

## A Non-Apparitionist Reading of *The Turn of the Screw* James Sexton

In at least two of James's novellas the protagonists' perceptions are far from unimpeachable. Both John Marcher of *The Beast in the Jungle* and his counterpart in *The Aspern Papers* deceive themselves as to the motivations of their own actions. The irony which results from a protagonist's failure to grasp his real motives fairly jumps off the page in *The Turn of the Screw*. Like John Marcher, the governess is self-deceived, and by the end of the story she stands revealed as a woman so obsessed with becoming mistress of Bly, the country estate, that she unwittingly destroys her two charges in an effort to convince herself of her worthiness not only to run the household, but to become her master's capable wife and loving mother to his wards.

Her unacknowledged and unconscious stratagem is to insinuate herself into the good graces of Miles, Flora, and Mrs. Grose, and ultimately to parlay their affection and her own good housekeeping record into possession of Bly and the master. Thus economic and sexual motives define the governess. Unaware of them at the conscious level, she creates Peter Quint and Mrs. Jessel as projections of her subconscious sexual and economic designs, thus purging her conscience of what a respectable onlooker might otherwise see as the machinations of a "designing woman" or Jezebel.

Those critics who absolve the governess of any blame in the death of Miles and the emotional withering of Flora and who instead see the story as an allegory of the struggle between good and evil or of the Fall of Man ignore objections which render their interpretations unconvincing. While one may readily concur with Robert Heilman that a fabric of Christian allegorical emblems runs through the story, one salient point must be noted—that most of the story, replete with such images, originates from the point of view of the Christian governess,

someone who certainly sees herself as an agent of good in the struggle for the souls of Miles and Flora; however, the choice of details so relentlessly moral in tenor only serves to underline her distorted perception. One sees that she is not caught up in a morality play come to life, but interprets her experience in light of her own upbringing, filling it with the commonplace images from the pulpit which doubtless pervaded her home. Yet Bly is not the stage of some celestial battle whose stakes are the souls of two children. This psychomachia is the imagined overlay of a neurotic sensibility.

One critic, Nathan Fagin, buttresses his case for *Turn of the Screw* as allegory with an oversimplified reading of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown", stating that the "purposes for which Quint seeks to meet little Miles are the same old purposes for which the Devil met Young Goodman Brown in the woods near Salem" (Fagin 200).

Here Fagin fails to mention that Brown has brought disillusionment upon himself for much the same reason as did the governess. Seeing what he construes as evil tendencies in himself – the desire to go deep into the forest of sin one last time before turning his attentions to domestic obligations—he projects his repressed guilt upon everyone else, most notably upon those least likely to be sinners, including his apparently angelic wife Faith. Fagin simply ignores the vast body of criticism which views "Young Goodman Brown" as a story dealing with repression, guilt and projection (Guerin 134). In fact there is ample evidence to show that James not only knew "Young Goodman Brown", but that he grouped it with "Roger Malvin's Burial" and "Rappaccini's Daughter" as examples of Hawthorne's highest achievement (James 56). Moreover, James's perception of what he called "the spiritual contortions, the darkened outlook,... the ingrained sense of sin, of evil...a cruel climate from every quarter and a pecuniary remittance from none" in Hawthorne's work perhaps returned to his mind when drawing the

character of the governess, for his discussion of the Puritan conscience applies equally well to her: "The conscience, by no fault of its own. . . lay under the shadow of the sense of sin"(58).

James then goes on to describe the ruinous effects of an overly-active sense of evil, which Hawthorne was felicitously able to exorcize:

This darkening cloud was no essential part of him – a black patch over his spirit ....Some natures would let it lie as it fell, and contrive to be tolerably comfortable under it. Others would groan and sweat and suffer; but the dusky blight would remain, and their lives would be lives of misery. Here and there an individual . . . would throw it off. . . plunging...into depravity.

Hawthorne's way was the best, for he contrived to transmute this heavy moral burden into the very substance of the imagination, to make it evaporate in the light and charming fumes of artistic production.

Unlike Hawthorne's, the governess's relation to the burden of sin was not "intellectual", but, still using James's terms, "moral and theological." Unlike Hawthorne, she "was. . . discomposed, disturbed, haunted by it" (59). No genius, she was unable to exorcize an insupportable sense of sin by transforming it into art. Instead, like Goodman Brown, she projected her guilt onto others—Miles and Flora, Quint and Jessel. Indeed, what strikes one about the three stories James singled out as "little masterpieces, small cold apologues" (James, *Hawthorne 2*) is their common treatment of the devastating effects of repression, and interestingly, *The Turn of the Screw* unifies the various aspects of guilt treated individually in Hawthorne's three stories.

"Rappaccini's Daughter" treats sexual guilt and what Frederick Crews calls "a conflict between lustful wishes and an ideal of sexless virtue" (133). Just as Giovanni's lust for Beatrice is conceived of as poisonous, so the governess, unable to bring her sexual feelings into the open,

translates them into an imagined sexual tryst between Quint and Jessel. The governess, who incidentally, is the same age as Giovanni and from a similarly sheltered environment, shares his tendency to set up "crude and unbalanced alternatives: Beatrice must be either childlike and innocent or poisonous and guilty. . . these alternatives are the only ones available to Giovanni's imagination" (120). Likewise for the governess there is no place in her moral scheme for a goodness tempered by venial human sin. She, as well as Miles and Flora, must be either all good or else "lost."

"Roger Malvin's Burial" treats another aspect of guilt which belongs to the governess, the subconscious scourging of evil which remains uncommitted, or as the narrator puts it:

Reuben, while reason told him that he had done right [by leaving Malvin behind], experienced in no small degree the mental horrors which punish the perpetrator of undiscovered crime. By a certain association of ideas, he at times almost imagined himself a murderer. (83)

Similarly, the governess at times almost imagined herself a Jezebel, and like Reuben Bourne she will atone for an irrational sense of guilt by "killing" a young male upon whom she has projected her own guilt. Finally, the salient parallel with "Young Goodman Brown" is that both Brown and the governess face imagined embodiments of their own brainsick thoughts in characters whom they imagine they have met.

And, indeed, Miles's dying words, addressed, not to Peter Quint, but to the governess, "...you devil!" convey the same sense of horror as Hawthorne's point that the fiend in his own shape is less hideous than when he rages in the breast of man (Hawthorne 252).

Lest the reader object that as yet no evidence has been put forward to warrant the placing of the governess in such a puritanical context, we must begin by pointing to her austere upbringing. The youngest of several daughters of a Hampshire parson, she speaks of her "small,

smothered life," (308) the austerity of which is implied by her comment that only at Bly could amusement be countenanced: " I...learned to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow. It was the first time...that I had known space and air and freedom" (308). To this note of constraint and heaviness is added the admission that her sexual curiosity had always been repressed, for she later speaks of the eighteenth-century novels "of deprecated renown" not a stray specimen of which had ever reached the "sequestered home and appealed to the *unavowed curiosity* of my youth"(341, italics mine).

At a very early juncture of the novel, then, the reader has been deftly provided with a crucial clue to the governess's character. From the outset James conveys her economic anxiety as well as her sexual repression, and significantly both motifs come together prior to her first meeting with Quint. The anxiety of poverty is underscored by the detail that she is the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson. This touch emphasizes the bleakness of her future unless she marries well. One can almost hear the strictures of the parson, whose puritan regard for money allows him to pervert scripture with his unrelenting admonition to "take thought for the morrow" (308).

The reader could be pardoned for imputing to the governess a design on the master motivated by economic imperatives, despite her elaborate self-justifying defense mechanism, often taking the form of parenthetical denials. For example, immediately after the revelation of her bleak past and camouflaged reflection on the future—she convinces herself that she alludes to Miles and Flora's "rough future": "I used to speculate as to how the "rough future...would handle them and might bruise them" (309)—immediately after reflections upon her austere past and uncertain future, she magisterially takes a tour of Bly and says, "I could take a turn into the grounds and enjoy, almost with a sense of property that amused and flattered me, the beauty and

dignity of the place" (309). Rhetorically, she reveals herself. Her unacknowledged aspiration to possession of Bly is contained in the principal clause, while the qualifying subordinate clause defends her from any accusation of having conscious designs.

Indeed, the sexual motives for her unconscious or at least very dimly-perceived designs on the master have been so greatly stressed as to minimize her very real economic motives. Yet one of the first things to set her heart aflutter is the "vast and imposing" (295) nature of the master's house in Harley Street, juxtaposed as this description is to that of the Hampshire vicarage. Moreover, she soon becomes aware of an accumulation of emotional capital for her amatory enterprise, noting carefully after accepting her position, that her dashing employer "put the whole thing to her as a kind of favor, an obligation he should gratefully incur" (295). The economic sense of the word "obligation", still current in French—"bond, debenture"—though less so in English, adds to the irony here. James would expect his readers to be aware of the financial denotation of an obligation.

In addition, she immediately guesses that the master is "fearfully extravagant", and as she is conscious of her own efficiency and husbandry, she soon sees another route to the master's heart, a hope which adds to the irony of her statement, that "what I was to enjoy might be something beyond his promise" (299). Again, the double-meaning of the phrase protects her from any accusation of design. Nowhere does she commit herself to the vulgar meaning.

Consciously, she refers to an unexpected bonus with respect to the children's natures – they are even better than promised. Nonetheless, the presence of yet another double-entendre justifies the reader's by now consistent attention to probable ironies, for soon after, the governess says to Mrs. Grose, "Well, that is . . . what I came for, to be *carried away*" (301, italics mine). Again, the phrase "carried away" is couched in a reference ostensibly referring to Miles's charm;

however, even the governess lets her guard down here, adding: "I'm rather easily carried away. I was carried away in London" (301). Here she directly alludes to the master's charms, and as a result invites Mrs. Grose's retort that she won't be the last to fall under the master's spell. The governess, realizing she has gone too far, replies, "Oh, I've no pretension to being the only one" (301), another richly ambiguous statement. Her disclaimer does nothing to erase from the reader's mind the idea that her main purpose for being at Bly is to be carried off in the arms of the master, her weak protest to the contrary notwithstanding.

With regard to her sense of husbandry, the motif of stitching takes on a subtle but important role. References to stitching appear twice in important places. The first reference occurs after the governess has received "disturbing letters from home, where things were not going well" (315). It is very possible that the bad news was financial. Perhaps it is not being overly subtle to suggest that the ostentation with which the governess sends her gloves to be stitched rather than buy new ones (the pair of gloves had received three stitches "with a publicity perhaps not edifying") is a direct attempt to advertise one of the virtues which she feels will help lead to the ardently desired reward of marriage. But more importantly, as though her unconscious mind wishes to press this advantage, it immediately manufactures another situation designed to show off another virtue which the governess later emphasizes, as if to further ingratiate the master to her – courage. Time and again she alludes to her courage as that virtue which most brings the master into her debt.

As if the evidence of economy were not enough to convince an onlooker of her suitability as wife, the governess will now play her trump card, and show that courage must be added to husbandry in the tally-book of her virtues. For the next thing she confronts after the image of the gloves is "a person on the other side of the window and looking straight in...the person who had

already appeared to me" (316). Her response is very significant. She feels "in the midst of dread ...a sudden vibration of duty and courage" (316). This is the first of her self-congratulatory references to her heroism, so common as to form a pattern – the recurrent perception of heroism as a virtue that must be seen and which will pay off in obtaining the master's gratitude. She rarely displays her virtues without speculating as to their effect upon the imagined audience: "I daresay I fancied myself a remarkable young woman and took comfort in the faith that this would more publicly appear" (309).

Even before mentally chalking up the emotional gains which her display of courage would win her, she imagines the dividends accruing as a result of her "discretion,...quiet good sense and general high propriety...which was giving pleasure – if he ever thought of it! – to the person to whose pressure I had responded." And later, just before her first meeting with the apparition, she is savoring the effect her virtues will have upon the master: "Someone would appear there . . . and would smile and approve. I didn't ask more than that – I only asked that he should know and the only way to be sure he knew would be to see it in his handsome face" (310).

Furthermore, just prior to the "Sea of Azov" confrontation with Mrs. Jessel, the governess is again finding a joy in the extraordinary flight of heroism the occasion demanded of her: "I now saw that I had been asked for a service admirable and difficult: and there would be greatness in letting it be seen – oh, in the right quarter! – that I could succeed where many another girl might have failed....I rather applaud myself as I look back . . . (325).

Surely it is no coincidence that before each visitation of the "ghosts" the governess is daydreaming and savoring in advance the master's gratitude. There is yet more of the same. In a fine stroke of irony, James continues



I was there to protect . . . the little creatures . . . .They had nothing but me, and I – well, I had them. It was in short a magnificent chance. This chance presented itself to me in an image richly material. I was a screen...(326).

Now, of course, she refers to the screen as the richly material image, yet it is very difficult to ignore the telling ambiguities of "chance" and "richly material." Indeed, the children are, in her perversely logical scheme, her best chance to insinuate herself into the good graces of the master, while the dual significance of "richly material" is obvious. One thinks here of other self-appointed "screens" in James's fiction, such as Mrs. Walker in *Daisy Miller*, a woman as deluded as the governess with respect to the source of threat.

As well, the motif of courage is also underlined by the important allusion to *Amelia* prior to her third meeting with Quint. Oscar Cargill has demonstrated the parallels between Amelia and the governess, particularly the fact that both women are left as protectresses of a young girl and boy (Cargill). Engrossed in that novel, the governess would doubtless see it as a justification of heroism in herself. Indeed, she sees herself as a second Amelia, who could hopefully expect a similar reward (Amelia inherits a fortune and is reunited with her husband.) Early in the novel, Amelia's husband, Capt. Booth, takes her in his arms and kisses her: "I caught her in my arms... called her my heroine; surely none ever better deserved that name..." (Fielding 101). Perhaps this representative, but by no means isolated, picture of female heroism rewarded in *Amelia* is in the governess's mind as she prepares to meet Quint for the third time:

Then with all the marks of a deliberation that must have seemed magnificent had there been anyone to admire it, I laid down my book, rose to my feet, and taking a candle, went straight out of the room and noiselessly closed and locked the door (341).

One notices her glancing yet again to the audience, nor can one avoid noticing that her confrontation with the ghost (this for the fourth time) is immediately preceded by her own stock-taking and imaginings of the master's debt to her.

That her experience is colored by expectations derived from Gothic romance and eighteenth-century novels like *Amelia* is suggested by her heroic role-playing. It is as though her malleable imagination placed her in a romantic setting and then created situations that would normally be found in a romance. For example, before meeting Quint for the first time, she imagines that she will meet someone on her walk (albeit a different person – the master). Again, her speculations as to the source of the strange apparition seem to be suggested by events in *Northanger Abbey* or *Jane Eyre*. She has apparently been reading such available fiction at Bly, and it is perhaps safe to speculate that she had read *Pamela*, for this novel may even have found its way into the Hampshire vicarage. If she had, we can assume that the parallels between herself and Pamela Andrews would not have gone unremarked. However, both Pamela and Amelia are beset by the unwanted advances of men of superior social position: Pamela by her handsome employer, Mr. B., and Amelia by the lascivious Captain James and the unnamed aristocrat who had undone her friend Mrs. Bennett; the daughter, interestingly, of a Hampshire parson. Given the governess's impressionable and imaginative personality, is it not probable that Quint is merely her subconscious rendering of the master as she fears he really is?

To illustrate the archetypal nature of the construct that the governess uses to dissipate her own unacknowledged sense of guilt, it is perhaps useful to allude here to Jung's theory of personality, which is roughly analogous to Freud's triad of id, ego and superego; and which he labelled shadow, persona, and anima. In Jungian terms, the governess is an example (like Goodman Brown) of a failure of individuation; that is, of "one who fails to confront and accept

an unpleasant archetypal component of the unconscious. Instead of assimilating this unconscious element to the conscious, the neurotic projects it upon some other person or object” (Jung 60 ).

The persona or mask that the governess presents to the world is that of Amelia or Pamela: that capable, attractive, courageous woman who would make an ideal wife for any wealthy, handsome man in the prime of his life. The anima is the "soul-image" or ideal self which the governess projects onto the master, but also onto Miles and Flora. Thus we have a composite anima in the persons of the two children and master. Lastly, the threat to future bliss, lurking in her subconscious, perhaps dimly-perceived, is the shadow, the dark side of the unconscious self – usually repressed. This is the designing woman, the Jezebel aspect of the governess, together with the sexually interested female whose pulse is set af flutter after the interview in Harley Street. Unable to assimilate this aspect of her psyche, the governess projects her Jezebel-like traits onto Mrs. Jessel, while Quint, whose name may suggest Daniel Quilp, the grotesque persecutor of another angelic child, Little Nell, in Charles Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop*, balances the composite shadow. In addition, Guerin convincingly points out that Quint’s first and last names are vulgar terms for the male and female sexual organs (139).

Immediately before her first meeting with the apparition, the governess had been fancying herself as the matriarch of Bly. Projecting her ideal image of herself onto Flora, she in turn projects her ideal of the master, the handsome prince, the “type which never dies out” onto Miles (295). The identity of the master and Miles is made plausible by the use of the noun "prince" to describe Miles during her garden stroll. This use of “prince” sets up a correspondence with the earlier description of the master, and, moreover, the name Miles – soldier – reinforces this identity, for she sees the master in this way, having first spoken of him as a hunter or soldier, with "trophies of the chase” (296).

Because of her intensely religious upbringing, she sees the analogy between her own bliss in Bly and that of Edenic bliss. The parallels are evident: Bly suggests Eden; Miles and master, Adam; while Flora and the governess suggest Eve. Her imagination, furnished with three of the four key elements in the Eden myth, creates the fourth – the lurking snake, or as she puts it, "the hush in which something gathers or crouches... like the spring of a beast" (309). Unconsciously camouflaging the sexual aspect of her attraction to the master in her equation of herself and the master with the innocent child-couple, her fancy considers the possibility of a loss of bliss, even as she has just recently begun to imagine it within her grasp. For what could happen that would take Eden, so near, away from her? Either the master could prove a *roué*, or else she would have to acknowledge the sexual and economic basis of her attraction to the master. The idealized male-female types which she has created would have to be seen as base.

Had she not, like Hawthorne's Reuben Bourne, condemned herself for an uncommitted (or at least venial) sin – falling prey to sexual desire, all would have gone well, and she might have been justly rewarded. But her unacknowledged guilt brings about a tragic *dénouement*.

She becomes increasingly disillusioned with the master. Unlike the prince of the fairy tales, the master never comes. As the governess says, "One of the thoughts that...used to be with me in these wanderings was that it would be as charming as a charming story suddenly to meet someone" (310). Instead of seeing the master, she sees someone she had mistaken for him, and what she says next contains a world of meaning: "the man who met my eye was not the person I had precipitately supposed."

Like Goodman Brown and young Giovanni she doubts the virtue of her beloved – and the result is the same in all three cases again expressed here ironically – a "bewilderment of vision."

Literally, this means merely that she was confused, but coming as it does in a context of biblical imagery suggests that the harmonious, totally integrated vision or sense of self in relation to the universe gives way to the sense of chaos, wilderness and ruptured harmony with one's surroundings. This line of thought is substantiated as the horror enters her conscious mind: that she does not know her Prince Charming, that possibly he is not what he seems. Again the reader is conscious of a tension between the possible meanings of, "I had not seen it in Harley Street – I had not seen it anywhere" (311). The possibility of a loss of Eden as a result of the corrupt nature of the master brings with it its objective correlative: "the place, moreover, in the strangest way in the world, had on the instant... become a solitude." The vision of Eden has turned into the vision of the desert, "all the rest of the scene had been stricken with death."

Ironically, James mentions the reason for the broken vision, "We were confronted across our distance quite long enough for me to ask myself... who then he was." She then states that he is "a person of whom I was in ignorance...." Such a devastating uneasiness about the master does have antecedents in the governess's earlier behavior. For example, she noted his "charming ways with women" (295) and betrays her concern by commenting to Mrs. Grose – that he liked his governesses young and pretty. Once the possibility of the master's not being ideal is admitted, we see her impending disillusionment. She voices doubt about the kind of company he kept (324), culminating in her admission to Miles, "I don't think your uncle much cares" (362). Here the secondary meaning seems to be that the master is indifferent to her, and this can be construed as an admission of despair.

Logically, if the New Adam (Master) is in fact the Old Adam (Quint), what then is the governess to think of herself? And, indeed, the resulting doubt about herself is immediately taken up. The as yet unnamed and only superficially described apparition "seemed to fix me... never

took his eyes from me. She now begins to be troubled about her own righteousness. It is also significant that a physical description of the apparition is not forthcoming until an effective vehicle for projection can be found. She later learns that Peter Quint will serve.

But it remains for Mrs. Grose to supply a clue which will balance the equation of evil in the governess's head. If the master is bad, then surely she is too. Prior to her first meeting with the apparition, Mrs. Grose suggests that Mrs. Jessel was "almost as young and almost as pretty" as the governess, thus unwittingly creating her *doppelgänger*, just as she creates the master's double by saying that Quint wore his clothes.

Then, too, the governess's exact imitation of Jessel's actions provides another telling detail to suggest their identity. On her second encounter the governess sees Jessel seated "on one of the lower steps with her back presented to me, her body half-bowed and her head, in an attitude of woe, in her hands" (345). Then later, before the third encounter, the governess clearly sees herself as Mrs. Jessel:

Tormented... I remember sitting down at the foot of the staircase – suddenly collapsing there on the lowest step and then, with a revulsion, recalling that it was exactly where more than a month before, in the darkness of night and just so bowed with evil things, I had seen the spectre of the most horrible of women. (365)

This incident on its own does not adequately convince us that Jessel is the mind-forged creation of the governess, but taken together with a parallel occurrence with Quint, it can hardly be ignored. One thinks here of the aftermath of the governess's second meeting with Quint, where she rushes to the window and exactly imitates his actions, pressing her face against the window and standing exactly where he had stood, frightening Mrs. Grose, who, on this occasion, takes the place of the governess as horrified spectator. Why does James insist on these two

passages if not to suggest the imaginary quality of the two ghosts, and to point to their origin in the governess's mind?

At last the ugly truth dawns on her. The two archetypal couples are mutually exclusive. Either her ideal projection of herself and the master upon Miles and Flora as sexually innocent, sheltered inhabitants of a kind of Eden is the true vision of what will come to pass, or else her shadow projection of the unspeakable Quint and Jessel – the Old Adam, whose name suggests not only Quilp, but more significantly, "Quince", the bitter fruit of the post-lapsarian world of experience – this hideous vision of herself and the master will prove to be the real one.

Still within an Edenic context, there is yet another archetypal aspect to Mrs. Jessel, for there is a remarkable similarity between the governess's shadow and the traditional figure of Lilith, Eve's supposed predecessor, who was "a nocturnal spectre in the form of a beautiful woman that carried off children at night and destroyed them" (M'Clintock, 463).

From the outset, because Miles's sin and expulsion was distressingly parallel to Adam's fate, she has always dreaded the consequent vulnerability of her ideal couple. Indeed, all that remains to bring her dream vision crashing down is to learn that Jessel was "infamous" (331). The knowledge that Quint did what he wished with Jessel and with all the women confirms her deepest psychological fears about the master and results in a projected confession: "I brought out with decision, 'It must have been also what she wished'" (332). Seeing her shadow reflected in Mrs. Grose's eyes, the awful truth of her own sexual desires now emerges, and as a logical corollary of the wickedness of the shadow couple, she concludes immediately that Miles and Flora are lost.

Before the case which seeks to show the governess as a neurotic, deluded victimizer of the children can be convincing, it remains to justify the children, to explain away the uneasiness

with which we tend to view them, especially now in the post-*Lord of the Flies* era, which is less inclined to sentimentalize fictional children. The case *for* the children is greatly helped by our suspicion that the governess's guilt is nurtured, paradoxically, by her very success in winning them over. The more she does, the more her unconscious becomes aware that the designing woman within her is winning. And by the end, the governess has an absolute need to prove Miles and Flora corrupt, for as she says, "... if he *were* innocent, what then on earth was I?" (406).

To justify the children, one must offer logical explanations for their seemingly sinister actions and also show how the governess's behavior towards the end of the story creates a kind of hysteria which infects the children.

In Miles's defense, all the alleged transgressions which may seem to justify our uneasiness about him can be seen to have natural, not supernatural causes. For example, his lie to Mrs. Grose about not having gone off for hours with Quint can be explained as the result of a natural antipathy to what would have appeared as unfair class consciousness to the child. It was simply a rebellion against the snobbism of Grose's directive that "young gentleman should not forget their station" (335). In fact, it is not even certain that Miles did lie, for the governess puts the words into Grose's mouth (336).

And what might be construed as diabolical artfulness when Miles plays the piano while Flora slips off, had been telegraphed in an earlier scene: "I perhaps came across traces of little understandings by which one of them should keep me occupied, while the other slipped away (340). It is strangely inconsistent that earlier the governess had described as venial those same actions which she later considers diabolical.

Next, his evening romp in the garden is attributable to boyish high spirits and similar presence of teamwork, while Miles's unsettling shriek, followed by his extinguishing the candle,



is understandable, considering that he is trying hard to convince the governess that he is bad. It is also easy to justify such a shriek in view of the hysterical atmosphere which the governess had introduced.

And Miles's terrible sin at school was probably the use of some form of indecent language. Given Quint's linguistic tutelage, it is natural that Miles eventually "said things." And like any young lad newly familiar with forbidden words, he naturally wished to share them with his friends – "those I liked" (401). And since he liked Flora, he no doubt also taught them to her. By the way, Miles's generosity in this regard explains Flora's billingsgate to Mrs. Grose in a later scene. Miles, at least, is convinced that his language was the reason for his being sent down: "Yes, it was too bad....What I suppose I sometimes said. To write home." Miles means here that his words were too shocking to cite in a letter.

Finally, the boy's final words, "Peter Quint – you devil!" are explicable since he had breakfasted with Flora and doubtless would have heard from her about the governess's attempts to get her to admit to the presence of Mrs. Jessel. Indeed, Miles thinks the governess is referring to Mrs. Jessel when he asks in the last scene, "Is she *here*?" It is perfectly natural, then, for Miles to conclude that if Mrs. Jessel is not indicated, then it must be Quint. He then screams out that name in response to the governess's question. However, it is more likely that he refers to the governess as the devil.

Moreover, there can be little doubt that the governess's bizarre actions could easily have transmitted her own anxiety to the children. Even she wondered "how my little charges could help guessing that I thought strange things about them" (338). For no reason she would catch them up and press them to her heart, begin to cry, watch them covertly, never allowing them out of her sight. Their pitiful response to such treatment is to try anxiously to please her, feeling as if

somehow her malaise were their fault. And undoubtedly she makes Miles feel wicked, first telling him that she will try to save him, and then questions him relentlessly about the letter. Little wonder the children manifest signs of anxiety. Through her relentless virtual exorcism of Miles, she whips him up to a frenzy during the final few weeks, which culminates in his fatal heart attack.

In James's "The Pupil" we see a parallel to the destruction of a young boy by adults who shunt their own anxieties onto the inadequate shoulders of children. What the narrator says about Morgan Moreen's ability to perceive the unspoken, applies equally to Flora and Miles: "... there was nothing that at a given moment you could say a clever child didn't know" (James Pupil 437).

Using Miles as a means to exorcise her own guilt, she must possess him in order to be vindicated. The ironic duality contained in the last sentence's "dispossessed" should not be lost on the reader. She has consistently treated Miles as a piece of capital, a good which might yield her possession of Bly. Miles was indeed possessed, but externally. He was possessed by the guilt-forged demon of the governess, and the only way for him to be free of it was to die: "his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped" (403).

The governess's dilemma is that to admit to sexual and economic desires would be tantamount to admitting her own baseness. Yet these ardent desires lead her unconsciously to project upon Miles and Flora her vision of herself and the master as a sexually innocent couple holding dominion over an Eden-like Bly, relieved forever of all thought for the morrow. But her dream is menaced by her unacknowledged doubts as to her own motives and those of the master. Like a Hawthorne character, then, she projects these unmentionable doubts onto others – Jessel and Quint, as archetypes of evil, the modern embodiments of the fallen Adam and Eve.

Indeed, her dream of a prince marrying a sinless princess must yield to the reality of a scheming Jezebel lying in wait for a dissolute employer who will never fall victim to her charms. To admit to this revised version of her experience would have been impossible, so she purges herself of guilt by projecting it onto Miles and Flora, two obvious and vulnerable scapegoats, considering Miles's sin and expulsion. The story of Adam and Eve is ready to be played out; all that remains is to identify them as Miles and Flora. Thus, unable to shine the light upon her own anxieties, she projects her guilt onto two innocents.

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