flora emerged with a grave countenance and admonished her caretaker for leaving before the governess could reproach her. The governess asked Flora if she thought she had been walking about the grounds, and the child responded that she thought perhaps someone was. She denied seeing anyone, but the governess did not believe her. The governess briefly considered confronting her with what they both knew, but dropped the subject. As she writes about the incident, the governess notes that to bring it up then would have spared her the events to come. Instead, she asked why the child had pulled the curtain over her bed to make the governess think she was still in bed, and the child responded that she didn't want to frighten the woman.

The following nights, the governess stayed up night and often checked the halls. On one occasion, she saw a woman sitting on a stair below with her head in her hands. Another significant event occurred eleven days after she met Quint on the stairs. She awoke to see that Flora had blown out the candle and was again at the window. Believing Flora to be communicating with Miss Jessel, the governess stole out of the room to find another window from which she could see her own. She paused outside Miles' room for a moment, wondering if she dared enter to see if he too was at his window, but chose to move on. Finding a room in a suitable location, she went to the window and determined that she had picked the right room to give her a view of her own. However, something else caught her eye. Miles was on the lawn below looking above her, as if at someone in the tower.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The governess apparently views the children's deceit as deceit for the good of others. Specifically, she believes that the children are trying to protect her. We also see the temptation of the governess to bring it out into the open, but she keeps it to herself. She declares in her recollections that to reveal her knowledge at the time might have saved her from later events.

The governess attributes little significance to the woman on the stairs, but it prefigures her actions later in the story. The next assumed appearance of Miss Jessel requires some imagination by the governess and the audience, for she doesn't actually see the apparition. She deduces that Flora is talking with Miss Jessel and seeks to prove it by looking through another window. She believes that Miles is looking at someone above her from his line of sight, and of course assumes that person to be Quint, but she does not actually see the object of his look. The governess, and the audience, must rely on

logic based on the governess's past experience, which now includes experience of the supernatural.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Late the next day, the governess confided again to Mrs. Grose, mentioning that she found security in telling her without fearing that the woman would betray her confidences inadvertently. She felt that Mrs. Grose lacked imagination, and as the woman saw the children healthy and happy before her, she did not appear frightened despite the governess's tales.

The governess related to Mrs. Grose the events of last night as they watch Miles and Flora walk across the grounds together while he read to her. The governess told Mrs. Grose that she brought Miles inside, and they returned to his room in silence. She had imagined him trying to think of a way to explain himself. She also said she had detected in him an air of triumph, and she realized that she was in a corner. She could not be the first to mention the ghosts, and so he had her trapped. However, she had to ask why he had gone out. He replied with the perfect answer. He had done so simply so she would think, for a change, of him as bad. He explained that Flora had risen from her bed to wake the governess specifically so she would him below.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The governess again portrays Mrs. Grose as simple, without imagination. Confident of her own ability to deceive others as necessary, she did not believe Mrs. Grose could show a similar strength. The governess believes that she is superior, and attributes Mrs. Grose's willingness to believe her to the woman's recognition of that superiority. Interestingly, she portrays her own ability to deceive as an asset and the children's ability to deceive as horrific.

There is also an unwillingness to be the one to introduce the topic of the ghosts to the children, as if by the mere mention of it, the governess would sully their innocence rather than save it. And yet, if they are already seeing ghosts, it is implied that their innocence is already tarnished. Miles, with his reason for being on the lawn and his cover story for Flora's presence at the window, seems to tell the governess that their innocence is not complete. Miles is also starting to take control of the situation. The governess says she is in a corner, and it seems Miles put her there.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The governess told Mrs. Grose that Miles had said one last thing before they had separated: "Think, you know, what I *might* do." She then guessed that he had been expelled because he had shown the school just that. She continued suspect that the four met regularly, and their own little world in which they amused themselves was one that included the late Miss Jessel and Quint regularly. Even as they watched the two cross the lawn, the governess declared that they were discussing the specters. She proclaimed that their goodness and beauty were fraudulent. They belonged to the dead, who were trying to fill them with evil.

Mrs. Grose accepted the governess's interpretation of the situation, but she questioned what the late Miss Jessel and Quint could do to them now. The governess responded that they were trying to get closer to the children with the ultimate goal of destroying them. Horrified, Mrs. Grose exclaimed that the governess had to request the master to take them away, but the governess did not agree. She believed she was trusted with the primary goal of not disturbing the gentleman. She also pictured him viewing her request as an attempt to draw him to her and an admission that she could not handle things alone. She saw that Mrs. Grose understood her position, but still admonished her that if the household manager contacted the master on her behalf, she would leave immediately.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The independent, imaginary world of the children has expanded to include the ghosts. Not only did Miles and Flora communicate with Miss Jessel and Quint, their whole worlds revolved around the two specters. The governess states outright that they, the absolute representation of beauty and goodness, are frauds, but she still intends to save them. Her determination to do so implies that the evil is alien to the two, and their goodness can be cleansed of it. However, Miles's statement around what he *might* do raises the question of how deeply he has been affected.

Mrs. Grose seems behind the governess, as usual, in figuring things out. The governess insists that the two ghosts have the goal of destroying the children. Mrs. Grose says they must involve the master in this. Perhaps she is simply calling him to his rightful duty to take care of the children, in which case her desire to involve the uncle is almost a criticism of his rejection of responsibility.

The governess, however, does not wish to be seen as going back on her word to the gentleman that had charmed her so deeply. She cannot betray his trust. One wonders how much this need to take responsibility for everything, to stand behind her word, to not disappoint the object of her infatuation, ends up making things worse.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

The governess and the children carried on together for a month, with neither side mentioning the ghosts. The governess felt certain Miles and Flora knew she was aware of their visitors, and at times they even seemed to say to each other that perhaps at that moment their caretaker would mention them, but both sides continued to avoid the subject. She could not raise the topic with the children, she did argue with herself over the possibilities frequently. The governess also felt certain that the ghosts visited the children in her presence, though she could not see them. There would be a sudden hush, an abrupt change in activity that indicated to her the passing of some otherworldly presence. Though tempted to exclaim to the children that she knew they were there, she kept her suspicions to herself. Two topics that saved them repeatedly were the children's uncle and the governess's own life. They would write their uncle letters, which the governess did not post, but saved in her own collection.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The governess is clearly obsessed with watching her charges closely at all times, but she is unwilling to unveil her reasons for keeping them close. Both sides suspect what is going on, but neither side will discuss the situation openly. We also find another reference to her life in this chapter, again without detail. Everything, her life, the children's visitors, the children's history, the governess's infatuation with the gentleman, any details on Mrs. Grose, are kept at surface level. Nothing is examined with any depth, with the possible exception of the governess's constant contemplation of the ghosts, which seems to be driving her slightly mad. This dedication to the resolution of the issue of the ghosts may be driven by her desire not to fail her employer.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The household trooped to church on Sunday morning. As the governess walked at Miles's side, she contemplated how she had kept him close to her without his objection, and that, should he decide to pursue the independence appropriate for his age and gender, she would not be able to stop him. Miles drove the point home that day by asking her when he might return to school. He further noted that it was not entirely appropriate for a boy his age to spend all his time with a lady. He said that he had been good, and that she couldn't complain with the exception of that one night. She responded that he wouldn't do that again and he agreed that he would not do that particular act again, as it was nothing, but he wanted to experience more life, to spend more time with similar people.

The governess said Miles didn't have his own kind, with the possible exception of Flora. He protested her comparison of him with a baby girl. She asked if he didn't like his sister, and he said of course he did, and her too, but if he didn't he would, in his words, "Well, you know what!" He asked her if his uncle knew he was still there. After thinking on the matter, she said she didn't think his uncle cared. Miles said he could be made to care if he only came down, and that he could be the one to get him there.

During the course of the governess's conversation with Miles, the others had passed into the church, and the governess and Miles were left to talk along in the graveyard. The governess had to sit on one of the headstones when Miles mentioned his uncle. After declaring he would bring his uncle to Bly, he entered the church, leaving the governess in the graveyard.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The governess tries to get to the church to buy herself time, but Miles delays her until he has his say. Miles is taking more control of the situation. She is no longer at the helm of her ship, which may have led to her willingness to sacrifice the uncle, just a little bit, by telling Miles that the gentleman did not care about Miles's situation.

Miles's role in the story has grown significantly, while Flora's has remained somewhat static. The chapter raises more questions about what is appropriate, this time in terms of gender. He should have been accorded some independence, and it is implied that it was not right for him to spend all his time with his governess. However, letting him free from her care would be to follow the footsteps of Miss Jessel, blurring the distinction between heroine and villain.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The governess could not enter the church. She believed Miles saw her fear of dealing with the school expulsion issue, and would use it against her to obtain his freedom. She did not want to have to deal with it with the uncle. For the first time, she wanted to get away from Miles, and she quickly determined that she could flee. She returned to the house and sat on the steps with her head in her hands. Remembering that she had seen her predecessor in this manner, she stood again and proceeded to the schoolroom to collect her things.

In the schoolroom, the governess encountered the object of her imagination a moment ago, Miss Jessel. The specter sat at the table, again holding her head in her hands. She rose and stood before the governess, who felt that she, not the specter, was the intruder. The governess addressed her, "You terrible miserable woman!" and cleared the air, left only with the sunshine and a determination that she must stay.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The governess's response to losing control is to flee, but her flight brings her in direct confrontation with her predecessor. Even before she encounters the woman, she acts as the woman had before by sitting on the stair and putting her head in her hands. Had Miss Jessel felt a similar sense of despair before she made her own flight from Bly, albeit for different reasons? Were they both oppressed by Quint? The posture they both demonstrated, and their determination to leave, brings the two in alignment for just a moment. This is further demonstrated by Miss Jessel's indication that she had a right to be there. Both the living and dead governesses claim the schoolroom for a moment, before the living one, affronted by the dead one's presumptions, addresses her with hostility and the latter disappears. The living one's decision to stay re-separates her from the dead one, who again fled.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Expecting remonstrations from the children, the governess was disappointed with silence. Mrs. Grose also did not inquire about her absence from church. On later questioning, Mrs. Grose admitted that the children had told her not to say anything because the governess would surely prefer silence on the matter. She went on to tell Mrs. Grose she had returned to the house for a talk with Miss Jessel, and that the latter had said that she suffered. The governess again knew that the specter was after Flora. She had decided to contact the uncle at last.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The children are again controlling the situation by not acting as the governess would have thought. They even control Mrs. Grose, directing her not to mention the governess's absence from church.

The governess's portrayal of her flight as having the purpose of having a talk with Miss Jessel is an interesting interpretation on her part. She chooses not to tell the woman she almost fled, but paints herself in a much more heroic light as going to confront the spirits themselves. Her deceit has expanded beyond masking her knowledge to protect childish innocence to portraying herself in a better light.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The governess sat down to write the letter at night as Flora slept, but could not and rose to check on Miles at his door. Reaching it, he called for her to come in, claiming she was as loud as a cavalry. He claimed he often sat up thinking about strange things, such as the way she raises him, and the other bit. He won't define what that other business is, only that she knows.

The governess told him that she hadn't known that Miles had wanted to return to school. He hadn't mentioned it at all until that day. He seemed puzzled at that, and she thought he was perhaps trying to think how he could explain that fact and maintain his innocence. She emphasized that he had not mentioned it once, and asked if he did not like Bly. He said of course he did, but he wanted what all boys wanted. He again emphasized that his uncle must come to Bly, but that she must be the one to do it.

The governess told Miles he would have to inform his uncle of the things he had not told her if he wanted to go back. He responded that he did not want to return to his school, but to go somewhere new. He also said he wanted her to leave him alone. She pressed him on what happened at school and before, and then threw caution aside and exclaimed that she would do anything for him, even die for him, if she could just save him. At that moment, she knew she had stepped across the line. Instantly, a gust of cold air shook the room, and Miles gave a shriek that could have sounded joyous or terrified. The governess cried that the candle had gone out, and Miles said, "It was I who blew it out, dear!"

Chapter 17 Analysis

Ambiguity again reigns in the conversation between Miles and the governess. The boy alludes to strange things but will not outright state what they are. Ambiguity is also the reason the governess used for not mentioning school before, for the boy had not even raised it as an issue and she did not know that he had been interested in returning. Miles then asks her to leave him alone, but she takes the opposite approach. As she presses him for more detailed information, she finally makes a clear statement. She tells him she wanted to save him. The result of this blatant statement, of the reason she has tied him so close to her, is a supernatural gust and the distinguishing of the candle. By bringing her intents into the light, she has gone too far, and Miles, perhaps a possessed, responds in a frightening manner. Ambiguity continues to rule, however, as his response could be triumphant or fearful.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

The next day, Mrs. Grose asked quietly if the governess had written the letter. She told her she had, but kept it secret that it remained in her pocket. The children were delightful as usual, and Miles proved even more a gentleman when he asked if she should like him to play the piano for her after dinner. He played brilliantly, and she felt almost as if she had been under a spell. Though she hadn't actually slept, she had forgotten about Flora.

The governess and Mrs. Grose searched for Flora with no success, and she perceived that Flora had left the house for the lake where Miss Jessel had appeared. Mrs. Grose asked how Flora could be out without a hat, and the governess questioned back, "Isn't that woman always without one?" She also said that Miles was with Quint in the schoolroom according to his plan. She left the letter on the table for Luke to take, and headed toward the lake without her hat. She told Mrs. Grose that she would not wait for her to get a hat, and perhaps she could try the schoolroom. Not wanting to encounter Quint and Miles, Mrs. Grose opted to follow the governess outside.

Chapter 18 Analysis

The governess is now completely out of control. Miles manipulates her to allow his sister to escape. Class again emerges as a question as it becomes apparent that Flora has left without her hat, implying no respectable little girl in her position would leave without one. It is revealed that Miss Jessel never used a hat either, and the reader will recall that Quint also did not wear hats. The hat seems to symbolize the degrading effects Quint had people, first on Miss Jessel, who then influenced Flora. Part of his evil, then, seems to be his ability to influence people in a class above him to act below their class. His influence extends even to the current governess as she throws propriety to the wind to chase after Flora without her own superficial expression of her position.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

The governess and Mrs. Grose advanced to the lake where the governess had noticed Flora liked to go on their walks. Mrs. Grose seemed confused at their destination. The governess assured Mrs. Grose that Flora was not likely in the water, but on the other side where Miss Jessel had appeared before. She also assured her that where Flora was, so was Miss Jessel. Mrs. Grose appeared relieved when the reached the pool to see no one, but the governess deduced that Flora had used a boat to reach the other side, and then hidden it in a copse. Mrs. Grose did not believe that a child could do so, but the governess reminded her that Flora was at times not a child, but an old woman.

The governess and Mrs. Grose walked around the lake where they indeed found a boat. They then passed through a gate in a fence and found the child standing in the grass. Flora plucked a dead fern, as if that was her reason for being there, but the governess felt certain she had just emerged from the copse. Mrs. Grose clutched the child tight, and as Flora looked over her shoulder at the governess, she dropped the fern as if dropping her pretext.

Flora confronted her tutor with the question, "Why where are your things?" The governess responded by asking her about her own. Flora then asked about Miles, and the governess said, "I'll tell you if you tell *me*—" but she could not finish the sentence. The lady then asked, "Where, my pet, is Miss Jessel?"

Chapter 19 Analysis

Logic and class again emerge in importance. The governess has a chain of logic too strong for the simpler Mrs. Grose to follow. It leads her to determine that the children are possessed. We saw evidence of this in Miles's shriek and act of blowing out the candle in the confrontation in chapter 17. The governess says, though she may not have direct evidence of this yet, that Flora is an old woman at times. This is indeed perhaps the only explanation for Flora's ability to take the boat across the lake and hide it in a copse. Mrs. Grose has not yet seen this, and requires for the governess to open her eyes. Flora, possessed or not, recognizes the governess's insights and drops her pretext.

The governess and Mrs. Grose find the child alone, but the governess believes she is only recently left that way. Her act of making a firm statement on the matter, of actually mentioning Miss Jessel's name serves to shock and raise tensions significantly.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

In response to this question, Flora gave a quick glare, Mrs. Grose shrieked and the governess herself gasped as she saw the woman in question across the lake. The governess felt joy as the vision justified her and proved that she was not mad, and she felt gratitude toward the specter for doing so. Rather than look at the spot pointed to by the governess, however, the young girl looked only at the governess with an expression of grave accusation. The governess cried out for the girl to look and admit to the presence, but she found in Flora's face only a look of damnation. The scene turned even direr when Mrs. Grose exclaimed, "What a dreadful turn, to be sure, Miss! Where on earth do you see anything?" The governess, still seeing the vision clearly, entreated them to look again, but to no avail.

Mrs. Grose appealed to the child, asking how Flora and Miles could see Miss Jessel when the woman was dead. She said it must be a mistake and they should return home. Flora continued to view the governess with accusation, and for the first time, the governess saw her as almost ugly. She cried that she saw nothing, that her caretaker was being cruel, and that she wanted to be taken away from her.

The figure remained in view for the governess as she heard these words from Flora, words which seemed is if they came from an outside source. She sadly shook her head and told the girl that all her doubts were gone. She had lost her in her interference. She told Flora goodbye, and then ordered Mrs. Grose to take the child and go.

The governess threw herself on the ground and wailed for an indeterminate period of time, then picked herself up to return to Bly. When she passed through the gate, she found the boat gone. She arrived at the house without seeing anyone else, and found that Flora had moved to Mrs. Grose's room. She did not inquire about Miles in respect of his newfound freedom, but had her tea alone and pulled a chair to the fire. At 8 o clock, Miles joined her there and they sat together in silence.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Events take a sharp turn in this chapter as Miss Jessel appears, but possibly only to the governess. Her initial response on seeing the specter is not horror, but elation at the proof of her logic and visions to date. She even feels gratitude toward the specter, something she never exhibits toward Quint. Her joy is more about her own validation and not about the act of saving the children. Her triumph is an empty one, however, when it becomes apparent that Flora will not validate the vision of Miss Jessel, and Mrs. Grose cannot see her. This implies a contradiction of the importance of logic and proof. Her proof, that is, has failed her.

The other interesting note in the chapter is the transformation of the child from perfection to ugliness, and once she sees the child as ugly, she concedes and says goodbye. She will later send Flora away as a sort of last attempt to save the girl, but she no longer feels Flora to be her responsibility. She released Miles by respecting his freedom and not asking after him on her return. Though she has given him some room, however, she is not content to let him go entirely.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Mrs. Grose came to the governess's room the next morning to tell her that Flora had passed the night in a fever, agitated that she might have to meet her current tutor. Mrs. Grose did not press her further on the possibility of her supernatural visitors, but said she didn't have to. She could see that the child had grown quite old. The governess interpreted this to mean that the child resented having her reputation questioned. Flora continued to deny having seen Miss Jessel, and the governess feared Flora would use the incident to portray her poorly to her uncle and get rid of her.

Despite this, the governess decided that Mrs. Grose must take Flora to her uncle while she stayed at Bly with Miles. She felt Miles had indicated with his silent stay with her the night before that he wanted to confide in her. She also couldn't have the gentleman see Miles until she had another chance to save him, and to bring him to her side.

Mrs. Grose agreed to go, revealing that she could not stay anyway after having heard Flora say horrific things. Hearing this, the governess burst out, "Oh thank God!" She was thrilled to find that Mrs. Grose still believed her. She urged Mrs. Grose to provide more details, and the woman replied that the girl used appalling language regarding her caretaker. Furthermore, she had heard such language before. Mrs. Grose needed to get the girl away from them, indicating again that she believed the governess despite the events of the day before. The governess was strengthened in this knowledge, believing that she could take care of things as long as the housekeeper vouched for her honesty.

The governess expressed one concern – that the master would receive the letter before Mrs. Grose and Flora arrived. Mrs. Grose assured her that would not be the case, for Miles took the letter. The governess noted that in this matter, Mrs. Grose seemed to know more than she did, and the housekeeper stated her belief that Miles had been expelled for stealing letters. The governess urged her to go and said that she would get Miles to confess. If Miles confessed, then he was saved, and if he was saved, so was she.

Chapter 21 Analysis

In this chapter, the governess expresses joy when she hears that Flora is being horrid. She is concerned more for her own justification than for the child's well-being. The child, after the confrontation, appears clearly possessed, though again James does not simply make such a statement. The child is also feverish, a sign that will emerge again later.

Mrs. Grose, seeing Flora act in such an ugly manner, does believe the governess though she couldn't see the apparition the day before. The governess is strengthened by her beliefs, perhaps even more so knowing that Mrs. Grose will stand up for her when they encounter the children's uncle. She also stays to try to save Miles, but one

wonders if this act, too, is more to impress the uncle than to save the child. Mrs. Grose hits it on the head by noting that the master thinks so well of the governess.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

After Mrs. Grose's departure with the child, the governess felt more anxious than she ever had before. The rest of the staff appeared confused at their leave, and the governess felt that she avoided "wreck" only by "clutching the helm."

Miles had disappeared for a walk that morning, after breakfasting with Mrs. Grose, Flora and a couple of maids. His action signified the change in his relationship to the governess, and she waited to see what he would allow her to do. She thought he no longer had anything to learn from her, and he would of course keep his freedom.

The governess declared that she and Miles would dine in the formal room in which she had seen Quint the second time. Waiting in the room for Miles, she reflected that she was fighting something unnatural. To fight it, she determined, "I could only get on at all by taking 'nature' into my confidence and my account, by treating my monstrous ordeal as a push in a direction unusual, of course, and unpleasant, but demanding after all, for a fair front, only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue." She would have to supply "*all* the nature."

At dinner, the governess believed she found the answer in the very thing that enabled Miles to do without her in his lessons – his extraordinary intelligence. She determined that this intelligence would be his saving factor, and to reach it, she would have to challenge his character. As she thought this, Miles asked her about the health of his sister. She confirmed that Flora was quite ill, and that she had seen it coming for a while. He asked why she hadn't removed Flora from Bly earlier, and she said now was just the right moment. Far from Bly, the effects of Flora's illness would dissipate. They finished the meal in silence, and when the maid had left, he turned to her and said, "Well—so we're alone!"

Chapter 22 Analysis

With Flora and Mrs. Grose gone, the governess feels alone, but this enables her somehow to return to grasp again the helm of her ship. She relocates her dinner with Miles to the dining room, and determines that the only way to fight something so unnatural was to supply all the nature. The whole ordeal requires only another "turn of the screw" of human virtue. Finally, we have the title of the story, though it is unlikely that it is the same title imagined, but not revealed, by the original narrator in the introduction. It implies the act of tightening, which becomes important in the end.

As the governess contemplates the fight of nature against the supernatural, she arrives at a conclusion. Miles is blessed with extraordinary intelligence, so much so that she no longer has anything to teach him. All she needed to do was to stretch and challenge it just a bit.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

The governess and Miles discuss that they aren't quite alone. There are, after all, the others, though they may not count for much. Miles stared out the window while the governess sat on the sofa with her knitting. She watched him press his head against the panes, and thought that the frames and squares of the window seemed for him a kind of failure. She wondered if he perhaps was looking for something that he could not see. He finally turned around to say he was glad Bly agreed with him.

The governess and Miles discussed his wanderings around the ground that day, and the governess mentioned that she enjoyed his company. In fact, she stayed solely for him. She recalled for him the night in his room when she had said she would do anything for him, and how she had wanted him to tell her something. Miles, growing nervous, clarified that she did not stay on just for him, but rather to hear him tell what she waited to hear. She concurred, and sensed in him a tinge of fear. Unable to be stern, she asked if he would like to go out, and he said that he did.

As the governess writes about the situation, she notes that she was writing perhaps with the knowledge of what was to come. She questioned how anyone could introduce to such a beautiful child any hint of ugliness, that to do so was an act of violence. She did need to question Miles, however, perhaps knowing what was to come. Miles prepared to leave, but he said he would tell her everything eventually. That moment, however, he had to see Luke, which she thought was likely a lie. Before he left, however, she asked only that he answer a much smaller question. Had he taken her letter?

Chapter 23 Analysis

Again, there is much discussion that touches lightly upon the topic of the ghosts, but never actually delves into the issue. It is almost as if, to state the presence of Miss Jessel and Quint, would be to make it real. Until that happens, Miles and the governess can both pretend, and the governess more so than the student, that he is innocent. About the act of broaching the topic, James writes "To do it in any way was an act of violence, for what did it consist of but the obtrusion of the idea of grossness and guilt on a small helpless creature who had been for me a revelation for me of the possibilities of beautiful intercourse?" However, we've seen that Miles is neither entirely helpless, nor perfectly beautiful. He has been manipulative and deceitful. Her unwillingness to accept this is further exemplified by her statement: "As horrible as it was, his lies made up my truth."

One notes that the relationship between the governess and Flora is quite different from the governess and Miles. She is completely devoted to him and willing to die to save

him. She did not demonstrate a similar attitude toward Flora. He does not grow ugly to her in his deception, or his possession, as Flora did.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

The governess couldn't tell just how he responded to her question, for her attention was captured by the appearance of Quint at the window. She rushed forward to grab Miles and hold him to her with his back to window. In her arms, he confessed that he had taken the letter. She felt him suddenly to be feverish, and his heart beat rapidly. Outside the window, Quint prowled like a "baffled beast."

Miles admitted that he had opened the letter to see what the governess had said of him. She held him from her to look at his face, which appeared to her to be harried. She perceived that he knew he was in the presence of something, but knew not what. Nor did he know that she was aware of it. She looked back at the window to see it clear, and felt triumphant. Finding nothing in the letter, he had burnt it. She asked him if he had stolen things at school. He mind seemed to be elsewhere, but he still expressed some surprise at the accusation. He asked if she knew that he was not to go back to the school, and she replied that she new everything. He gave her an odd look at her response, but denied that he stole anything.

The governess urged him to tell him what he had done. Miles appeared ragged at this time, almost struggling for breath. He stated that he had said horrible things to people he liked, who had repeated them to others, including the school masters. She pressed him again to tell him what he said, and at that moment Quint reappeared at the window. Though Miles seemed not to see the apparition, she grasped the boy to her breast and cried, "No more, no more, no more!"

Miles asked, "Is she *here*?" When the governess repeated the pronoun in question, he exclaimed, "Miss Jessel, Miss Jessel!" She says no, it is not Miss Jessel, but the "coward horror" back for the second time. Almost frantic, he asks, "It's *he*?" To the governess's challenge, he asked if it is Peter Quint, and looks for the specter. The governess asked what it mattered, saying he belonged to her, the specter had lost him, and then pointing to the apparition, "There, *there*!" However, Miles had already looked again at the window and seen nothing. He "uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss," and the governess caught and held him. After a minute, she realized she held only his body, for his heart had stopped.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Miles, like Flora, becomes feverish as the governess confronts him about the letter and Quint appears at the window. Unlike the encounter with Miss Jessel, however, there are no feelings of gratitude or joy. The battle for Flora was a preview. This is a full battle for the soul of a child, and she congratulates herself at her ability to act. He admits that he

took her letter, and she holds him tight. When she looks at the window again, Quint is gone, and she feels she has won.

However, the governess doesn't stop there. She further challenges Miles with a reluctant accusation of stealing things at school, which he denies. He then admits that his crime was saying things so horrible they could not be repeated in the letter to his uncle. In a book that is full of references, hints and other ambiguities, the boy's crime turns out to be the act of making definitive statements. Of course, the author never reveals what those statements are, but one might infer that they are a result of Quint's lower class influence, possibly even his possession of the boy.

The tension in this last chapter grows as the governess confronts Miles, and then pushes him for more information. The boy becomes more ill as he struggles for breath, but the governess pushes for more. As she does, Quint reappears and she cries for it to end. Finally, he utters the names of ghosts, and their shared secret it in the open. As he does, however, he shrieks and falls. The governess's logic has failed her. She thought she just needed to give him a little push for his intelligence to save him, but she pushed too hard. At the climax, she turns the screw too tight, and the boy is lost forever.

Characters

Douglas

Douglas is the person who reads the governess's tale to the narrator and the assembled guests at the Christmas party. In the introduction to the governess's tale, Douglas offers to tell a terrible tale that heightens the terror effect by "two turns" of the screw, since it tells about ghostly interactions with two children. Douglas is very cryptic about his relationship to the governess, saying only that she was ten years older than he was and that she was his sister's governess, which is when she told him her tale. Once Douglas starts telling the tale, it is told entirely from the governess's point of view, from the account that she wrote down for Douglas.

Flora

Flora is the eight-year-old girl who the governess thinks is being tempted by the ghost of Miss Jessel, her former governess. When the governess arrives at Bly to take care of Flora and Miles, she is overwhelmed by Flora's charm; Flora is a model student in the classroom. When the governess sees Miss Jessel while alone with Flora in the garden, she believes that Flora saw the ghost, too. However, the girl sweetly denies that anything is amiss when the governess tries to question her in vague terms about what is happening. Even when the governess catches her peering out of the window in the room they share, Flora denies anything is wrong.

One afternoon, the governess realizes that she does not know where Flora's whereabouts. She and the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, go looking for the little girl by the lake, where they see she has taken the boat. They walk around the lake, and the governess confronts her, asking where Miss Jessel is. At this moment, the ghost of Miss Jessel appears to the governess, but the little girl, no longer charming, tells the governess that she does not see the ghost and never has. She tells Mrs. Grose that she wants to be taken away from Bly, away from the governess. That night, Flora gets ill with a fever. The next morning, Mrs. Grose tells the governess that Flora has been using evil language. The governess has Mrs. Grose take Flora away from Bly to her uncle's home.

The Governess

The governess tries to save Miles and Flora from Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, two ghosts she claims she has seen. In the introduction to the tale, Douglas, who says that he was friends with the governess before her death, gives her background. The governess is a young woman during the events of her tale, and she has been given the task of taking care of Miles and Flora. The children's uncle has hired her on the condition that she never bothers him with matters involving the children. When she arrives at Bly, the governess is nervous, having never had this much responsibility. She

is instantly taken with Flora and dismisses sounds that she hears her first night there. After receiving a note from Miles's headmaster that says he is being expelled, she is nervous about meeting the boy but finds him to be charming. It is not long after she arrives that the governess starts to see ghosts—first a man, then a woman. With Mrs. Grose's help, the governess identifies these ghosts as Peter Quint, the former valet, and Miss Jessel, the governess's predecessor. Feeling that the children's souls are in grave danger, the governess sets herself the task of protecting them from the ghosts and stands up to the apparitions on several occasions.

Meanwhile, the governess keeps an eye on the children and attempts to get them to confess that they have seen the ghosts, too, approaching the subject in vague terms. When the children are unresponsive, she becomes more insistent, watching them at all hours and questioning them when she finds them out of their beds at night. She writes a letter to her employer to let him know of the suspicious activities at Bly, but Miles steals it. When she confronts Flora at last, naming Miss Jessel, Flora denies seeing the ghost and becomes sick. The governess has Mrs. Grose take Flora to her uncle's. When the governess confronts Miles about his association with Quint one night, she sees the ghost at the window. She presses the boy, who finally names the valet. When the boy turns to look at the ghost, it is gone, and the boy shrieks, falling into the governess's arms, dead.

Mrs. Grose

Mrs. Grose is the housekeeper at Bly, who gives the governess information about the identities and lives of Miss Jessel and Peter Quint. When the governess first arrives at Bly, Mrs. Grose seems to be overjoyed at her appearance, although she hides this emotion, which the governess finds odd. After the death of Miss Jessel, and prior to the arrival of the governess, Mrs. Grose—who is of a lower class than the governess—has been taking care of Flora, while Miles was sent away to school. Mrs. Grose cannot read, which the governess realizes when she hands Mrs. Grose a letter. When the governess sees the second appearance of Quint, she confesses the sighting to Mrs. Grose, who identifies the ghost.

From this point on, Mrs. Grose is the governess's confidant in the ghostly matter, although Mrs. Grose rarely gives information to the governess unless pressed to do so. Even then, she gives many vague responses, which sometimes cause the governess to come to her own conclusions. When Flora is found missing, Mrs. Grose and the governess go to look for her. When they find her by the lake, Mrs. Grose does not see the ghost of Miss Jessel, although the governess does. Because she cannot see the ghost and because the governess tries to browbeat Flora into saying that the child has seen Miss Jessel, Mrs. Grose starts to think that the governess is seeing things. However, that night after Flora has a fever and starts to use bad language, Mrs. Grose is inclined to side with the governess once again, and she agrees to take Flora to her uncle's.

Miss Jessel is one of two ghosts who the governess claims is trying to corrupt Miles and Flora. The governess is the only one who claims directly to have seen the ghost of Miss Jessel, which appears to her several times throughout the story. The first time Miss Jessel appears, the governess recognizes her, having already spoken about ghosts with Mrs. Grose after seeing the apparition of Peter Quint. Through Mrs. Grose, the governess also finds out that Miss Jessel, the former governess, was having an affair with Quint, who was much lower in class, and that Quint treated Miss Jessel horribly. When the governess and Mrs. Grose find Flora has stolen away to the lake, the governess sees the ghost of Miss Jessel once again. However, Mrs. Grose does not see the ghost, and Flora claims not to either, even when the governess presses her to confess her meetings with the ghost. After Flora becomes ill and is sent to her uncle's, the governess does not see Miss Jessel again.

Miles

Miles is the ten-year-old boy whom the governess thinks is being tempted by the ghost of Peter Quint, her employer's former valet. Shortly after her arrival at Bly, the governess receives a letter that says Miles is being sent home from school and that he can never return. When Miles arrives at Bly, however, the governess thinks the headmaster must be mistaken, because Miles is a charming boy. Miles is a model student in the governess's classroom and sweetly denies that anything is amiss when the governess tries to question him in vague terms about what is going on. Even when the governess catches Miles wandering around the lawn at midnight, he denies that there is anything wrong other than that he is causing some mischief. When the governess questions him about his activities at school, he is curiously silent; although at one point, Miles asks the governess if he can go away to school again.

One night in his room, the governess asks the boy once again about his experiences at school, and a gust of cold wind comes out of nowhere, blowing out the candle. Miles says he has blown it out, but the governess is unsure. The next morning, Miles is conspicuously happy, and he coaxes the governess into listening to him play the piano. When she realizes that Flora is missing, she thinks that Miles has set her up. The governess goes to search for Flora, leaving a letter to her employer□apprising him of the suspicious activities at Bly□on the table. Miles steals the letter, an act that he later admits to the governess. During the same conversation, Miles tells the governess that he got kicked out of school for using bad language. When the governess sees Quint's ghost at the window, she presses the boy to say his name. He says, "Peter Quint—you devil!" and then looks for the ghost, but he is gone. Miles screams and falls into the governess's arms, dead.

The Narrator

The narrator is the unnamed person who speaks in the introduction to the governess's tale and who tells the reader that he is reading the exact tale that was read to him, from

an exact copy of the manuscript. The narrator disappears after Douglas starts reading the governess's account of her experiences.

Peter Quint

Peter Quint is one of two ghosts who the governess claims is trying to corrupt Miles and Flora. The governess is the only one who claims directly to have seen the ghost of Quint, which appears to her several times throughout the story. The first time he appears, the governess mistakes him for an intruder. After his second appearance, the governess's description to the housekeeper marks him as Quint. The housekeeper tells her that Quint was the former valet and was a vile man when he was alive. He had an affair with Miss Jessel, the previous governess, even though he was a servant and she belonged to a higher class. According to Mrs. Grose, Quint had suspicious relations with Miles while still living.

The Uncle

Miles's and Flora's uncle is the unseen employer, who, at the beginning of her employment, makes it clear to the governess that she is not to bother him about the children. The uncle never appears in the story and is only referred to by others.

Themes

Ghosts

Any discussion of *The Turn of the Screw* would be incomplete without addressing all of the major themes that various critics have identified in this ambiguous tale. The first and most apparent theme is that of ghosts. When the governess first arrives at Bly, she hears some traditionally ghostlike activity, the faint "cry of a child," and the sound of "a light footstep" outside her door. She pays no attention to these sounds, but a short while later, upon the second sighting of a man who she thinks is an intruder, she chases the man. However, as the governess notes, when she comes around the corner where the man was standing, "my visitor had vanished." When the governess sees Miss Jessel the first time, she notes the "identity of the apparition," using a word that is commonly associated with ghosts. The governess uses the word again when she sees Quint on the stairs, but it is curious to note that Quint appears "as human and hideous as a real interview," as opposed to appearing faint or ethereal, like many other traditional ghosts.

Good versus Evil

Even though the ghosts appear as human, the governess makes it very clear that they are evil and that hers is a fight of good against evil. When she is first talking with Mrs. Grose about Quint, she identifies the ghost as "a horror." Later, when she has learned the identities of the ghosts, she describes them, even in their earthly life, as "fiends." The governess decides to pit herself against the evil ghosts, noting to herself that "the children, in especial, I should thus fence about and absolutely save." Although, at one point, after she learns more about the children's relationship with Miss Jessel and Peter Quint during their lives, she thinks, "I don't save or shield them! It's far worse than I dreamed—they're lost!" However, the governess does not give up the fight, and at the end of the book, as Mrs. Grose is leaving with Flora to go to the child's uncle's house in the city, the governess notes her plan for Miles: "If he confesses, he's saved." When the governess gets Miles alone that night, and she does finally force him to say Quint's name, Miles asks, "*Where*?" looking for the ghost. At this point, the governess thinks she has won the battle versus evil, and says: "What does he matter now, my own? . . . *I have you* . . . but he has lost you for ever!" However, after Miles shrieks and falls into the governess's arms, she realizes that, though she believes she has banished the ghost, Miles has died in the process.

Insanity

Could the governess be hallucinating? Besides actual ghosts, this is the other popular theme to which many critics point. There is evidence in the novel that perhaps the governess is seeing things. First and foremost, there is the fact that nobody except for the governess has ever plainly stated that they have seen ghosts. The one time that the

governess thinks she will be vindicated, when the ghost of Miss Jessel appears before her and Mrs. Grose, the governess realizes she has a "thrill of joy at having brought on a proof." However, the housekeeper does not see the ghost: "What a dreadful turn, to be sure, Miss! Where on earth do you see anything?"

The governess herself hints at the possibility of madness at other points in the narrative. When she is describing the state that she is in after the first ghost sightings, when she is watching in "stifled suspense" for more ghostly occurrences, she notes that if this state had "continued too long," it could "have turned to something like madness." The governess faces a much longer dry spell, in which she sees no ghosts, during several weeks at the end of the summer and early autumn. Although she does not describe herself in "stifled suspense," she does say that one would think that the lack of ghosts would "have done something toward soothing my nerves," but it does not. If one uses this and other examples of the governess's nervous condition, the ghosts can be explained as hallucinations.

Style

Setting

Bly, a "country home, an old family place" in the country, is a classic setting for a ghost story. When the governess first arrives, she is impressed by the "greatness that made it a different affair from my own scant home." When she receives her first tour of the place by Mrs. Grose, the governess notes the "empty chambers and dull corridors . . . crooked staircases," and a "square tower that made me dizzy." All of these descriptions fit the profile of the classic spooky old house. So does the fact that the house features large, sweeping grounds, which include a lake and several pathways, both of which are imbued with the same feeling as the garden, the "lonely place" in which the governess first sees the ghost of Peter Quint.

Narration

Although the main body of the story has been written down by the governess, it is unclear as to when she recorded her story, since she notes in the story that she has "not seen Bly since the day I left it" and gives some hypothetical observations that might appear to her "older and more informed eyes" if she were to see it again. For his part, Douglas merely says that when she was his sister's governess, "It was long ago, and this episode was long before." Nevertheless, the governess has written the story down and sent Douglas "the pages in question before she died." As noted in the introduction, Douglas then reads the pages to the narrator and other assembled guests. Later, before Douglas's death, the narrator notes that Douglas "committed to me the manuscript," which the narrator is now telling to the reader. Because the story is from an exact transcript, the story can be assumed to be exactly as the governess wrote it down.

Because it is told in the first person narrative mode, the reader is called upon to trust that what the governess is saying is true. However, the governess has all of the traits of a classic unreliable narrator, meaning that it is unclear as to whether the reader can trust her or not. For starters, there is the question of how much time elapsed between Miles's death and her recording of the tale, as mentioned above. In addition, because the governess sees things that others do not and poses the idea that her sanity is in danger, the reader has cause to believe that perhaps the governess's viewpoint is not accurate. In fact, at one point, she admits to herself—and the readers—that she is attempting to "retrace today the strange steps of my obsession." The fact that her fight between good and evil became an "obsession" may have clouded her ability to tell the tale accurately.

Allegory

The good versus evil theme follows a specific narrative technique, known as allegory. An allegory is a second level of meaning in the story, which affects every part of it. In

this case, the allegory becomes one of God versus the Devil, with the governess representing Godlike or divine qualities, while the ghosts, and sometimes the children, represent Devillike or evil qualities. The governess invokes the name of God on many occasions. When she has first seen her main opponent, the ghost of Peter Quint, she remarks to Mrs. Grose: "God help me if I know *what* he is!" A few lines down from this comment, Mrs. Grose says, "It's time we should be at church." Church is a traditional symbol of God, and indeed the governess looks to her church for strength when she feels she is starting to lose the battle for Miles's soul. She is on her way to church with the boy and thinks "of the almost spiritual help of the hassock on which I might bend my knees."

She also notes of Miles that "I seemed literally to be running a race with some confusion to which he was about to reduce me." At times, the governess describes Miles with demon-like adjectives, saying that it was his "wickedness" that got him kicked out of school. For the ghosts, the allegorical meaning is also clear. The governess uses terms of evil to describe them throughout the story,

but at the end, when Quint makes his final appearance to her, she notes "his white face of damnation." She also remarks that, when she pulls Miles close to her to protect him, "It was like fighting with a demon for a human soul," a clear reference to the classical fight between God and Satan for human souls. Finally, when the governess finally presses Miles to name who "he" is, Miles says, "Peter Quint—you Devil!"

Historical Context

The Growth of Towns

The governess's employer, the uncle of Miles and Flora, is conspicuously absent from the story, always in the city, at his house on Harley Street. In Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, this was not uncommon. In 1800, London had approximately nine hundred thousand inhabitants. By 1900, just after James wrote *The Turn of the Screw*, the population had expanded to 4.7 million. For some, city life meant poverty, as the towns were segregated by class, with the poorer inhabitants living in slums. The more wealthy residents, like the governess's employer, lived in more fashionable districts. As the governess notes, "He had for his town residence a big house filled with the spoils of travel and the trophies of the chase." However, like other wealthy landowners who were able to maintain a second residence, "it was to his country home" that the governess is sent.

Sickness and Medicine

The nineteenth century saw many advances in the science of medicine—including a greater understanding of physiology and the use of vaccines and other preventative methods. However, since these methods were not always used universally and since medicine had not yet evolved into a standard, regulated practice, the effectiveness of medical attention was largely due to the individual knowledge and skill of the practitioner. People could not hope for a cure if they were to get sick. As a result, people attempted to reduce their susceptibility to even minor illnesses, which could develop into larger and more problematic ones. Between 1830 and 1850, people in Europe were especially cautious, as there was an epidemic of cholera in both London and Paris. In the book, the governess chastises Miles when she finds him walking outside at midnight, telling him that he has "caught your death in the night air!" Likewise, when the governess and Mrs. Grose realize that Flora has gone outside without telling them, Mrs. Grose is shocked: "Without a hat?" Wearing a hat to cover one's head, where much of the body's heat is lost, was one common preventative method to avoid getting sick.

The Governess

The idea of employing a live-in lady to teach children—especially girls—dates back to the Middle Ages, but became more popular near the end of the eighteenth century when the middle classes in England grew in wealth and size. However, the romanticized English governess familiar to readers of nineteenth-century novels like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847), and many of James's novels has helped to instill the idea that governesses were common installments in every wealthy home during this time period. In reality, only a small percentage of women who worked served as governesses. For those who did employ a governess,

the woman was intended to help the mother—or the widower, if the mother were not alive—with the intellectual and moral raising of the children. Like the governess in the story, who is "young, untried," and who is "taking service for the first time in the schoolroom," most governesses did not have any special training.

Critical Overview

James's *The Turn of the Screw* is considered one of literature's greatest ghost stories. Since its publication in 1898, it has been popular with both critics and the public. For the critics, the debate has always been sharply divided. When it was first published, the issue was whether the tale was artistically sound or a morally objectionable story. Many critics, like an *Outlook* reviewer, note both: "it is on a higher plane both of conception and art. The story itself is distinctly repulsive." Likewise, a *Bookman* reviewer notes: "We have never read a more sickening, a more gratuitously melancholy tale. It has all Mr. James's cleverness, even his grace." And a review in the *Independent* says that, "while it exhibits Mr. James's genius in a powerful light," the book "affects the reader with a disgust that is not to be expressed."

Those who found negative things to say about the book were often commenting on the subject matter, the damnation of children, which was a taboo and relatively unexplored theme at the time. A reviewer for the *Independent* expresses this feeling best, noting that Miles and Flora are "at the toddling period of life, when they are but helpless babes," and that through their participation in reading the story, readers assist "in an outrage upon the holiest and sweetest fountain of human innocence" and help to corrupt "the pure and trusting nature of children." Some early reviewers did purely enjoy the tale as a good ghost story, and recognized James's efforts to improve his medium. A reviewer for the *Critic* states that the story is "an imaginative masterpiece," and William Lyon Phelps, the stenographer to whom James dictated the story, calls it "the most powerful, the most nerve-shattering ghost story I have ever read," providing for "all those who are interested in the moral welfare of boys and girls an appeal simply terrific in its intensity."

For the next few decades, most critics continued to view the story as a ghost story, whether or not they agreed with the moral quality of the tale. However, in 1934, with the publication of Edmund Wilson's "The Ambiguity of Henry James," the debate was sharply divided again, this time into those who read the tale as the frantic ravings of a repressed woman and those who still believed it to be a ghost story. Wilson's assertion that "the young governess who tells the story is a neurotic case of sex repression, and the ghosts are not real ghosts at all but merely the governess's hallucinations," provided the fuel for the former viewpoint. Since then, the critical debate has been almost comical, as various people have come along and stated, with absolute certainty, that one viewpoint was true and the other was false. In 1948, Robert Heilman says, "It is probably safe to say that the Freudian interpretation of the story . . . no longer enjoys wide critical acceptance."

In 1957, Charles G. Hoffman notes that "the Freudian interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw* can never be denied since . . . the governess is psychopathic." In the same decade, Leon Edel shifted the focus somewhat, saying that the novel "has become the subject of a long and rather tiresome controversy arising from a discussion of circumstantial evidence in the narrative." Edel further notes that most critics fail "to examine the technique of the storytelling, which would have made much of the dispute

unnecessary." Edel focused on the method of narration to illustrate that the governess is an unreliable narrator and concluded that it is the governess "who subjects the children to a psychological harassment that in the end leads to Flora's hysteria and Miles's death." In other words, another vote for a Freudian reading.

However, the traditional ghost story view did not dry up, and, as David Kirby notes in the foreword of Peter G. Beidler's 1989 book, *Ghosts, Demons, and Henry James: The Turn of the Screw at the Turn of the Century*, "the battle has been so even over the years that it looked as though neither side would prevail unless new evidence were gathered." In fact, Kirby claims that "Beidler has settled the issue conclusively; he is the new master of Bly and its occupants." Beidler, after reading through about two thousand ghost stories from James's era, uses his research to demonstrate that "the evil-ghost reading" is more likely. However, as Robert L. Gale notes in his entry on James for *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, "the critical battle is still raging, and it is likely to do so indefinitely, since James seems consciously to have salted his text with veins leading in different directions."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Poquette holds a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses how the absent employer sets off a chain reaction that triggers the governess's hallucinations in James's novel.

It is very difficult to make an argument about most aspects of *The Turn of the Screw* without first announcing whether one belongs to the group that views the tale as a ghost story or to the group that feels the governess's ghosts are really hallucinations. This essay will take the latter view as a starting point and discuss the reasons behind the governess's hallucinations. It is her master's curiously absent status, coupled with the governess's unrequited love for him, that drives the young woman to her hallucinations.

When the governess applies for the job at Bly, her employer tells her that there is one binding condition that no other woman has been able to meet: "she should never trouble him—but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything." Instead, the governess is to be totally in charge and should "meet all the questions herself . . . take the whole thing over and let him alone." The governess is unsure at first, especially because she knows the position will entail "really great loneliness."

If she had her way, on the other hand, she would be governess in the house of the master himself, on whom both Douglas and the governess imply she has a crush. As Douglas notes in his introduction to the tale, when the governess first meets the master, she notes that he is "a gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life, such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel, before a fluttered, anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage." The governess is drawn to him on their first meeting and gives other clues throughout the story that she is pining for a romantic relationship, preferably with him. This feeling is compounded, first of all, by the fact that Bly is her first assignment: "She was young, untried, nervous."

As Leon Edel notes in his article, "The Point of View": "she has ample reason to be nervous about the duties and responsibilities conferred upon her . . . a young girl taking her first job." Even though she is nervous at the thought of the job at Bly, she is also eager to impress her new master, as she notes when she takes her walks alone in the garden: "I was giving pleasure—if he ever thought of it!—to the person to whose pressure I had responded." The governess thinks that she has made her employer happy since she is the only one who has been able to adhere to his guideline of no contact. She starts to congratulate herself immensely: "What I was doing was what he had earnestly hoped . . . and that I *could*, after all, do it proved even a greater joy than I expected." In fact, the governess starts to fancy herself "a remarkable young woman and took comfort in the faith that this would more publicly appear." In other words, she is hoping that her great deed will attract the master's attention.

It is telling that, in this frame of mind, she starts to have a romantic daydream, "a charming story suddenly to meet someone." Who is this someone? The governess's further description identifies this "someone" as a person who "would stand before me

and smile and approve. I didn't ask more than that—I only asked that he should *know*." The governess is having a romantic daydream, imagining that her master will appear so that she can see his approval "in his handsome face." As Harold C. Goddard notes in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, the absence of the master is having a very real effect on the governess's psyche. Says Goddard, when "a young woman, falls in love and circumstances forbid the normal growth and confession of the passion, the emotion, dammed up, overflows in a psychical experience, a daydream."

However, the daydream that appears before the woman on the tower is not the one she expects—"the man who met my eyes was not the person I had precipitately supposed." Her conscious mind is asking for the appearance of the master so that she can show him how good she is being and perhaps be rewarded. But it is the deeper, subconscious mind, freshly affected from all of her thoughts about how she wants to prove herself to the master, that precipitates the "ghostly" vision. In her mind, the governess is creating a challenge for herself, something that is greater than merely following the master's orders and something that will perhaps yield a greater reward, once the master sees how she has been victorious.

The governess does not realize this, of course, and attributes the vision to the dead ghost of Peter Quint, once she has spoken with Mrs. Grose and gotten this idea in her head. However, Mrs. Grose has already planted other ideas in the governess's head, prior even to the time when the governess sees her first hallucination. Shortly after the governess arrives, she inquires after her predecessor, and Mrs. Grose tells her that "She was also young and pretty—almost as young and pretty, Miss, even as you." The governess notes that "He seems to like us young and pretty!" and it is here that Mrs. Grose slips and mentions a mysterious "he," which the governess notes but then forgets. More important, however, is her subconscious mind, which is recording that fact and adding it to the other strange things it has noticed at Bly—the cryptic death of her predecessor, the sounds she hears at night, the fact that Miles's headmaster has dismissed him. Although she does not think about these things consciously at first, all of these first impressions, coupled with her desire to appear a hero to her employer, help her subconscious to create a suitable challenge.

Once the governess's vision has gotten out of hand and she has whipped everyone into a frenzy, Mrs. Grose suggests contacting their master, an idea that would undercut everything that the governess is trying to accomplish at Bly. She thinks about her master's reaction: "his derision, his amusement, his contempt for the break-down of my resignation at being left alone and for the fine machinery I had set in motion to attract his attention to my slighted charms." The fact that she mentions her "slighted charms" confirms that the governess's intentions with the master are more than professional. In fact, she is so protective of her vision, and of her reputation with her master, that she threatens Mrs. Grose not to send for the master behind her back: "I would leave, on the spot, both him and you."

It is not her love for the master alone that creates the governess's hallucinations. The young woman's tendency for nervousness has already been noted. But she herself indicates that she might be drawn toward something more, under certain circumstances.

At one point, while waiting in "stifled suspense" to see the ghosts again, she remarks that if this tense state were to continue for too long, it could turn "to something like madness." Is the governess mad, or does she just have an overactive imagination brought on by unreleased passion? The second case has already been addressed, but the story gives indication that the first may be true. When the children start prying into the governess's background, she notes that they try to dig out the "many particulars of the eccentric nature of my father." Depending upon the meaning James attaches to the word "eccentric," the governess could be saying that her father was insane. Goddard is much more certain of the father's condition. He says that she is "the daughter of a country parson, who, from his daughter's one allusion to him in her story, is of a psychically unbalanced nature; he may, indeed, even have been insane."

If this is the case, then the romantic daydreams about her master may have tapped into some genetic madness that she inherited from her father. In any case, as the story goes on, the governess does start to appear a little crazy. She imagines that the children—under the influence of the ghosts—are plotting against her: "It was not . . . my mere infernal imagination . . . they were aware of my predicament." The governess believes that her tactful but vague allusions to the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel are being deliberately ignored by the children: "so much avoidance could not have been so successfully effected without a great deal of tacit arrangement." In all reality, the children are probably confused as to what the governess is referring, or if they do understand her, they may think her mad, too.

Regardless of what the children think, they suffer as a result of the governess's delusions. She watches them constantly, and on certain occasions, seems ready to give in to a mad rage, as when she thinks Flora is keeping something from her: "At that moment, in the state of my nerves, I absolutely believed she lied." The governess lets the reader know that "if I closed my eyes it was before the dazzle of the three or four possible ways in which I might take this up." In other words, the governess is seeing three or four ways that she can deal with Flora, either to punish her for lying or to beat an answer out of her. The hint of violence is soon made real, when she almost succumbs to one of the visions, which "tempted me with such singular intensity that, to withstand it, I must have gripped my little girl with a spasm that, wonderfully, she submitted to without a cry or a sign of fright." The governess's mental state is rapidly deteriorating, and she can barely constrain herself from doing something harmful to the children. Edel notes that the governess is reading "sinister meanings into everything around her" and suggests that it is the governess's "psychological harassment that in the end leads to Flora's hysteria and Miles's death."

If even one other person were able to verify a ghost sighting, then perhaps this statement could be refuted. The governess gets her chance near the end of the novel, when she sees the ghost of Miss Jessel while she is standing with Mrs. Grose and Flora. The governess is happy that somebody else will be able to testify as to the ghosts' existence: "She was there, and I was justified; she was there, and I was neither cruel nor mad." Unfortunately, Mrs. Grose sees nothing, and as this essay has shown, the governess *is* cruel and likely mad. She has been cruel to the children with her psychological torture, driving one into hysteria and one into the grave, and she is

certainly displaying the signs of one who is mentally deranged. Perhaps when the ghost of Peter Quint disappears at the end of the story, her subconscious mind has declared herself a winner and so banished that particular illusion. She certainly claims triumph for herself, with her exclamations to Miles—"*I* have you . . . but he has lost you for ever!" However, given her nervous state, she could easily succumb to another hallucination at her next job—if, of course, there is a handsome young gentleman who inspires her subconscious mind to create another challenge.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *The Turn of the Screw*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Chase discusses the idea of innocence in The Turn of the Screw*.*

Few critical theories about literary works have engendered as much controversy as Edmund Wilson's thesis in "The Ambiguity of Henry James" (1934) that in *The Turn of the Screw* "the ghosts are not real ghosts but hallucinations of the governess," who "is a neurotic case of sex repression" (*Homage* . . .). Wilson never abandoned his Freudian hypothesis, in spite of sharp rebuke from many Jamesian scholars. Dorothea Krook, for example, speaks of "his misguided Freudianism" and accuses him of "arriving at conclusions which are no longer even perverse but merely fatuous." And Krishna Vaid contends that he "makes a travesty of the text" and has even "violated . . . the larger context more flagrantly and more persistently than any adherent of his theory." Wilson's interpretation is like the proverbial horse that has "been much beaten but never yet . . . to death," and more than one critic would like to see it given a "decent burial" (Krook . . .). But the Freudians are still active. A Freudian reading alone, however, which shows that Miles is as much a sexually precocious young man as he is a ten-year-old boy, results in ambiguity. This ambiguity can be resolved only if the innocence of the two innocents, Miles and the governess, is recognized. Both are inexperienced characters who blunder at one another throughout the novel, especially in chapter 17.

The theory that the governess is sexually repressed is well founded: she is the daughter of a country clergyman, suggesting limited informal contact with the opposite sex; she is infatuated with her handsome employer, whom she never sees after their single interview; and she states, immediately before her first sighting of Peter Quint, that "it would be as charming as a charming story suddenly to meet some one"—a man, presumably. The Freudian innuendoes, whether intentionally or subliminally inserted, are evident: the figure of Peter Quint on the tower (a phallic symbol), the lake (the female sex organ) in front of Miss Jessel, and the piece of wood that Flora intently maneuvers into the hole of another piece of wood (*Hommage* . . .). And as Robert Liddell observes, even the words *turn* and *screw* in the title of the work are suggestive.

Many factors contribute to the governess's anxious state of mind, especially the letter dismissing Miles, the presence of Miss Jessel and the children, and the governess's mixed feelings toward the handsome man who employed her and thus gave her the responsibilities of Bly. After a conversation with Miles (chapter 14), during which he insists that "a fellow . . . [cannot] be with a lady *always*," the governess feels that she must learn why the boy has been dismissed from school and, furthermore, must inform his uncle, even if that means her employer must come to Bly. As she collapses on the staircase (chapter 15), the governess becomes aware of the presence of Miss Jessel and calls her predecessor a "terrible miserable woman"; but when she talks with Mrs. Grose afterward (chapter 16), she asserts that Miss Jessel told her that "she suffers the torments . . . of the lost. Of the damned" and therefore has come to take Flora "to share them." When the governess and Mrs. Grose speak of the letter from school, the governess blames the children's uncle for all that has happened because he left the two in the care of Miss Jessel and Peter Quint. Because Miles is "so clever and beautiful

and perfect," the governess believes that he must have been dismissed "for wickedness." Resolving to write to her employer that night but unable to start the letter, she goes to Miles's doorway. She explains that "under [her] endless obsession," she listened "a minute" at Miles's door for "some betrayal of his not being at rest." He, too, has been listening for and hoping to see someone—specifically, the governess—as is suggested by his cordial and seemingly prepared invitation for her to enter, in a voice that conjures up images of "gaiety in the gloom", "gaiety" because of his happiness at hearing just whom he wanted to hear—and see. When she asks him what he was thinking of as he lay awake, Miles says, "What in the world, my dear, but *you*?" He adds, "Well, I think also, you know, of this queer business of ours." As she "mark[s] the coolness of his firm little hand," she asks what he means. Miles replies, "Why the way you bring me up. And all the rest!" The governess has to hold her breath "fairly . . . a minute" as she continues her questioning: "What do you mean by all the rest?" He smiles "up at [her] from his pillow": "Oh you know, you know!" She can "say nothing for a minute . . ."

The governess's youthfulness and inexperience are important to note, and the suggestion is that the age difference between her and Miles is no greater than that between her and Douglas. The governess may well be one of James's "thwarted Anglo-Saxon spinster[s]" (*Homage* . . .), but she is also sexually excited by the innuendoes of this exchange, as is Miles. The young boy whose hand she holds is sexually aroused by this attractive young woman. Undoubtedly influenced by Peter Quint and by his uncle, Miles is part boy, part man. He has the sexual urge, but not the confidence which comes with maturity. He can only try to express himself through his enigmatic responses. Despite the governess's momentary inability to answer Miles, she does reveal her thoughts: "I felt as I held his hand and our eyes continued to meet that my silence had all the air of admitting his charge and that nothing in the whole world of reality was perhaps at that moment so fabulous as our actual relation."

At once—compulsively or inadvertently—she returns to a topic that can only add to the excitement of each. She tells Miles that he can return to school, although it must be "another, a better" school. As she reminds him that he has never told her anything about the school or his companions there, her imagination creates an image that is, at least temporarily, emotionally acceptable to her: "His clear listening face, framed in its smooth whiteness, made him for the minute as appealing as some wistful patient in a children's hospital; and I would have given, as the resemblance came to me, all I possessed on earth really to be the nurse or the sister of charity who might have helped to cure him." As he smiles and calls "for guidance," something about him "set . . . [her] heart aching, with such a pang as it had never yet known." As she prattles on about his not telling her about the school, her "absolute conviction of his secret precocity [or his sexual precocity?] . . . made him . . . appear as accessible as an older person." Her confusion in the situation reveals itself as she speaks of that precocity as "whatever I might call the poison of an influence that I dared but halfphrase." The entire exchange must be read as the ambiguity of innocence and innocents. How, for example, can her next remark, "I thought you wanted to go on as you are," be interpreted? At one level it can refer to his remaining in the country (she responds to his desire to "get away" by asking

if he is "tired of Bly"), where he is constantly her close companion. Or this can be seen as a reference to his virginity.

The basic problem of *The Turn of the Screw* is the narrative point of view. To distance the story, James employed the time-worn device of the old manuscript to authenticate the events at Bly. But the mind of the governess is the filter through which those events must come. The memories are hers, but does she record what actually happened at Bly or what she imagined, what she unconsciously wished for? Therein, of course, lies the crux of the debate between the Freudian and non-Freudian readings of *The Turn of the Screw*.

The memory of the governess suggests that in this sequence Miles is as excited—or as confused?—as she. In response to her question about going on as he is, "he just faintly coloured." Admitting that he "likes Bly," he insists, "Oh *you* know what a boy wants!" To her immediate inquiry as to whether or not he would like to return to his uncle, Miles blurts out the sexually explosive line, "Ah you can't get off with that." She unhesitatingly replies, "My dear, I don't want to get off!" But she then is the one "who changed colour."

The emphasis on the word *you* and the exclamations "Oh" and "Ah" suggest that she remembers the incident as emotional and containing an urgent, if oblique, attempt at communication with the precocious boy. The expression "get off" illustrates the sexual quality of the governess's memories. Today that phrase can mean "to have an orgasm," as in the line from a contemporary novel: "All he wants to do is get in, get off and get out as fast as possible" (King . . .). It can also mean to "become . . . intimate with" (Freeman . . .), "to become friendly with, or deliberately attract, a member of the opposite sex" (Cowie and Mackin . . .), and "to have sexual intercourse with" (Delbridge . . .). Although the last usage occurs more frequently in modern Australian English, it is also found in English Renaissance Literature. In John Fletcher's *The Wild-Goose Chase*, produced in 1621, Belleur, thinking about his planned seduction of Rosalura, says, "I am resolved to go on; / But how I shall get off again. . . ." Once "on," that is, he will not want to "get off" anymore than the governess in her sexual fantasy wants to "get off" Miles. In this reading of the term, the only difference between Belleur's and the governess's fantasies is one of position. Belleur's words carry the "innuendo of sexually dismounting from the woman after copulation" (Henke . . .); the governess's observation ("I don't want to get off!") would indicate that she imagines herself in the superincumbent position. It is important to note that James was quite familiar with Fletcher. Some time after James's admission to London's select Reform Club in 1878, he observed, "Since my election, I have done nothing but sit there and read Jowett's Plato and Beaumont and Fletcher" (Edel . . .). This evidence, along with the fact that "get in" implies sexual intercourse in Thomas Dekker's 1630 play *The Honest Whore, Part II*, that "go" and "off" are used separately to suggest various aspects of intercourse elsewhere in Renaissance drama (Henke . . .), and that "to get with" has meant "to beget," or "to impregnate," at least since the time of Christ, gives credence to a sexual reading of this interchange between Miles and the governess—and others as well, most notably that in which Miles comments on her ability to "bring . . . [him] up." James is clearly a master of sexual innuendo.

The governess's mention that Miles "lay beautifully staring" at her during the conversation adds to the suggestiveness of the scene, as does his further remark that "I don't want to go back.... I want a new field." That remark moves the governess to action. Speaking again of his "unimpeachable gaiety" and troubled by the idea that if he left, he would probably reappear "at the end of three months with all this bravado and still more dishonour," the governess asserts that she could not stand such an event:

. . . and it made me let myself go. I threw myself upon him and in the tenderness of my pity I embraced him. "Dear little Miles, dear little Miles—!"

My face was close to his, and he let me kiss him.

But here occurs another twist of the ambiguity, for Miles accepts the kiss, "simply taking it with indulgent good humour," saying "Well, old lady?" That remark might well have encouraged her to make the next move; it is adult, something Quint or his uncle might say. But Miles cannot maintain an adult pose, especially when the governess asks, "Is there nothing—nothing at all that you want to tell me?" He turns from her, looking round only to remind her that he had earlier told her "to let me alone."

The woman in the governess is persistent; she does not want to "lose" her "man." Urged on by his "faint quaver of consenting consciousness," she drops to her knees at his bedside to "seize once more the chance of possessing him"—his soul possibly, his body certainly. When she says to him, "if you *knew* how I want to help you," she is subtly offering herself to him; she even acknowledges to herself that she has "gone too far" to retreat. At this moment an inexplicable, "extraordinary blast" of air shakes the room "as if . . . the casement had crashed in," causing the boy, in an orgasmic frenzy, to utter "a loud high shriek which . . . might have seemed . . . a note either of jubilation or of terror." Though Miles is not physically capable of an orgasm, the adult in him experiences it symbolically, and because of the nature and novelty of the experience, he is elated and terrified. Appropriately, the candle (a phallic symbol) that the governess takes with her to Miles's room is extinguished. The boy-man's sexual desire has been symbolically satisfied and the heat from the flame of the candle has been dispelled by the "chill" from the "gust of frozen air." Of course, Miles's fire has been extinguished, not by cold air, but by the governess. And Miles, once again more the man than the boy, reveals that he has done his part to facilitate matters; his extinguishing the candle not only darkens the room for the secret tryst but also symbolizes his active role as lover.

James mentions the candle seven times in this short chapter, the repetition reinforcing its symbolic importance. That it generates heat, is phallic-shaped, and is usually found in the governess's hand makes it an ideal symbol for conveying her sexual desires. Early in the chapter when Miles, lying in bed, asks her what she is "up to," the governess is standing over him with candle in hand; she is "up to" a number of things. And when the candle is not in her hand, it is "designedly, a short way off"—always within reach, to be sure.

Whether James intentionally included the Freudian imagery in the novel is a moot point, but recognition of its existence is not tantamount to calling "a great writer 'a repressed governess' " (Liddell . . .). Edward Davidson advises not to fall victim to "the obvious human failing to confuse life and literature—to assume, in other words, that what a man wrote he inevitably was in his own person. If a writer dealt with . . . eroticism, he was of necessity . . . erotic." The sexual innuendoes in no way undercut James, but rather add to the richness of his characterizations. These innuendoes are fully explicable only if they are viewed as the products of the innocence and resulting confusion of two characters—Miles and the governess—whose real complexity has thus far eluded both the Freudians and the non-Freudians.

Source: Dennis Chase, "Ambiguity of Innocence: *Turn of the Screw*," in *Extrapolation*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1986, pp. 137, 198-202.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Bell discusses the thematic use of the principle of uncertainty in The Turn of the Screw*.*

The preoccupation of a generation of critics with the reality status of the ghosts in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* has always seemed to me misplaced. One may grant that the spectral appearances to which the governess in the tale testifies cannot be proven to be supernaturally actual or her illusion, that we are in a condition of uncertainty over the question and that the story merits the title of "fantastic" which Todorov gives it. But is this not a minor source of our interest? The reader's epistemological quandary, his inability to be positive about how to "take" the phenomena reported by the narrator is, of course, rooted in his inability to verify or refute her first-person account; we cannot escape the enclosure of her mind, and all efforts to find internal clues of veracity or distortion in what she tells us are baffled by its essential mode. The confidence she has inspired in her fictional editor, Douglas, does not really help, either, for he, too, is a possibly compromised and implicated speaker over whose shoulder the first-person narrator of the frame-story looks at us without either reassurance or skepticism. But her report perplexes the reader in other ways too; the principle of uncertainty operates more fundamentally in leaving us in doubt about her way of reading experience generally, her evaluation of herself and others, her identification of motive and meaning in their behavior and her own, her moral vision. One may say that the presence or absence of the Miss Jessel and Peter Quint at Bly is crucial in such a judgment; if they are to be believed in, she is justified in her view of the children and her sense of her own duty, and if not, she is a victim of delusion. But, in fact, this is not so. Though the story gains its special *frisson* from its fantastic element, one can conceive an equally powerful Jamesian mystery that might be based entirely on the moral uncertainty alone. One has only to think of another work, *The Sacred Fount*—to see that James could have composed a fiction whose indeterminacy is rooted in our unease concerning the narrator's deductions and judgments about others, his purely visual perceptions being never in doubt.

Todorov has himself noticed that in some of James's ghost stories the quality of the fantastic is threatened by the possibility of allegory. In "The Private Life," the double who sits at his desk writing while another self occupies himself with mundanity may or may not be a supernatural presence, but he is so much more obviously a symbolic figure in a fable of the artist's nature that the hesitation of the fantastic is almost eliminated. He finds *The Turn of the Screw*, on the other hand, James's most realized example of the fantastic, one that maintains its uncertainty throughout the text and keeps it to the forefront. But I would argue that it, too, is a fable. And I would support this view by means of another insight of Todorov which he does not apply closely to *The Turn of the Screw*—that many of James's fictions concern themselves with the act of perception turned towards an absence, that they are quest stories in which the pursuit of some phantasmal object without presence except to the perceiver threatens the ambivalence of the fantastic, makes meaningless the question, "Does the ghost exist?" Precisely this happens, I think, in *Turn of the Screw*. The story, I would urge further, represents a

search for an absence that is not re-strictedly "ghostly." It is not the ghost of the two dead household servants that the governess seeks to validate, but something more undenotable, an evil in the children and in the world which the ghosts can be said simply to represent. This absence can never be converted to presence; precisely for that reason all reader curiosity about the children's relation with the dead or proofs of their corruption must be frustrated.

James would seem to have deprecated any attempt—such as this one—to take his tale very seriously, tending to reply to questions about its meaning with the evasive declaration (to H. G. Wells in 1898) that "the thing is essentially a potboiler." He could still refer to it in the preface to his revision in the New York Edition as "a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, or cold artistic calculation, an amusette to catch those not easily caught." But what trap is laid for the over-clever may, after all, be precisely illustrated by the way puzzlement over the ghostliness of the ghosts has leld so many astray. His other remarks in this same preface are worth examining, and suggest that by calling his work one of pure ingenuity he may have meant that he had dispensed with any claim to the realistic. What he has written, after all, he tells us, was something in the mode of romance, "a perfect example of the imagination unassisted . . . unassociated, a fairytale pure and simple . . . an annexed but independent world."

But if the ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw* belong to the realm of romantic dream rather than to literal reality this does not mean that they are the dreams of a sick young woman who has hallucinated. Their irreality functions mythically, to create a profound perception about the structures of human experience. Leon Edel, perhaps taking a hint from the preface, has noted the connection with the two fairytales James particularly mentions. Like Cinderella, the governess is the youngest child who ventures alone into the world dreaming of a meeting with Prince Charming. And Bluebeard's last wife, Fatima, is given the keys to the treasures and told not to enter a forbidden room. But her curiosity overcomes her and she finds the bloody corpse of her predecessors as, indeed, the governess, longing for her absent master, comes upon *her* dead predecessor. What such archetypal narratives may mean as representations of human desire and fear should concern us even in James's transforming context. He saw his governess's visions, the putative evil spirits, the demons of fairytale, as having a symbolic function: "They would be agents, in fact; there would be laid on them the dire duty of causing the situation to reek with the air of Evil." By their capacity for, as it is said in the story, "everything," by the material absence of that capitalized absolute, they would suggest a general vision which he was sure the reader could make present sufficiently out of his own memories.

But Romance is essentially Manichean. It sees the world in terms of opposed purities, allowing only for ideal virtue and undiluted viciousness, for heroes and heroines, villains and villainesses diametrically opposed, for evil and good in so complete a state that no experience we recall can fully express them. The condition of romance depends upon absence (as realism does upon presence) not because romantic narratives do not contain details but because the details are never *enough*; no amount of them will ever fill the void of the absolute, supply enough wicked deeds to justify the Wicked King's title, describe the Good Prince so that his goodness is fully accounted for. Implicit in the

diametrics of the romance is the mythos of the Christian tradition which, while according responsibility for creation to one sacred being yet suggests that God's contest with Satan splits the universe into domains of equal power, inexhaustible sources of the divine and the demonic.

In *The Turn of the Screw* this version of life is the governess's private one; she is the writer of romance, the absolutist of the Manichean interpretation of the Christian tradition. In a way, therefore, our interest in her must, after all, be psychological—not in the sense of Edmund Wilson and his followers so that we may discover the cause of her hallucinations in erotic tensions but so that we may find the story's subject in her theory of experience. James's chosen technical method, the first-person narrative unillumined by exterior comment, focuses us upon her mind and its schemes of judgment. James had remarked of the host story generally—in another preface in the New York Edition—that "the moving accident, the rare conjunction, whatever it be, doesn't make the story, —in the sense that the story is our excitement, our amusement, our thrill and our suspense; the human emotion and the human condition, the clustering human conditions we expect presented, only make it."

James seems to have realized only as he wrote that the story's subject was the governess's mind. He had begun with a different focus, the idea of the effect on the children of *their* sight of the apparitions, as his notebook germ, the story told him by the Archbishop of Canterbury, shows. In this notation there is no hint of the narrator James would create; the archbishop had related that he had been told about the haunted children by "a lady who had no art of relation, and no clearness." This original focus on the children's perceptions is preserved in the prologue of the story when Douglas speaks of the interest his tale will offer: "I agree—in regard to Griffin's ghost, or whatever it was—that its appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch. . . But if the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to *two* children—?" But, in fact, the screw of childish perception of horror is never really turned at all in the story we subsequently receive. We never witness as dramatized mental events the appearance of Quint and Miss Jessel to Flora and Miles; indeed, this gap in the presentation is so marked that there are grounds for supposing that the children never see them at all, even though the governess thinks otherwise. Instead, characteristically, James has given us still another of his studies of a consciousness intellectually and emotionally mature and refined enough to provide drama and theme. It may not be accidental that James chose to include *The Turn of the Screw* not with some of his other ghost-stories but in the volume of the New York Edition that contains, *The Aspern Papers*, in which the narrator's self-presentation is the subject we are called upon to grasp and evaluate.

That the governess's mind was the story's subject Virginia Woolf perceived in 1918 when she remarked in the course of reviewing a book about the supernatural that the ghosts "have neither the substance nor the independent existence of ghosts. The governess is not so much frightened of them as of the sudden extension of her field of perception, which in this case widens to reveal to her the presence all about her of an unmentionable evil. The appearance of the figures is an illustration, not in itself specially alarming, of a state of mind which is profoundly mysterious and terrifying." As Woolf

points out, the appearance of the figures, the onset of the "state of mind" which is suddenly opened up to the unknown in itself, is preceded "not by the storms and howlings of the old romances, but by an absolute hush and lapse of nature which we feel to represent the ominous trance of her own mind." One remembers, at Woolf's reminder, the wonderful sentence in the story—"The rooks stopped cawing in the golden sky, and the friendly evening hour lost for the unspeakable minute all its voice," which precedes the first appearance of Quint. The world of nature and the self, "golden" and "friendly" as Bly appears, is about to reveal itself as deceptive and corrupt.

Deceptive and corrupt, however, to a particular way of seeing. "Seeing" is more than a matter of the eyes and the truthful record of what they register. The governess's "seeing"—moral and metaphysical—is what we are made, by the devices of the story, to ponder, to question. James remarks in his preface that the record the governess keeps is "crystalline," but he adds, "by which I don't of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter." If she is an "unreliable narrator" it is on the grounds of judgment. If the governess sees always with an imagination that shifts alternately from a view of Bly as paradise unfallen to a view of it as permeated with corruption, it is because her mind is like one of those designs which allow us to see a flock of white birds crossing a black sky from left to right or a flock of black birds crossing a white sky from right to left—but never both flocks at once. It is an imagination incapable of perceiving ambiguity, only capable of admitting one view and excluding the other. It cannot reconcile and combine, can only exchange the view for its exclusive opposite.

Maybe this accounts for the fact that the characters' configuration in the story the governess tells consists of doubled pairs representing alternate versions of the same reality with the exception of Mrs. Grose, whose simple, whose admirable "grossness" makes such a division impossible. The governess sees herself duplicated twice, in opposite ways, in the person of Miss Jessel and little Flora. She sees the master, whose masculine actuality is represented in her imagination as a figure either of infinite grace or infinite corruption as both little Miles and Quint.

For who is Quint in this drama of the self's revelation to itself? He is, of course, a version or inversion of the owner of Bly, the God-like fine gentleman who has sent the governess upon her mission there with the injunction never to appeal to him—and who has caused her to fall in love with him. The governess has already admitted to Mrs. Grose that she was "carried away in London," and the housekeeper says, "Well, Miss, you're not the first—and you won't be the last." The master's sexual magnetism has exercised itself—for good or evil—before, and is, in fact, soon confused with Quint's in the conversation that ensues when the governess inquires about her predecessor. That predecessor, moreover, is also a projection from within the governess—this time, of her own capacity for sexual subjection. "She was young and pretty—almost as young and almost as pretty, Miss, even as you," says Mrs. Grose. "He seems to like us young and pretty," says the governess, to which the answer of Mrs. Grose is, "Oh, he *did*. . . I mean that's *his* way—the master's." Her seeming to correct herself in this curious fashion suggests to the governess that the housekeeper is speaking of someone else. Indeed, she may be, for Quint, who is the master's "man," also "liked [them] young and pretty," it is soon made clear to us. On the other hand, the housekeeper may not really be

referring to anyone but the master. It is only the governess who must divide the master from a double who has his capacity for vice, or from that role in relation to women which arouses her resentment.

It is after this conversation that the objectified image of the master as an object of hatred rather than love appears just when she has been half-expecting to meet the gentleman from Harley Street. She thinks—with one side of her mind, one might say—that he will suddenly appear, smiling and approving of her handling of the problem presented by the letter from Miles' school—the letter that suggests to her that the perfect little boy has committed some unmentionable wickedness. She has, of course, decided to do nothing—unwilling to establish the nature of the child's offense or to clear him of fault, as she could do by writing the school an inquiry. She thus retains her capacity for alternate visions of Miles who, as I have said, is also a representative of the master. And now the master's double appears in his place, an apparition whose description at first is only that he wears no hat—and so is *not* a gentleman—but otherwise might be the master or the master in ungentlemanly aspect, for he wears his "better's" clothes and "looks like an actor," that is, an impersonation of someone else.

Quint is her intuition, then, of the evil in the fine gentleman, the benevolent masculine authority who has commanded and possessed her erotic fancy, or a version of the master as her suspicion and resentment conceive him now, at a moment of trouble when he cannot be appealed to. Miss Jessel, as I have already stated, is herself. The predecessor is seen later in postures that the governess even recognizes as her own. When she is about to write a letter to the master she is confronted by sight of this figure at her own desk, occupied in writing "like some housemaid writing to her sweetheart." The governess has collapsed at the foot of the steps in the lonely house after her return from her conversation with Miles outside the church—a conversation in which he tells her definitely that he must leave. She realizes that it is exactly there, identically bowed, that she has seen "the spectre of the most horrible of women." Her own emotions, at this moment, are those of guilt and shame—she has deserved Miles's reproach that he is kept from school and "his own sort" by her possessive surveillance. And, perhaps, in the figure of despair, the haggard and terrible Miss Jessel, she sees the self within her which could deserve to be cast off by the master. But she cannot see herself as, in a mingled human way, both of these at the same time.

Her attachment to Miles is, by this same division of mind, also a representation of her attachment to the master. The ten-year-old boy is a "little gentleman," an exquisite, tiny representation of male glamor, dressed, like Quint, if not in the master's clothes, at least by the master's tailor. If he is an unfallen child, an avatar of the good master, he is also Quint from whom he acquired the wickedness of adult masculinity. He has become a nephew also of Quint who as a sort of surrogate uncle, ruled the household in the master's stead, making "too free" with the maids and with "everyone," as Mrs. Grose remembers. To the governess, Miles is beguilingly graceful and gallant; he calls her "my dear," he makes love to her with his flattery of her as a "jolly perfect lady," and in the scene after Flora's departure when they dine together alone, the governess herself thinks of them as a pair of newlyweds, too shy to speak before the waiter. Indeed, she has been utterly "carried away," just as Mrs. Grose predicted when she said, "You will

be carried away by the little gentleman," words that echo the statement that the governess had already been carried away in Harley Street. Critics have observed that the governess fastens her sexual passion, frustrated of its object in the master, upon the child, but it should be noted that Miles has enacted for his own part the master's seduction. And as its sequel, he will abandon her, by his resolution to go back to school. This is such an abandonment as she knows, the poor governess, she might expect from the master—who would also want to go back to his "own sort," his own class. Miss Jessel, one takes it, was used and abandoned if not by the master *in proprie persona* then by his alternate, Quint.

Flora, of course, completes the symmetry of the three couples—the governess and the master, Miss Jessel and Quint, and the two children, and though there is no sexual relation between the children to make for exact duplication, she, too, stands in a slighter way for the governess. In her original beauty and innocence she is an absolute of the governess's own goodness more perfect because presexual, unfallen. She, too, would be abandoned by Miles who wants to leave for his "own sort," this time the world of masculinity from which she is divided, as a girl, as absolutely as the governess is divided from the master's and Miles' world by both class and sex. In the end, her beauty becomes suddenly ugly, hard, like Miss Jessell's, when she seems "an old, old woman" to the governess who has, herself, by this time, lost her own innocence forever.

I have elaborated the pattern of duplicates in the story to emphasize its structure of mirroring and reversal. One can seem to say almost the same thing as I have been doing by identifying all these paired figures, or a least Miss Jessel and Quint, as hallucinatory projections of the governess's repressions. But this is to literalize the poetic design of James's fable, and to diminish its thematic strength. That design and import is rather, as I have said, the vision of a world divided, bifurcated, just as the paired figures are, into absolutes of good and evil. If such perfection of beauty, goodness, grace as represented by the children exists in the world, then the opposite of these qualities is implied by them. The governess's own nature is an exhibition of a love that is hate, trust that is fear, solicitude that is destructiveness. I believe that James wishes to suggest a criticism of this view of human nature and the world at large. In this moral fable the governess's tragic fall from the role she imagines for herself—savior and protector, agency of absolute goodness—brings her to that opposite condition which is conjured also by her imagination, that of destroyer. In her demand that the children admit that they have known and seen the ghosts, she is demanding their admission of their own absolute evil which must simultaneously exist as an alternative to the absolute good she has seen in them. She will not believe in Miles's attempt to convince her that he can be ordinarily bad. Believing in his absolute goodness she insists upon his capacity for some inconceivable demonstration of damnation.

A close reading of the entire story will show how its ambiguity, so often referred to, is really a kind of binary permutation in which alternatives maintain their exclusiveness. The governess's narrative language reinforces at every point the effect of a viewpoint in which assertions can be read backwards, so to speak, to mean their opposites. Such effects can be summarized in the governess's own phrase when she starts her tale: "I remember the whole beginning as a succession of flights and drops, a little see-saw of

the right throbs and the wrong." The see-saw rhythm is immediately initiated. She had, she tells us, somehow dreaded her arrival at Bly, but was, instead, delighted by its beauty—the "bright" flowers, the "golden" sky—and she is received "as if I had been the mistress," a fulfillment, seemingly, of her dream of marriage to the master. On this first evening she meets the beautiful, perfectly named Flora, and goes to bed in a grand room. But there is a "drop" in Mrs. Grose's eagerness to see her, an excessive eagerness that implies another reading of appearances. And appearances are just what the governess will not ever trust, since all things may be replaced by their opposites.

Even when she seems to assert that things are wholly what they seem, doubt invades her sentences and makes them mean another thing entirely:

But it was a comfort that there could be no uneasiness in a connection with anything as beatific as the radiant image of my little girl, the vision of whose angelic beauty had probably more than anything to do with the restlessness that, before morning, made me several times rise and wander about the room to take in the whole picture and prospect, to watch from my open window the faint summer dawn, to look at such stretches if the rest of the house as I could catch, and to listen, while in the falling dusk the first birds began to twitter, for the possible recurrence of a sound or two less natural and not without but within, that I had fancied I heard.

There could be no uneasiness—yet uneasiness is precisely what the image of Flora, described in Edenic terms,—provokes in her. And, not surprisingly, she soon hears, she believes, "the cry of a child" sometime during the night. These "fancies" were thrown off, she adds immediately, yet she contradicts their identification as fancies by promptly going on to say that: "in the light, or the gloom, I should rather say, of other and subsequent matters" these impressions would return. Examining her feelings the next morning, she produces a statement which, denying, seems to assert a ground for fear: "What I felt the next day was, I suppose, nothing that could be fairly called a reaction from the cheer of my arrival; it was at the most only a slight oppression produced by a fuller measure of the scale, as I walked round them, gazed up at them, took them in, of my new circumstances." As little Flora conducts her from one part of the house to another she rocks from one attitude to another: "I had the view of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all colour out of story-books and fairy-tales. Wasn't it just a story-book over which I had fallen a-doze and a-dream? No ; it was a big ugly antique but convenient house, embodying a few features of a building still older, half-displaced and half-utilized, in which I had the fancy of our being almost as lost as a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship."

And so the first little chapter ends, and the next begins with a "this" whose referent is, presumably, this second view of Bly which is said to have come home to her when she went to meet "the little gentleman" and during the evening was "deeply disconcerted" by the letter which arrives from Miles's school. She does not read it to Mrs. Grose but she admits that it says only that he cannot be kept on, which immediately means to her "that he's an injury to others." She asks Mrs. Grose if she has ever known the boy to be bad —to which the housekeeper, who does not think in absolutes, as I have said, eagerly

assents, while vigorously rejecting the terms the governess employs—"contaminate," "corrupt"—in reference to him. As I have already noted however, the governess will never really be convinced, even by Miles himself, that he is capable of venial fault, only, as he is angelic, of demonic wickedness, like Satan himself for whom there could have been no half-way halting-place between Heaven and the Hell to which he fell. So, she continues to invoke by denial a wicked Miles. After meeting him, she is ready to pronounce it "monstrous" she says, that "such a child as had now been revealed to me should be under an interdict." And her sentences still continue their curious game: "It would have been impossible to carry a bad name with a greater sweetness of innocence."

It becomes structurally necessary, as the story advances, that this see-saw play be kept up, that the choice between the alternatives be put off as long as possible. So the governess never does the obvious things that might resolve the problem of choice. She does nothing about the letter from the school—she does not show it to Mrs. Grose, and we are ourselves prevented from judging the nature of its contents. She does not write to the boy's uncle about it; she does not write to the school authorities to inquire of them the exact cause for his dismissal; she does not question Miles himself. Yet the perfect trust on which this attitude seems to be based is ready to yield to its opposite. The gentleness of the children is called "a trap that put her off her guard," the peacefulness of the succeeding days, "the hush in which something gathers or crouches."

When she has her first vision of the man on the tower, she does not make general inquiry about a possible intruder—but only after the figure's second appearance sneaks to Mrs. Grose about the being she describes as "a horror," or "like nobody," as though he could not be identified in ordinary human terms. Miles, meanwhile, continues to astound her by his perfect goodness, which she scrutinizes for evidences of its opposite: "If he had been wicked he would have 'caught' it, and I should have caught it by the rebound—I should have found the trace, should have felt the wound and the dishonour. I could reconstitute nothing at all, and he was therefore an angel." Without warrant, it would seem, then, she "knows" that there has been something between Miles and the dead valet, and that the spectre is trying to continue relations—and her suspicion is confirmed by Mrs. Grose's revelation, to her "sickness of disgust," that, alive, Quint had been "too free." So Miles is corrupt after all! She begins to watch the children with an attentiveness of suspicion that she calls a "service admirable and difficult," a devoted guardianship, but her own words betray her: "I began to watch them in a stifled suspense, a disguised tension, that might well, had it continued too long, have turned into something like madness." And what "saved" her from this madness, the madness of being unable to move from the pole of trust to the pole of condemnation? Why, "proofs" of the children's infernal natures, the first of these being the appearance of Miss Jessel and Flora's appearance of pretending that she has not seen this female figure of "quite as unmistakable horror and evil." But she will not confirm or dismiss her hypothesis by questioning the child herself.

The alternatives are, as always, absolutes. If the child meets the dead governess willingly, isn't it, asks Mrs. Grose, "just proof of her blest innocence?" But the governess counters, "If it isn't a proof of what you say, it's a proof of—God knows what ! For the

woman is a horror of horrors." At this point, the governess announces, "It's far worse than I dreamed. They're lost." So, the governess has moved from her vision of perfect goodness to its opposite. But now it is her own worth and validity that she describes in the self-contradictory language that suggests negation even as it affirms, as in the following which pretends to exonerate Flora: "To gaze into the depths of the child's eyes and to pronounce their loveliness a trick of premature cunning was to be guilty of a cynicism in preference to which I naturally preferred to abjure my judgment." In the presence of the children, however, the see-saw is again in motion, and "everything fell to the ground but their incapacity and their beauty" until, as it swings back to the negative side she feels "obliged to re-investigate the certitude" of Flora's "inconceivable communion."

By questioning Mrs. Grose she ascertains, to her satisfaction, that Miles had known about the relation between Quint and Miss Jessel and had concealed this knowledge and been corrupted by it. It is no use for Mrs. Grose to cry, "If he was so bad then as that comes to, how is he such an angel now?" Everything the governess now thinks she learns about the relations of the children and the dead pair suits "exactly the particular deadly view [she is] in the very act of forbidding [herself] to entertain." She resolves to wait for the evidence of Miles's damnation. Even as she waits, however, the effect of her pupils' appearance gives a "brush of the sponge" to her convictions and she begins "to struggle against [her] new lights." Their charm, as it maintains itself, seems "a beguilement still effective even under the shadow of a possibility that it was studied." Their graceful responsiveness to her succeeds "as if [she] never appeared . . . literally to catch them at a purpose in it." "If" the children "practised upon [her], it was surely with the minimum of grossness."

It is then she has her third encounter with Quint and finds that Flora, at the window, denies that she has seen or looked for anyone but the governess herself—who reflects, "I absolutely believed she lied." And she sees Miss Jessel on the stairs before, on another night, the little girl is again at the window, and the governess declares with conviction, "She was face to face with the apparition we had met at the lake and could now communicate with it as she had not then been able to do." She herself sees only little Miles in the garden, but is convinced that he is gazing up at the tower above her head, the tower at the top of which, standing in the same spot, she had herself seen the valet's ghost. So, the governess concludes and concludes, and her images betray her self-knowledge or her suspicion of absolute evil in herself when she describes how Mrs. Grose listened to her "disclosures" her theories. It was, she says, "as had I wished to mix a witch's broth and propose it with assurance, she would have held out a large clean saucepan."

Miles's explanation is the very center of the story, the nub of the problem I have been describing as the governess's absolutist obsession. He tells her that he simply wanted to bring down a little her conception of his unnatural goodness, to make her think him "for a change—*bad* !" He had been very naughty; he had sat up without undressing until midnight, and then he had gone out and nearly caught cold. "When I'm bad I *am* bad!" he says, in triumph. And she is nearly persuaded to see-saw once again thinking of "all the reserves of goodness that, for his joke, he had been able to draw upon." But the

returns to her conviction that the children are engaged in a continuous deception and that "the four . . . perpetually meet." She tells Mrs. Grose: "Their more than earthly beauty, their absolutely unnatural goodness. It's a game. It's a policy and a fraud!" Miles's plea for a normal human allowance of good and bad commingled has failed.

Yet more and more her language betrays that she, who has dreamed the role of savior, has become by her own converting vision, demonic. "It was not, I am sure today, then, my mere infernal imagination," she declares, or, after she sees Miss Jessel at her desk, "she was there, so I was justified, she was there, so I was neither cruel nor mad." Against the weak denial of the syntax the powerful epithets, "infernal," "cruel," "mad" thrust themselves. The children continue affectionate, and she says, "Adorable they must in truth have been, I now feel, since I didn't in these days hate them!—and we are made to suspect that hate them she did and does. Miles's reasonable plea for school and his liberty arouses her determination to prevent it, it would seem, for *now* she will write the master and inform him of the expulsion from the old school. Again, when Mrs. Grose asks the nature of the child's offense, she—and we—are denied, and the governess answers in terms, once more, of the evil-goodness alternatives: "For wickedness. For what else—when he's so clever and beautiful and perfect?" Only abstract wickedness can be the counter-truth of such an appearance of completest goodness. She is driven now, beyond her former discretion, to even ask him what had happened and to receive for answer only his shriek as she appeals to him, drops on her knees, to "seize once more the chance of possessing him," and he blows out the candle—or Quint does. The admission, the proof absolute, still evades her while she reflects, "Say that, by the dark prodigy I knew the imagination of all evil *had* been opened to him; all the justice within me ached for the proof that it could ever have flowered into act."

And so the children continue *either* divine or infernal, as the governess's use of the words betrays. She calls their contrivance to keep her from simultaneously observing them (Miles plays the piano for her while Flora goes off to the lake), "the most divine little way to keep me quiet." "Divine?" echoes Mrs. Grose, and the governess rather giddily responds, "Infernal then!" The governess is now ready to speak out, to say, "Miss Jessel," to Flora, and point to the opposite bank of the lake with triumph and even "gratitude" that the apparition is there and the moment of proof has arrived, but the child sees nothing and says to Mrs. Grose, who sees nothing also, "Take me away from *her* !"

There is nothing more to be hoped for from Flora, and she must be taken away by Mrs. Grose, who gives the governess what "justifies" her when she reports the "horrors"—again undenotable—that she has heard from the child. She is, consequently, alone with Miles, still to extract a confession from him. She is assailed by a "perverse horror" of her own efforts; "for what did it consist of but the obtrusion of the idea of grossness and guilt on a small helpless creature who had been for me a revelation of the possibilities of beautiful intercourse?" But the illumination passes. She asks him if he stole her letter and Quint's "white face of damnation" appears at the window once more just as the boy admits that he has taken it. And then she asks him what he had done at school and gets only his vague reply that he "said things . . . to those I liked." It sounds altogether so meagre a criminality that the governess swings, for the last time, away from her conviction of his depravity and feels "the appalling alarm of his being perhaps innocent.

It was for an instant confounding and bottomless, for if he were innocent what then on earth was I?" It is *her* innocence, finally, that may be its opposite, that is, damnation. And this, in fact, is what she must find confirmed at the very last. Pointing to the wraith she sees at the window, clasping the terrified child, to her breast, she hears him cry out, "Peter Quint—you devil!" She has triumphed; it is "a tribute to her devotion ;" he has named the "hideous author of our woe," almost identified, in the Miltonic phrase, with the Devil himself. *Or* she has been herself named the devil of the story, she who has believed in the absolute beauty of childish innocence, in the master's unimpugnable grace, in her own holy motives—for Miles, who sees nothing that she sees, is dead.

Source: Millicent Bell, "*Turn of the Screw* and the *recherche de l'absolu*," in *Delta*, Vol. 15, November 1982, pp. 33-48.

Adaptations

The Turn of the Screw was adapted as a television movie and shown by the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in 1959. The production was directed by John Frankenheimer and starred Ingrid Bergman as the governess, Isobel Elsom as Mrs. Grose, Paul Stevens I as Peter Quint, and Laurinda Barrett as Miss Jessel.

The Turn of the Screw was adapted as a television movie and shown by the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) in 1974. Directed by Dan Curtis, the production stars Lynn Redgrave as the governess, Megs Jenkins as Mrs. Grose, James Laurenson as Peter Quint, and Kathryn Leigh Scott as Miss Jessel and features an ending that differs dramatically from James's original text. The movie is available on video from Artisan Entertainment.

The Turn of the Screw was adapted into an opera with a prologue and two acts in 1954, by the famed English composer, Benjamin Britten. The opera was filmed in Czechoslovakia in 1982 by Pgd/Philips. Directed by Petr Weigl, the film features Czech actors lip-synching the musical parts, which are sung by others, including Helen Donath as the governess, Ava June as Mrs. Grose, Robert Tear as Peter Quint, and Heather Harper as Miss Jessel. Filmed in naturalistic settings, as opposed to a stage set, the opera is not widely available but is worth the effort of looking for it.

The Turn of the Screw was adapted as a cable television movie in 1990, co-produced by Shelley Duvall. Directed by Graeme Clifford, the movie features Amy Irving as the governess. It is available on video from Warner Home Video.

The Turn of the Screw was adapted as a film in 1992. Directed by Rusty Lemorande, the film features Patsy Kensit as the governess. It is available on video from Artisan Entertainment.

The Turn of the Screw was adapted as a *Masterpiece Theatre* movie in 1999 by Anchor Bay Entertainment. Directed by Ben Bolt II, the film features Jodhi May as the governess, Pam Ferris as Mrs. Grose, Jason Salkey as Peter Quint, Caroline Pegg as Miss Jessel, and Colin Firth as the governess's employer—whose appearance deviates from James's original tale.

The Turn of the Screw and *Daisy Miller*, two of James's short novels, were adapted to an abridged audiocassette by Dercum Press Audio in 1987.

The Turn of the Screw was adapted as an audiocassette and audio compact disc in 1995 by Naxos Audio Books. Both abridged versions are read by Emma Fielding and Dermot Kerrigan.

The Turn of the Screw and Other Short Works was adapted as an audiocassette by Blackstone Audio Books in 1994, read by Pat Bottino.

Compare and Contrast

1850s: Cholera rages through London and Paris, taking many lives and putting many people on guard against illness.

1890s: Because of better public hygiene, industrial towns have started to reduce the transmission of cholera and other contagious diseases. On a similar note, vaccines and xrays come into use.

Today: As modern medicine creates antibiotics and other medicines to combat disease, bacteria evolve, prompting the creation of newer medications.

1850s: With rare exception, middle-class women are expected to fulfill their traditional role of bearing and raising children. For those who are unmarried, serving as a governess in somebody else's home, helping to raise other people's children, is an acceptable option.

1890s: Women work more and devote less of their lives to bearing and rearing children, and their expectation of life increases.

Today: Women have many options for both work and family. Some choose not to have children at all, whereas others remain at home, rearing their children and tending the home. Others pursue challenging careers in the same fields as men, and many balance both a career and a family.

1850s: As a result of industrialization, cities increasingly become the center of business, and many English gentlemen keep city residences so they can better handle their affairs, leaving the hired help to watch the country estates.

1890s: In both England and America, the rapid spread of industrialization has widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The privately wealthy live in sumptuous estates, whereas many poor are forced to live in tight-packed slums in cities.

Today: Technology is a necessary part of many people's lives. Those who own and invest in these technologies become the new rich, whereas the poor continue to get poorer.

What Do I Read Next?

Although James was American-born, he was an Englishman by preference, and many of his stories, including *The Turn of the Screw*, take place in England. For other ghost stories that take place in England, a good introduction is *The Oxford Book of English Ghost Stories*, edited by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert and published by Oxford University Press (1989). This massive anthology includes forty-two stories, written between 1829 and 1968, from such literary greats as Walter Scott, Bram Stoker, Rudyard Kipling, and Edith Wharton.

One of the most enduring English stories involving ghosts is Charles Dickens's holiday favorite, *A Christmas Carol*, first published in 1843, concerning the famous three ghosts—The Ghost of Christmas Past, The Ghost of Christmas Present, and The Ghost of Christmas Future, along with the ghost of Ebenezer Scrooge's friend, Jacob Marley. Together, the three ghosts warm the frigid heart of Scrooge, who realizes the error of his miserly ways. A current version of the short novel was printed in 1999 and is available from Bantam Classics.

Voices of Madness, 1683-1796, edited by Allan Ingram, collects four texts written in Britain in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. All four authors—one woman, three men—were regarded as insane, and their narratives tell of their experiences, including their treatment by others. The book was published by Sutton Publishing in 1997.

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow (1819), Washington Irving's classic tale of American horror, features a timid teacher, Ichabod Crane, who encounters The Headless Horseman, a spooky ghost in the backwoods of rural New York. The story is available in a 1999 edition from Penguin USA.

Like *The Turn of the Screw*, which was written a year later, James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897) fell into the part of his career when he was experimenting with new writing techniques. In the case of the latter novel, James also creates a sense of ambiguity. In this case, the confusion comes from the thoughts of Maisie Farange, an adolescent girl who witnesses her parents getting divorced and remarrying, and slowly comes to understand the greater moral issues involved in all of these relationships. The book is available in a 1998 edition from Oxford University Press.

One of the undisputed masters of the supernatural was Edgar Allan Poe, whose chilling tales have delighted readers for ages. In *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems* (2001), one can see why. Along with the perennial favorite stories, such as "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The Pit and the Pendulum," the collection includes little-known works like "The Angel of the Odd," as well as Poe's famous poem "The Raven."

Through extensive interviews, research, and documentary photos, Leslie Rule's *Coast to Coast Ghosts: True Stories of Hauntings across America*, details some of the nation's

spookiest locations. Written in a conversational style, Rule's book was published by Andrews McMeel Publishing in 2001.

Further Study

Griffin, Susan M., ed., *Henry James Goes to the Movies*, University Press of Kentucky, 2001.

In this diverse collection of essays, Griffin assembles fifteen of the world's most noted Jamesian scholars. The various writers discuss why James has become so popular to a wide variety of filmmakers, as well as the impact that James has had on film and the impact that film has had on James. The book also contains a complete filmography and a bibliography of work on James and film.

Lewis, R. W. B., *The Jameses: A Family Narrative*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991.

This unique group biography offers portraits of Henry James's highly intellectual family, starting with the novelist's grandfather, William, in 1789 Ireland and ending with the death of the author in 1916. Through his shrewd business dealings, James's grandfather William made one of America's largest fortunes in the nineteenth century, which helped to shape the lives of the younger members.

McGurl, Mark, *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James*, Princeton University Press, 2001.

At one point, there was no such thing as an art novel in America—and then Henry James came along. In his book, McGurl discusses how James's novels influenced the change in thinking that led to the widespread development of the modern art novel and then traces the development of modern conception after James.

Pippin, Robert B., *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

In this critical study of James's major fictions, Pippin argues that the author was motivated by his morals and that this theory of moral understanding permeated his stories. Written in an accessible, nontechnical style, Pippin offers new interpretations of many of James's fictions, including *The Turn of the Screw*.

Pool, Daniel, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist—The Facts of Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century England*, Touchstone Books, 1994.

This highly informative reader's companion is perfect for those who wish to learn more about the language, culture, and customs of nineteenth-century England. As such, it serves as an indispensable guide to the fiction of James, Austen, Dickens, and other authors of the era whose stories are set in England.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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