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When Henry James described his novella *The Turn of the Screw* as "an *amusette* to catch those not easily caught (the 'fun' of the capture of the witless being ever but small...),"[1] he was not kidding. Several generations of readers have stranded themselves on what James deceptively denigrated as a "pot-boiler." Oddly enough, critical focus has aimed at the wrong phrase ("to catch those not easily caught"), just as in reading this delightful and essentially humorous tale, readers are lured into focussing on the wrong characters. James's *amusette* (for that is the telling word) has caught just about everyone precisely because it is, indeed, "a plaything."[2]

James's theory of art as organic postulates that no words necessary are omitted, but also that no unnecessary words are added. Why should he have expended so many words to describe the children's activities, if they are to be seen as static "victims?" Readers have apparently attributed all those details of the children's games, costumings, and whispered confabulations to "verisimilitude," and forgotten about them. If, however, James honored his own definition of art as organic, these details must be necessary. Rather than static victims of evil, the children emerge under close observation as active perpetrators of a series of hoaxes. The governess, their victim, is actually the static figure.

If we choose to ignore James's many hints concerning the children's play, the governess' subjective narration indeed sounds like a ghost story. For Harold Goddard, the tale affirms childhood's innocence:

> The evil leaves its mark, if you will, but no trace of stain or smirch. The children remain what they were—incarnations of loveliness and charm. Innocence is armor plate: this is what the story seems to say. And does not life bear out that belief? Otherwise, in what but infamy would the younger generation ever end? Miles and Flora, to be sure, are withered at last in the flame of the governess' passion. But corrupted—never![3]

Edna Kenton sees a deep psychological study of the governess' psyche:

> There are traps and lures in plenty, but just a little wariness will suffice to disprove, with a single survey of the ground, the traditional, we might almost call it the lazy version of this tale. Not the children, but the little governess was hounded by ghosts, who, as James confides with such suave frankness in his Preface, merely "helped me to express my subject all directly and intensely."
>
> So, on *The Turn of the Screw,* Henry James has won, hands down, all round; has won most of all when the reader, persistently baffled, but persistently wondering, comes face to face at last with the little governess, and realizes, with a conscious thrill greater than that of merely automatic nerve shudders before "horror," that the guarding ghosts and children—what they are and what they do—are only exquisite dramatizations of her little personal mystery, figures for the ebb and flow of troubled thought within her mind, acting out her story.[4]

Robert Heilman sees the ghosts as real, and in contact with the children: "I am convinced that, at the level of action, the story means exactly what it says: that at Bly there are apparitions which the governess sees, which are consistent with her own independent experience, and of which the children have a knowledge which they endeavor to conceal."[5]

Leon Edel thinks the governess imagines she sees apparitions, but is sure that the children do not:

> The governess' imagination, we see, discovers "depths" within herself. Fantasy seems to be reality to her. Anything and everything can and does happen, in her mind. The attentive reader, when he is reading the story critically, can only observe that we are always in the realm of the supposititious [sic]. Not once in the entire story do the children see anything strange or frightening. It is the governess' theory that they see as much as she does, and that they communicate with the dead. But it is the governess who does all the seeing and all the supposing. "My values are positively all blanks save only so far as an excited horror, a promoted pity, a created expertness," James explained in his Preface. But we have one significant clue to the author's "blanks." In his revision of the story for the New York Edition he altered his text again and again to put the story into the realm of the governess' feelings. Where he had her say originally "I saw" or "I believed" he often substituted "I felt."[6]

Eric Solomon, having applied the methods of Sherlock Holmes,

announces: "Never again need there be another explication of *The Turn of the Screw...*," and proceeds to frame Mrs. Grose as the perpetrator of evil, accusing her of having bumped off both Miss Jessel and Quint. Her motive? She wanted to be governess herself![7] Mark Spilka sees the apparitions as "sex-ghosts" arising out of the governess' severely repressed libido: "The intruder supplants another object of romantic fancy, her master and the children's uncle, whom she dreams of meeting now on the path, smiling and approving, as in a 'charming story.' Instead she sees the sex-ghost, Peter Quint."[8] For Charles G. Hoffman the ghosts are real, and Wayne C. Booth is of the same opinion: "I may as well begin by admitting—reluctantly since all of the glamor is on the other side—that for me James' conscious intentions are fully realized: the ghosts are real, the governess sees what she says she sees."[9]

Let us begin by reassembling the actual data of the story. All readings of *The Turn of the Screw* that conclude the governess is an ogress for various reasons having to do with her romantic self-image, her deeply repressed libido, her unbalanced childhood, her strict religious training—perhaps true in themselves—fly in the face of the stated testimony in the story. That testimony must be accepted, or we have no story. The young governess was recalled, years later, as having been an excellent person. Douglas found her to be "the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position; she would have been worthy of any [presumably any man's affection] whatever."[10] In a succession of meetings and conversations he found her "awfully clever and nice....I liked her extremely and am glad she liked me too."[11]

To this clever and agreeable woman, authorship of the narrative is attributed. Surely this feat, with its concomitant attempts at accuracy and honesty, even when the evidence puts her in a bad light, suggests a person of above average qualities. The data as given by the governess, who wrote the account years later—that is to say, did not dash it off on the tide of hysteria—is to be taken as essentially accurate. James himself assures us in the Preface that the story depends upon trusting the accuracy of the governess' observations, if not of her interpretations of them: "It was 'deja tres-joli', in "The Turn of the Screw," please believe, the general proposition of our young woman's keeping crystalline her record of so many intense anomalies and obscurities—by which I don't of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter."[12]

Now what had been going on at Bly prior to the arrival of this

inexperienced twenty-year-old governess? The real existence of one Peter Quint, deceased, formerly a personal servant to the Harley Street bachelor, and of Miss Jessel, also deceased, a former governess, must be accepted. Was Peter Quint named for Peter Quince of *"A Midsummer Night's Dream,"* as has been suggested?[13] Certainly this is an inviting possibility, although not a necessary one. Peter Quince the clown—that is "not a gentleman"—aspired to dress up in costume, impress the "quality"; produce his poor play for the amusement of dukes and courtiers. Peter Quint of James's tale was a gentleman's gentleman who purloined coats and vests from his master's wardrobe, to play the urbane playboy at bucolic Bly. He pinched bottoms, this Quint, or "was too free," in Mrs. Grose's phrase, with the young female help. One has every reason to surmise, in fact, that he managed to get poor Miss Jessel pregnant, as a consequence of which she was obliged to leave her position. Very likely she died in connection with childbirth.

Peter Quint taught little Miles everything he knew, no matter how inappropriate that knowledge might be to one of Miles's tender years. Young Miles thus became a prodigy, altogether too knowing in the ways of the world, and precociously in advance of the innocent governess who would shortly be hired to take care of him. A little scholar, mathematician, pianist and actor, he could memorize yards of verse as well as plan and execute simple but effective stratagems. At school he amused himself at the expense of everyone he found amusing. He "said things," he finally admits, for which he was a length expelled. This expulsion was not upsetting to Miles; he was far too mature to be ruffled by trifles. The world, he knew, is filled with schools; one could always be sent to another. A great little imitator, Miles was cursed with his precociousness, for he found himself living in a humorless world.

Imagine, then, his delight upon returning in enforced fashion to dull Bly at meeting a new governess, one who is chockful of insipid but beautifully idealistic banalities as to what she shall do for her little charges. The governess is simply too enticing a target for Miles's feeble resistance to withstand. He decides to throw a little mystery into her life. He does not wish her ill—at least not at first—he just craves a bit of amusement to while away the time until fall. An amiable rascal, Miles really likes his new governess.

Significantly, the governess sees no "apparitions" until little Miles returns to Bly. Then one fateful evening after tucking her

charges in bed, the governess strolls out on the grounds. These strolls have become a habit with her, something that Miles no doubt would notice. She likes to amuse herself with the almost-proprietary feelings she is beginning to allow herself. During this twilight hour while the governess romances her fantasies, Miles is busy preparing one of his own. He dons one of the late Peter Quint's coats, one which Quint had previously stolen from his master. The governess will later report to Mrs. Grose that her apparition was dressed "in somebody's clothes. They're smart, but they're not his own."[14] How could the lady possibly know this? Because, of course, the clothes do not fit. Then Miles, bent on impersonating his late friend, stuck himself up with some whiskers and clapped upon his head an audacious mop of "red hair, very red, close-curling." The clear-eyed governess also took note that the eyebrows were "somewhat darker," thus letting us know that Miles had trusted to distance and twilight to average out the wig and his own darker coloring. The governess was also able to make out that the eyes of her apparition were sharp and strange: "I only know clearly that they're rather small and very fixed."[15] Of course they are small; the little imposter is only ten years old! As for the clarity of the eyes, we can only note that by the time Miles has worn himself out scaring the governess, his eyes will not seem so bright. The governess sums up her impression by concluding: "He gives me a sort of sense of looking like an actor."[16] Her perceptions, as James has indicated, are crystalline; for essentially she is right. Still, one might wonder how Miles could impersonate the height of an adult? Miles knew that his inferior stature must give him away. His solution was two-fold. First, he would depend heavily upon sharp angle-divergences from the horizontal—these would throw off the observer's perspective; just to be sure, he would employ distance. Finally, he would conceal the lower torso just enough to confound any possible estimation of his own shortness. We see, then, for our first apparition, the ludicrous sight of Miles supporting himself upon the parapet of the tower by hands "stiff-armed" upon the ledge, and "walking" himself along by shuffling his hands:

> He was in one of the angles, the one away from the house, very erect, as it struck me, and with both hands on the ledge. So I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page; then, exactly, after a minute, as if to add to the spectacle, he slowly changed his place—passed, looking at me hard all the while [Miles must make sure she looks at his face, not his hands as he "walks"] to the opposite corner of the platform...and I can see at this moment the way his hand, as he went, passed from one of the crenellations to the next.[17]

Not too difficult a feat of gymnastics for a ten-year-old. The governess *saw,* as James assures us, but was unable to interpret correctly what she saw. Miles must have been sufficiently satisfied with the results to put in the back of his mind the notion of staging a reappearance.

On a rainy Sunday, the sort of day when kids chafe with boredom, the governess prepares for the late service at church. She tidily recalls her mended glove which she had stitched in the dining room, as she says: "with a publicity perhaps not edifying—while I sat with the children at their tea...."[18] That is, the children took note of her sewing, and knew she would retrieve the glove before going to church. By this time, the light is fading; it it a good time for deceptions. Reentering the dining room, the poor lady is presented with a second vision of the dead Peter Quint. She sees him more closely, but not more clearly, and again in half-view: "He was the same—he was the same, and seen, this time, as he had been seen before, from the waist up, the window, though the dining room was on the ground floor, not going down to the terrace on which he stood."[19]

Alack! Our sharp-eyed governess makes her first mistake. She *assumes* that he stands on the terrace, although she only sees the upper half of her apparition. Of course she is wrong. Miles's little legs are not that long. He hangs from the vines, or possibly stands on a box or ledge—and he again wears his Peter Quint outfit.

The governess' terrors now engage like gears with her early training. She regresses. She decides that since the figure coolly surveyed the room, it was not looking for her, but "someone else." It's a spook right out of a ghost story, in other words, out to "get" the children. She runs out of the house and around the corner to confront...nothing: "The terrace and the whole place, the lawn and garden beyond it, all I could see of the park, were empty with a great emptiness. There were shrubberies and big trees, but I remember the clear assurance I felt that none of them concealed him. He was there or was not there; not there if I didn't see him."[20] Mistake number two, and really serious this time. Ghosts never hide behind trees or bushes, it is true, but little boys up to mischief do. The governess, not James, believes in ghosts. Here again, as James promises us in the Preface, the governess is accurate, but she is starting to misinterpret everything. That is where James was having so much fun with his readers, who were busily populating his story with their own themes of good and evil, or moralizing upon their own Freudian bogeymen. Why should we insult the author's intelligence with our own superstitions? Brother to William

James, Henry was well aware of the various theories of the nature of reality, as well as of the "psychical phenomena" that James understood were created by autosuggestion. Had the governess been less romantically given to *frissons,* and had she immediately searched the grounds, she would have infallibly dragged out of concealment one small boy, rather ridiculous in "somebody's clothes," glued-on red chin-whiskers, and a red wig. Instead of seeking her tormenter, the badly shaken governess begins to identify with him. She places herself against the window, standing now where she had seen the apparition: "It was confusedly present to me that I ought to place myself where he had stood. I did so; I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he had looked, into the room."[21] Her image, distorted by the faulty glass, scares the bejesus out of Mrs. Grose, who now enters the room. Why, we wonder, does the governess so stand, and so frighten? She is now ready to reveal her two visions of spirits, and this unconscious identification with the "ghost" helps her stage the occasion. We next learn from Mrs. Grose that the Harley street bachelor had departed Bly a year ago, leaving behind his servant, Peter Quint. The chapter ends with Mrs. Grose's dramatic disclosure: "Yes, Mr. Quint is dead."[22]

James had now drawn his slipnoose around the necks of many thousands of coneys, and only those "not easily caught" can hear the high, tinkling laughter, the silvery voice, as George Meredith described it, of the Comic Spirit. Under the pressure of their own insecurities and spectral imaginings, governess and housekeeper, two women "alone in a haunted house," reaffirm a moral world of "good" people and "bad" people. These are categories that James's fiction often hoots at in mirthful derision. In *The Art of Fiction* he denies that one can "carve a moral statue," or "paint a moral painting." In the Preface, he announces that his "values are all blanks." His task, as he saw it, was to produce the perfect work of art, not to preach. Peter Quint, according to Mrs. Grose, was "bad" because he liked pretty girls and, heaven help us, booze! Mrs. Grose says of this "bad" man that "he did what he wished...with them all,"[23] that is, with Miss Jessel and the rest of the female help. Unfortunately for him, he died of a "visible wound to the head."[24] A fall on a slippery slope, a blow by a jealous rival or outraged father would explain the matter. The governess settles for the icy slope. Their moral rectitude will work adversely, however, effectually blinding the two women to the truth until the governess reaches a state of frenzy.

James was at pains to point out that his apparitions are essentially "imps."[25] Because of the story's popularity and success, James was obliged to write comments on it to editors, correspondents and readers; yet was careful not to disclose the center of his mystery. Why should James reveal his mechanism when his express purpose was to hoodwink everyone he could? Indeed, it was easier for James to deceive his readers than it was becoming for little Miles to fool the governess. That lady's personal courage in giving pursuit to the second "ghost," rather than cringing in a corner and screaming, mandated the refinements that were to follow.

Miles has learned that the governess is a lot braver woman than he had reckoned on. If there is to be a third manifestation, he must arrange matters so that he *cannot* be pursued. The plan, briefly, is this: Flora, by now a co-conspirator, is to decoy the governess down to the lake whilst Miles arranges himself in disguise on the other side. Object in view: to scare hell out of the governess. He will now impersonate the late Miss Jessel, but at a sufficient distance to discourage pursuit. We start with the usually restless Miles for once deeply buried in a book: "We had left Miles indoors, on the red cushion of a deep window seat [from which he can see when the coast is clear]; he had wished to finish a book, and I had been glad to encourage a purpose so laudable in a young man whose only defect was an occasional excess of the restless."[26] The over-active Miles indoors reading, and in that window—this already sounds suspicious. The governess tells us, as she strolls out with Flora:

> I was aware afresh, with her, as we went, of how, like her brother, she contrived—it was the charming thing in both children—to let me alone without appearing to drop me and to accompany me without appearing to surround....I walked in a world of their invention...so that my time was taken only with being, for them, some remarkable person or thing that the game of the moment required.[27]

We note the unconscious irony here, for the "game" invented for today is to show the governess a resurrected Miss Jessel. Reaching the marge of the lake, the governess becomes aware by a process of *presque-vu* that someone is on the other side. By the end of the chapter she will have steeled her courage to "face what I had to face." That is, she raises her eyes to see the distant figure of impudent-imp Miles, now dressed in a cast-off black Miss-Jessel-dress, standing on a hid-

den stump or box and staring at his sister. At his sister! We see that Miles is indeed refining upon the game. As the governess becomes increasingly protective, Miles senses that her romantic nature tends to project her into heroic postures. He knows right where to aim at the lady's psyche. Having borrowed a page from the ghost stories of childhood, he now appears to be the ghost of Miss Jessel, longing for the soul of tiny Flora. He knows, as well, that the governess will not likely offer pursuit at the expense of abandoning Flora.

By the end of Chapter 7 the governess is convinced that the children are "lost": possessed by the wicked spirits she supposes to be walking the earth. As she weeps, little Flora reproaches her in wide, blue-eyed innocence. This open gaze effectually aborts a half-formed conclusion the governess is unwilling to allow herself: "To gaze into the depths of blue of the child's eyes and pronounce their loveliness a trick of premature cunning was to be guilty of cynicism in preference to which I naturally preferred to abjure my judgment and, so far as might be, my agitation."[28] The governess *sees* that the girl is pretending innocence, but denies the testimony of her own observation because it contradicts a cherished nineteenth-century theory that children are tender innocents. Yet we might ask if any of James's child characters are really childlike. Invariably they tend to be both "old" and precocious (cf. "The Pupil" as a rather autobiographical instance of childhood maturity). The reason for Miles's precocity is not difficult to find. We learn from Mrs. Grose that for a period of months Quint and the boy had been "perpetually together...quite as if Quint were his tutor—and a very grand one—and Miss Jessel only for the little lady. When he had gone off with the fellow, I mean, and spent hours with him."[29] Miles apparently absorbed a good deal more than was good for him.

Chapter 9 provides the most explicit information the author chooses to impart concerning the mechanics of the children's escapades. Here we can observe all of the requisite skills for mounting special effects. The children build their games around the static governess, "telling her stories, acting her charades, pouncing out at her, in disguises, as animals and historical characters...there were confabulations in corners, with a sequel of one of them going out in the highest spirits in order to 'come in' as something new....Sometimes, indeed, when I dropped into coarseness, I perhaps came across traces of little understandings between them by which one of them should keep me occupied while the other slipped away."[30] The governess is a

willing plaything for the children, who, she observes, delight in secrets, are adept at disguises, live in a world of make-believe and have an extensive wardrobe of costumes. She sees them stage distracting maneuvers, yet makes no connection between their play and the specific conditions and costuming of the apparitions.

The fourth appearance of Miles as Quint is a shocking turn of the screw. The governess will be shown not only that spirits can penetrate the house itself, but also confirmation that Flora is being sought. On this occasion, reading *Amelia* most of the night, the governess hears movement in the hall. Locking the door behind her, she travels to the stairwell, where she sees the figure of Quint on the landing below. Again, the dimness of the light and the deep perspective help Miles bring off his effect. The figure the governess describes as absolutely human, palpable and substantial, turns its back and descends "straight down the staircase and into the darkness in which the next bend was lost."[31] We have no way of knowing, of course, whether Miles intended to be overheard in the hall; he may have been surprised in the act of exiting the house, bent on making his appearance on the lawn outside. This latter possibility seems likely, for upon returning to her room the governess discovers that Flora has artfully arranged her bed to give the impression she's sleeping in it, when in fact she's hanging out the window, as though being "called" by the spirit of Quint. In response to the question "You thought I might be walking the grounds?" Flora replies: "Well, you know, I thought someone was," and sweetly explains why she arranged the bed: "Because I don't like to frighten you!"[32] The governess, however, takes this wickedly ironic comfort literally.

Following this episode, the governess sits awake nights, waiting. We may suppose that such wakefulness will have a damaging effect upon the lady's general health and equanimity. What even worse damage, then, must the children be doing themselves by their perverse tactics? By the end of the story little Flora will have become feverish and hysterical, and Miles will be so debilitated as to succumb to a heart attack. For in order to turn the screw on the governess, the children must stay awake, too.

Stay up the governess and children surely do. One night the governess "recognized the presence of a woman seated on one of the lower stairs with her back presented to [her], her body half bowed and her head, in an attitude of woe, in her hands."[33] We shudder to think of the hours of patient sitting on the stairs necessary for Miles to show

the governess this fifth and latest horror. On still another night Miles engineers what may well be his *tour de force,* a supernatural manifestation done entirely without costuming. In clear moonlight the governess sees

> on the lawn a person, diminished by distance, who stood there motionless and as if fascinated, looking up to where I had appeared—looking, that is, not so much straight at me as at something that was apparently above me. There was clearly another person above me—there was a person on the tower [of course she's wrong here, Miles is pulling a very old gag, that of "looking up," in order to make others foolishly gawk at nothing] but the presence on the lawn was not in the least what I had conceived and had confidently hurried to meet. The presence on the lawn—I felt sick as I made it out—was poor little Miles himself.[34]

Miles explains his presence as a determination to show the governess that he could be "bad." She, however, is persuaded by her own inner fears that he was somehow lured outside by a ghost — indeed, that he was looking above her at one. How, we might wonder, was the governess to know Miles was out there, so that she should look? Miles explains, "Oh, I arranged that with Flora....She was to get up and look out....So she disturbed you, and, to see what she was looking at, you also looked—you saw." Here is the culprit's own admission of staging this sixth appearance, yet again, as before, the governess sees events with clarity, but is unable to interpret them properly.

By Chapter 12, in trying to explain her ghost-theory to Mrs. Grose, the governess can summarize certain common conditions under which the apparitions occur: "They're seen only across, as it were, and beyond—in strange places and on high places, the top of towers, the roof of houses, the outside of windows, the further edge of pools."[36] Perspective, distance, angles; Miles employs whatever will compensate for his features and size, and whatever will discourage pursuit. We have seen that rather than realize *why* she sees "ghosts" only in such places, the governess consistently chooses a metaphysical and "moral" interpretation of the events: a distant, spectral threat is moving closer and closer. By all logic, however, if that word can be used in connection with the traditions of ghost stories, there is no necessity for "real" ghosts to make use of the logistical oddities the governess has observed.

II

Now as fall approaches and the children pump their governess for details about her home, her "eccentric" father (still another red herring from James's inexhaustible larder of deceptions), the days pass with no more appearances, although often conditions appear favorable: "The place with its grey sky and withered garlands, its bared spaces and scattered dead leaves, was like a theatre after the performance—all strewn with crumpled playbills."[37] This theatrical image is extremely unlikely for a young lady who has never in her life seen a play! It is not at all unusual, however, for the socially gregarious author, who, working through his heroine, announces the end of the supernatural performances. Miles had evidently tired of the game; his thoughts are turning, with the leaves, to school, and to new fields of enterprise. He demands to know when he is to go back to school, only to learn that no enrollment plans have been made. He faces the prospect of spending an inactive year as a virtual prisoner of Bly.

Miles's performance has ended or, to be more exact, has been suspended, and now hallucination replaces the staged appearances to which the governess has been subjected, and with a self-induced vision. The governess is now under severe emotional pressure, and Miles turns the screw still another quarter-turn. At the church door Miles demands that the governess " 'clear up with my guardian the mystery of this interruption of my studies, or you cease to expect me to lead with you a life that is so unnatural for a boy'."[38] The governess fears failing with Miles, with her position, and ultimately with the Harley Street bachelor who has figured so richly in her fantasies of success. Thus rather than sit beside Miles in the unbearable pew, she returns to Bly. Her head is filled with the temptation to take flight, simply to disappear from Bly; but at the same time she is in a state of near-collapse:

> I remember collapsing down at the foot of the staircase—suddenly collapsing there on the lowest step, and then with revulsion, recalling that it was exactly where more than a month before, in the darkness of night and just so bowed with evil things, I had seen the spectre of the most horrible of women.[39]

Self-hatred overcomes the governess as she begins to relive what may well have been the final moments before Miss Jessel's departure from Bly. Her tendency to identify with Miss Jessel, both emotionally and

in posture, reminds us that the governess had behaved in very much this same way when, after her second sighting of Miles as Peter Quint, she had placed herself where her tormentor had stood and looked into the dining room. The governess is now in a dangerously unbalanced state of mind. We see her enter the classroom to pick up her few possessions, preparatory to flight, and there we witness, for the first time, the governess in a state of actual hallucination. An image generated out of her own despair, that of Miss Jessel, is sorrowfully seated at the teacher's desk, her head propped in her hands. The image is quite unlike those of previous appearances, for it "passed away" or vanished, where in every other sighting the figures of Quint and Jessel remained fully palpable while walking out of the range of vision. The governess cries out to this "terrible, miserable woman," again, a self-condemnation, and we become aware of the evanescence of the figure: "She looked at me as if she heard me, but I had recovered myself and cleared the air. There was nothing in the room the next minute but the sunshine and a sense that I must stay."[40] This apparition behaves as ghosts should. Screamed at, it disappears; or, stated more exactly, after discharging a quantity of overwrought emotion, the governess is partially restored to her normal senses.

As we have been witness to the previous scene, it becomes apparent to us that in reporting this sighting to Mrs. Grose, the governess is either deliberately or unconsciously lying. No words, we know, were spoken by the apparition; yet in response to Mrs. Grose's question, " 'A talk! Do you mean she spoke?' " the governess replies:

> "It came to that. I found her, on my return, in the schoolroom,"
> "And what did she say?" I can hear the good woman still, and the candour of her stupefaction.
> "That she suffers the torments—!"
> It was this, of a truth, that made her, as she filled out my picture, gasp.
> "Do you mean," she faltered, "—of the lost?"
> "Of the lost. Of the damned. And that's why, to share them—"
> I faltered myself with the horror of it. But my companion, with less imagination, kept me up. "To share them—?"
> "She wants Flora."[41]

At this point we are dealing with a form of hysterical psychosis. The governess is reporting what happened, not in the schoolroom, but in her own troubled imagination. The setting is most appropriate to this hallucination, for school is the key to the whole problem. Miles

belongs in one, and wants to be sent to one. The governess can not advance his education herself, yet stands in the way of his escaping Bly. How, then, can Miles be sent to school? Clearly, he must force intervention into his case. He cannot communicate with his uncle, and the only other adult of sufficient authority to help him is Mrs. Grose.

With Chapter 18, Miles reluctantly resumes his torture of the governess. We readily infer his reluctance from the many signs he shows, both before and after this next apparition, of his real affection for her. His method is to distract the governess while Flora rows the boat across the lake. Once she misses Flora, and finds the boat gone, the governess can be expected to hurry around the lake to rescue Flora. By this time, Miles will have costumed himself as Miss Jessel and will appear on the near side of the lake, the Bly side. The difference between this and other appearances is that with Flora missing, the governess will naturally assume that the child is with Mrs. Grose. Mrs. Grose will thus be made aware by the governess that the child is gone, and can be depended upon to assist in the search. The needed witness will then be present to force the issue of the mystery of Bly out into the open, or, as Miles puts it to the governess: " 'My uncle must come down and you must completely settle things'."

As though they were on the best of terms, Miles offers to entertain his governess musically. After half an hour of song, the governess asks where Flora is and Miles responds: " 'Why, my dear, how do *I* know?'—breaking moreover into a happy laugh."[42] His behavior is obviously intended to trigger the governess' alarm. Yes, Miles is a little devil, all right, but not because he is possessed by spirits from beyond the grave—James knew better than that—but because his natural precocity has been abetted by unfortunate factors: his having no parents, his guardian's indifference to him; and piled upon neglect, he has had too much of the wrong kinds of attention from substitute parental figures like Quint. Last in line is the well-intentioned but ineffectual governess, who now stands between the boy and his future.

It may be objected that Mrs. Grose denies seeing this seventh apparition, the figure of Miss Jessel across the lake: " 'She isn't there, little lady, and nobody's there—and you never see nothing, my sweet! How can poor Miss Jessel—when poor Miss Jessel's dead and buried'?"[43] Again, James catches more coneys. Mrs. Grose does in fact see the figure, but moves to protect the child Flora by denying the presence. The following day, however, in the absence of the children, she admits to the governess that she has at last witnessed and now believes in "such doings."

We see why Miles, after having retired it, has again gotten out his supernatural machinery. In modern terms, the children desire a "confrontation" with their governess, but in the presence of a second adult witness, one who can be expected to take the desired action of reporting to the children's uncle about these "goings on." The confrontation involves causing the governess to name Miss Jessel—a dead woman—in the presence of both Flora and Mrs. Grose, and to state that this dead woman now stands in plain sight. Flora's carefully rehearsed part of the plan is to turn against the governess in deadly hatred. Indeed, so well does she act that the governess observes that Flora speaks "exactly as if she had got from some outside source each of her stabbing little words." Yet Flora manages to make one revealing mistake: " 'I don't know what you mean. I see nobody. I see nothing. I never have'." No one has suggested, at any time, that Flora has ever seen anything spooky. Her denial implies her knowledge of other, previous manifestations. Yet both the governess and Mrs. Grose have maintained throughout that little Flora is innocent, and must be protected from the knowledge of what they suppose to be evil. Flora's sudden turning against her governess is a calculated move, the logical climax to the scenario Miles generated for that purpose, rather than being, as it appears, a spontaneous demonstration. We may be certain the whole scene was previously rehearsed, right down to that rhythmic triplet, " 'Take me away, take me away—oh, take me away from her'!"

III

We are now in a position to unravel the final and fatal "appearance." This one is not the eighth; if we count only those productions mounted by Miles, there are seven. The governess' hallucinatory image of Miss Jessel in the schoolroom and the final manifestation of a "white face" at the dining room window while she attempts to shake the truth out of Miles are two events quite outside of Miles's manipulations. Indeed, Miles is now powerless to continue the game. The governess insists that Flora be removed from Bly at once, to prevent the "contamination" of Flora from spreading to Miles. Unwittingly, she has taken the right step to solve the mystery, for without Flora's assistance Miles will be unable to stage his little surprises. The odd, but artistically correct climax James conceived will balance in ironic

perfection the misunderstanding of the governess against the final and fatal hallucination to which little Miles will become subject.

With Flora and Mrs. Grose removed, Miles and the governess are brought to a final showdown in the dining room. The governess seeks some admission of guilt from Miles; she wants him to admit he has seen ghosts of the dead. For his part, Miles seeks to conceal his hoaxing. The governess asks if Miles intercepted a letter she had mailed to the boy's uncle; but before he can reply, she sees "Peter Quint" at the window. She makes no mention, this time, of the red hair and red whiskers she had been careful to describe previously. All we are shown in the way of details is the "white face" of "damnation." This is the distorting glass through which Mrs. Grose, upon seeing the governess, was given such a fright. There are two good possibilities for what the governess sees at this moment. She may see a self-induced hallucination. This tempting explanation is encouraged by James, who has the governess' questioning of Miles timed in cause-effect fashion to the appearance of the face at the window. A second explanation is even more likely. Miles has just said that he must go out to see the servant Luke. Waiting in the yard, Luke may stroll to the window to see if the little master is through talking. We already know what the glass does to any face appearing behind it, so if we prefer a palpable image, Luke's will do.

Seeing the face at the window, the governess pounces upon Miles to shield his eyes from the sight, but Miles does not know that. He thinks she is seizing him because he admitted taking her letter. He had imagined it would reveal some of his carryings on, and is puzzled that it contained "nothing." When the governess attempts to connect this purloining to his expulsion from school, Miles denies that he stole while there. But for what reason was he expelled? Apparently for precisely the sort of behavior he delights in at Bly: impersonation. Miles admits he "said things" to his friends. The governess is utterly confounded, for she had been expecting him to say "said things" to those he *disliked,* that he showed insubordination—"talked back." The explanation for Miles's expulsion is simple enough: he mocked the school's staff for the entertainment of his friends. This behavior came to light through letters his schoolmates wrote home to their parents. Miles was perhaps given a warning or two, then, toward the end of the school year, expelled. When the governess, again seeing the face at the window, springs upon Miles with an outcry, he asks "Is she *here*?" and names Miss Jessel. Now it is clear that Miles actually sees nothing

at the window and is only guessing. Based upon his own evocation of Miss Jessel the day before, he is beginning to suspect that his late governess' spirit has been awakened by his impersonation of her. The governess at this point tells him it is not Miss Jessel, so Miles now guesses " 'It's he'?" The question form tells us that he still sees nothing. When the governess queries: " 'Whom do you mean by *he*?' " Miles cries out: " 'Peter Quint—you devil'!" He still sees nothing, as his supplication " 'where'?" lets us know, but he clearly believes that an evil spirit is somewhere present. The tables are turned, now, with the governess momentarily gaining strength against the "apparition" while the screw is turned mercilessly on little Miles. She can shield his body, but she cannot shield his imagination from the kind of psychotic hallucination which is about to occur in Miles, at the very moment the governess becomes free of it, as she says, " 'forever'." Her ecstatic triumph builds upon her acceptance of Miles, sins and all. Because she now feels vindicated by Miles's naming of Peter Quint, she can transcend fear and so clear her mind. Alas, we now observe Miles undergoing the same hallucinatory experience:

> But he had already jerked straight round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day [so the governess thinks, for she is reporting that *she* sees nothing, and so assumes that Miles sees nothing, at the very moment when he imagines he sees Quint]...he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall.[15]

Miles has just seen the face of Quint, in his mind's eye, of course, but projected upon the window. Or he has seen the distorted face of Luke. Since he had used Quint's image to frighten the governess, he now supposes that Quint's spirit has come to "get" him. Miles collapses into the governess' arms, dead of a terror-induced heart-stoppage. The governess has a different explanation, saying that "his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped." Irony dominates here, for Miles dies not dispossessed, but "possessed." He has finally seen what he had caused the governess to see seven times. Since he is more susceptible to fright than the governess, who has shown herself to be a terribly brave woman, and since he is exhausted from a summer's sleeplessness, the shock of that single appearance proves fatal.

We can be certain that no one mourned Miles's death more than the governess; after all, no one cared more for him. In later years, she

proved her competency in her profession, at least when the children were less impishly given to playing tricks on her, for she became governess to Douglas's younger sister.

NOTES

[1] "Preface," *The Aspern Papers; The Turn of the Screw; The Liar; The Two Faces, The Novels and Tales of Henry James* [New York Edition] (New York, 1908), p. 12.

[2] An Amusette is a toy,, a plaything. James would have been aware that it is also a light caliber (obsolete) field piece—just right for plinking away at distant targets.

[3] Harold C. Goddard, "A Pre-Freudian Reading of *The Turn of the Screw*," *NCF*, 12 (1957), 33.

[4] Edna Kenton, "Henry James to the Ruminant Reader: *The Turn of the Screw*," *The Arts*, 6 (1924), 255.

[5] Robert Heilman, " 'The Turn of the Screw' as Poem," *UR*, 14 (1948), 277.

[6] Leon Edel, *The Modern Psychological Novel* (New York, 1964), pp. 44-45.

[7] Eric Solomon, "The Return of the Screw," *UR*, 30 (1964), 205.

[8] Mark Spilka, "Turning the Freudian Screw: How Not To Do It," *L&P*, 13 (1963), 106.

[9] Charles G. Hoffman, *The Short Novels of Henry James* (New York, 1957), p. 75; and Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), p. 314.

[10] Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw," *The Two Magics* (New York, 1898, rpt. 1920). All page references are to the 1920 edition.

[11] Ibid., p. 7.

[12] James, "Preface" to *The Aspern Papers*.

[13] Ignace Feuerlicht, " *'Erlkönig'* and *The Turn of the Screw*," *JEGP*, 58(1959), 73.

[14] *Turn of The Screw*, p. 57.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[18] Ibid., p. 48.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. 50.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 58.

[23] Ibid., p. 78.

[24] Ibid., p. 66.

[25] "Preface." James could scarcely disclaim more clearly than he does here the very basis of most readings of his tale:

> Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself—and that already is a charming job—and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy (with the children) and horror (of their false friends) will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him *think* the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications. This ingenuity I took pains—as indeed great pains were required—to apply; and with a success apparently beyond my wildest hope. How can I feel my calculation to have failed, my wrought suggestion not to have worked, that is, on being assailed, as has befallen me, with the charge of a monstrous emphasis, the charge of all indecently expatiating? There is not only from the beginning to end of the matter not an inch of expatiation, but my values are positively all blanks save so far as an excited horror, a promoted pity, a created expertness—on which punctual effects of strong causes no writer can ever fail to plume himself—proceed to read into them more or less fantastic figures. Of high interest to the author meanwhile—and by the same stroke a theme for the moralist—the artless resentful reaction of the entertained person who has abounded in the sense of the situation. He visits his abundance, morally, on the artist—who has but clung to an ideal of faultlessness.

[26] *Turn of the Screw,* pp. 67-68.

[27] Ibid., p. 68.

[28] Ibid., p. 82.

[29] Ibid., p. 85.

[30] Ibid., pp. 93-94.

[31] Ibid., p. 98.

[32] Ibid., p. 102.

[33] Ibid., pp. 102-103.

[34] Ibid., p. 106.

[35] Ibid., p. 113.

[36] Ibid., p. 117.

[37] Ibid., p. 123.

[38] Ibid., p. 138.

[39] Ibid., p. 140.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., p. 145.

[42] Ibid., p. 159.

[43] Ibid., p. 174.

[44] Ibid., p. 175.

[45] Ibid., p. 208.