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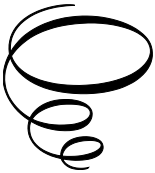
By

Edward Lobb

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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This book first published 2025

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN: 978-1-0364-4313-9
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-4314-6

For TOM KITUKU
and my two families,
blood and chosen:

That later we, though parted then,
May still recall those evenings when
    Fear gave his watch no look;
The lion griefs loped from the shade
And on our knees their muzzles laid,
    And Death put down his book.

—W. H. Auden, “A Summer Night”

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The quotation from W. H. Auden on the Dedication page is used by permission of Curtis Brown Ltd., New York.

I wrote the first draft of this book during the lockdown in the first year of COVID (2020), using only my personal library and what I could find online. During that time, I discussed various aspects of my argument with a number of people, and I am grateful to all of them for their interest, their intelligence and candour, and their humour. I was able to complete my research when academic libraries re-opened. My most profound debt is to my dear friend and colleague Catherine Harland, who took time from a busy schedule to read and comment on the entire typescript when it was complete. Her comprehensive knowledge of Victorian literature and religious debates, her rigorous intelligence, and her sense of style improved much in this book; I am particularly thankful for her alerting me to the subtlety of James's use of *Jane Eyre* in *The Turn of the Screw*. Any faults that remain here are of course my own.

—E. L.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In his letters, Henry James referred at least twice to *The Turn of the Screw* as a "potboiler,"[1] but he thought well enough of it to include it in the New York Edition, make numerous small revisions to it, and write a long preface about its origins and technique. Its subsequent career as the most popular and most discussed of his works would have amused and bemused him, not least because of the rich and eminently Jamesian spectacle of misreadings and cross-purposes in the debates.

This short book is an exercise in the Old (formerly the New) Criticism—a formalist study of *The Turn of the Screw.* This is not, of course, a new idea; many of the most enduring essays on James's novella were written during the period 1940-1975, when formalism and historicism dominated the discussion of literature in North American and English universities. The dominance of literary theory, roughly from 1975 to 2000, produced its own body of work on *The Turn of the Screw*, and in the last twenty years there has been a return to formalism, often in combination with other approaches. The only possible justification for adding to this immense critical literature is the usual claim that everyone else has missed the point, and it is on that immodest but traditional basis that I put forward this study. Readers of a certain age will remember with affection Morris Zapp in David Lodge's *Changing Places*, whose ambition is to write one book on each of Jane Austen's novels so authoritative that no-one will ever be able write on them again. We are all, in our dreams, Morris Zapp.

At the same time, I am aware that no critical study is final and that many academics would rather "teach the debate" than commit themselves to any firm conclusions about James's novella. Whole courses on critical theory

[1] *Letters*, 312, 314; to H. G. Wells, 9 December 1898, and to F. W. H. Myers, 19 December 1898.

have used *The Turn of the Screw* as a test case, showing how many different interpretations of it, and of literature generally, are possible depending on the theory employed. This sort of exercise has its own value and interest, but I believe that the formalist approach has not been exhausted. Formalism emphasized the discovery of theme through technique, and examined diction, imagery, symbolism, allusion, irony, tone, point of view and so on to develop coherent and persuasive readings of literary works. Biographical information was irrelevant and not to be used in formulating a reading, and in theory even authorial intent was excluded; what W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley called "the intentional fallacy" was summed up *avant la lettre* in D. H. Lawrence's maxim in Chapter I of *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923): "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it." (Kemp 59) Lawrence himself did much to reveal the subconscious meanings of classic American works, and later *The Turn of the Screw* was one of the first works to benefit from the de-linking of intention (if known) from actual achievement: thus, even if James's intention was simply to write a ghost story, he might well have written a study of hysteria, for example, quite independent of his own aims.

In practice, formalist critics were usually pragmatic about biography and history, since some knowledge of both was necessary for the proper understanding of words, social customs, and so forth. Similarly, though they paid lip service to the intentional fallacy, such critics most often believed that they were in fact revealing authorial intent and conscious art by analyzing the tropes and structures which inform a poem or novel. A network of images or allusions might have been created subconsciously or half-consciously, but the artist who wrote the work could not, in this view, ultimately have been less conscious of what he or she was doing than the reader or critic who came after; as James said of writers and readers alike in "The Art of Fiction" (1884), "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!" (*Criticism* 1, 53) Like any critical doctrine, the intentional fallacy can be debated endlessly; my only reason for raising the issue is to state that my own formalist reading is one that I believe represents James's own intentions, if only because the evidence I lay out could not have occurred accidentally or unselfconsciously in the mind of any artist, much less one as

acutely self-aware as Henry James. It is possible, loath as I am to admit it, that I may have missed something, and my reading does not, of course, preclude others. If critics want to argue that the real subject of *The Turn of the Screw* is menstruation or lesbian affection or the status of servants in Victorian households—all of which have been proposed—and can provide a reading based on evidence within the text, no formalist critic can quarrel with them. My own reading also acknowledges elements of what I consider irreducible ambiguity, notably about subjects like the reasons for Miles's not being allowed to return to his school, but I do not think these are central to James's purpose; they are, rather, aspects of atmosphere and elements of the mystery which remains at the heart of most human situations. I discuss these elements in their proper place.

I have occasionally included what might be considered inferences from data when these seemed unexceptionable. It does not seem controversial, for example, to assume in the light of historical knowledge that a Englishwoman of twenty raised in an early Victorian vicarage and living away from home for the first time is both a virgin and sexually naïve, and would have been seen as such by James's contemporaries; similarly, it does not seem a violation of formalist purity to assume that such a young woman would be aware of the context and implications of her use of biblical allusions and religious vocabulary.

Since suspense is a quality of narrative, not criticism, I shall state my argument briefly before proceeding to the details. *The Turn of the Screw* is not about a delusional young woman who imagines that she sees ghosts, nor is it about a heroic young woman who protects her young charges from real ghosts. The ghosts may or may not be real (I shall argue that they probably are) but the question of their existence is no more the central issue in *The Turn of the Screw* than river navigation is the central issue in *Heart of Darkness*. The governess's retrospective narration, written long after the events at Bly, manifests a double consciousness. While the governess scrupulously conveys her thoughts and feelings at the time of the events, there are many indications that her perspective has changed greatly at the time of writing, ten years later, and that she creates a severe indictment of her earlier self and her demonic possessiveness regarding the children. She sees in retrospect that her need to control the children and to own them

emotionally led to Flora's illness and Miles's death. Since she is writing her account for one reader only—Douglas—she feels no need to signal the differences between her two perspectives, but the clues are there, both in her narration and in the Prologue, for the later readers to whom James addresses the tale.

I do not put forward this argument as yet another "solution" to the puzzle of the novella, although it is that, but to draw attention to the subtlest and boldest use of point of view in all of James's fiction. Most criticism of *The Turn of the Screw* simply ignores even the possibility of a double perspective and thereby misses or misreads evidence that clarifies many of the issues in the story. The first section of my Chapter 2 considers this evidence: the governess's biography, her use of certain images and metaphors, her religious vocabulary, and her use of parallels between herself and the ghosts. Sections ii–iv of Chapter 2 examine the use of names and allusions in reinforcing the idea of double consciousness; sections v–vi consider some issues which remain unresolved or problematic. Chapter 3 steps back from the story itself to review briefly the nature of morality in James's fiction as a whole, his view of tragedy, his developing mastery of point of view, his other ghost stories, and the Preface and revisions of *The Turn of the Screw* in the New York Edition—all in order to show how the reading I propose is consistent with James's ideas and technique. Chapter 4 considers the novella section by section, adding more detailed evidence to the arguments set forth in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 is a brief conclusion which discusses double consciousness in a wider cultural context.

Much of the material here is not new, but the various points have never, to my knowledge, been brought together to argue that the governess is self-aware at the time she writes her account and is writing a self-indictment.[2] The original elements of my reading—the discussion of *King Lear*, my revision of O'Gorman's thesis about the origin of Peter Quint's name, and a few other matters—are summarized in Chapter 5, but I have been happy

[2] The argument of Oscar Cargill, who perceived differences between the governess's point of view at the time of the events and at the time of writing, is discussed in Chapter 5.

to build on the work of others. I have kept references to earlier criticism to a minimum for two primary reasons.

a) The critical literature on the novella is immense, and no-one can claim to have read all of it, including the material in other languages. I have read a great deal of it, but when referring to commonplaces of *The Turn of the Screw* criticism I have not felt it necessary to identify the principal statements of opinion on every issue I raise, which would make the book tedious reading and far too long. I gladly acknowledge critical work that seems to me fundamental.
b) Similarly, I have not felt it necessary to discuss any arguments that do not touch on my main points, or that depend on general theories of language, philosophy, psychology, culture, methodology, and so on. These have their own interest, and I am not concerned with refuting them; I am simply more interested in making my own case. Readers and critics should not therefore be offended if their favourite readings are not discussed or even listed in the Works Cited. In the case of perennial questions of interpretation, I often cite older critics because they established cogent positions and arguments on issues that are still at the heart of critical debate, and because some of them made both breakthroughs and errors that are instructive.

All quotations from the novella are from the text of the first English book publication, *The Two Magics* (London: Heinemann, 1898), as reprinted in *Henry James: Complete Stories 1892-1898* (New York: Library of America, 1996). I have used this edition because the Library of America edition is likely to be in print for a long time, and because the differences between the first English and the New York Edition, while important and tending to reinforce my reading (see Chapter 3, iv]), are not decisive as far as interpretation is concerned; it should be noted, however, that James himself emphatically preferred the version in the New York Edition. For those using different editions, I include chapter numbers,[3] before the LOA page number

[3] In what follows I occasionally refer to the Roman-numbered sections of *The Turn of the Screw* as chapters, but since James does not call them chapters, I employ the lower case. The chapters of this book are referred to as Chapters, upper-case, and are Arabic-numbered.

parenthetically, for example (I/644); since the numbered sections are short, my quotations can be found easily in any edition of the novella. The first, unnumbered section is referred to throughout as the Prologue for convenience, although James did not call it that. I have also used the Library of America editions of James's other works. I must apologize for inevitable repetitions both of specific points and sometimes of examples: different scenes, particularly in Chapter 4, which reviews the entire novella, often take us back to earlier points in the argument, and new points are sometimes best illustrated by scenes and phrases, or other works by James, already used for other purposes. When you are hoping to demonstrate that all roads lead to Rome, the landmarks on the horizon tend to recur even from different points of the compass. I should also mention that in most cases I do not use the term "madness" as a synonym for mental illness, but in the more general sense of folly or irrational beliefs or behaviour.

The late Tony Tanner, who gave us a fine study of James, wrote his last books not for what is sometimes called the "research community" but for students and readers who simply wanted to understand Jane Austen, Henry James, and Shakespeare better. This book is meant for that same audience, the "common reader" of critics from Samuel Johnson to Virginia Woolf and the present.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVIDENCE

i: Why the Governess Writes her Account and What It Says

On September 11, 1952, Flannery O'Connor wrote to Caroline Gordon and mentioned her current reading. "I have just read *Victory*. Everything I read of Conrad's I like better than the last thing. I've also just read *The Turn of the Screw* again and to me it fairly shouts that it's about expiation."[4] This last sentence is her only critical comment on the novella and can serve as a summary of my argument here. Expiation can occur only as a result of guilt, which usually comes from a later perspective on earlier actions, and O'Connor suggests in a few words what I hope to demonstrate: that the governess's retrospective narrative is marked by a very different consciousness than she displays at the time of the events, and that the entire novella must be read with an awareness of the double consciousness it presents. *The Turn of the Screw* is James's boldest experiment in point of view, and the failure to understand its subtle balance of perspectives within a single narrative voice is responsible for many of the errors in the critical literature on the story.[5]

The idea that the governess has much to atone for is not of course new. In his introduction to *The Ghostly Tales of Henry James* (1948), Leon Edel refers to "the morbidly curious governess and the children she plagues," (xxiii) but he does not suggest that she is aware later of what she has done. The splendidly named S. Gorley Putt takes a similar line in *The Fiction of Henry James* (1966) and couches his brief analysis in prose as measured as James's own:

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[4] O'Connor, pp. 899-900. This letter does not appear in *The Habit of Being* (1979), the first published collection of O'Connor's letters.

[5] There is a brief discussion of James's developing use of point of view in Chapter 3, iii).

> For what it is worth, it is my own view that the governess, having stumbled all unknowing upon childhood sensibilities in Flora and Miles (with or without supernatural aid from the persons who had first, in their lifetimes, excited them)—sensibilities of which she is totally ignorant—seeks in hysterical stupidity to trap and absorb spirits she cannot begin to understand. The story is full of horrors, in all conscience, but nothing is more horribly uncanny, to her vexed and harried charges, than the poor distracted governess herself. They could live with bad memories, or even bad ghosts, but not with her. She is no protectress, but a vampire. She is the most dangerously deluded, and Miles is the most pitiful victim, of all James's long list of emotional cannibals. (348-349)

Like Edel, Putt does not address the question of the governess's possible later self-awareness, but his last sentence does emphasize the most important moral theme in James's work as a whole, the utter wrong of treating other people as adjuncts of oneself or using them as means to one's own ends.[6] Putt also in effect sidelines the ghosts as a peripheral issue: the question of their reality is interesting in itself but not decisive in our reading of the novella. If they exist, they may or may not be influencing the children, but the real drama is played out between the governess and her young charges.

The wisdom of this sidelining is apparent when we consider the confusion engendered when the ghosts are kept at centre stage. The old debate between "apparitionists" and "non-apparitionists"—those who argue that the ghosts are real and those who consider them a product of the governess's imagination—tended to identify the question of the ghosts' existence with the question of the governess's mental stability. If the ghosts were real, the implicit argument ran, the governess was not delusional and her actions, however extreme, could be understood and even justified; if they were not real, she was neurotic, if not actually mad, and she herself caused the children's sometimes odd behaviour, Flora's sudden fever in chapter XXI, and probably Miles's death. The ghosts' reality and the governess's mental stability are in fact separate issues, but even as sage a critic as Edmund Wilson felt obliged to modify his non-apparitionist, Freudian reading of the story when confronted by J. A. Waldock with the

[6] See Chapter 3, section i) for a brief discussion of Jamesian morality.

apparitionists' trump card, the governess's precise and accurate description of Quint's unusual features.[7] It should be admitted at the start that the ghosts' reality is one of the genuinely irresolvable elements of the story; the reason for Miles's not being allowed to return to school is another. I shall discuss the reality of the ghosts in section v) of this chapter, but the point to be made here is that Putt is quite right to separate the ghosts' reality from the question of the governess's mental state: the children "could live with bad memories, or even with bad ghosts, but not with her."

The long interval between the events at Bly and the governess's writing of her account is crucial to our understanding of the narrative because it raises several important questions. Why would the governess choose after such a long time to revisit events so horrible and obviously traumatic? Why would she confide this account to Douglas? And—most important—what change did the passage of time make in her view of her actions ten years earlier? It is possible to argue, of course, that she has not changed her mind about anything, and most critics proceed on the assumption that there is no difference between her perspective at the time of the events and at the time of writing; it is as if, apart from a few obvious exceptions, she is narrating events and describing her reactions as they happen. But this is not the case, as even a superficial reading makes clear.

The elaborate narrative frame of *The Turn of the Screw* is easy to follow but complex in effect. What we read is an unnamed narrator's report of a week spent at a country house, in the course of which a man named Douglas, after describing his relationship with the governess decades before, reads

[7] Wilson, 123. Wilson appended two later notes, dated 1948 and 1959, to his 1934 essay, which he had already expanded in 1938 for publication in *The Triple Thinkers*. While he was not the first to suggest that the governess was experiencing hallucinations, Wilson is still the best-known proponent of this point of view because of the Freudian elements in his reading. In 1948 he acknowledged that "I forced a point in trying to explain away the passage in which the housekeeper identifies, from the governess's description, the male apparition with Peter Quint," (123) and moved toward the idea that the governess was a projection of James's own fears about his perception of reality and that "not merely is the governess self-deceived, but that James is self-deceived about her." (125) In 1959 he was again "convinced that James knew exactly what he was doing and that he intended the governess to be suffering from delusions." (132) The effect of these changes is not any loss of confidence in Wilson as a reader, but admiration and respect for his open-mindedness.

aloud the narrative which she wrote after the events at Bly and confided to him before her death. What we hear, then, is coming to us third-hand, and it is necessary to ask why James constructed so complex a setting for his story.[8] The "now" of the frame narrative is already in the past, for Douglas has died in the meantime: the first narrator tells us that "Poor Douglas, before his death—when it was in sight—committed to me the manuscript." (Prologue/638) Let us assume, then, simply to establish a timeline, that the Prologue is set in 1895, just three years before the first publication of *The Turn of the Screw* in 1898; the specific years are less important than the periods of time between them. We know that Douglas has kept the manuscript for forty years (Prologue/638), which dates his friendship with her to 1855. When he first meets her, he has completed his second year at Trinity (Prologue/637) and is therefore about twenty years old; she is "ten years older." (Prologue/636) If she is thirty in 1855, and we know that she was twenty when she was at Bly (Prologue/639), the principal story unfolds a decade earlier, in or around 1845.

The passing of forty years has not dimmed Douglas's memory of the governess or her extraordinary story, which suggests the impact both of them had on him. More significantly, the governess had ten years to think about what happened at Bly, and few of us see events a decade old exactly as we did at the time. It is likely, then, that the governess's view of events has changed, and overt suggestions of her later perspective are scattered through the novella; in chapter III, for example, she writes that "*What I look back at with amazement* is the situation I accepted," (651; my italics) and just before she sees Quint for the first time she mentions that "One of the thoughts that, *as I don't in the least shrink now from noting*, used to be with me in these wanderings was that it would be as charming as a charming story suddenly to meet someone." (652; my italics) It is far less obvious markers than these, however, that signal the different perspective that a decade has given her, and I shall identify some of these markers under three headings later in this section.

---

[8] Two of James's other ghost stories from the 1890s, "Sir Edmund Orme" (1891) and "The Friends of the Friends" (1896), also feature introductions to first-person manuscripts by nameless narrators, but in both cases the introductions are very brief—less than a page—and do not give any personal background about the narrators.

In analyzing changes in the governess's point of view, it is obviously important to consider not only the timeline but her motives for writing. This is likely to bring up an old and predictable objection to treating fictional characters as if they were real people. A. C. Bradley was criticized for doing this in his 1904 book *Shakespearean Tragedy*, and Elmer Edgar Stoll compared "psychologizing" critics of *The Turn of the Screw* to those who imaginatively fill in the non-existent earlier lives of Hamlet and Falstaff. (230) But there is a difference between speculative critical infilling and legitimate inference from literary data. When one critic posits an incestuous attraction between the governess and her father solely on the basis of her mentioning "disturbing letters from home, where things were not going well," (IV/657) he is creating—infilling—an antecedent scenario which the evidence on the page does not support even if it does not specifically contradict it. (Grunes, 228) On the other hand, it is possible to infer from specific data in the Prologue the governess's reasons for writing. It is clear, to begin with, that the frame narrative in *The Turn of the Screw* does not exist simply to provide an excuse for the manuscript's existence: it requires no excuse, and James wrote many stories, including ghost stories, in which first-person narrators describe their own experiences without any introduction or motives beyond those contained in the stories themselves; *The Aspern Papers* is only one example. The existence of a detailed frame here suggests strongly that it provides evidence of the governess's motivation for writing.

The most significant element of the frame narrative is Douglas's description of the governess as "'a most charming person'" and "'the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position; she would have been worthy of any whatever.'" (Prologue/636-7) It is apparent that the governess showed no signs of neurosis while employed by the Douglases and did her work very well. Douglas also suggests a budding romance:

> "I was much there that year—it was a beautiful one; and we had, in her off-hours, some strolls and talks in the garden—talks in which she struck me as awfully clever and nice. Oh yes; don't grin. I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she liked me too. If she hadn't she wouldn't have told me. She had never told anyone. It wasn't simply that she said so, but that I knew she hadn't. I was sure; I could see." (Prologue/637)

A romance between an affluent twenty-year-old man and a thirty-year-old family employee may seem implausible, but age and class differences are not insuperable. There are precedents enough for the breaking of class barriers in English fiction, including *Pamela* and *Jane Eyre,* and the latter is alluded to in chapter IV of the governess's narrative. (655) Douglas's friends also do not see the age difference as important:

> From our end of the great brown hall we heard [Douglas's] step on the stair [as he went up to bed]; whereupon Mrs. Griffin spoke. "Well, if I don't know know who she was in love with, I know who *he* was."
>
> "She was ten years older," said her husband.
>
> "*Raison de plus*—at that age! But it's rather nice, his long reticence."
>
> "Forty years!" Griffin put in. (Prologue/638)

Readers who doubt the existence of a romance between Douglas and the governess must account for his and Mrs. Griffin's clear suggestions that there was one, and any attempt to declare *him* an unreliable narrator is unsustainable: there are no internal inconsistencies in his account, and it is not contradicted by any evidence in the story.[9]

It is equally important that Douglas affirms a causal connection between that romance and the governess's giving Douglas her written account of what happened at Bly: "'If she hadn't [liked me] she wouldn't have told me.'" Most readers and critics take this as a set-up, an easy explanation of why the governess finally wrote her narrative: she liked him, so she told him her story. But she cannot have done so simply to amuse him or to give him the same agreeable *frisson* that Douglas's auditors are hoping for. No-one would willingly revisit events as terrible and life-altering as those at Bly—events which can be seen as calling into question her mental stability—without a profoundly compelling reason for doing so, and the governess herself draws attention to the extreme difficulty of writing her account in chapter IX:

> I find that I really hang back; but I must take my plunge. In going on with the record of what was hideous at Bly, I not only challenge the most liberal faith—for which I little care; but—and this is another matter—I

[9] The classic definition of the rules of the game is Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961).

> renew what I myself suffered, I again push my way through it to the end. There came suddenly an hour after which, as I look back, the affair seems to me to have been all pure suffering; but I have at least reached the heart of it, and the straightest road out is doubtless to advance. (681-2)

It is obvious, then, that the governess must have had a serious personal motivation for writing her manuscript, and Douglas makes clear that it is her affection for him. We know that Douglas did not marry her, and the causal connection he asserts between the romance and the writing suggests that she wrote an explanation—indirect, coded, eminently Jamesian—of why her romance with Douglas could not continue, and that Douglas accepts her explanation.[10]

Her reasons have to do with her emotional history, as Douglas's auditors infer:

> "I see. She was in love." [says the narrator of the Prologue]
> He laughed for the first time. "You *are* acute. Yes, she was in love. That is, she had been. That came out—she couldn't tell her story without its coming out. I saw it, and she saw it; but neither of us spoke of it. I remember the time and the place—the corner of the lawn, the shade of the great beeches and the long, hot summer afternoon. It wasn't a scene for a shudder, but oh—!" He quitted the fire and slipped back into his chair. (Prologue/637)

What came out in this sunlit conversation was her *way* of being in love, and it is this that causes the shudder.[11] Before the Douglas family employs her, the only eligible male in the governess's life that we hear of is the uncle of Miles and Flora. The governess's highly emotional nature is apparent in her reaction to him, as the narrator explains:

---

[10] At least two earlier critics, Oscar Cargill and Marcella Holloway, C.S.J., thought that the governess wrote her story as a warning to Douglas, but they differed on what the warning was about, and both came to what seem to me demonstrably false conclusions. Their contributions to the debate are discussed briefly in Chapter 5.

[11] It seems clear from the passage above that the governess initially told Douglas the story rather than giving it to him to read, and that she subsequently wrote the fuller account that we read. The conversation on the lawn might only have dealt with the governess's infatuation with her employer, but this seems unlikely since that story by itself would not cause a "shudder."

> This person proved, on her presenting herself, for judgment, at a house in Harley Street, that impressed her as vast and imposing—this prospective patron proved 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. One could easily fix his type; it never, happily, dies out. He was handsome and bold and pleasant, off-hand and gay and kind. He struck her, inevitably, as gallant and splendid, but what took her most and gave her the courage she afterwards showed was that he put the whole thing to her as a kind of favour, an obligation he should gratefully incur. She conceived him as rich, but as fearfully extravagant—saw him all in a glow of high fashion, of good looks, of expensive habits, of charming ways with women. (Prologue/639)

She sees him only twice. Douglas confirms that the governess accepted her new job despite the "'serious duties and little company, [and] really great loneliness,'" partly because of the excellent salary and partly because she had "'succumbed'" to the young man's charm. (Prologue/640-1) He has, apparently unwittingly, swept her off her feet, and he is clearly the person about whom the governess is daydreaming when she first sees Peter Quint in chapter III. Her feelings are kept in check by the social difference between them, her awe of him, and his stipulation that she not bother him about anything. We can take her infatuation with him as a given, then, and look—as Douglas suggests—to the story, not the prologue, for an account of her great love.

> Mrs. Griffin, however, expressed the need for a little more light. "Who was it she was in love with?"
>
> "The story will tell," I took it upon myself to reply.
>
> "Oh, I can't wait for the story!"
>
> "The story *won't* tell," said Douglas; "not in any literal, vulgar way."
>
> "More's the pity, then. That's the only way I ever understand."
>
> "Won't *you* tell, Douglas?" somebody else inquired.
>
> He sprang to his feet again. "Yes—tomorrow. Now I must go to bed. Good-night." (Prologue/637-8)

The qualifier in Douglas's first sentence implies that the story *will* in fact tell us with whom the governess was in love, but in a non-literal, unvulgar, indirect way—as we would expect from a Jamesian heroine. The young uncle does not appear in the story itself, and there is much to suggest

that the governess is in love with the children; this point is as close to non-controversial as anything in *The Turn of the Screw*, but I shall point out some of the evidence in my Chapter 4. Love for children or young charges is a different sort of love from that of an adult couple, of course, but no less relevant, in this case, in explaining to Douglas why she feels she cannot marry. She has realized that she is incapable of any kind of love without a morbid degree of possessiveness, and explains this to him in her account of what happened at Bly. If we come back, then, to Putt's description of the governess, we can see that she is indeed, *at the time of the story*, "no protectress, but a vampire," "the most dangerously deluded . . . of all James's long list of emotional cannibals." (348-349) But in the years following Miles's death, she overcomes her delusions, becomes aware of her own psychology, her own failings, and *at the time of writing* she creates a carefully crafted self-indictment to explain her renunciation of married love. Her tendency to be, in her own words, "'rather easily carried away'" (I/644), aggravated by her desire to protect the children from what she perceives as malign influences, becomes by degrees a need to control the children, to deny them any agency, to prevent them from growing up, to own them emotionally. She subsequently realizes that her devouring love was the cause of the children's fears, of Flora's illness and Miles's death, and she decides never to marry.

In this regard, it is significant that the difference in age between the governess and Miles—ten years—is the same as that between her and Douglas, and that both have younger sisters. A few critics, ignoring or willfully misinterpreting the scene of Miles's death, have attempted to argue that Douglas *is* Miles, all grown up, but it seems clear that Miles is Douglas's symbolic stand-in in the governess's confession and cautionary tale, and that the parallels between them are intended, by the governess herself, as a warning to Douglas that she is incapable of a mature love that acknowledges the other person as an independent equal. If we accept even provisionally the reading I propose, it is clear that Putt is quite right in sidelining the ghosts as a peripheral issue. Whether they exist or not, they function in the story as the governess's surrogates, just as Miles functions as Douglas's, and the ghosts' desire to "possess" the children precisely parallels her own possessiveness. The issue of their reality is finally

irresolvable—see section v) of this chapter—but their symbolic function is clear.

In the chapter-by-chapter analysis in Chapter 4, I set out in detail the stages of what the governess calls, in chapter XIII, "the strange steps of my obsession." In the rest of this section I wish only to emphasize the double perspective of the novella and to summarize the *kinds* of clues the governess plants to indicate that perspective. The first two headings below deal with verbal clues, the third with physical juxtapositions; the governess and James employ all of these to reinforce our sense of the changes that have taken place in her perception.

a: Religious Language: Binaries and Salvation

As a parson's daughter, the governess naturally employs religious language even more frequently than an average Englishwoman of her time, and her infatuation with the children leads her initially to idealize them. Flora is not simply "the most beautiful child [she] had ever seen," (I/642) but a different category of being altogether:

> [. . .] there could be no uneasiness in a connection with anything so beatific as the radiant image of my little girl, a vision of whose angelic beauty [. . .] made me several times rise and wander about my room to take in the whole picture and prospect. (I/643)

On the next page she attributes to Flora "the deep sweet serenity indeed of one of Raphael's holy infants" and refers to her "placid heavenly eyes." (I/644) As she admits to Mrs. Grose, "'I'm rather easily carried away.'" (I/644) Mrs. Grose warns her that she will be even more dazzled by Miles, and she is. She sees him

> on the instant, without and within, in the great glow of freshness, the same positive fragrance of purity, in which I had, from the first moment, seen his little sister. He was incredibly beautiful, and Mrs. Grose had put her finger on it: everything but a sort of passion of tenderness for him was swept away by his presence. What I then and there took him to my heart for was something divine that I have never found to the same degree in any child—his indescribable little air of knowing nothing in the world but love. (III/650)

Mrs. Grose has already noted that Miles is capable of being bad, (II/648) and even before the governess meets him she learns that he has been sent home from his school for unspecified reasons and cannot return. But various psychological factors—her aesthetic sense, her emotional needs, her tendency to be "carried away"—lead her to see both children in terms more appropriate to angels. Miles in particular is no doubt a stunner, but the religious hyperbole here (angelic, holy, heavenly, divine) suggests not only that the governess views life in Christian terms, as we would expect, but that she sees people and events in dramatic religious binaries: good and evil, angels and demons, innocence and corruption, salvation and damnation. In a universe-spanning work like *Paradise Lost*, these binaries and absolutes give force to a cosmic drama; in the world of mid-nineteenth century England, they simply interfere with seeing shades of grey in everyday human situations. The governess's frequent comparison of the children to angels means that she never really sees them at all.

> Both the children had a gentleness (it was their only fault, and it never made Miles a muff) that kept them—how shall I express it?—almost impersonal and certainly quite unpunishable. They were like the cherubs of the anecdote who had—morally, at any rate—nothing to whack! (IV/657)

As the governess tries to come to terms with Miles's supposed expulsion from his school,[12] she misses another chance to see him as a flawed, normal boy: "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. I found nothing at all, and he was therefore an angel." (IV/657) The tortured logic of assuming that Miles must be innocent because she can see no evidence that he was *punished* for wickedness culminates in the absurd "therefore" which frees Miles of the taint of real wickedness; but rather than see him now as an ordinary human boy, she recurs to her vision of him as an angel.

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[12] Although critics have often referred to Miles's expulsion, this word is used only in chapter XII of *The Turn of the Screw,* and only by the governess, not the school authorities. As the governess says to Mrs. Grose, "'They go into no particulars. They simply express their regret that it should be impossible to keep him.'" The governess decides that this "'That can have only one meaning [. . .] that he's an injury to the others.'" (II/647) This issue is discussed in section vi) and in the analysis of James's chapter II in my Chapter 4.

The governess's religious imagination is a significant part of her undoing, for she begins to conceive of herself as the children's saviour. Her messianic delusions begin in chapter VI:

> I had an absolute certainty that I should see again what I had already seen, but something within me said that by offering myself bravely as the sole subject of such experience, by accepting, by inviting, by surmounting it all, I should serve as an expiatory victim and guard the tranquility of my companions. (VI/665)

The hubris of comparing herself to Christ is apparently lost on the governess at the time, but her choice of words after the fact makes it clear. When it becomes obvious that the children do not want her protection, she decides that they have been won over by the enemy; as she says to Mrs. Grose in chapter XII, "'Their more than earthly beauty, their absolutely unnatural goodness. It's a game [. . .] it's a policy and a fraud!'" (XII/692) It is one sign of the governess's disordered mind that the very beauty and goodness that so impressed her before can now be seen as evidences of depravity. The children were angels at first and now they are demonic, in league with the ghosts, but they have never been simply children. In this central chapter, the thirteenth of twenty-five if we count the prologue, the die is cast. The governess now sees her situation as a kind of Manichaean symbolic drama in which she, as "expiatory" Christ, will redeem the souls of the wholly corrupted children, whether they want to be saved or not. But the real sacrificial victim, as the governess realizes in agonized retrospect, will be Miles, and she will be the cause of his death.

The governess also draws attention to her religious view of the world by employing a number of everyday words and phrases which have residually religious meanings and implications. When she refers to Mrs. Grose's room as "swept and garnished," (XVI/706), we must pay attention to the biblical allusion and what it implies. When she speaks of "atonement," (II/647) "revelation," (VIII/675) and "reprobation," (XX/721) she uses these words consciously in order to suggest their theological significance; when she refers to herself as "justified," (XX/719 and XXI/727) and to Miles's being "saved," (XXI/728) she does so with full retrospective awareness that the words reveal her sense at the time that the stakes in the contest were nothing

less than salvation or damnation. Her use of these words and phrases is discussed in detail in the chapter-by-chapter analysis of my Chapter 4.

b: The Language of Possession, Imprisonment, and Battle

The governess's hunger for the children's love (and also, secondarily, for that of Mrs. Grose) is apparent from the beginning of the novella. The hyperbolic, religiously inflected descriptions of Flora and Miles discussed above are one indicator of this, but the governess makes no secret of her love and seems occasionally aware, even at the time, that it is extreme. Her need to feel that she is loved in return causes her from the beginning to read equivocal situations as proof that she really is loved. Referring in chapter I to Mrs. Grose's "being so glad to see me," she notes that

> I perceived within half an hour that she was so glad—stout, simple, plain, clean, wholesome woman—as to be positively on her guard against showing it too much. I wondered even then a little why she should not wish to show it, and that, with reflection, with suspicion, might have made me uneasy. (643)

This passage is typical of the governess's double perspective. The glimmer "even then" of a reason for Mrs. Grose's restraint—that she is not *exceptionally* glad to see the governess, or that she perceives the governess's extraordinary neediness and draws back—is repressed, but in retrospect the governess herself draws attention to it as a warning ignored. Another clue of the same type occurs in chapter III when the governess apparently extorts a kiss from Mrs. Grose as proof of a degree of affection that may not exist. (650-1)

The primary objects of the governess's affection are the children, of course, and from the beginning she demonstrates a marked possessiveness with regard to them. When Mrs. Grose says that Quint was "'much too free'" the governess replies "'Too free with *my* boy?'" (VI/665)[13] Her determination to do battle with the ghosts for the souls of the children is already couched in terms of possession, and in the latter half of the novella

[13] In his revisions for the New York Edition, James increased the use of the pronoun "my," emphasizing the governess's possessiveness and her belated awareness of it; see Chapter 3, iv). A number of critics, including Fryer, e.g., have noted the governess's possessiveness.

her battle will increasingly be with the children themselves rather than the ghosts, and the language of ownership and imprisonment will become more and more prominent.

In chapter XIV, the governess notes that she was sometimes aware of her possessiveness regarding Miles and Flora:

> Why did they never resent my inexorable, my perpetual society? Something or other had brought nearer home to me that I had all but pinned the boy to my shawl, and that, in the way our companions were marshalled before me, I might have appeared to provide against some danger of rebellion. I was like a gaoler with an eye to probable surprises and escapes. (699)

Her sense at the time is that she was overprotective, pinning Miles to her shawl; the action is infantilizing but also caring and maternal. This gives way to a more severe retrospective judgment and a far stronger image: she was in fact "like a gaoler," and this image of imprisonment will recur. At other times, her vocabulary seems almost nudging. When Miles declares that he wants to be "'let alone,'" the governess drops to her knees beside his bed and seizes "once more the chance of possessing him," (XVII/712) implying both the parallel of possessiveness and ghostly possession and her status as the being who truly haunts the children's lives—and again, the word will recur. When she mentions Flora's "self-possession" to Mrs. Grose (XIX/716) she means Flora's composure, but also suggests Flora's stubborn determination to keep control of her own soul and destiny.

The governess's battle with the ghosts for the children's souls has become a battle with the children themselves. In the governess's mind, if Quint and Miss Jessel seek to lead Miles and Flora to damnation, she must wrest their souls back; if the children resist—if they insist on their "self-possession"—that is further proof that they have been won over by the enemy. For the best of reasons, as she thinks, she must have the upper hand and dominate, control, possess the children for their own good. Flora's fever in chapter XXI results in her removal from Bly with Mrs. Grose and probably saves her life; Miles is not so fortunate. Particularly as she writes the last sections of the story, the governess's feeling is quite candidly that she and Miles were opponents, fighting for his soul. The name Miles derives from the Latin *miles* (soldier) and part of the horror of the story is that a