The Turn of the Screw

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY JAMES

Henry James was born into a wealthy family, the second of five children born to a prominent theologian, Henry James Sr. His father placed high value in his children's education (James's brother, William James, became a pioneer of psychology and philosophy). The family spent many years in Europe's major cities: the first twenty years of James's life were spent travelling between Europe and the United States, and in these cities he was tutored by some of the countries' best known intellectuals. After a brief time spent at Harvard Law School in 1862, James—who had always been a voracious reader—turned to literature, which later became his profession. While traveling through and living in Europe, he wrote his first novels, often choosing characters who, like him, lived lives caught between Europe and the United States. He later established for himself a strong reputation as both a novelist and essayist, and he kept company with some of the greatest writers and thinkers of his time, among them Stephen Crane, Edith Wharton, Joseph Conrad, Ivan Turgenev, and Robert Lewis Stevenson. Startled by the outbreak of World War 1, James chose to become a British subject in July of 1915 as a gesture of protest against America's refusal to enter the war. His health declined, and after suffering a stroke, James died, and his ashes were buried in the Cambridge Cemetery in Massachusetts.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Turn of the Screw grows out of the Gothic literary tradition. Works in this genre include Anne Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, Matthew Gregory Lewis's play *The Castle Spectre*, and other similar works which feature ghost-haunted upper-class families in small communities sealed off from the outside world. But this book does not belong to the Gothic tradition. James and his contemporaries, such as William Dean Howells and Stephen Crane, were called Realists. James paid particularly close attention to making the psychologies of his characters "realistic", and *The Turn of the Screw* exemplifies this Jamesian brand of Realism sometimes called psychological realism. Several books grew out of this attempt to realistically depict characters' psychologies, including modernist novels such as Virginia Woolfe's *Mrs. Dalloway* up to the contemporary novel, such as the Spanish novelist Javier Marias's *A Heart So White*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Turn of the Screw*
- **When Written:** 1896-1897
- **Where Written:** Rye, East Sussex, England
- **When Published:** 1898
- **Literary Period:** American Realism
- **Genre:** Novella; Ghost Story
- **Setting:** England's Countryside
- **Climax:** Miles death at the end of the novel
- **Antagonist:** Deliberately unclear
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Christmas Tale. Henry James began working on *The Turn of the Screw* when he was commissioned by a London newspaper to write a ghoulish Christmas tale for a special issue. The inspiration for his work came from a similarly plotted and structured story he'd heard an acquaintance of his once tell. He admired his acquaintance's subtlety in telling the story, and the lack of resolution, and he emulated this ambiguity in his own rendition._

Horror Today. In the 2013 film *Insidious: Chapter 2*, the young protagonist, Dalton Lambert—a boy tormented by ghosts—is seen reading *The Turn of the Screw*.

PLOT SUMMARY

The book opens with an unnamed narrator's description of a party held one Christmas Eve in England at which some friends have gathered to share ghost stories. One of the partygoers, Douglas, says that he knows a particularly sinister ghost story about a governess's time spent taking care of a wealthy Londoner's niece and nephew at a country estate haunted by two ghosts. He has access to the governess's written account of her experience, and he offers to go get it and read it to the partygoers. The partygoers excitedly accept his offer, and the following night he reads to them the governess's story, at which point the narration shifts to the governess's point of view.

The governess worries that she may have made the wrong decision when she accepted the position, but when she sees the estate for the first time, she falls quickly in love with its beautifully put together exterior. Her first meeting with Flora, the beautiful and well-mannered young girl for whom she would be responsible at Bly, calms her worries still more. She also takes comfort in the welcoming demeanor of Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper at Bly who eventually becomes the governess's trusted confidante.

The night she arrived at Bly, the governess received a letter announcing that Miles, the boy for whom she was responsible, was expelled from school. The letter does not specify the circumstances of his expulsion. The governess has not yet met Miles at this point—he hadn't yet come home from school—so her relationship with him begins on a mysterious and sour note, and this colors her relationship with the boy throughout her time at Bly. When she meets him, the governess decides he's as well-behaved as his impressively good sister.

One evening while out for a walk, the governess spots a strange man looking down at her from one of the home's towers. She doesn't mention the meeting to anyone, but when she sees the man again one afternoon staring at her through the **window** from outside the room she's in, she tells Mrs. Grose about these sightings. Mrs. Grose tells the governess that the man she's seen is Peter Quint, the estate's now deceased former valet.

The governess eventually encounters a second stranger. This time she is by the estate's lake with Flora when she sees a somber-looking woman dressed in black staring from a distance at her and Flora. The governess tries to find some hint in Flora's face that she too sees the woman, and she is certain that the girl is aware of the woman but intentionally keeps this hidden from the governess. The governess describes this woman to Mrs. Grose. Mrs. Grose tells the governess she's seen Miss Jessel, the previous governess who also had died.

The governess believes Miss Jessel and Quint pose a threat to the children, so she asks Mrs. Grose to tell her about the time at Bly when they were alive. Mrs. Grose tells the governess that Quint had been "too free" with everyone at the estate. She says that he and Miss Jessel had a sexual relationship. She also says that Quint and Miles had maintained a dubious relationship—possibly a sexual one—and she tells the governess that the boy tried to lie about their time together. The governess is convinced that the children are secretly continuing their relationships with these two.

One day while Miles plays piano for the governess, Flora leaves the home unattended. The governess believes the two children conspired to make this possible, that Miles distracted her with his piano playing so that Flora could leave to meet Miss Jessel. She and Mrs. Grose head to the lake, and they find Flora there. The governess sees Miss Jessel across the lake, and she yells to Mrs. Grose and Flora, convinced that the two also see her. They say they do not see her, and the governess accosts Flora, saying she sees Miss Jessel but refuses to admit that she does. This upsets Flora greatly, and she asks to be taken away from the governess. The girl falls ill, and the governess tells Mrs. Grose to take her away from Bly to her uncle's place in London.

The book concludes with a dramatic final scene in which the governess and Miles are together alone in the home. The governess sees Quint outside through the **window**, and she grasps Miles in an effort to protect him from the man. She tells Miles she "has him" now, that he will never have to meet with Quint again. The boy's heart stops.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Governess – The book's protagonist and main narrator, the governess is the young woman who has been assigned to take care of the education and supervision of Miles and Flora at their uncle's country estate, Bly. Born to a family of humble means in the English countryside, the governess lived a sheltered life until she left for London to pursue the employment opportunity she settled on at Bly. She is a strong-willed and intelligent but emotionally volatile character, and she takes her position as the children's caretaker with a seriousness that can seem either overbearing or admirably protective. Her emotional volatility calls into question the reality of the ghosts she eventually claims to see, and because no other character claims to see the ghosts, her stability remains an unsettled question.

Mrs. Grose –The governess's key confidante throughout the story, Mrs. Grose is a longtime servant at Bly. She has known the children for much longer than the governess, and her love for the two causes her occasionally to deny the accusations the governess makes against the children's character and behavior. Mrs. Grose respects the governess and listens willingly to her claims to see ghosts and her concerns about Bly. Sometimes, though, Mrs. Grose seems to withhold information from the governess; she often stops short of full disclosure about such matters as the histories of the children and the estate's past. The governess thinks of Mrs. Grose as her confidante, but she does not seem certain that an entirely honest relationship exists between them.

Miles –The ten year-old boy for whom the governess isresponsible,Miles is a precocious and charming "young gentleman". When the governess arrived at Bly, she received a letter saying that Miles had been expelled from his school, though the note does not give a reason for this expulsion. The governess's relationship with Miles is colored by this suspicious past, because it implies that there is a kind of devious or even evil side of him which she cannot reconcile with what she perceives to be his immaculate behavior. The governess further assumes that Miles meets regularly with the ghost of Peter Quint, or that he is at least under his influence.

Flora –The eight year-old girl for whom the governess is responsible, Flora is a beautiful and pleasant young girl. At first, the governess speaks highly of Flora's charmingly childish grace and innocence. Eventually, though, the governess begins to suspect that Flora meets secretly with Miss Jessel, and she thinks that Flora's outward displays of innocence and beauty intentionally conceal a dark inner life.

The uncle –The children's uncle—the man who hired the governess—is a wealthy resident of London who became the guardian of Flora and Miles when his brother, their father, died. After facing difficulties raising the two children, he sent them to Bly, his estate, where they were taken care of by Mrs. Grose and other servants and help at Bly. The governess has a deep respect for him and his opinion of her capabilities as the children's caretaker.

Peter Quint –Formerly the valet at Bly, Quint is the first ghost the governess encounters at the estate. According to Mrs. Grose, he was something of a scoundrel while alive, and apparently a bad influence on the children, Miles in particular. Mrs. Grose also says that he had a scandalous relationship with Miss Jessel.

Miss Jessel –The children's deceased governess, Miss Jessel is the second ghost the governess encounters at Bly. Mrs. Grose says that Miss Jessel had been a lady (she had a good upbringing, and dressed well) and she had a controversial affair with Peter Quint. The governess eventually comes to believe that Flora meets secretly with Miss Jessel.

Douglas –The man who follows Griffin's story by adding a "turn of the screw" to Griffin's shocking story when he reads the governess's manuscript to the partygoers, a story that involves *two* ghosts and *two* children.The governesswas Douglas's sister's governess, and the way Douglas speaks of the governess implies that he had once been in love with her.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Luke – The servant who was supposed to deliver the governess's letter to the children's uncle.

Unnamed Narrator –The man who, at the beginning of the book, describes the Christmas Eve storytelling party at which the governess' account of her time at Bly eventually is told.

Griffin –The storyteller at the Christmas Eve party who tells a story about a ghost's visitation to a young boy, a ghost story that—because of the presence of a child in the narrative—appalls and shocks the partygoers.

Mrs. Griffin –The member of the storytelling party who concludes that Douglas had likely been in love withthe governess.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE SUPERNATURAL

To call this a theme may seem a little ridiculous, given that this is a ghost story—of course there are supernatural events. But the theme of the supernatural, in Henry James's hands, is worth thinking about. The supernatural is important because it brings into the story an essential, richly complex element of ambiguity: given the evidence, it is possible that the ghosts are there and equally possible that they are not there at all. The governess claims she sees them, but no other characters ever admit to seeing them. If we believe the governess's account, then the other characters seem to be withholding from her important truths about Bly and its history. But if we believe the other characters in the story, then there are no ghosts, and the governess seems unaware of being obsessive and unhinged.

The story is best appreciated when readers acknowledge the possibility that each of these two ways of reading the book are equally true, given the evidence. The logic that guides this theme is crucial to understanding what's great about *The Turn of the Screw*. The reader can choose to sympathize with the governess, who sees the ghosts and tells us they're real, or the reader may sympathize with the other characters in the story, none of whom ever seem to see what the governess claims she sees. But the reader would be best off to try not to conclude either way, and to work to explore the viewpoints of each character, and what those divergent viewpoints may imply about the characters wrapped up in all this confusion.

The supernatural is thereby the key to some of the book's deepest insights about the difficult relationships we have with other people's minds and experiences. It can sometimes be impossible to figure out whether what we see in other people is something we've invented with our own imaginations, or if we're seeing other people as they really are. We can be convinced that we're seeing the truth—say, that someone is sad—but if they deny what we claim to see, either we've invented what we see, or some secret is being kept. Occasionally we're correct, and the ghosts we see haunting other people are really there. On the other hand, we could be misreading the ghosts we see, and they may be our own thoughts, feelings, or histories. (Psychologists call this phenomenon "projection.") In *The Turn of the Screw* it is impossible to tell whether the ghosts are only haunting the governess, or if they are some key to the true histories, feelings, and thoughts of the children she's taking care of. It is this impossible division that makes the supernatural an important theme.

EXTERIOR VS. INTERIOR

This theme is closely related to the supernatural, since the basic question here is: do external impressions obscure internal realities? But this

theme does not necessarily have anything to do with the supernatural. This is about discrepancies more rooted in everyday happenings, and the important question that these discrepancies implies: can external appearances (the clothes a person wears, or the smile they have) ever provide us with enough evidence for us to make conclusions about internal truths (the quality of a well-dressed person's life, whether or not that person smiling is in fact happy)? *The Turn of the Screw* suggests that the external world can easily deceive us and that upon closer inspection the internal, true story that lurks beneath the surface may be revealed.

Consider, for example, the governess's confused initial impressions of Bly. When she firsts arrives she thinks it is a beautiful place, with its expansive countryside setting, the bright flowers surrounding the home, the open windows and fresh curtains. It is a place that is much nicer than what the governess is used to after her more humble upbringing. But it does not take her long to begin experiencing the place as a "big ugly antique." The house eventually becomes for her a place of horror instead of a place of beauty. Bly is an estate with a dark history, at least as far as the governess can tell.

Similarly, both Miles and Flora strike her initially as almost overwhelmingly beautiful. Miles is a little gentleman, impeccably put together. Flora is an equally impressive, beautiful, and apparently innocent young girl. Eventually, though, the governess perceives in these children something more sinister, less innocent, less beautiful. Her immediate perception of these children as graceful and beautiful young innocent children is undermined by her experience of them.

STORYTELLING

The Turn of the Screw explores the relationship between storytelling and the reality stories depict: can stories be trusted as representations of reality; does the telling of a story always imply some separation or distance from reality; can stories tell something true without telling explicitly the truth? These are not questions the book explicitly answers. But an argument can be made that part of Henry James's agenda here is to argue that stories—even fictional stories—can powerfully influence the realities they depict.

The structure of this book is a good entry point into what *The Turn of the Screw* says about the power stories have. *The Turn of the Screw* begins in one setting—the old home in England where storytellers have gathered to scare each other on Christmas Eve—and then ends in a different setting, at Bly. What happened to the storytellers? Why did Henry James leave them out of the ending? This book is a fiction, so this may seem trivial. But this change from beginning to end is not due to Henry James's carelessness as a novelist. Rather the change can be read in light of the book's message about stories: the story in the manuscript Douglas read from overtook the reality of the gathered storytellers the book created at the beginning. James has taken an old literary technique, called a "frame narrative", in which stories are nested within stories by a series of storytellers, and he uses this technique to show how some stories (such as the governess's manuscript), if they are sufficiently powerful, can overtake the frames they are placed within (such as the Christmas Eve storytelling party).

The letter the governess receives from Miles's head-master provides another good example of how stories can complicate and influence reality. The letter is an incomplete story about Miles: it says that he has been expelled from his school but it offers no explanation, and no character in the book seems willing or able to explain to the governess why Miles may have been expelled. This mysterious letter and the stories about Miles that it implies color the governess's relationship with Miles throughout the story. Why was he expelled? Is he evil or good? Was the letter the result of a false accusation? Because she has no evidence to answer these questions, the stories this letter spawns in her mind take place in the realm of speculation. In other words, they are fiction, but they still come to define her relationship to Miles.

SECRECY

Each character in *The Turn of the Screw* withholds some crucial bit of personal information from each of the other characters. This tendency to repress, lie, and conceal personal information—to create and enforce an atmosphere of secrecy—is presented in this book as something capable of thwarting the development of meaningful and healthy relationships with others and with ourselves.

The governess, for example, cannot openly discuss with the children her concerns about their wellbeing because of the unbridgeable gap that seems to exist between her and the children about their times spent with Miss Jessel and Peter Quint. This secrecy between the governess, Miles, and Flora eventually leads to serious trouble. When it has built up to unbearable intensity, that is, in the two scenes when the governess sees the ghosts while the children are there with her, and the governess implores them to be honest with her, Flora has an emotional breakdown and is forced to leave Bly, and Miles dies. It is not clear whether or not the children do see the ghosts here, but the violence in these scenes—especially between the governess and the children—shows how powerfully secrecy can break down personal relationships.

The secrecy between the governess and Mrs. Grose is also important. Here secrecy is not the perhaps understandable silence that emerges between adults and children. Instead, this is a different kind of secrecy, one consisting of confused allegiances, the occasional leakage of half-truths, and the refusal to confront reality head-on. Mrs. Grose divulges some important information about the children, about their uncle,

about Miss Jessel and Peter Quint. But she only confides through the filter of secrecy, and these half-revelations are almost as destructive as the total reticence the children show. Mrs. Grose's secrecy is a bit more adult, a pretended openness that allows lies and truths to be confused. Mrs Grose's refusal to be open with the governess suggests that this secrecy has affected her own ability to see what's truly going on at Bly.

YOUTH AND INNOCENCE

The Turn of the Screw explores and complicates the relationship between youth and innocence. Youth and innocence are difficult to pin down in the book: the children seem precocious and (in the governess's words) wicked, but at the same time they are presented as innocent and honest victims of a difficult situation. Henry James was known to have had an interest in the inner lives of children, as both precocious and mature members of the world, and as innocent victims of that same world. He is sometimes said to have spoken for the children of the upper-class in the same way Charles Dickens spoke for the children of the lower class. Miles and Flora are orphans who were more or less abandoned by their assigned caregiver, their uncle. They are thus forced to develop their own sense of family, one consisting of moving parts, such as new governesses, and frustrated head-masters. When the governess requests that Flora be taken away from Bly, and when later Miles's heart stops in the final scene, we see how sharply Henry James has drawn the children as innocent victims of adult concerns.

At the same time, though, the children's victimhood—their difficult pasts with Miss Jessel and Peter Quint, their abandonment by almost all adults in their lives—grants them a kind of seriousness and maturity not typically associated with innocently youthful children. This can be read as part of what is so frustrating for the governess about the children she's taking care of. Flora and Miles both have about them a kind of maturity and worldliness that the governess lacks. She cannot access them because she is unable to see them for what they are: not innocent, but experienced.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

WINDOWS

Windows in *The Turn of the Screw* are in two instances the invisible boundary separating the governess from the ghost of Peter Quint. It is no coincidence that these encounters happen at **windows**. The story is, at least in part, about boundaries that—like **windows**—at once divide and connect people to each other. This is especially true of the governess's relationship with the children. The governess often discusses her feeling that the children deliberately withhold their inner feelings and personal histories from her, so their reticence prevents her ability to access the children. But she clearly believes that her encounters with the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel, and the awareness she develops of the children's relationship with the two, give her what she considers to be privileged access to the children's histories and feelings. Nobody else ever confesses to seeing the ghosts, and the conclusions the governess draws about the children's relationships with them remain unverified, so these encounters with the ghosts function like **windows**, or like boundaries that at once connect the governess to, and divide the governess from, the children.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Signet Classics edition of *The Turn of the Screw and Other Short Novels* published in 2007.

Preface Quotes

"I quite agree—in regard to Griffin's ghost, or whatever it was—that its appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch. But it's not the first occurrence of its charming kind that I know to have involved a child. If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to TWO children—?"

Related Characters: Douglas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

At a Christmas Eve party in London, the partygoers have been sharing ghost stories, one of which has featured a ghost haunting a child. Douglas, one of the partygoers, attempts to trump this story, bragging that he knows of a ghost story that features not just one but *two* children. The fact that the novel's main narrative is embedded within this scene highlights the importance of the theme of storytelling. James explores the idea that we tell stories to impress others, and Douglas' dramatic phrase "what do you say to TWO children––?" indicates that he is competing to tell the most disturbing tale.

This passage is important as it is one of two places where the novel's title is mentioned, and thus provides insight into the function of the phrase "The Turn of the Screw" within

the narrative. Douglas says that the appearance of a ghost to an innocent child "adds a particular touch," meaning that the juxtaposition between the horror of the ghost and the child's innocence makes for a good story. Douglas uses the phrase "the turn of the screw" to imply a level of creepiness within the story; however, this phrase also gives a sense of something being closed or sealed. This may foreshadow the governess' feeling that she is trapped at Bly.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"The little girl who accompanied Mrs. Grose appeared to me on the spot a creature so charming as to make it a great fortune to have to do with her. She was the most beautiful child I had ever seen…

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Mrs. Grose, Flora

Related Themes:

Page Number: 291

Explanation and Analysis

On the way to Bly the governess had been feeling nervous about her new position, but as soon as she arrives her anxieties are soothed by the beauty of the house and of Flora. In this passage she describes Flora as "the most beautiful child" she has ever seen, adding that anyone who knows her is lucky. This observation reveals the governess' initial belief that outward beauty corresponds to internal innocence; however, the coming events will come to challenge this view. The fact that she describes Flora not just as beautiful but as the *most* beautiful child she has ever seen adds to the sense that there might be something unnatural (or indeed supernatural!) about Flora's charm.

"I take what you said to me at noon as a declaration that *you've* never known him to be bad."

She threw back her head; she had clearly, by this time, and very honestly, adopted an attitude. "Oh, never known him—I don't pretend *that*!"

I was upset again. "Then you *have* known him—?"

"Yes indeed, miss, thank God!"

On reflection I accepted this. "You mean that a boy who never is—?"

"Is no boy for *me*!"

I held her tighter. "You like them with the spirit to be naughty?"

Then, keeping pace with her answer, "So do I!" I eagerly brought out. "But not to the degree to contaminate—"

"To contaminate?"—my big word left her at a loss. I explained it. "To corrupt."

She stared, taking my meaning in; but it produced in her an odd laugh. "Are you afraid he'll corrupt *you*?"

Related Characters: The Governess, Mrs. Grose (speaker), Miles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

Having read the news that Miles is being expelled from school, the governess asked Mrs. Grose if Miles was badly behaved, and Mrs. Grose replied that he wasn't. Here, however, Mrs. Grose slightly contradicts herself, saying it's not the case that Miles was *never*bad, but that she wouldn't like a boy who was perfectly behaved all the time anyway. The governess agrees, but nervously adds that a child shouldn't be so bad that he "corrupts" others, to which Mrs. Grose laughs and asks her if she is worried that Miles will corrupt her.

This passage is significant as it establishes a key tension between innocence and corruption, and specifically foreshadows the governess's anxiety about whether Miles is truly innocent or whether, beneath his veneer of purity, he has been "corrupted" by Quint. Although the governess claims to like it when children have "the spirit to be naughty," her obsession with innocence suggests otherwise. Mrs. Grose's question of whether the governess is worried that Miles will corrupt *her* hints at an interpretation of the novel wherein the governess is the innocent one, and Miles and Flora are the corrupting forces. This would represent an eerie challenge to the presumed association between children and innocence.

Finally, the fact that Mrs. Grose at first said that Miles was perfectly behaved and then contradicts herself hints that

she is perhaps not as trustworthy she might initially seem. This, combined with the many unfinished sentences and murky pauses of the dialogue, creates suspense and adds to the ambiguity of which characters in the novel are telling the truth or misunderstanding one another.

Chapter 3 Quotes

It would have been impossible to carry a bad name with a greater sweetness of innocence, and by the time I had got back to Bly with him I remained merely bewildered—so far, that is, as I was not outraged—by the sense of the horrible letter locked up in my room, in a drawer. As soon as I could compass a private word with Mrs. Grose I declared to her that it was grotesque. She promptly understood me. "You mean the cruel charge—?" "It doesn't live an instant. My dear woman, LOOK at him!"

Related Characters: The Governess, Mrs. Grose (speaker), Miles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis

Having met Miles for the first time, the governess is as smitten with his beauty and seeming innocence as she was with Flora, and is "bewildered" as to why he has been expelled from school. She confides this to Mrs. Grose, justifying her disbelief by saying "LOOK at him!". Once again, the governess reveals her complete faith in the idea that an outward appearance of beauty can be taken as proof that a person is innocent.

The fact that the governess received the letter before meeting Miles also means that the contents of the letter are a constant influence on how she views him—either making her wary and distrustful of Miles, or else indignant on his behalf.

That was exactly present to me—by which I mean the face was—when, on the first of these occasions, at the end of a long June day, I stopped short on emerging from one of the plantations and coming into view of the house. What arrested me on the spot—and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for—was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real. He did stand there!

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Peter Quint

Related Themes:

Page Number: 302

Explanation and Analysis

A few weeks have passed since the governess's arrival, weeks she has described as joyful and carefree. The only thing she wishes during this period is that "someone" would look on at her life at Bly and that "he" would approve. In the midst of having this thought she sees a strange man in the distance, looking at her. The governess is shocked, and feels that her imagination has "turned real."The man she sees turns out to be the ghost of Peter Quint, though she does not realize this yet.

It is important to note the context in which this first appearance of Peter Quint takes place. Note that the governess had just been longing for "someone" to witness her life with the children; the fact that she uses male pronouns to describe this person both connects him to the male ghost who does appear and suggests that the person she is hoping would watch her might be Miles and Flora's mysterious uncle (whom, it's suggested, she might feel a romantic attraction for). This is significant as one interpretation of the novel holds that the ghosts of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are indeed figments of the governess's imagination. One possible motivation for her experiencing visions of ghosts is a sense of loneliness at Bly and unrequited love for Miles and Flora's uncle. On the other hand, of course, it's entirely possible that there really are ghosts in this ghost story, and the figure of Quint appears just when the governess is feeling most alone.

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.

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Peter Quint

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 309

Explanation and Analysis

The governess has seen the ghost of Peter Quint again, this time through a window. She goes outside to find him and cannot see him, though insists that this is not because he is hidden by the trees but because he has actually vanished. This passage shows that the governess is quick to dismiss a

plausible explanation (that the man she saw is now simply hidden by other objects in her sightline), and instead jumps to the conclusion that, because she can't see him, he has disappeared.

Depending on the reader's interpretation of the story, the governess may seem suspiciously quick to trust her own perceptions, perhaps suggesting that she has a loose grip on reality. The statement "He was there or was not there: not there if I didn't see him" indicates the governess' certainty that the man is appearing to *her* in particular, thereby centering her own role in the narrative as more than a mere witness.

Chapter 5 Quotes

"The children?"
"I can't leave them now."
"You're afraid—?"
I spoke boldly. "I'm afraid of HIM."
Mrs. Grose's large face showed me, at this, for the first time, the faraway faint glimmer of a consciousness more acute: I somehow made out in it the delayed dawn of an idea I myself had not given her and that was as yet quite obscure to me.

Related Characters: The Governess, Mrs. Grose (speaker), Peter Quint, Miles, Flora

Related Themes:

Page Number: 311

Explanation and Analysis

The governess has described the man she has seen to Mrs. Grose, who is rather dismissive and says they should head to church. The governess protests, saying that she can't leave the children because she is afraid of the man. Mrs. Grose then seems to display a hint of recognition, indicating to that Mrs. Grose may know more than she has so far revealed (and indeed more than the governess knows). This mysterious sense of recognition advances the governess's coming suspicion that, despite the fact that the governess trusts and confides in Mrs. Grose, Mrs. Grose may be keeping secrets from her. Meanwhile, the governess's unwillingness to leave the children confirms her feeling of duty to protect them and her paranoia that the man she has seen intends to harm them.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"He was looking for someone else, you say—someone who was not you?"
"He was looking for little Miles." A portentous clearness now possessed me. "That's whom he was looking for."
"But how do you know?"
"I know, I know, I know!" My exaltation grew. "And *you* know, my dear!"

Related Characters: The Governess, Mrs. Grose (speaker), Peter Quint, Miles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

The governess has vowed to Mrs. Grose that she will approach her task of protecting the children with renewed vigour, and goes on to say that this is because she knows that the ghost of Peter Quint was "looking for" Miles. This moment certainly adds a disturbing element to the story, though––as this passage shows––it is not quite clear how the governess knows Quint is targeting Miles. As in many parts of the novel, she seems to be relying on a strong yet inexplicable sense of intuition.

This is significant, as it would have been unusual at the time for two women to be effectively running a household with no male supervision. Much of the governess and Mrs. Grose's distress can be read as anxiety over whether to trust their own instincts; this is reflected in the fact that the governess is constantly longing for the authoritative intervention of Miles and Flora's uncle. At the same time, this exchange reveals that the governess does strongly believe that both she andMrs. Grose know that the "innocent" Miles is in danger, emphasized by her exclamations "I know, I know, I know! ... And you know, my dear!"

"Oh, it wasn't *him*!" Mrs. Grose with emphasis declared. "It was Quint's own fancy. To play with him, I mean—to spoil him." She paused a moment; then she added: "Quint was much too free."
This gave me, straight from my vision of his face—*such* a face!—a sudden sickness of disgust. "Too free with *my* boy?"
"Too free with everyone!"

Related Characters: Mrs. Grose, The Governess (speaker), Miles, Peter Quint

Related Themes:

Page Number: 315

Explanation and Analysis

In response to the governess' suspicions that Quint's ghost is "looking for" Miles, Mrs. Grose confesses that, when he was alive, Quint was especially fond of Miles and liked "to spoil him." She then goes on to say that he was "much too free," a comment that horrifies the governess.

It is important to note that the use of euphemistic expression here leaves the true meaning of Mrs. Grose's words ambiguous. During the Victorian era, sexuality was often referred to with this kind of indirect language; at the same time, due to the strict social codes of the era, "much too free" could mean any number of transgressions. The governess's horror at the thought that Quint was "too free" with Miles suggests that she interprets Mrs. Grose as saying that Quint sexually molested Miles. However, Mrs. Grose's reply that Quint was too free with *everyone* again throws this interpretation into doubt, all while also hinting at the later revelation that Quint and Miss Jessel had a sexual relationship of their own.

❝ Suddenly, in these circumstances, I became aware that, on the other side of the Sea of Azof, we had an interested spectator…My heart had stood still for an instant with the wonder and terror of the question whether she too would see; and I held my breath while I waited for what a cry from her, what some sudden innocent sign either of interest or of alarm, would tell me. I waited, but nothing came…

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Flora, Miss Jessel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 320

Explanation and Analysis

The governess is outside by the lake with Flora, and she suddenly sees another person in the distance. This person is different from the ghost of Peter Quint, though it has appeared at a distance and is watching the governess and Flora in the exact same manner as Quint. Although the governess is terrified, it seems that Flora hasn't noticed the person; the governess waits for Flora's reaction, but Flora continues to act as if nothing is there.

This passage represents another example of the difficulty of assessing whether the ghosts are products of the governess' imagination or not. On the on hand, the fact that only the governess can see the ghosts seems to clearly indicate that they are all inside her head. At the same time, if the ghosts are real and have indeed "corrupted" Miles and Flora, it makes sense that Miles and Flora act as if they are not there. Once again, James ensures that evidence for one interpretation can just as easily be taken as evidence in favor of the other.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ "They *know*—it's too monstrous: they know, they know!"
"And what on earth—?" I felt her incredulity as she held me.
"Why, all that *we* know—and heaven knows what else besides!"
Then, as she released me, I made it out to her, made it out perhaps only now with full coherency even to myself. "Two hours ago, in the garden"—I could scarce articulate—"Flora *saw*!"
Mrs. Grose took it as she might have taken a blow in the stomach. "She has told you?" she panted.
"Not a word—that's the horror. She kept it to herself!"

Related Characters: Mrs. Grose, The Governess (speaker), Miles, Flora

Related Themes:

Page Number: 320-321

Explanation and Analysis

Having waited in vain for Flora to acknowledge the appearance of the ghost by the lake, the governess later tells Mrs. Grose what happened, emphasizing that she now believes that Miles and Flora *do* see the ghosts but pretend that nothing is there. Indeed, the governess suggests that Miles and Flora perhaps understand the situation far better than Mrs. Grose and she herself do (as indicated by the phrase "and heaven knows what else besides!"). The governess is horrified that Flora pretends not to see them, as this suggests that the ghosts have some kind of influence over the children.

Once again, it is very difficult to know whether or not to trust the governess here. She insists that she knows Flora saw the ghost, but again, this knowledge seems to be purely intuitive and not based on any evidence (it actually *contradicts* the evidence, as Flora didn't seem to see the ghost). This passage also significantly disrupts assumptions about the binaries between innocence and corruption and between truth and secrecy. The governess's revelation shifts the presumption that the children are innocent,

honest, and ignorant, while she and Mrs. Grose––as the adults and authority figures––possess disturbing knowledge that they must keep secret from the children. According to the governess's new beliefs, it is in fact the children who are keeping horrifying secrets from the adults, who remain innocently clueless about what is really going on.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ 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 a cynicism in preference to which I naturally preferred to abjure my judgment and, so far as might be, my agitation. I couldn't abjure for merely wanting to, but I could repeat to Mrs. Grose—as I did there, over and over, in the small hours—that with their voices in the air, their pressure on one's heart, and their fragrant faces against one's cheek, everything fell to the ground but their incapacity and their beauty.

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Mrs. Grose, Miles, Flora

Related Themes:

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

The governess has been questioning Mrs. Grose about Miles' relationship with Quint, trying to figure out if Miles is really as innocent and honest as he appears; Mrs. Grose has responded by admitting that Miles has been secretive about his time with Quint. The governess, disturbed, resolves not to assume Miles is lying, and once again contemplates the children's beauty and charm as evidence that they must be innocent.

This passage is typically ambiguous. On one level, it seems to suggest that the governess' obsession with the children's apparent innocence is naïve. She seems almost to fetishize their adorable looks, losing the ability to think rationally in the rapturous, sensual description of "their pressure on one's heart, and their fragrant faces against one's cheek." At the same time, it could be just as likely that Mrs. Grose is keeping secrets as opposed to Miles, and the governess's enduring commitment to protecting the children perhaps reveals her noble, loyal character.

Finally, the phrase "their pressure on one's heart" disturbingly foreshadows the final scene in the story, when the governess describes Miles's death by saying that "his little heart... had stopped."

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ You were looking for me out of the window?" I said. "You thought I might be walking in the grounds?"
"Well, you know, I thought someone was"—she never blanched as she smiled out that at me.
Oh, how I looked at her now! "And did you see anyone?"
"Ah, NO!" she returned, almost with the full privilege of childish inconsequence, resentfully, though with a long sweetness in her little drawl of the negative.
At that moment, in the state of my nerves, I absolutely believed she lied...

Related Characters: The Governess, Flora (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 336

Explanation and Analysis

During the night the governess has caught Flora hiding behind the window blind, and when asked what she was doing there, Flora responded that she was looking for the governess through the window. The governess, suspicious, asks if Flora saw anyone, and Flora responds in a sweet yet resentful "drawl," "Ah, NO!", leading the governess to believe she is lying. This is the first moment when the governess truly suspects either of the children of being anything less than purely innocent and honest (although at this point she still maintains a favorable view of Miles, eerily echoing Peter Quint's favoritism of the boy over Flora).

Note the difficulty in determining the tone of what Flora is saying here. The words she uses––"Ah, NO!"––are simple, and could be said in any number of ways. The governess at once describes her expression as privileged, "negative," and resentful––all suggesting that she is speaking with a kind of sneer, and is perhaps lying––while at the same time using the words "childish inconsequence," "sweetness," and a "little drawl," which suggest innocence. The ambiguity here makes it impossible to know for sure if Flora is lying, and also indicates that the binary between innocence and dishonesty is perhaps not as simple as we might presume.

Chapter 11 Quotes

He was gentleness itself, and while I wagged my head at him he stood there more than ever a little fairy prince. It was his brightness indeed that gave me a respite. Would it be so great if he were really going to tell me? "Well," he said at last, "just exactly in order that you should do this."
"Do what?"
"Think me—for a change—*bad*!" I shall never forget the sweetness and gaiety with which he brought out the word, nor how, on top of it, he bent forward and kissed me. It was practically the end of everything.

Related Characters: The Governess, Miles (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 342

Explanation and Analysis

The governess has questioned Miles about why he was outside, and he sweetly admits it was because he wanted her to think he was bad. He then kisses her, and she feels overwhelmed with emotion. This exchange is another example of the highly complex and ambiguous psychological interplay between the governess and the children. On one level, Miles behaves adorably, and it is fairly plausible that he would view making the governess think he was bad as some kind of trick or game. The governess herself certainly seems inclined toward this interpretation, again revealing her infatuation with Miles's resemblance to "a little fairy prince."

At the same time, if the reader believes that Miles and Flora are actually under the influence of the ghosts, then this passage can be read as an example of highly effective (and disturbing!) manipulation. Miles certainly seems to know exactly how to make the governess sympathize with him, and the governess's dramatic claim following his kiss ("It was practically the end of everything") may indicate the extent to which Miles is able to influence her emotional reactions.

Chapter 12 Quotes

"Why, of the very things that have delighted, fascinated, and yet, at bottom, as I now so strangely see, mystified and troubled me. Their more than earthly beauty, their absolutely unnatural goodness. It's a game," I went on; "it's a policy and a fraud!"
"On the part of little darlings—?"
"As yet mere lovely babies? Yes, mad as that seems!" The very act of bringing it out really helped me to trace it—follow it all up and piece it all together. "They haven't been good—they've only been absent. It has been easy to live with them, because they're simply leading a life of their own. They're not mine—they're not ours. They're his and they're hers!"
"Quint's and that woman's?"
"Quint's and that woman's. They want to get to them."

Related Characters: Mrs. Grose, The Governess (speaker), Miles, Flora, Peter Quint, Miss Jessel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 344

Explanation and Analysis

Here the governess confesses a major change of opinion to Mrs. Grose: she now believes that the children have been deliberately trying to seem innocent when in fact they have been corrupted by Quint and Miss Jessel. She says that this explains their extraordinary, "unnatural" sweetness and obedience, and she concludes that the children do not belong to the governess and Mrs. Grose, but to the two ghosts. This is a pivotal moment in the novel, the point when the governess's own innocence––manifested through her naïve insistence on the innocence of the children––suddenly falls away and she fully accepts her suspicion and paranoia.

This passage also makes clear that it is impossible for the governess to imagine that the children are independent, autonomous beings. She says that she thought they were good because they were obedient, but in fact they have just been "absent.. leading a life of their own." She then goes on to tell Mrs. Grose that the children are "not ours. They're his and they're hers!" This shows not only that, when it comes to the children, the governess imagines goodness as being the same as obedience, but also that she believes the children must either belong to her or to someone else––they cannot simply exist as their own people.

Chapter 13 Quotes

What it was most impossible to get rid of was the cruel idea that, whatever I had seen, Miles and Flora saw *more*—things terrible and unguessable and that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past. Such things naturally left on the surface, for the time, a chill which we vociferously denied that we felt…

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Miles, Flora

Related Themes:

Page Number: 350

Explanation and Analysis

The governess has been tormented by her conviction that Miles and Flora know she has also seen the ghosts, and almost raises the issue with them several times before deciding against it. In this passage she reflects on how disturbing it is to know that Miles and Flora have been corrupted and have seen "terrible and unguessable" things that even she does not know about. However, she also admits that the three of them still continue to act as if everything is fine.

Her words reflect the theme of deception and of the tension between exterior innocence and the dark, disturbing secrets that lie beneath. The governess's statement that "whatever I have seen, Miles and Flora saw more" represents a reversal in the natural position of adults and children, a narrative device typically used in gothic ghost stories that leads to ominous consequences.

Chapter 14 Quotes

I call it a revolution because I now see how, with the word he spoke, the curtain rose on the last act of my dreadful drama, and the catastrophe was precipitated. "Look here, my dear, you know," he charmingly said, "when in the world, please, am I going back to school?"
Transcribed here the speech sounds harmless enough, particularly as uttered in the sweet, high, casual pipe with which, at all interlocutors, but above all at his eternal governess, he threw off intonations as if he were tossing roses.

Related Characters: Miles, The Governess (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 352

Explanation and Analysis

While walking to church, Miles asks the governess when he will be going back to school. The governess confesses to the reader that his words might seem innocent when written down, but that she knows they indicate the imminent arrival of "the last act of my dreadful drama." Once again, the true meaning of Miles's words, as well as the tone with which he delivers them, remain ambiguous. The governess describes his voice as "sweet, high, casual," and yet she is utterly convinced that his question signals that something terrible will happen. Her use of theatrical language ("the curtain rose on the last act of my dreadful drama") also conveys the governess' self-conscious awareness of the reader and of her own role as the storyteller.

Dark as midnight in her black dress, her haggard beauty and her unutterable woe, she had looked at me long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers. While these instants lasted, indeed, I had the extraordinary chill of feeling that it was I who was the intruder. It was as a wild protest against it that, actually addressing her—"You terrible, miserable woman!"—I heard myself break into a sound that, by the open door, rang through the long passage and the empty house. 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.

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Miss Jessel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 358

Explanation and Analysis

The governess, shaken by her conversation with Miles, has returned to Bly while Mrs. Grose and the children remain at church. There she finds Miss Jessel sat at the governess's own writing table and screams at her, at which point Miss Jessel looks at her and then disappears. This passage is a perfect example of the ambiguity over whether the ghosts are real or not. If we read *The Turn of the Screw* as a ghost story, then the governess's description conjures a typical gothic ghost figure: "dark as midnight," hauntingly beautiful, evoking a "chill" in those around her.

On the other hand, it is also very possible to interpret this passage as an exploration of the governess's psyche, and read her description of Miss Jessel as representing her inner turmoil. After all, the governess sees Miss Jessel sitting at her table, and then gets the sudden feeling that "it was I who was the intruder." We might therefore interpret

the vision of Miss Jessel as a manifestation of the governess's insecurities about her position and authority. Finally, the fact that after the governess has "recovered herself... there was nothing in the room" does perhaps indicate that Miss Jessel was a projection of the governess's mind, and when she "recovers," even she is able to recognize this.

Chapter 17 Quotes

"Dear little Miles, dear little Miles, if you KNEW how I want to help you! It's only that, it's nothing but that, and I'd rather die than give you a pain or do you a wrong—I'd rather die than hurt a hair of you. Dear little Miles"—oh, I brought it out now even if I *should* go too far—"I just want you to help me to save you!"

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Miles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 365

Explanation and Analysis

The governess and Miles have been talking in his bedroom. During the course of their conversation, Miles has shown resistance to the way the governess has been taking care of him, saying that he wants to go back to school or at least to speak with his uncle. The governess grows increasingly hysterical, eventually falling to her knees and exclaiming that she just wants Miles to let her save him. She announces that she'd "rather die than hurt a hair of you," ironically foreshadowing the ending of the novel when she (arguably) squeezes him to death.

Indeed, this entire passage can be read as prefiguring the final scene of the novel, an ominous indication that the governess's relationship with Miles has become inappropriately intense and volatile. At the same time, if we interpret the ghosts as being real, then Miles's conflict with the governess symbolizes Quint's attempt to sever their relationship so that Quint can have Miles all to himself. Either way, the fact that neither Miles nor the governess discuss Quint openly clearly creates an unbearable level of tension between them, suggesting that repression and secrecy lead to chaotic and terrible consequences.

"She's with *her*?"

"She's with *her*!" I declared. "We must find them."

My hand was on my friend's arm, but she failed for the moment, confronted with such an account of the matter, to respond to my pressure. She communed, on the contrary, on the spot, with her uneasiness. "And where's Master Miles?"

"Oh, *he's* with Quint. They're in the schoolroom."

"Lord, miss!" My view, I was myself aware—and therefore I suppose my tone—had never yet reached so calm an assurance. "The trick's played," I went on; "they've successfully worked their plan. He found the most divine little way to keep me quiet while she went off."

"'Divine'?" Mrs. Grose bewilderedly echoed.

Related Characters: The Governess, Mrs. Grose (speaker), Miles, Flora, Peter Quint, Miss Jessel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 368

Explanation and Analysis

Miles has been playing the piano for the governess, during which time Flora disappeared. The governess, having realized this, goes to Mrs. Grose and insists that they find Flora, who the governess is convinced is with Miss Jessel. When Mrs. Grose asks where Miles is, the governess tells her he must be with Quint and that the piano playing was a "trick" to distract her while Flora ran off with Miss Jessel.It is clear at this point that, like the children, Mrs. Grose is alarmed at the governess's behavior. Whether we interpret the ghosts as real or not, it is clear that the governess's belief in their influence over the children is leading her into a frenzy, which in turn isolates her from those around her.

Even at this crazed and climactic moment, the governess still seems fixated on the binary between innocence and corruption. She calls Miles's piano playing a "divine little way to keep me quiet." The use of the word "divine"––emphasized by Mrs. Grose's bewildered repetition––shows that the governess retains her obsession with the children's unearthly purity, even while she is accusing them of conspiring against her.

Chapter 20 Quotes

Miss Jessel stood before us on the opposite bank exactly as she had stood the other time, and I remember, strangely, as the first feeling now produced in me, my thrill of joy at having brought on a proof. She was there, and I was justified; she was there, and I was neither cruel nor mad. She was there for poor scared Mrs. Grose, but she was there most for Flora…

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Mrs. Grose, Flora, Miss Jessel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 373

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Grose and the governess have found Flora outside by the lake, and as they stand there the governess spots Miss Jessel again, in the same position as when the governess saw her for the first time. Note that this is the first occasion that one of the ghosts has appeared in the presence of another adult, and the governess feels overjoyed at the "proof" that they are real. While this might seem like a perverse emotional reaction, it reveals that the governess' feelings of isolation and self-doubt have begun to scare her even more than the existence of the ghosts in the first place. Regardless of whether the reader believes that the ghosts are real, in this part of the novel James suggests that psychological torment and the possibility of madness can be far more frightening than supernatural horror.

Of course, the governess's immediate feeling of relief is ironic, as after this passage Mrs. Grose reveals that she did*not* see the ghost of Miss Jessel. Once again, this can be interpreted in a number of ways; either as proof that the ghosts are the governess's hallucinations, or that they deliberately conceal themselves from Mrs. Grose in order to make the governess seem mad, or that they appear to particular people at particular times for some other reason. Indeed, the governess herself emphasizes the idea that the ghosts do not simply appear but reveal themselves to individuals with her statement that, "She was there for poor scared Mrs. Grose, but she was there most for Flora."

❝ "I don't know what you mean. I see nobody. I see nothing. I never *have*. I think you're cruel. I don't like you!" Then, after this deliverance, which might have been that of a vulgarly pert little girl in the street, she hugged Mrs. Grose more closely and buried in her skirts the dreadful little face. In this position she produced an almost furious wail. "Take me away, take me away—oh, take me away from *her*!"

Related Characters: Flora, The Governess (speaker), Mrs. Grose

Related Themes:

Page Number: 375

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs. Grose has admitted that she does not see Miss Jessel, Flora agrees, saying she has "never" seen anyone or anything and accusing the governess of being cruel. She then demands that Mrs. Grose take her away. Flora's words alarm the governess, not only because they are so directly accusatory but because they also challenge the governess's presumptions about the binaries of innocence and evil.

Throughout the novel, the governess has been fixated on the idea that the children are innocent and pure, that Quint and Miss Jessel are evil, and that she––the governess––is the children's protector and is therefore good. However, this exchange majorly subverts these beliefs, suggesting that if Quint and Miss Jessel don't exist, then it is the governess herself who is having a cruel, corrupting effect on the children. Note that this subversion is also evident in the way the governess describes Flora here, no longer using words associated with magical innocence and beauty, but instead calling her "vulgarly pert" and "dreadful." The fact that the governess's opinion reverses so suddenly suggests that the appearance of innocence can be highly unstable and misleading.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ Here at present I felt afresh—for I had felt it again and again—how my equilibrium depended on the success of my rigid will, the will to shut my eyes as tight as possible to the truth that what I had to deal with was, revoltingly, against nature. I could only get on at all by taking "nature" into my confidence and my account, by treating my monstrous ordeal as a push in a direction unusual, of course, and unpleasant, but demanding, after all, for a fair front, only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue.

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 385

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Grose and Flora have now left Bly, and the governess is aware that the rest of the staff know about her outburst and her belief in the ghosts. She clearly feels rattled, and resolves that the only way to maintain her composure is to pretend as though she is not dealing with anything supernatural and that her ordeal is nothing out of the ordinary. Of course, if the ghosts are real then this is a fairly admirable (and no doubt necessary) course of action, and

can be seen as an example of the governess's maturity and common sense.

On the other hand, the tactic of repressing what is really happening below an exterior of normalcy has clearly led to terrible consequences thus far. The governess's determination to "shut my eyes as tight as possible to the truth" sounds irresponsible and deluded, despite her belief that it is the rational course of action. It can also be taken as evidence that the ghosts really are all in her head, as she seems suspiciously convinced of her ability to impact reality using the power of her mind alone.

Finally, note that the title of the novel is once again mentioned at the end of this passage. In this instance, "turn of the screw" refers to the need for the governess to "tighten up" her composure and behave sensibly.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ This inference grew in a few minutes to sharp intensity and seemed bound up with the direct perception that it was positively *he* who was. The frames and squares of the great window were a kind of image, for him, of a kind of failure. I felt that I saw him, at any rate, shut in or shut out. He was admirable, but not comfortable: I took it in with a throb of hope. Wasn't he looking, through the haunted pane, for something he couldn't see?

Related Characters: The Governess (speaker), Miles

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 387

Explanation and Analysis

Miles and the governess are now alone at Bly, and the governess has watched Miles stare out the window as if looking for something. She has a sudden revelation that Miles has not actually seen the ghosts this whole time (though he has perhaps sensed their existence). This comes as a relief, as she realizes that Miles has not been corrupted by the ghosts as she had feared. Once again, she seems him as innocent, a perception that alleviates much of her distress.

The language used in this passage is complex and contradictory, typical of James's enigmatic prose style. The governess sees Miles as "shut in or shut out," an observation that emphasizes the theme of exterior vs. interior and conveys the importance of the novel's idea of belonging. She imagines that Miles is "looking, through the haunted pane, for something he couldn't see," an assumption that, once again, she derives not from evidence but merely through intuition. It is thus typically difficult to assess the governess's reliability here. Is the window pane really haunted? Is Miles really searching for something, or is he simply looking out the window and daydreaming? It seems plausible that the governess is projecting her own thoughts and feelings onto Miles; regardless of whether the ghosts are real, her strong desire to see him as innocent is clearly inextricable from her own wish to feel responsible and noble as his protector.

❝ "It's he?"

I was so determined to have all my proof that I flashed into ice to challenge him. "Whom do you mean by 'he'?"

"Peter Quint—you devil!" His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. "*Where*?"

..."What does he matter now, my own?—what will he EVER matter? I have you," I launched at the beast, "but he has lost you forever!" Then, for the demonstration of my work, "There, *there*!" I said to Miles.

But he had already jerked straight round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day. With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss...We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped.

Related Characters: The Governess, Miles (speaker), Peter Quint

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 395

Explanation and Analysis

The novel's dramatic conclusion is a masterpiece of creepiness and ambiguity. Miles has confessed that he stole the letter the governess wrote to his uncle, and admits that he was expelled from school for "saying things." Meanwhile, the governess has seen Quint at the window. At first Miles seems confused by what she has seen, referring to it with female pronouns, but then he cries out "Peter Quint--you devil!" It is difficult to determine exactly what happens next, but the novel's conclusion is definite: Miles' heart has stopped, and he is dead.

One way to interpret the ending of the novel is as a final piece of evidence that the ghosts are real and that Quint *did* corrupt Miles. The fact that Miles shouts Quint's name and seems to expect to see him indicates that Miles believes

he is there. It is possible that Miles' heart stops in fright, or because Quint kills him, or because he cannot survive the governess seizing him from Quint's possession (indeed, this is arguably conveyed by the use of the word "dispossessed").

Another interpretation reads Miles's fright as being directed at the governess and her frantic behavior. It is possible that Miles's cry "you devil!" is in fact directed at the governess. The governess's repetition of "the quiet day" perhaps suggests that there is indeed no one else there but the two of them. According to this interpretation, it is the governess herself who kills Miles––either by frightening him or by smothering him so tightly that he suffocates. Indeed, this would explain how she knows that his heart has stopped.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

An unnamed narrator describes a party he attended one Christmas Eve at which the partygoers had gathered to tell "strange tales" (ghost stories). An attendee named Griffin tells the guests a story in which a ghost visits a young boy, and the listeners are all especially shocked by Griffin's story's inclusion of children in the story of a ghost visitation. This prompts a second attendee, Douglas, to bring up a story he knows in which two children are visited. He describes this inclusion of a second child as his story's "turn of the screw."

The atmosphere set here is deliberately eerie and tense—it is a winter night, the house is described as old and—and it serves to set the stage for the atmosphere that will be sustained throughout the book. The listeners' shock at hearing that there will be not one, but two children visited by ghosts in Douglas's story touches upon the tangled relationship between youth and innocence later explored in this book.

Douglas has access to the story's original manuscript, which was written by the governess who was taking care of the two visited children. The governess had also been Douglas's own sister's governess, and from his description of her an attendee of the party named Mrs. Griffin deduces that Douglas likely was in love with her. Douglas announces to the partygoers that he will send his servant to retrieve the manuscript, if they are willing to wait in order to hear him read them the story. The attendees excitedly agree to await the arrival of the manuscript, and when it arrives the next day they meet to hear Douglas's reading.

The listeners are drawn to Douglas's story because he knew the governess personally, and he has access to the original manuscript. This is significant because it makes Douglas's story—within the context of the party—not just a story but rather the truth, which makes Douglas's telling more powerful and exciting for the listeners at the party. Storytelling is becoming a strong presence here rather than a passive, entertaining element of the party.

Douglas gives his listeners some background information about the governess. The youngest daughter of a poor country parson, she had read of the position in an advertisement. She went to London where she met the children's wealthy uncle who'd become their guardian upon the death of his younger brother, their father. Facing difficulty taking care of the children (named Miles and Flora), this wealthy uncle sent them to his country home, an estate called Bly, where they lived and were taken care of by an "excellent woman" named Mrs. Grose, who was still at Bly, and a recently deceased governess (the circumstances of whose death Douglas does not explain). With this background information now provided, Douglas begins reading the manuscript to the partygoers.

The governess's backstory (her underprivileged upbringing) sets her up as someone likely to be impressed (and therefore potentially deceived) by the uncle's lavish estate. Here we also find out the extent to which the children have been abandoned or left behind by the adults in their life: once by their parents, once by their uncle, and finally by the recently deceased governess. This sets them up as the victims they'll later be portrayed to be.

CHAPTER 1

The governess's story begins with her description of her journey to Bly. She mentions the mixed feelings she was then experiencing: She thought that she may have made a mistake by committing to this somewhat peculiar arrangement, but she is nonetheless excited to begin this new stage in her life. Her worries are later relieved when she arrives at Bly, which she says struck her initially as a beautiful home.

The governess is comforted by Bly's impressive exterior. The estate's beauty calms her, but her mood change from nervous and uncertain to confident and excited comes across in the text as perhaps too quick to be permanent. Bly is set up here as a potentially deceptively beautiful place.

Mrs. Grose informs the governess that Miles will arrive in a couple days by the same carriage the governess herself rode in on. The governess says she would like to go, with Flora, to the carriage's pick-up point, so that she may welcome Miles and introduce herself to him. Mrs. Grose enthusiastically agrees to this idea, and so a plan is made to meet Miles.

The governess has quickly developed a close relationship with Flora and Mrs. Grose here. She seems excited to dive into her responsibilities, and her enthusiasm is warmly received by Mrs. Grose and Flora.

The Governess spends her second day at Bly getting to know Flora. They play outside for some time and eventually the governess asks Flora to take her on a tour of Bly. Flora agrees happily and shows the governess the place "step by step and room by room and secret by secret." The governess deduces from this tour that Flora thinks her home to be a place full of wonder and a kind of fairytale magic.

The governess has already decided here that Flora's innocence is genuine and one of her defining characteristics. She sees Flora's appreciation for the estate as an endearing, youthful, innocent fantasy. As the story continues the governess will continue to see the estate as a place of magic and secrets, but of a darker sort. And she will come to see Flora's openness as a mask used to hide deeper truths.


CHAPTER 2

The governess reveals that on her second evening at Bly she had received from the children's uncle a letter forwarded from the head-master at Miles's school. He hadn't yet opened the letter, and requested that the governess not bring up with him whatever business happened to be contained in the letter. Much to the governess's dismay, the letter announced that Miles had been expelled from his school, but it offered no explanation for why that was the case.

It is interesting that, even though the governess received the letter announcing Miles's expulsion on her first night at Bly, she withholds this information from the reader until now. The motives for this are unclear, though it is our first encounter with the secrecy and holding back that will occur frequently in the book.

The governess confides in Mrs. Grose about the announcement of Miles's expulsion, and she seeks from Mrs. Grose an explanation. Mrs. Grose comes to Miles's defense, saying she cannot imagine what he could have done, since he is by all appearances an impeccably behaved "young gentleman." The governess asks whether or not Mrs. Grose has ever known Miles to misbehave, and she replies that though he has misbehaved occasionally, that's for the better, since no boy should always be perfect.

Mrs. Grose's reluctance to speak honestly with the governess about Miles's behavior is a first glimpse at the secrecy that later becomes such a destructive force between these two caregivers. Mrs. Grose's refusal to criticize Miles is likely a function of the belief that children, like Miles, are always to be understood as innocent.


The next day is the day of Miles's arrival. Before leaving to meet Miles, the governess asks Mrs. Grose what happened to the previous governess. Mrs. Grose replies that she does not know exactly what happened. She says only that one day the old governess left, apparently having fallen ill, and not long thereafter she heard from the children's uncle that the previous governess had died. The governess asks, further, whether or not the previous governess had ever seen anything to be worried about in Miles. Mrs. Grose replies that, no, the previous governess had never mentioned anything like that, at least not directly to her.

Here is further evidence of the secrecy that is going to be developed between the governess and Mrs. Grose, especially in matters regarding the children's behavior and their presumed innocence. The previous governess's unexplained disappearance hints at the supernatural atmosphere that will soon be introduced into the governess's story. Though it's also worth noting that the unexplained disappearance may have a perfectly normal explanation, but because it isn't explained may play in the governess's mind as something sinister and speaking to the supernatural. Put differently, it's never clear if the governess is perceiving supernatural events that suffuse Bly, or if the governess, based on the past history and things she doesn't know, is imagining them.

CHAPTER 3

The governess picks up Miles and when she sees him she is impressed by what she calls his "incredible beauty." When she returns to Bly she immediately discusses with Mrs. Grose how impressed she is by him, and says that she cannot now believe that he was expelled.

The governess's early infatuation with Miles is another example of her predilection to be easily overtaken by appearances, especially appearances of beauty and youthful innocence. Here she sees his beauty and seeming innocence as something that makes the prospect of him doing something bad enough to get expelled seem impossible.

The governess reminisces on her first few weeks at Bly. She says they were the first time in her life when she had known "space and air and freedom": she taught the children their lessons, and lived care-free and happily. But she then concludes this reminiscence by saying that the happiness and calm was, in retrospect, something more like a quiet before a storm—or, in her words, "that hush in which something gathers or crouches."

The governess's reminiscence provides an important, early insight into the tension between the appearances of calm and innocence and the realities of darkness and ugliness that lurk beneath those appearances. She makes it clear in such passages that she now—while writing the story—knows something that she did not know then, but she does not explicitly say what.

The chapter concludes with the governess's description of an unexpected encounter with a man—a stranger—at Bly. She says that while out for an evening stroll, she looked up at one of the house's two towers, and saw a man looking down at her. They make eye-contact, and it is clear to her that he has seen her and that he knows she can see him, but they are too far apart to call out to each other and be heard. Because this man isn't wearing a hat, he has about him an air of casual familiarity, and so the governess believes there is someone living in the house whom she does not know.

The governess did not know it yet, but this is her first glimpse of the ghost of Peter Quint. The feeling she has seeing him—a combination of disbelief and fear—and her inability to communicate with this man sets the stage for later encounters with the ghosts. In each encounter she will feel the force of the presence of these strangers, but who they are and what they want will remain out of her reach.

CHAPTER 4

After seeing the strange man up in the tower, the governess returns into the home and sees Mrs. Grose in the hall. She decides not to say anything to Mrs. Grose about the event, though, and she hurries up into her room.

The governess's reluctance to talk with Mrs. Grose about her encounter with the strange man indicates the beginning of the gap of secrecy that will later grow between the two.

The governess describes her developing relationship with the children. She says that she is both developing an intimate familiarity with them and also finding in them "constant surprises" (though she does not explain what those surprises are in any detail). She mentions that Miles's behavior is so consistently kind that the cause of his expulsion from school is pushed into "deep obscurity"—she cannot imagine that there was anything cruel or evil about him.

The governess becomes more confused by Miles's outward appearance of innocence. His outward appearance is so persuasive that the doubts she had about his behavior are practically erased. But it is important to note that she calls this a progression into "obscurity": in hindsight, she sees Mile's behavior as a purposeful effort at deception, rather than the development of authentic trust between the two of them.

The chapter finishes with the governess's description of another encounter with the strange man. While on her way out of the home to go to church with Mrs. Grose and the children, she remembers that she left her gloves inside. While in the room where she went to retrieve her gloves, she sees through the **window** the man, staring "deep and hard" into her eyes. She runs outside to see if she can catch the man, but by the time she's outside the man had left. It was as if he had vanished: she is convinced that the dense shrubbery isn't concealing him. When she looked through the window, back into the room where she had stood, she saw Mrs. Grose standing where she had stood moments before.

The governess's second encounter with Quint's ghost is now at eye-level, so she is more struck by the man this time than she was before. Her sense now seems to be that this man poses some kind of threat, which explains her quick reaction to pursue him outside. Her pursuit of the ghost also attests to her strong belief that protecting the children is her role and her commitment to fulfilling that role.

CHAPTER 5

Having seen the governess standing outside the house, Mrs. Grose goes outside and asks the governess what had left her so shaken. The governess confides in Mrs. Grose, telling her about her most recent encounter with this strange man, and about the encounter when she saw him up in the tower.

This is the first of many encounters between Mrs. Grose and the governess in which the two seem to develop together a sense of trust and confidence.

The governess describes the man to Mrs. Grose. She tells her that he was not wearing a hat, had red hair and sharp eyes, and that his handsomeness suggested that he was a gentleman. Mrs. Grose concludes that the man she described was Peter Quint, who was once the valet for the children's uncle, who had stayed behind after the uncle left and was put in charge of the house. Mrs. Grose then adds that Peter Quint had died.

The governess's description of the man and her conclusion that he was a gentleman—something she bases only on his handsome appearance—is an instance of appearances indicating a person's status and character. Mrs. Grose's proclamation that the governess has seen a dead man introduces explicitly the supernatural into the story.

CHAPTER 6

The governess describes her decision to begin pursuing her position as the children's caretaker more seriously, almost as a kind of call-to-arms. With Mrs. Grose as her confidante, she resolves to protect the children from what her encounters with Quint led her to believe was a threatening environment.

The governess expresses in this instance her firm belief that the children are innocent and require her protection, but neither of these opinions—that they are innocent, that they need her—seem grounded in anything but her own fears.

The narrative returns to the governess's conversation with Mrs. Grose about her encounters with Quint. At the end of the conversation, the governess mentions that she believes Quint had been looking for Miles. Hearing this, Mrs. Grose mentions that Quint had been "too free" with everyone at Bly, including the boy, and that she had been afraid of what Quint—whom she calls a "clever" and "deep" man—was capable of doing.

The governess's conversation with Mrs. Grose enforces her suspicion that the children are in danger at Bly. Mrs. Grose's ambiguous phrasing of Quint's behavior heightens the tension of this moment, and the governess's anxiety is heightened by what she considers to be Mrs. Grose's secrecy.

A later scene is described in which the governess and Flora venture together outside. While watching Flora play beside a lake, the governess spots another visitor staring at the two of them. The governess looks to Flora, to see if she notices the visitor, but she does not seem to see what the governess has seen.

This is the first time the governess witnesses one of these "visitors"—this time someone new—while in the company of another person. The visitor is in Flora's line of sight, but she seems not to notice, which calls into question the reality of this new presence.

CHAPTER 7

The narrative continues to the afternoon following this lakeside encounter with the new visitor. The governess tells Mrs. Grose that she believes the children see the visitors but are not telling her about their encounters with them. She is convinced that Flora saw the ghost by the lake, but that for some reason she stayed quiet about what she'd seen.

The governess's suspicion that Flora and Miles could see the visitors shows that her impression of these children as innocent of any flaws is shifting. Earlier she saw their seeming innocence as making any bad behavior on their part impossible to conceive. Now, with Flora, she sees her seeming "innocence" as a mask to hide non-innocent behavior.But it is unclear whether the governess has misread the situation: nobody's corroborated her visions of these ghosts.

The governess describes the visitor she'd seen to Mrs. Grose. She says she was an "infamous" looking woman dressed in black, and Mrs. Grose concludes that she was Miss Jessel, the children's former governess. Mrs. Grose calls Miss Jessel a dubious character, and she says that Quint "did what he wished" with her, which the governess interprets to mean that the two had had a sexual relationship. To the governess's horror and dismay, Mrs. Grose says that in fact Quint "did what he wished" with everyone at Bly, not only with Miss Jessel. This causes the governess to break down, considering herself as she does the children's protector.

The governess's strong reaction to Mrs. Grose's description of the relationship between Quint, Miss Jessel, and Bly, seems excessive. Mrs. Grose never explicitly says that anything sexual or threatening had taken place between Quint, Miss Jessel, and the children, but the governess reads this into Mrs. Grose's account. This suggests that the governess's zealous approach to protecting the children may be distorting her perception of reality. It is also worth noting how common perception is that sexuality corrupts innocence.

CHAPTER 8

The narrative continues to describe the time following the governess's conversation with Mrs. Grose. The governess decides to continue on with her duties, to plow ahead despite her recent fears and doubts; she still considers herself the sole protector of these children. The governess eventually meets with Flora again, and Flora's tenderness causes her to feel guilty at having suspected her of any kind of secrecy or foul play.

This an important instance of the ambiguities introduced by the supernatural: the governess's renewed trust in Flora leads her to admit she may have been the only one to see Miss Jessel. This sudden shift implies that perhaps Miss Jessel wasn't there at all.

Later, the governess questions Mrs. Grose, hoping to draw out of her when, if ever, Mrs. Grose had thought Miles had been badly behaved. The governess's aggressive questioning causes Mrs. Grose to say that Miles had been secretive about the time he had spent with Quint. The governess continues to prod, and she infers from Mrs. Grose's frazzled description of Miles's secrecy that Miles had withheld information he'd gathered about the relationship between Miss Jessel and Quint. The chapter concludes with Mrs. Grose asking the governess not to assume Miles is a liar, and the governess says she'll wait for firsthand evidence to decide either way.

The conclusion that the governess draws from the story her aggressive examination of Mrs. Grose yields—that Miles actively lied about his time with Quint—may not be what Mrs. Grose had intended to disclose about Miles's "bad" behavior, but rather the result of the governess's intimidating and intense questioning. On the other hand, Mrs. Grose may be trying to conceal some truth she knows about Miles, in which case the governess's interpretation may be justified. Both options seem equally possible.

CHAPTER 9

The governess reflects on the days following her conversation with Mrs. Grose. Her time spent with the children returned again to the calm and carefree atmosphere she had experienced with them before. The children begin to seem "preternaturally fond of her", and she finds herself yet again wondering how it could be possible that Miles had been expelled from his school. Despite all this, though, she wonders whether or not the children are being excessively kind in order to conceal some secret they share and are trying to keep from her.

This moment in the story is another example of the quick return to normalcy that follows the governess's intense suspicions and doubts about the children's innocence, but it also highlights how sometimes even in these periods of relative calm, the governess tends to perceive some insidious truth concealed by the appearance of innocence. In this way, the governess starts to see innocence as a kind of proof of corruption beneath.

After this period of reflection, the narrative moves forward to the night of the governess's third encounter with Quint. One night, while reading in her room—a room she shares with Flora—she perceives in the hallway outside something "undefinably astir" in the house. She sees the curtain around Flora's bed is closed, and assumes she is safe. Shortly after exiting her room, she sees Quint standing on a landing on the stairs below. He fixes his eyes on her exactly as he had before, and this time she is certain that he is dangerous. She stands her ground, unafraid, and the silence between them is disturbingly unnatural. She says that were the moment any longer, she may have doubted "whether or not even *I* were in life."

The governess's reaction to her encounter with Quint—her fearlessness—challenges the idea that she sees these figures out of some kind of fear-induced paranoia. Her courageous encounter with the supernatural is significant: she no longer dreads the supernatural presences, and she now sees them as a kind of obstacle, a challenge to overcome. Her final comment suggests that she sees herself as existing almost on the same plane as these ghosts: the ghosts attempting to corrupt the children, and the governess attempting to save their innocence.

CHAPTER 10

The governess returns to her room after her encounter with Quint. She is terrified to notice that Flora's bed is now empty—the curtain around it now drawn—and when she rushes to her bed to search for her, Flora emerges from behind the **window's** blind. The governess, now upset, asks why she had hidden there. Flora replies that she had noticed the governess had gone missing, so she was looking out the window to see if she'd gone outside. The governess thinks Flora is lying, so she asks why Flora had drawn the curtain around her bed, making it seem like she'd gone to sleep. Flora flashes her "divine smile" and says because she didn't want to frighten the governess.

The governess's interaction with Flora serves as in important development in their relationship. The governess will continue to suspect that Flora's "divine smile" and other expressions of innocence conceal some ulterior motive. But it really isn't clear if Flora was hiding or closing the curtain around her for just the reason she said. The governess believes Flora was looking at Miss Jessel, though this is an unverifiable assumption—we only have the governess's side of the story.

Suspicious of Flora now, the governess stays up at night trying to catch the girl sneaking out of bed again. During these nights, she occasionally leaves the room they share to explore the area of the house where she had seen Quint. She does not see Quint again in the home, but she does encounter Miss Jessel again, seated on the steps of the home with her head in her hands. Miss Jessel vanishes though before the two can make eye contact.

The governess's sleepless nights watching out for Flora's activity show us an ever more alert and rigid governess. Her description of her encounter with Miss Jessel lacks the emotional charge she had felt when she first encountered these ghosts. She has shifted from scared onlooker to a kind of severe security guard.

On a night when she feels particularly tired, the governess allows herself to fall into a deep sleep. She awakes suddenly when she realizes a light she left burning had been blown out. She notices that Flora left her bed to look out the window again, and she assumes the girl blew out the light. The governess says she now knows Flora can see Miss Jessel down below. To confirm this, she leaves to look out from a different **window**, but instead of seeing Miss Jessel, she is horrified to see Miles outside.

The governess is now certain that Flora can see Miss Jessel. Her reliability as a narrator is undermined though when she only sees Miles down below. What Flora actually sees remains a mystery here. The governess's horror at seeing Miles mirrors her horror of seeing the ghosts, as if the two now overlap somehow in her mind, as if Miles being outside is a corroboration of her belief of his hiding something corrupted beneath his innocent exterior.

CHAPTER 11

The day after seeing Miles out on the lawn, the governess speaks privately with Mrs. Grose about what had happened. Before describing what she says to Mrs. Grose, though, the governess spends time describing how willingly Mrs. Grose would always listen to what she had to say. The governess says she recognized in Mrs. Grose the recognition of the governess's "superiority".

The governess highlights here an important aspect of her relationship with Mrs. Grose. Throughout the book Mrs. Grose goes along with what the governess says, apparently unquestioningly. This does not imply a trusting relationship, though—only a one-sided relationship. It may be that this one-sidedness is due to Mrs. Grose's sense of the governess's superiority; or it may be that Mrs. Grose is withholding her true thoughts.

The governess then describes what she says to Mrs. Grose about her encounter with Miles. After seeing him out on the lawn, the governess went outside to the terrace. Miles then came to meet her on the terrace, and the two wordlessly went inside. The governess says she saw this as an opportunity to challenge Miles's presentation of himself as an always well-behaved young gentleman. But she mentions that she wanted to approach the subject lightly, in a way that was "thoroughly kind and merciful."

The governess sees this as an opportunity to make Miles confess that his youthful and innocent external appearance is, at least to a certain degree, a deception. But the governess's desire to be kind and merciful shows that, even when confronted with evidence, she cannot treat Miles as anything but an innocent thing to be protected.

In response to the governess's question about why Miles had been outside, Miles said that he wanted her to think of him as "bad." He said "bad" cheerfully, and after his confession he leaned in to kiss the governess. The governess embraced him, suppressing the urge to cry. Finally, Miles admits that he and Flora had conspired to set up this whole scenario: she stood looking out the window so that the governess would also look out and see Miles standing there. At the end of their conversation, the two embraced, and the governess calls the whole scenario a "joke."

This scene is an important example of the kinds of ambiguities that make the characterization of these children so tricky. It isn't clear here how "bad" Miles wanted to seem, nor is it clear why he wanted to seem bad. The governess treats him like an innocent child here when she embraces him, but this treatment is inconsistent with her occasional suspicions that he is not so innocent as he seems.

CHAPTER 12

After finishing her description of her night with the children, the governess tells Mrs. Grose she believes the two children were meeting secretly with the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel. She tells Mrs. Grose that the children only seemed to be well-behaved and obedient—their goodness and innocence is "a policy and a fraud." She says she believes the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel were encouraging the children to continue with the unspecified "evils" in which they had all partaken when the two were still alive and at Bly.

In this section the governess's suspicion that the children are not truly innocent, but are somehow corrupted by Quint and Jessel, clearly escalates. Now the governess explicitly describes their innocence as a kind of mask for the "evils" they are actually practicing. Putting all this another way: the governess still sees it as her duty to save the children's innocence, but she sees herself as saving them from themselves as well as the two ghosts.

Mrs. Grose immediately accepts the governess's evaluation of the situation, and, further, suggests that they must tell the children's uncle right away and have the children removed from the estate. The governess refuses, and when Mrs. Grose says that she will then contact the uncle herself, the governess threatens to leave the estate. She is strongly committed to sorting out this situation on her own.

Mrs. Grose's readiness to accept the governess's suspicions makes Mrs. Grose seem like a kind of enabler of the governess's suspicions of the children. Mrs. Grose hasn't seen the ghosts, but she fears them as a threat. Because Mrs. Grose is the governess's only confidante, the governess's suspicions are difficult to evaluate. At the same time, the governess wants to look competent in her job and is overawed by the rich uncle, and so she refuses to get help or any other outside perspective.

CHAPTER 13

The governess divulges to the reader the thoughts that were going through her head in the months following her realization that the Miles and Flora were conspiring against her. She believes the children know that she had seen Quint and Miss Jessel, and she believes further that the children know that she's aware of their visits with the two ghosts. Whenever she tries to bring up the matter with the children, though, she stops short and instead discusses her own life with them. The governess begins to suspect that the children see the visitors when she does not, even when they are in the same room together. But—she thinks—they deliberately keep silent.

The governess's fear for the children's safety here has transformed into a fear that they keep secrets from her about the time they spend with Miss Jessel and Quint. Yet her still lingering belief that they are innocent inhibits her ability to confront them honestly though, so her suspicions remain without substance. She seems to see them as both corrupt and innocent simultaneously.

Miles and Flora eventually mention to the governess their concern that they had not heard from their uncle in a long time. The governess says she sees this as an opportunity to reconnect with the children, so she suggests to them that they write letters to him. She tells the children that their uncle probably would not respond, so she encourages them to write them as "literary exercises." She says that she kept the letters, and still has them in her possession. The chapter concludes with her saying she never lost patience with the children.

It is significant that the governess keeps the letters because this shows that she increasingly believes herself to be the only person who can protect the children, and this belief eventually intensifies to become a kind of overbearing and stifling attitude toward the children.

CHAPTER 14

The governess moves on to describe a particularly important interaction she has with Miles. While walking to church one day, Miles asks the governess when he'll be going back to school. The governess says she detects some secondary motive in his asking—he seems unusually cheerful and polite, even for him. It seems to her as if some significant change has taken place between them, though she does not specify the nature of the change.

The governess continues here to express her belief that Miles's outward expressions of innocence—such as his innocently expressed desire to go back to school—conceals insidious motives. Once she gets into this way of thinking, it becomes self-sustaining: every innocent action Miles makes becomes evidence of the hidden corruption the governess believes she has spotted in him.

Miles says he brought up the subject because he no longer wants to be around women all the time—he wanted to be with people of his "own sort." The governess tells Miles that few people seem to be of his own sort, except perhaps Flora, which greatly offends Miles. Miles then asks whether or not his uncle is aware that he was not back at school. The governess tells Miles that his uncle likely would not care either way, and Miles then proudly claims that he will get his uncle to come to Bly himself in order to evaluate this situation.

Miles's rationale for wanting to return to school shows that—perhaps without the governess's awareness—he feels stifled at Bly, where he remains constantly under the governess's watch. The governess here continues to try to keep the children's uncle's influence at bay, showing again that she has taken it upon herself to shield them from external influences other than herself.

CHAPTER 15

After her conversation with Miles, the governess stays outside the church and reflects upon their conversation. She thinks that he knows he "got something out of" her, or that he knew she was afraid of having to bring up why he had been expelled from school, and she expects him now to use that fear of hers against her as a way to gain freedom for himself. She says she wishes she could bring up the issue with the boy's uncle, but the prospect of doing so was too much for her to handle.

The governess's suspicion that Miles has been keeping a secret from her, and conspiring with Flora, has now escalated to the fear that Miles is taking advantage of her. She sees his beautiful and innocent exterior as a kind of weapon he's now using in his own favor. Her unwillingness to report anything to the uncle shows her continued shielding of the children and desire to show her ability to handle this on her own.

Because she is so shook up by her interaction with Miles, the governess returns to Bly, leaving Mrs. Grose, Flora, and Miles behind at the church. Upon entering the home, the governess notices a stranger seated at her writing table. To her horror, the woman in the black dress is Miss Jessel. The governess calls out to her, calling her a "miserable woman". Miss Jessel disappears.

That Miss Jessel is seated in the governess's chair here is significant. It enforces the idea that the governess sees in the ghosts a kind of challenge to her authority as the primary person responsible for the children.

CHAPTER 16

Flora, Mrs. Grose, and Miles return home from church, and the governess is surprised to see that no one mentions that she did not join them at mass. The governess believes that the children are deliberately remaining silent to taunt her, and she thinks that they have "bribed" Mrs. Grose to remain silent, too. The governess breaks the silence with Mrs. Grose by having a private conversation with her in the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Grose admits that the children had indeed told her not to say anything to the governess about her absence. They had believed that the governess would have liked it better that way, though the governess clearly did not—and she is unsure why the children would have thought that.

Mrs. Grose's willingness to go along with what the children wanted—to keep silent regarding the governess's absence when they return—indicates that Mrs. Grose's allegiance to the governess may not be as strong as the governess assumes.

The governess then tells Mrs. Grose about her meeting with Miss Jessel. The governess tells Mrs. Grose it is clear that Miss Jessel is tormented, and that to relieve her torment she wants Flora for herself. The governess then says that she has decided to contact the children's uncle, and Mrs. Grose agrees that it would be a good idea.

The governess's sense of the threatening presence of the ghosts here has grown significantly stronger. Her willingness to contact the uncle shows that she now senses the situation may get out of hand.

The governess says that she is concerned, though, that their uncle will hold it against her not having dealt with Miles's expulsion from school, which they each admit is still a mystery—indeed, neither can hold it against Miles, and they blame his expulsion alternatively on his uncle, Quint, Miss Jessel, and Mrs. Grose herself (for allowing the children to go on meeting with Quint and Miss Jessel). In the end, though, the governess agrees to contact the children's uncle.

This moment in which Mrs. Grose and the governess entertain possible reasons for Miles's misbehavior at school shows that their unwillingness to confront him honestly—an unwillingness driven by their insistence on his innocence (which the governess actually doubts)—shows that by refusing to treat him as anything but an innocent child they delay any actual treatment of possible behavioral problems.

CHAPTER 17

The governess begins to write her letter to the children's uncle. She cannot write, so she visits Miles in his room, and after waiting outside to see if he is asleep, she hears him cheerfully say he knows she is there. Miles says that he had been lying awake thinking about their "queer business together." When the governess asks what he's referring to, Miles says the way she has been taking care of him, and "all the rest." He wants to go back to school, while the governess wants desperately to help him.

The governess detects yet again a subtext in her conversation with Miles. She seems to think that he may eventually disclose to her what she assumes to be the truth, that is, that he visits with Quint. But he continues only to discuss the school. And yet, is there any subtext there? It isn't clear.

The two discuss Miles's school. The governess is concerned for him, and throughout the conversation she says how painful it is to see such an innocent boy suffer the kind of confusion she sees him suffering. She tells him she is concerned about him, and wonders why he never mentions his school. Miles says that he wants the governess to leave him alone, and that he would prefer it if his uncle came to Bly to settle everything.

The governess's concern for Miles overrides her ability to have an open conversation with him, and it causes Miles to feel overwhelmed, so he asks again to speak with his uncle.

Because she is so disturbed by Miles's unwillingness to confide in her, the governess falls to her knees at the boy's bedside and yells that she wants to "save" Miles. In response to her reaction, Miles shrieks, it is unclear to the governess whether he is laughing or afraid. Suddenly, the candle in Miles's room goes out, and the governess is horrified, presumably thinking that there is a ghost in the room with them. When she cries out about the candle, Miles says that it was he who blew the light out.

This tense interaction with Miles prefigures what will later transpire between the two—when Miles dies in the governess's arms—and it is a particularly strong example of the governess's sometimes overwhelming attitude toward the children as their sole protector. In the governess's mind Miles is here connected to the ghosts, who she thinks initially blew out the candle. Does Mile's admission that he blew it out reveal the nonexistence of the ghosts or his connection with them?

CHAPTER 18

The narrative continues on the day following the governess's late-night interaction with Miles. After the governess has finished her lessons with the children—during which they had been extremely well-behaved, which the governess finds suspicious— Mrs. Grose asks the governess if she has written the letter yet. The governess says that she has, but she does not mention that she has not yet sent it.

The governess thinks the children's outwardly good behavior is another attempt to conceal some kind of conspiracy, or to catch her off guard. And her secrecy toward the Mrs. Grose about the letter is important, as it shows she does not confide in her with complete honesty.

Later, Miles asks if the governess would like to listen to him play the piano. She reflects on how, in her opinion, no child has ever lived in such "beauty and misery" as Miles. She thinks about how good he is, and how strange it is that he was ever penalized for anything. The governess is lost in the moment: she is so immersed in the music he's making that, she realizes, she loses track of Flora. The governess asks Miles if he knows where Flora has gone, and he politely says that he does not.

The governess is progressively developing a more complex, more adult image of Miles here. She thinks of him now as not only an innocent boy, but also as a melancholy character—unusually melancholy for a child. Though she still cannot believe that he has done anything bad, which shows she ultimately still thinks he's an innocent boy.

The governess, panicked, runs to find Mrs. Grose, who also does not know where Flora has gone off to. The governess says that Flora must be out with Miss Jessel, and she tells Mrs. Grose she believes that Miles had intentionally distracted her with his piano playing. When Mrs. Grose asks where Miles is now, the governess says he must be with Quint, that the two children intentionally worked together that day to set up meetings with Quint and Miss Jessel. The governess convinces Mrs. Grose to come with her outside to find Flora, even if that means leaving Miles with Quint. On her way out, the governess leaves her letter to the children's uncle on a table for Luke, a Bly servant, to pick up and deliver.

The governess's suspicions of the children's conspiracy are in this case possibly not unfounded. Her idea is not disputed by Mrs. Grose, and the presentation of the evidence here—Miles's insistence that she listens to him play the piano, Flora's sudden, unexplained disappearance—suggests that perhaps the children may have set this up. But because the governess is the one telling this story, some doubt should always be kept in mind—hers is ultimately the only perspective we have.

CHAPTER 19

The governess and Mrs. Grose leave Miles behind to go find Flora outside. The governess decides to head to the lake, because it was there that she had last seen Miss Jessel. While walking to the spot where they had seen Miss Jessel, the governess talks to Mrs. Grose about what the children must say when they meet secretly to discuss Miss Jessel and Quint. She tells Mrs. Grose that the children likely say things that are horribly appalling, though she does not try to guess what that might be.

The governess here continues to tell Mrs. Grose that the children, when left alone, are likely engaging in some kind of serious misbehavior. She has a sense that their secret depravity is so great that she can't even guess at what it is. The governess has no evidence for this, though. Her certainty that the children act this way is itself a guess.

When they arrive at the spot, Flora is nowhere to be found. The governess then notices that the boat that is usually there has gone missing, and she assumes that Flora has taken the boat across the lake to meet Miss Jessel, and that she has furthermore hidden the boat. Mrs. Grose asks how she thinks a little girl could do such a thing, and the governess says that when the girl is alone she is no girl at all, but an "old, old woman."

The governess's characterization of Miles as a child with strangely adult characteristics has now been attributed to Flora, too. The shady boundary between innocent childhood and mature adulthood is here growing still shadier. If the children really are what the governess is suggesting, then what is she protecting them from? Aren't they already lost?

The two then go around the lake to see if they can find Flora. When they get to the other side of the lake, they see the boat, exactly as the governess had expected. After looking for a bit, they see Flora. Mrs. Grose excitedly rushes to Flora and hugs her, and during this embrace Flora gives looks at the governess over Mrs. Grose's shoulder, staring at her with what the governess describes as a serious look. This seriousness is broken when Flora innocently asks why the two are not wearing hats. The governess replies by asking Flora where Miss Jessel is.

The difference between the governess's relationship with the children, and Mrs. Grose's relationship with the children, is highlighted here: Mrs. Grose receives a hug, and the governess receives a serious stare. Mrs. Grose's interaction is with a more innocent Flora; the governess, on the other hand, perceives something more sinister underneath the innocence.

CHAPTER 20

Still standing by the lake after having found Flora, the governess sees Miss Jessel staring at them from the opposite bank. The governess grasps Mrs. Grose's arm and directs her attention to where she sees Miss Jessel standing. The governess is convinced that Mrs. Grose sees Miss Jessel, too, and she takes comfort in this belief. Flora shoots the governess an accusatory glare, though, instead of looking out at Miss Jessel, and to this the governess passionately yells at Flora to look at Miss Jessel instead of continuing to stare at her. And much to the governess's disappointment, Mrs. Grose says she does not in fact see Miss Jessel.

This is the first time Mrs. Grose has been with the governess while the governess was seeing either Quint or Miss Jessel. That meant that the governess's visions earlier were uncorroborated. But now Mrs. Grose directly contradicts those visions. The governess's claims to have seen these ghosts are thus now at their least believable. In this scene, at least, the ghosts appear only to her, or are entirely of her own invention.

The governess accosts Mrs. Grose, saying that she must be able to see Miss Jessel. Mrs. Grose tells the governess that nothing is there, and that she thinks the governess has never seen anything at all, because—as she and Flora know—Miss Jessel is dead. Mrs. Grose calls the whole thing a "mistake and a worry and a joke." At this, the governess looks to Flora, whose childish beauty and innocence has vanished, revealing to the governess only a cold stare. Flora denies ever having seen Miss Jessel, and asks Mrs. Grose to take her away from the governess.

Mrs. Grose's claim that the governess's visions have never been real introduces an important element of skepticism here. Her claim calls into question not just the reality of the ghosts but also the relationship between the governess and Mrs. Grose, as now it seems that Mrs. Grose has secretly questioned these visions throughout. Flora, meanwhile, seems to see the governess as a threat to her, when the governess sees herself as Flora's protector (perhaps even from Flora herself).

The governess finds Flora's behavior appalling. She accuses Flora of being under Miss Jessel's influence, and she says that she feels like she has lost Flora to Miss Jessel. Mrs. Grose frantically takes Flora away from the scene, saying nothing. The governess sits and reflects on her loss of Flora, despairing at the situation for some time. She comments on how much control Flora seemed to have had over the situation. She then walks around the lake, and notices the boat is gone.

The governess now sees in Flora nothing but a threateningly cold attitude, an unwillingness to accept the governess's protection. We still do not know—we never know—whether the governess's actions are justified. But her anger at Flora and Mrs. Grose seems particularly intense in this instance. And it's perfectly also possible that Flora's cold behavior results from her own sense that the governess is crazy and a threat to her.

Back at Bly, the governess heads to her room and notices that Flora's belongings have all been removed from the room they had shared. Later that evening, she sits by the fire in the schoolroom in silence, and feels a "mortal coldness." Miles enters the room, and she says she senses he wanted to be with her. The two sit together in silence.

The governess's relationship with Flora is now over. She has not succeeded in "saving her" or in persuading her to confide in her about Miss Jessel. Her attention now turns to Miles, whom she hopes she still has a chance at saving from what she perceives to be the influence of the ghosts.

CHAPTER 21

The narrative continues to the morning following the day by the lake. Mrs. Grose enters the governess's room early to speak about Flora's condition. Flora, she says, has fallen ill, and she seems to Mrs. Grose to have grown old and weak. Mrs. Grose confirms the governess's expressed suspicion that Flora likely will never speak with her again. She says that Flora has said nothing about Miss Jessel, and she is afraid to bring up the subject with her, since she doesn't want to worry the girl any more. The governess says there would be no point in doing so, since Flora is too clever to reveal anything about her interactions with Miss Jessel.

Mrs. Grose has taken on a freshly honest approach now in her conversation with the governess. She does not withhold from the governess that Flora will likely never want to speak with her again. The governess's claim that there would be no point talking with Flora about Miss Jessel shows to what extent the governess has attributed to Flora a kind of corrupted innocence. She both doesn't want to worry Flora by continuing to press her, and sees Flora as so clever and corrupt that talking with her would be pointless because Flora would just evade her questioning.

The governess then says that she will not leave Bly, and she insists that Mrs. Grose take Flora to her uncle. She says that Flora needs to be away from Quint and Miss Jessel and, most of all, she needs to be away from the governess herself. The governess says she will stay behind and try to earn the trust of Miles, with whom she senses she is growing a closer bond.

The governess's relinquishment of her control over Flora shows how thoroughly she feels she has lost the girl to Miss Jessel. Her comment that Flora in fact, needs to get away from her, the governess, can also be taken two ways: that Flora has been so corrupted that she is beyond saving, or that the governess herself is a danger to Flora.

Mrs. Grose returns to the subject of Flora. She says that even though she hasn't seen Miss Jessel herself, she nonetheless senses Miss Jessel's influence in the way Flora talks about the governess. She calls what Flora has said "horrors" but she doesn't elaborate, and instead collapses on a couch. She does confirm that she now believes the governess's claims about the continued presence of Quint and Miss Jessel at Bly.

This seems to be a development of true confidence between Mrs. Grose and the governess. But Mrs. Grose's sudden contradiction of what she had said at the lake—that the ghosts were not real—seems strange. The governess may be wrong to think she truly has Mrs. Grose's trust. Mrs. Grose does come across as someone who agrees with whoever she is talking to.

At the end of the chapter, Mrs. Grose says that she has a suspicion, which she had hoped to withhold, that Miles had stolen the letter intended for his uncle. She says further that this must be why Miles had been expelled. Mrs. Grose says that if Miles will confess to this, he will be saved, redeemed from his misbehaved condition. The governess promises to save Miles.

Mrs. Grose's reticence yet again appears here—she withheld from the governess her suspicions of Miles, though it is not clear why. The governess's final claim that she will save Miles demonstrates that she has not lost her nearly messianic sense of her own importance here at Bly.

CHAPTER 22

With Mrs. Grose and Flora now gone from Bly, the governess prepares herself for her time alone with Miles. She is aware the maids and other staff at Bly know about what has happened, and she notices them staring at her, but she chooses to put on a rigid appearance in order to seem in control of the situation. She overhears maids saying that Miles had eaten with Flora before her departure. She assumes the children had time to discuss the situation, and she worries about how best to approach delicately the subject of Bly's "monstrous ordeal." She says she has to stay rigid and take control fearlessly, taking on the situation as "only another turn of the screw of ordinary human nature."

The governess's "rigidity" in this situation can be seen in two ways, depending on whether the ghosts are assumed to be real, or if they are only her own imaginings. If they are real, her control of the situation, and her acceptance of the situation as only a "turn of the screw" (or a slight modification of) ordinary human nature, seems like a kind of brave heroism. On the other hand, if the ghosts aren't real, she can seem to have endangered the children, and to have taken the situation wrongfully and desperately into her own hands and then rigidly refused to see anything but her own delusions.

Miles does not bring up the ghosts, but only asks if Flora has fallen ill. The governess says that Bly disagreed with Flora, and after she says so the two have a conversation that seems to the governess almost to broach the subject of Miss Jessel. Miss Jessel never comes up, but it is clear the governess thinks Miles uses his usual innocence to avoid the subject.

This conversation seems to the governess to dodge around the topic of Miss Jessel, but since this is told from her perspective, it is unclear whether or not this is the case. It could be that Miles truly does not know about the situation, and that he only thinks Flora has fallen ill. Miles may be as innocent as he seems, or he may not be.

CHAPTER 23

The narrative continues to describe the first evening Miles and the governess spend alone at Bly. While in the room outside of which the governess had once seen Quint, the governess sits on the couch, and Miles stares out the **window**. The governess has a revelation: she claims that Miles is looking longingly out the window because he is searching for something he cannot see. He cannot see the ghosts she has seen the whole time.

This sudden reversal is important. The governess now clearly sees Miles only as an innocent boy, one who can only feel but not truly see the damaging presence of Quint and Miss Jessel.

The governess asks Miles if he likes staying at Bly. He says that he does, and he hopes that she feels the same. She says that she does like it, and that there is nothing in the world she wouldn't do for him. The governess then builds up the courage and gall to ask Miles to tell her what is on his mind, and he says he will, but that he first has to go out. He says he has to go see Luke. The governess is disappointed, knowing now that he wants to deceiver her again, so she asks him directly if he had stolen the letter she'd hoped Luke would take to Miles's uncle.

The governess asserts herself here as Miles's protector and savior, but she is disappointed to see that her openness is not reciprocated. She seems finally to have realized that in order really to draw out of him what is on his mind, she needs to admit to him that she knows he is not perfectly innocent. In order to save him, she has to confront him as someone who honestly needs saving.

CHAPTER 24

After the governess asks Miles whether or not he had stolen the letter she'd meant to have sent to his uncle, she notices through the room's **window** the face of Quint, staring threateningly into the room. The governess reacts to this with another surge of her sense of protective purpose, and she decides to try to prevent Miles from seeing Quint outside.

Quint's appearance at this moment continues a pattern that emerges throughout this story: the ghosts tend to appear when the governess is at the edge of a discovery about the children, in this case, the truth about whether or not Miles stole the letter. That may be because such moments "summon" the ghosts, or because the governess's own imagination acts up in the moment's she feels are significant.

Miles then confesses that he had stolen the letter. He says he took it to see what she had said about him. The governess says it is clear to her that Miles knows he is in the presence of something at this moment, but it is equally clear that he does not know what. After mentioning this, the governess looks at the window again, and Quint is gone.

The governess's inclination that Miles feels but does not see the presence of Quint shows that her impression of Miles's relationship with Quint continues to change. Instead of seeing him as deliberately secretive about the relationship, she sees him now, once more, as the innocent victim.

The governess then asks what Miles found when he read the letter. He says he found nothing, and that he burned the letter after reading it. The governess asks Miles if he stole letters at school, and she tells him she knew all along that he had been expelled. He tells the governess he was expelled for having "said things", though he does not clarify what he had said. His confusing explanation gets stranger still when he tells her he'd said these things only to people he liked, and in his letters home. The governess starts to wonder if he had been innocent all along, and she worries what that would say about her.

The governess's pause to reflect upon whether or not she had misread Miles expulsion provides more evidence that she's not sure whether Miles ever was the devious person she had, for a time, thought he was. Her pause for self-reflection, in which she wonders what his innocence might say about her, suggests that she may not have the level of confidence in her shrewdness as she's claimed to have.

Suddenly, Quint reappears at the window. The governess latches onto Miles, and yells at Quint. Miles then asks "Is she here?" and the governess infers that he means Miss Jessel. The governess responds that it is not Miss Jessel, so Miles asks if she means "he", and the governess asks whom he means by "he." Miles yells out "Peter Quint—you devil!" and asks where he is. The governess exclaims that Miles doesn't need to worry, that he now is in her care. Miles looks out the window, and sees nothing. The governess says that because he now knows what he has lost, he utters "the cry of a creature hurled over the abyss", his heart stops, and he dies.

The sudden appearance of Quint may be the ghost coming to exact revenge. But the ghost appearing at this moment, when the governess is just starting to doubt herself, could also be taken as her subconscious "saving" her from having to entertain such doubts. Miles's death is the climax of this story. The governess believes Miles dies because of his despair at having lost Quint forever. But Miles never says he saw Quint, he only shouts his name, so it could be the case that he has died for some other reason, perhaps by being smothered by the governess's clinging hug. Or perhaps Quint did abuse Miles in some way, and the governess by imagining the ghost of Quint has scared Miles to death. It is unclear, though, as it has been throughout—the book does not resolve itself to affirm or deny the governess's understanding of the story or reliability as a storyteller

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Downes-Angus, John. "*The Turn of the Screw.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 1 Dec 2013. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Downes-Angus, John. "*The Turn of the Screw.*" LitCharts LLC, December 1, 2013. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-turn-of-the-screw.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Turn of the Screw* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

James, Henry. The Turn of the Screw. Signet Classics. 2007.

CHICAGO MANUAL

James, Henry. The Turn of the Screw. New York: Signet Classics. 2007.