

**The Staging, Production, and Reception of Benjamin Britten's *The
Turn of the Screw* in the UK from 1954 onwards**

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ABSTRACT

Relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the production and staging of Benjamin Britten's chamber opera *The Turn of the Screw*, even though it remains one of the most frequently performed operas in the UK. This thesis seeks to explore the cultural significance and representations inherent in Britten's opera since its première in 1954. Employing case study examples of six productions of *The Turn of the Screw* staged in the UK from 1954 to 2022, each directed by different opera directors, these productions are analysed considering factors such as the creative team's philosophy, stage design, blocking, directorial decisions, and post-performance critical reception and interpretations. The thesis is structured around four key themes: social class, the supernatural, sexuality, and gender. Research analysing the diverse stage performances of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, and examining the reception of its various productions, sheds light on the continuous renewal and revitalisation of the opera over nearly seven decades.

The opera's productions not only mirror, to a certain extent, the prevailing social and cultural trends of their respective eras, but also invite audiences to perpetually re-engage with and reinterpret the work. This process continually updates and enriches the collective understanding of the opera. This thesis offers an in-depth analysis of the thematic reception and interpretative evolution of the opera in the UK since its inception, contributing to the scholarly discourse on opera staging, production methodologies, and reception theory. It enriches academic discourse on *The Turn of the Screw* with detailed case studies and critical insights, deepening the understanding of the opera's cultural significance.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

A journal article based on the content of the first chapter of this thesis, titled 'The Desire for Power: Staging Social Class and Authority in Benjamin Britten's The Turn of the Screw, 1954—2020', will be published in The Opera Journal, Autumn/Winter 2024 Issue.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates how Benjamin Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw* has demonstrated cultural significance through its continuous renewal and revitalization in the United Kingdom over nearly 70 years since its première in 1954. By analyzing six diverse productions directed by various opera directors, it explores how stage performances have shaped and informed contemporary audiences' understanding of the opera. Delving into the social and cultural shifts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—focusing on themes such as social class, the supernatural, sexuality, and gender—the study examines how these changes have influenced both Britten's adaptation of Henry James's novella and productions of *The Turn of the Screw*. The primary aim is to elucidate the relationship between social-cultural developments and opera production, demonstrating how *The Turn of the Screw* reflects and engages with evolving social issues. By situating Britten's opera within this broader context of opera culture studies, this thesis not only enriches the discourse on opera production but also highlights the opera's enduring relevance and its role in reflecting and influencing social change.

0.1 Staging and Production

'Operas are theatre works: their texts, verbal and musical, are meant to be staged'.¹ Prior to the prominence of opera directors, facets of opera production such as stage design and costume – those with a decorative flair – received extensive attention from opera practitioners. However, components integral to the actual production process, encompassing dramatic interpretation and preparation, the staging and performance techniques of singers, and the overall organisation and supervision of all elements, were comparatively neglected. This relative lack of emphasis persisted until the emergence

¹ Roger Savage, Barry Millington and John Cox, 'Production', *Grove Music Online*, 2002, accessed August 23, 2023, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000006452>.

of ‘director’s opera’ in the latter part of the twentieth century.² Staging serves as the vessel for the opera created by the composer, while also being the vibrant and contemporary means through which the creative team presents the ideas of the work. Reception encompasses audiences’ and opera professionals’ feedback on the production, which continually evolves over time, resulting in new interpretations that enrich the opera’s contextual significance, reflecting the era it belongs to.

Productions may occasionally face harsh criticism: Paul Robinson states in ‘A Deconstructive Postscript: Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera’ that any interpretation of staged opera is likely to result in a misreading.³ However, interpreters of opera should not be intimidated by criticism, which would prevent them from bringing the opera from the page to the stage, thereby risking stagnation without innovation. Ultimately, the concept of ‘music-performance’—where the act of performing is seen as an interpretative and creative process—is a vital method for presenting written works.⁴ As described by Nicholas Cook’s ‘page-to-stage’ research model, performance is not merely a reproduction of the score but an active engagement that brings new meaning to the music.⁵

An opera production is an intricate and comprehensive entity. It should consist of both material and interpretative elements, as each is indispensable. The material aspect of an opera production revolves around the physical staging, also known as *mise-en-scène*, which includes set design, lighting, costume, makeup and hairstyles, blocking, performers and musical instruments, among others. The material content of an opera production involves the collaborative efforts of the creative team, including the director, the orchestra and the conductor, working in harmony with the on-stage performers to bring the opera to life.

² Ibid.

³ Paul Robinson, ‘A Deconstructive Postscript: Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera’, Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (eds), *Reading Opera* (Princeton, 1988), 328.

⁴ Nicholas Cook, ‘Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance, 7:2’, *The Online Journal of the Society for Music Theory*, 2001.

⁵ Ibid.

The interpretative aspect of opera production can be understood as revolving around three groups, each generating three levels of reception. These three groups consist of the creative team with the director at its core, the orchestra with the conductor at its core and the vocal performers' ensemble with the soloists at its core, along with the audience observing the opera. Therefore, opera production entails three levels of reception: the creative team, with the director as the core, interpreting the musical work; the ensemble of performers understanding the director's and conductor's vision and adding their own dimensions; and the audience comprehending the stage production.⁶ It is crucial to recognise that the audience's understanding of the stage production is an integral part of the interpretative and receptive chain, which plays a crucial role in the construction of a complete musical work. Consequently, opera cannot be disconnected from its audience.

0.2 Reception Theory of Opera and its Staging and Production

The reception of an opera contributes to the identity and meaning of the work; thus, subsequent understandings and interpretations become integral to its identity. Rather than other purely musical pieces, opera often tells us quite tangibly about changing extra-musical cultural values through performances and interpretations across time, with interpretations sometimes unsettling works and maybe even working in counter-intuitive ways.⁷ For instance, in *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (2007), David Levin critically reassesses opera production, focusing on opera houses in the United States and Germany. He introduces a variety of conventional and unconventional modes of stage production, and argues that the cases presented in

⁶ Áine Sheil, 'The Politics of Reception: Richard Wagner *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Weimar Germany', (doctoral thesis, King's College London, 2003), 25.

⁷ Nicholas Till, *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University of Cambridge, 2012), 226-230. Also see David J. Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 2-3.

the book challenge audiences' perceptions of specific operas and contribute to a reimagined understanding of the concept of opera as it unfolds on stage.⁸

Reception history reflects the relationship between musical works, performances, and listeners rather than the relationship between musical works and listeners. Musical works tend to be mediated and negotiated through performance rather than reaching recipients in the more direct ways with novels and literature. Thus, the recipient generally accepts performance as part of the process of understanding a musical work to some degree.

Despite the fact that opera is a music genre that combines theatre and music, it has been historically marginalised by both musicology and theatre studies due to the cultural separation of theatre and music in Europe. Addressing this marginalisation, Nicholas Till argues that opera studies possesses the requisite criteria, rules, and elements to stand as a distinct academic discipline, rather than being bifurcated into music and theatre.⁹

Different from a literary work, opera perception encompasses the work of the composer, librettist, direction team (including director of the opera, conductor, lighting/costume designer, etc.), as well as performers' understanding of the operatic work. These aspects are the crucial parameters to make comments on any specific opera production with multi-layers and complex contexts. A number of musicologists explore new textual and cultural analysis in their research, such as gender studies, literary studies, politics, and film theory, etc. Echoing Nicholas Till's perspective, opera studies have undergone a transformation since the early 1990s, moving away from formalist and liberal humanist approaches towards an emphasis on the social and historical contexts of the works.¹⁰ This shift is also evident in the broadening scope of opera

⁸ Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 7.

⁹ Till, *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, 2.

¹⁰ Nicholas Till, 'Introduction: Opera Studies Today', in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, 1–22.

studies, which now encompass not only dramatic texts but also performance practices and events.¹¹

Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker's publication *Analyzing Opera* in 1989 expands opera studies into a broader realm of music performance and aesthetic value. Abbate and Parker initially focus on canonical works, such as Verdi and Wagner's operas, to re-explore familiar pieces through fresh critical approaches. The book transitions opera from a 'work' to a 'text', and subsequently from a 'text' to a 'performance'.¹²

However, researchers tend to shy away from dealing directly with this question: can stage performance shape, or even significantly alter the audience's understanding of an opera? Carolyn Abbate issued a challenge to scholars in her book *In Search of Opera*:

That musical works acquire alternative histories----identities constituted by licentious or excessive performances and (for opera) adaptations and staging----is a threat many scholars regard with horror: one need only look at reactions to radical mises-en-scène.¹³

Abbate posits that stage performances can significantly shape and alter both musicologists' and audiences' perceptions of opera. This opinion suggests a further picture of operatic stage productions: that they are not only gnostic in the dramaturgical analysis that is the foundation of live interpretations, but also drastic in staging and performance.¹⁴ In this way, opera is a carrier of performance that updates new meanings in different stagings as a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

The combination of staging and performance can hardly constitute a flawless opera production, it must involve the final recipient: the audience. Roland Barthes' assertion

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Abbate Carolyn and Roger Parker, *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Also see, George Martin, review of 'Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner', ed. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *The Opera Quarterly*, vol. 8 no. 1, (1991): 88-93.

¹³ Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xi.

¹⁴ Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 4-6. Also see Carolyn Abbate, 'Music: Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry*, 2004, 30/3, 505-36.

that ‘the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author’ challenges the notion of a stable text,¹⁵ disrupts the traditional ‘author-God’ paradigm, and underscores the recipient’s significance. One text cannot mean anything on its own, it is meaningful in an intertextual context that involves other parameters. Although Barthes offered the idea that writings are multidimensional constructs in which the reader generates meaning, it does not mean any recipient can act entirely autonomously in an interpretation of texts. Barthes’s perspective questions the idea of a consistent text and highlights the recipient’s involvement in constructing significance, thus emphasising the significance of audience interpretation in opera.

Roland Barthes asserts, ‘the text is experienced only in an activity of production’.¹⁶ From the mid-1990s onwards, musicologists have articulated intricate insights into historical performance practices and the social contexts within which operas were staged. In 1994, Roger Savage presented a cogent overview of opera staging history in ‘The Staging of Opera’.¹⁷ The following year, David Levin critically examined Wagner’s text in ‘Reading a Staging/Staging a Reading’,¹⁸ asserting that ‘we learn to recognise and demand a reasoned staging, an inventive staging, one that engages the interpretative faculties as well as musical and dramatic sensibilities’.¹⁹

In 1998, James Treadwell raised questions about Levin’s concept of performance as a decisive act of interpretation in ‘Reading a Staging’. According to Treadwell’s viewpoint, opera fell beyond the purview of academic scrutiny, resulting in opera performance being less tethered to theory and less committed to consciously

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in Roland Barthes and Heath Stephen, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), 189.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’, in *Image, Music, Text*, essays selected and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157.

¹⁷ Roger Savage, ‘The Staging of Opera’, in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*, ed. Roger Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 350-420.

¹⁸ ‘Wagner’s text’ can be understood here as words and music in Wagner’s works. The article examines the relationship between staging and reading in the context of opera and theatre, focusing specifically on Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger*.

¹⁹ David J. Levin, ‘Reading a staging/Staging a reading’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 9 no. 1 (1997): 69, 71.

interpretative efforts.²⁰ Levin swiftly and respectfully responded to Treadwell's concerns in 'Response to James Treadwell', contending that operatic *mise-en-scène* is a translation of the past into the present for a contemporary audience. It entails an interpretation of the music, rather than merely a visual representation of the music.²¹

The disagreements between Levin and Treadwell have significantly contributed to the advancement of opera studies, particularly within the realms of staging and production. The current evolutions in operatic stage production have converged with critical considerations within the field of musicology. Numerous opera houses now involve academic critics in their programme books and production protocols, as Levin states:

Especially in Germany, Opera houses often prepare extensive program books to accompany and elaborate upon new productions... The program books extend and embed the interpretive work done in the production, affording a further forum in which to elaborate the ideas presented onstage.²²

In 2011, Clemens Risi proposed a novel method for analysing the performative aspect of operatic productions. Risi argues that traditional approaches to analysing opera performances have neglected the intense bodily responses that operatic productions elicit. A new approach to analysing opera performances, according to Risi, should take into account the affective engagement of the audience, the performers, and the performance space.²³ He contends that the most attractive and successful parts of an opera performance are frequently those that deviate from the conventional parameters of dramaturgy and convincing portrayal of dramatic characters. Risi's approach differs from the typically score-oriented academic treatment of operatic productions, which

²⁰ James Treadwell, 'Reading and Staging again', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 10 no. 2 (1998): 205.

²¹ David J Levin, 'Response to James Treadwell', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 10 no. 3 (1998): 307-11.

²² Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 5-6.

²³ Clemens Risi, 'Opera in Performance—In Search of New Analytical Approaches', *Opera Quarterly* 27 (2011): 283-95.

emphasises the transition from text/score to *mise-en-scène*/interpretation, from page to stage.²⁴

Often, the audience is not fully aware of the role of scenery, costumes, and stage action in transforming opera into a vivid theatrical experience. Behind the scenes, stagehands, scenic artists, electricians, and stage managers are involved in this complex undertaking. *From the Score to the Stage* is the first comprehensive history of opera production; it traces the development of set design and visual style in continental Europe from the seventeenth century to the present day.²⁵ Written by Evan Baker, the book focuses on the stage directors, singers, composers, and technicians involved in bringing operas to life, as well as the other key figures and processes. It examines the difficulties of opera performance, the roles of impresarios, and the music publishing industry. The book also examines the history of stage direction, theatre technology, and stage design, tying together the technical aspects of actual performances with their social contexts. The book sheds new light on renowned operas by composers such as Wagner and Verdi through detailed discussions of specific productions.

By conducting in-depth analyses of case studies and encompassing a diverse array of musical compositions, musicologists have made significant strides in enhancing the theoretical and methodological aspects of musical performance studies. In 2012, *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies* was published. *The Companion* delivers methodological and interpretive resources for engaging with opera. This book challenges opera criticism that neglects diverse subject positions shaped by culture, gender, class, race, and sexuality.²⁶ Identity studies are examined in ‘Part IV Issues’, which delves into gender, national identity, and exoticism – areas often disregarded in opera studies in the past. *The Companion* serves as a reminder to musicologists that the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Evan Baker, *From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Production and Staging* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

²⁶ Till, *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*.

connection between opera and theatre extends beyond the libretto, encompassing the theatrical form shared by performances.²⁷

Feminist, queer, ethnic, decolonisation, and global trade studies contribute to the concept of the interdisciplinary in opera studies nowadays. Herbert Lindenberger examines opera in social, aesthetic, and historical contexts in *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception*, shedding light on a genre that has remained recognisable for over four centuries.²⁸ It explores how opera was initially perceived by audiences and its subsequent evolution. In addition, it addresses how innovative musical and theatrical techniques posed a challenge to modern opera audiences. Drawing on recent neuroscience experiments, Lindenberger illustrates how various operatic forms evolved over time to captivate audiences, and how opera has communicated with its audiences by examining operatic moments from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* to the present day. Overall, his book promotes the field of opera studies as a burgeoning interdisciplinary domain of academic inquiry.

Stemming from interdisciplinary study, contemporary approaches to opera have transcended traditional disciplinary boundaries. *Opera Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries* (2006) contains thirteen essays that move across geographical and social boundaries into a variety of cultural contexts; they analyse movements between media and genre through interpretation and performance of composers' creations and they document the transforming effects of aesthetic considerations as they bear on opera. This collection asserts that transformation of the circumstances of creation and reception of operatic works has an impact on the life of those works in their following transformations, but also influences audiences' experience and reception of them.²⁹ Roberta Montemorra Marvin, in her 'Introduction

²⁷ Jesse Njus, 'Review of The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies, ed. Nicholas Till', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, vol. 31 no.2 (2017): 169-171.

²⁸ Herbert Lindenberger, *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

²⁹ Roberta Montemorra Marvin, and Downing A. Thomas, *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries* (Ashgate, Aldershot and Burlington, 2006).

to Special Issue on Opera Reception' (2013), also asserts that the evolving technology of the twenty-first century introduces new modes of accessing operatic performances, presents new possibilities for staging productions, and offers new means of communication about these works and their performances.³⁰ Emanuele Senici likewise asserts that the advent of recording, radio broadcasting, and video has engendered a transformation in terms of accessing opera, offering the potential for limitless repeatability.³¹ Senici further contends that technologies mark a pivotal phase in the realm of reproduction.³²

Danielle Ward-Griffin's research explores how opera's reception and staging have been influenced by media, particularly television and site-specific film adaptations. In her study of the NBC Opera, she demonstrates how the network's productions between 1949 and 1964 aimed to redefine opera for American audiences by incorporating televisual aesthetics, such as English translations and more intimate staging techniques, to create a form that was both theatrically engaging and suitable for television's close-up, screen-centric format.³³ This approach challenged traditional operatic conventions and sought to make the genre more accessible and relevant in a post-war media landscape. Similarly, her analysis of Britten's *Billy Budd* traces the evolution of realism across stage and screen productions, noting how directors employed a 'selective realism' to negotiate psychological intensity and naturalistic detail, using television to cultivate a more intimate engagement with the opera's narrative.³⁴ In her examination of the site-specific film *Peter Grimes* on Aldeburgh Beach, Ward-Griffin delves into how cinematic adaptations reshape the reception of operatic space. She argues that such

Also see, Stephen Tcharos, 'Review Work *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*', *Music & Letters*, Oxford University Press, vol.89, no.1 (2008): 121.

³⁰ Roberta Montemorra Marvin, 'Introduction to Special Issue on Opera Reception', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2013): 117.

³¹ Emanuele Senici, 'In the Score: Music and Media in the Discourse of Operatic Mise-En-Scène', *Opera Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 3, (2019): 207–09.

³² *Ibid.*, 209.

³³ Danielle Ward-Griffin, 'As Seen on TV: Putting the NBC Opera on Stage', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71, no. 3 (2018): 602.

³⁴ Danielle Ward-Griffin, 'Realism Redux: Staging *Billy Budd* in the Age of Television', *Music & Letters* 100, no. 3 (2019): 450.

productions blend live performance with filmic techniques to create a ‘hypermediated’ experience, where visual and auditory elements are manipulated to intensify the viewer’s sense of immersion, ultimately transforming the perception of the opera’s ‘authentic’ setting.³⁵ By situating these works within the broader context of operatic production, Ward-Griffin’s research underscores how evolving media have continually influenced the aesthetic and cultural reception of opera, making her contributions vital for understanding modern developments in operatic staging and reception theory.

In *Opera in Performance* (2022), Clemens Risi explicates the performative aspect of contemporary opera productions, providing a cutting-edge investigation into the performance.³⁶ Risi conducts a critical analysis of his interactions with singers, stagings, and performances at opera houses and festivals throughout the German-speaking region over the past two decades. This book initially focuses on the nuances of actual performance, draws readers’ attention to previously unexplained moments and provides tools for describing the experience of opera audiences. Moreover, it emphasises the importance of examining the interaction between auditory and visual elements in opera productions and how this interaction influences audience interpretation of the work. Additionally, it highlights the significance of interdisciplinary approaches between fields such as musicology, theatre studies, and visual arts. Risi advocates for further research and exploration of new technologies and digital media to enhance the production and distribution of opera, aiming to attract new audiences.

In bridging the gap between existing academic discussions on opera production and some of the contemporary challenges faced by the opera industry, this thesis introduces a method that combines archival research with additional theoretical insights. My approach particularly aligns with Till’s call for a heightened focus on the perception and cultural factors in opera studies, incorporating perspectives and insights from

³⁵ Danielle Ward-Griffin, ‘Virtually There: Site-Specific Performance on Screen *Peter Grimes* on Aldeburgh Beach’, *Opera Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2015): 364.

³⁶ Clemens Risi, *Opera in Performance: Analyzing the Performative Dimension of Opera Productions*, trans. Anthony Mahler (London: Routledge, 2022).

production teams and valuing aspects before, during, and after production. In analysing the design and performance elements on the opera stage, I draw on Levin's focus on production staging and potential avenues for audience interpretation, as well as Abbate's emphasis on 'performance' in opera. Through an analysis of existing documentary types and digital media, I explore the interaction between dynamic performances by actors and static staging on stage, considering the production team's creative intentions in light of Barthes's perspective on audience reception, especially critics' reviews. Furthermore, for operas with electronic archives, I consider Clemens Risi's process from 'text/score' to 'mise-en-scène/interpretation', situating opera within discussions on art in the digital age, highlighting opera's relevance and adaptability in an ever-changing cultural landscape.

0.3 *The Turn of the Screw* and related statistics

An examination of the evolution of operatic stage and performance theories since the advent of new musicology in the mid-1980s reveals a distinct trend. Research predominantly gravitates towards German and Italian canonical operas. Despite the resurgence of twentieth-century British operas in public consciousness (as elaborated in the following section) and their prominent staging in opera houses, they have attracted comparatively limited scholarly focus in the sphere of opera production research.

An analysis of the *Cambridge Opera Journal* from its inception in 1989 (Volume 1, Issue 1) through to 2023 (Volume 35, Issue 1), alongside the *Opera Quarterly* spanning 1983 (Volume 1, Issue 1) to 2022 (Volume 36, Issue 3-4), reveals that attention to detailed case studies focusing on individual opera productions by the British composer Benjamin Britten has begun to emerge. There are discussions and reviews of key productions, such as *Peter Grimes* on Aldeburgh Beach,³⁷ as well as treatments of first productions. Notably, Danielle Ward-Griffin's article, 'Theme Park Britten',

³⁷ Ward-Griffin, 'Peter Grimes on Aldeburgh Beach'.

engages with productions of *Albert Herring* and *Peter Grimes*,³⁸ indicating that Britten's works have been examined in relation to their staging and interpretation. Other scholarly work on the productions of Britten's operas exists in other journals, periodicals, and doctoral theses. For instance, Monika Brown discussed Petr Weigl's filmic opera production in 1982 in *Mosaic*,³⁹ while Michael Ewans examined film versions and stage productions.⁴⁰ Britten on the operatic stage has also been explored in doctoral theses, such as Imani Mosley's 2019 thesis, which investigated the reception of four of Britten's operas (*Billy Budd*, *Gloriana*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Owen Wingrave*).⁴¹ Peter Auker, in his 2021 doctoral thesis, analysed the cinematic elements in *The Turn of the Screw* and discussed how these elements manifest themselves in film adaptations of the opera and video recorded stage productions.⁴²

This thesis, therefore, selects Benjamin Britten's chamber opera *The Turn of the Screw* as a critical and exemplary case study, aiming to further enrich the field of Britten's opera production studies. This selection shifts the focus to a topic that has hitherto received scant attention within academic circles: the performance and stage art of British opera. By undertaking this approach, the study aims to contribute significantly to the scholarship on the production of British operatic works, with a particular emphasis on stagings within the United Kingdom.

Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976) occupied a significant role as a highly influential English composer, conductor, and pianist. Britten is also recognised for his role in rejuvenating English opera. After a journey to America in 1942, Britten established the

³⁸ Danielle Ward-Griffin, 'Theme Park Britten: Staging the English Village at the Aldeburgh Festival', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 27 no. 3 (2019), 63-95.

³⁹ Monika Brown, 'Film Music as Sister Art: Adaptations of "The Turn of the Screw"', *Mosaic* 31, 1 (1998): 72-8.

⁴⁰ Michael Ewans, 'Interpretation and performance: *The Turn of the Screw* by Benjamin Britten and Myfanwy Piper', *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, vol. 14 no. 3 (2021), 259-279.

⁴¹ Imani Danielle Mosley, '"The Queer Things He Said": British Identity, Social History, and Press Reception of Benjamin Britten's Postwar Operas', (doctoral thesis, Duke University, 2019).

⁴² Peter Auker, 'Their Dreams and Ours: Britten, Film, and "The Turn of the Screw"', (doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2021).

English Opera Group (EOG), an entity dedicated to the creation and performance of English operas. Furthermore, Britten's operatic compositions have garnered immense respect and are often acknowledged for their ability to vividly convey his personal inspirations, concerns, and aspirations. His contributions played a substantial part in elevating English music throughout the twentieth century.⁴³

The Guardian Newspaper published an article titled 'Top 50 Operas' in 2011, which compiled a list of the 50 outstanding opera works from various countries over the course of more than four centuries since the inception of opera. Among them, *The Turn of the Screw* secured a place, alongside another opera by Britten, *Peter Grimes*. Britten, thus, joined the ranks of notable British composers on the list, following in the footsteps of Henry Purcell and the German-British composer George Frideric Handel.⁴⁴

According to data analysis, Britten's works have had a notable presence in the British opera market. Operabase reveals data spanning from 1996 to the 2024 opera season, demonstrating that Britten's operas hold a significant position in the top 50 performed and produced operas in the British opera scene. Specifically, five of Britten's operas feature in this category: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with 238 performances and 45 productions, *The Turn of the Screw* with 212 performances and 38 productions, *Albert Herring* with 191 performances and 35 productions, and *Peter Grimes* with 150 performances and 31 productions. Additionally, the list includes other British composers, such as Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with 271 performances and 80 productions. This data suggests that Britten's operas have maintained a substantial presence in the British opera market over the past three decades.⁴⁵

⁴³ Jennifer Doctor, Judith LeGrove, Paul Banks, Heather Wiebe, and Philip Brett. 'Britten, (Edward) Benjamin'. *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed Aug 8, 2023. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000046435>.

⁴⁴ Fiona Maddocks, 'Top 50 Operas', *The Guardian*, Aug 20, 2011, accessed Aug 10, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/aug/20/top-50-operas>.

⁴⁵ 'Statistics by Operas', *Operabase*, accessed Sep 26, 2024, <https://www.operabase.com/statistics/en>.

Given Benjamin Britten's pivotal status in English art music, a plethora of academic sources cover various aspects of his life and work. These sources range from biographies to musical analyses and interdisciplinary explorations. Additionally, the Britten-Pears Foundation has meticulously curated invaluable materials relating to Britten in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, England. This research encompasses diverse perspectives, spanning musical analysis, operatic reception, interpretation, and more, evident in academic journals, newspapers, and doctoral theses.

As one of Britten's most notable and frequently performed operas, *The Turn of the Screw* has been interpreted both as a depiction of characters' psychological processes and as a ghost story. The opera was composed in 1954 and had its première on September 14, 1954, at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Italy. The libretto for the opera was written by Myfanwy Piper, and it closely follows the plot of Henry James's eponymous novella from 1898 while condensing and adapting the story to fit the operatic format.

Set in a remote English country estate during the late 19th century, the story is a classic example of a psychological horror tale. It follows the experiences of a young governess who is hired to care for two orphaned children, Miles and Flora, at a grand and somewhat eerie mansion named Bly. As she settles into her role, the Governess starts to perceive strange and unsettling occurrences. She becomes convinced that the estate is haunted by the malevolent spirits of two former employees, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, who had a questionable influence over the children before their deaths. The Governess becomes increasingly obsessed with protecting the children from these alleged supernatural entities, but she struggles to determine whether the threats are real or products of her own imagination. The children's behavior becomes more mysterious and complex, blurring the line between innocence and malevolence. The story delves into themes of repressed desires, psychological instability, and the ambiguity between reality and the supernatural.

Britten's decision to adapt *The Turn of the Screw* into an opera was influenced by his fascination with its 'glorious & eerie' nature, and he deemed it an 'incredible masterpiece'.⁴⁶ He also had a desire to create a chamber opera that featured a small cast and orchestra.⁴⁷ The opera is known for its intense and evocative music, which captures the eerie and suspenseful atmosphere of the original novella. Britten uses a 13-player chamber orchestra, which adds to the intimate and unsettling nature of the story. The small ensemble allows for intricate and detailed orchestration that supports the psychological depth of the characters and the narrative tension. The vocal writing is also highly expressive, reflecting the emotional and psychological turmoil of the characters.

The Turn of the Screw received widespread acclaim after its première in Venice, generating significant attention at the Venice Biennale. In *Musical America*, Christina Thoresby described the opera as the second pinnacle of Britten's accomplishments following *Peter Grimes*,⁴⁸ while Felix Aprahamian, writing in the *Sunday Times*, hailed it as 'the peak of Britten's achievement'.⁴⁹

As this opera, which received widespread acclaim during its première in Venice, returned to its home country in the UK for its national première on 6th October, 1954, it was similarly greeted with overwhelming praise. Andrew Smith of the *Daily Herald* stated, 'The audience left him in no doubt that he had triumphed.'⁵⁰ Andrew Porter of *The Financial Times* proclaimed,

We need have no hesitation in declaring that Benjamin Britten's new opera, 'The Turn of the Screw', is the most distinguished work of art that the British theatre has produced... since 'The Rape of Lucretia' first appeared.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Benjamin Britten, *Benjamin Britten's Diary*, Britten-Pears Library, Jan 6 and 7, 1933.

⁴⁷ Arnold Whittall, 'The Chamber Operas', in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1999), 104-5.

⁴⁸ Christina Thoresby, 'Britten Premiere', *Musical America*, November 1, 1954, 5.

⁴⁹ Felix Aprahamian, 'Britten in Venice', *The Sunday Times*, September 19, 1954.

⁵⁰ Andrew Smith, 'Horror-opera Triumphs', *Daily Herald*, October 7, 1954.

⁵¹ Andrew Porter, 'The Turn of the Screw', *The Financial Times*, October 7, 1954.

However, upon closer examination of critical feedback, we discover that there are also sceptical voices regarding the opera. Sheila Lynd in *Daily Worker* pointed out that sometimes the opera's elements, such as the children playfully adding a comic verse to the Magnificat or the use of high voices for all characters, create an unintended sense of absurdity and complexity.⁵² In the *Daily Express*, Cecil Smith criticised Britten's *Screw* for lacking sufficient narrative coherence:

Benjamin Britten's new opera is a failure. But because his inventive genius shines through its ineptitudes it is a magnificent failure. At the first London performance of 'The Turn of the Screw' last night I felt – even more strongly than I had at the world premiere in Venice last month – that he had written a music drama without drama.⁵³

Even with critics' scepticism about the opera's dramatic and musical qualities, it did not hinder the opera's enthusiastic reception during its performances at the time. This could perhaps be attributed to the continuous stream of opera reviews published after its national première in London, which sparked interest in the opera.

According to EOG's financial reports, the theatre's financial capacity show a consistent upward trend in the four performances of its UK première run (Figure 0.4).⁵⁴ It reached 73% on October 7th, 87% on October 8th, 93% on October 11th, and 100% on October 16th. With an average of 88%, it became the opera with the highest financial capacity in EOG's 1954 opera season. In contrast, *The Beggar's Opera*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, and the double-bill *Love in a Village/A Dinner Engagement* staged during the 1954 opera season ended with dismal financial capacities, averaging 59, 46, and 61% respectively. Despite the impressive financial performance of *The Turn of the Screw*, EOG still concluded the 1954 opera season with a financial deficit of £2000, marking it as a bleak season.⁵⁵

⁵² Sheila Lynd, 'This Britten is Fascinating', *Daily Worker*, October 7, 1954.

⁵³ Cecil Smith, 'It's a Failure-But It's Magnificent', *Daily Express*, October 7, 1954.

⁵⁴ Paul Kildea, *Selling Britten: Music and the Market Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 113.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-3.

Such deficit results are not solely attributed to the high production costs of the new operas but are also closely tied to the significant impact of poor ticket sales due to low attendance rates for these operas.⁵⁶ These figures indirectly indicate the relatively high approval that Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* received from the British public at that time.

0.4 Reception History and *The Turn of the Screw*

In all art the road to appreciation lies through reflection.

-----Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*⁵⁷

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said that one cannot step into the same river twice.⁵⁸ This adage aptly reflects the fluid nature of the meaning and value of artistic works, which are not inherent or static but rather co-created by their recipients, who themselves evolve over time. The recipient's judgment, interpretation, and re-creation of the work affects whether the work is perceived to be valuable, whether there is an afterlife,⁵⁹ and the length of the afterlife. Although the concept of 'reception' was only formally proposed and discussed by German critics in the late 1960s, it has long existed in ancient Greek philosophical concepts and later theatre concepts, such as the awareness of the audience in Shakespeare's writing. The twentieth century witnessed a burgeoning of theoretical research in this area, seeking to redress the nineteenth century positivist focus on the ontological study of works. In contemporary times, reception

⁵⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁵⁷ Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, trans. Richard N. Coe (London: John Calder Press, 1970), 7.

⁵⁸ The original Greek text is 'ποταμῷ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμβῆναι δις τῷ αὐτῷ καθ' Ἡράκλειτον οὐδὲ θνητῆς οὐσίας δις ἄψασθαι κατὰ ἕξιν <τῆς αὐτῆς>', which means 'for, according to Heraclitus, it is not possible to step twice into the same river, nor is it possible to touch a mortal substance twice in so far as its state (*hexis*) is concerned'. See Thomas More Robinson, *Fragments* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 55.

⁵⁹ The term 'afterlife' in musical reception studies, which Carl Dahlhaus attributes to Walter Benjamin, suggests that a musical work 'threads its way through many different social and cultural formations, attaching itself to them in different ways, adapting its own appearance and in the process changing theirs' See Jim Samson, 'Reception', *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040600>.

theory has become an indispensable framework for Western academics in the study of artworks.

0.4.1 Artistic creation as reception—James’s and Britten’s *The Turn of the Screw*

Britten’s opera *The Turn of the Screw*, adapted from Henry James’s novella of the same name, occupies a place in the tradition of reception and interpretation of this work. Trends in interpreting James’s story that serve as references for Britten’s creative work allow Britten’s opera to be integrated into a broader discourse of interpretation of James’s work. This section demonstrates how James and Britten were recipients too of various artistic work and influences in creating their respective versions of *The Turn of the Screw*.

This Gothic and experimental work of fiction achieved extraordinary recognition during James’s lifetime, and it has been argued that even now, readers tend to know the author of *The Turn of the Screw* is James even though they know nothing about or anything else by him.⁶⁰ James thoughtfully engaged with the ghost story genre: he was knowledgeable about the literary traditions and conventions of ghost stories and aimed to bring new ideas to this genre. In the novella, he added psychological complexity and uncertainty to the story, transforming it from simple ghostly encounters to a deep investigation of perception, reality, and the unconscious mind. This introduction of ambiguity and psychological complexity into the ghost story genre was groundbreaking and has led to ongoing interest in and scholarly discussion about the novella.

Furthermore, James was influenced by various literary and cultural sources. The late nineteenth century, when James was writing, was a period marked by a fascination with spiritualism and the supernatural as mentioned previously, as well as a burgeoning interest in psychology and the inner workings of the mind. These cultural currents, including the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose exploration of moral and

⁶⁰ Vivien Jones, ‘Henry James’s “The Turn of the Screw”’ in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Patricia Howard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1.

psychological complexity James admired,⁶¹ along with James's own personal experiences and literary influences shaped his approach to writing the novella.

The study of *The Turn of the Screw* and its adaptations has evolved over time since its publication as a serialisation in *Collier's Weekly* in 1898. James's novella is a pioneering work in the ghost story genre, originating from an anecdote shared with James by Archbishop of Canterbury Edward White Benson in 1895. The story is mainly about the Governess' fight with two ghosts to protect two children, as James hints in his *Notebooks* (12 January 1895):

Note here the ghost-story told to me at Addington ... the story of the young children left to the care of servants in an old country-house, through the death, presumably, of parents. The servants, wicked and depraved, corrupt and deprave the children; the children are bad, full of evil, to a sinister degree. The servants die and their apparitions, figures, return to haunt the house and children, to whom they seem to beckon, whom they invite and solicit, from across dangerous paves, the deep ditch of a sunk fence, etc.⁶²

This anecdote is widely believed to have had a significant impact on James's conception of the novella. The story of ghosts visiting an old country villa provided James with a basic narrative structure, which he could adapt and expand upon in his creation of the story. The note indicates that these ghosts are real and their relationships with the children are genuine, and the Governess is a narrative figure, an outside spectator. This interpretation was accepted for more than twenty years. In the 1920s-1930s, two critics, Heywood Broun and William Lyon Phelps, claimed that apparitions haunt the children and the young Governess does see the real ghosts.⁶³

The Governess' experience is relayed by a third person narrator. Thus, there is a duality for speaker and hearer, actor and observer, since the Governess could be either

⁶¹ Fred Kaplan, *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius: A Biography* (London: Sceptre, 1993), 62.

⁶² Henry James, F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B Murdock ed., *The Notebooks of Henry James* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 178-79.

⁶³ Henry James, Heywood Broun, *The Turn of the Screw: the Lesson of the Master* (New York: Modern Library, 1930), see Introduction. Also see William Lyon Phelps, *Howells, James, Bryant and Other Essays* (New York: New York Macmillan Co., 1924), 143.

subjective or objective in her experience of the ghosts, and the listener in the novella who receives Douglas's story tends to take the Governess's experiences as true, even though they may not be objective. Meanwhile, the unnamed narrator of the main story can be seen as a describer who tells the Governess' story again to their listener (Fig. 0.4.1 (a)). The duality and ambiguity in the novella have generated many analyses of the original *Turn of the Screw* and the operatic version by Britten.

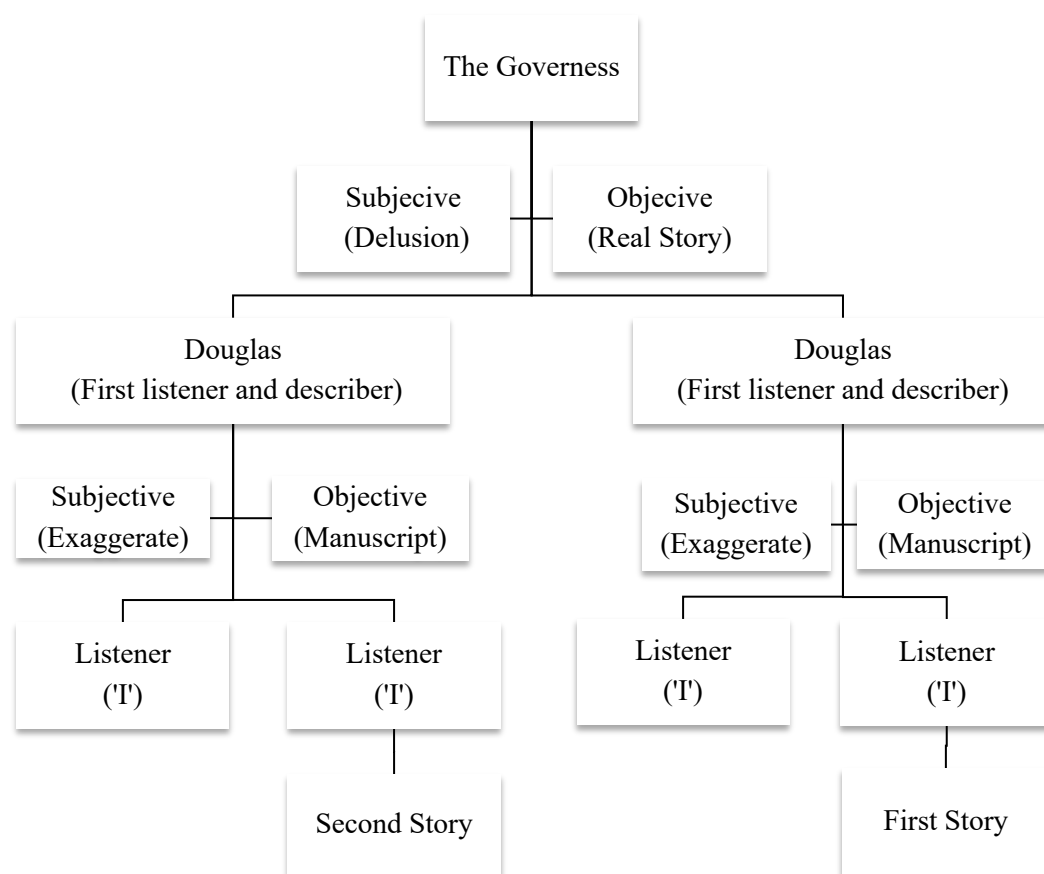


Fig. 0.4.1 (a) Two Interpretations in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*

Since opera can be described as one of the forms of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, it is worth analysing how the music and the libretto convey and present literary and dramatic features. Especially, it is well accepted that Britten was extraordinarily sensitive to literature in his compositions. Through examining the literary traces in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, we may begin to understand Britten and Piper's attitudes towards James. Piper once emphasised: 'Neither Britten nor I ever intended to interpret the work,

only to re-create it for a different medium'.⁶⁴ Although such a claim is difficult to fully realise in practice, an initial analysis of the libretto reveals that Piper and Britten mostly follow the novella's structure, but with some additions and omissions needed to make the translation from the novella more suited to musical form.

The opera extracts sixteen scenes from the 24 chapters of James's novella. While the structure shows that the libretto of the opera mostly keeps the frame of James's novella, there are some exceptions, for instance, Act I Scene 6 is based on Chapter 9, and Act I Scene 7 is based on material from Chapter 6-7. Furthermore, two chapters are omitted and two additional scenes are added to the opera: in the prologue, James's story opens with the house-party, drawing out many details and clues that serve the idea of an authentic ghost story, such as the locked drawer, the posting of the key, and the date that the manuscript can be delivered. These details are hard to transfer to the opera's opening scene as the narrative technique of the novella is totally based on literary techniques, so the characters, such as the first narrator (the anonymous 'I'), Douglas, and other guests in the novella do not show up in the opera's opening scene; Britten and Piper may also have wanted to minimise the cast to fit with the chamber nature of the opera.

Although James and Piper seem to share similar ideas, Britten himself has his own understanding of the novella: he balances the two interpretations and tries to enhance the ambiguity of the story in his composition. In the period in which Britten was composing the opera, scholars writing about *The Turn of the Screw* tended to focus on psychological analysis.⁶⁵ The omissions and additions of the libretto make the two different interpretations of 'are the ghosts real' or 'the Governess is hallucinating' applicable and sustain the ambiguity in the opera.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁵ See next section of the scholarly reception of James's *The Turn of the Screw*.

0.4.2 Scholarly reception of *The Turn of the Screw*

Early interpretations of James's novella primarily focused on the ambiguity of the narrative and the question of whether the ghosts were real or a product of the Governess's imagination. Critics have tried to examine the specific nature of the ghosts hinted at in the novella. One of the arguments is that the ghosts are objectively real, thus the Governess battles against evil in order to save Miles and Flora, and this kind of interpretation is referred to as 'first story' interpretation.

Although critics have attempted to link *The Turn of the Screw* to 'ghost stories' in the gothic genre, a more consistent approach has been to link it to 'ghost cases' by scholars of 'psychical research'.⁶⁶ Psychological interpretations gained prominence over time, with scholars and critics examining the Governess's mental state and her repressed desires. Another point of view is that the ghosts do not really exist, that they are the Governess's delusion, which is referred to as 'second story' interpretation.

In 1918, Virginia Woolf wrote that 'the ghosts represented the Governess' growing awareness of evil in the world. The power of the story was in forcing readers to realise the dark places fiction could take their minds'.⁶⁷ In 1919, Henry A. Beers claims that the Governess who saw the phantoms was mad.⁶⁸ In 1924, Edna Kenton followed the theory of the 'mad Governess', and analysed in detail the mystery of the Governess, in whose mind the ghosts and children are merely figures of troubled thought.⁶⁹ In 1934, Edmund Wilson's landmark study of the Governess's hallucinations followed ideas from Edna Kenton but also applied Freudian theory in suggesting the Governess was repressed.⁷⁰ Wilson portrayed the Governess as a sexually repressed hysteric who imagined all the apparently supernatural elements in James's *The Turn of the Screw* and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁶⁷ Virginia Woolf, 'The Supernatural in Fiction', in *Granite and Rainbow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1958), 63.

⁶⁸ Henry A. Beers, *Four Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), 44.

⁶⁹ Edna Kenton, 'Henry James to the Ruminant Reader: *The Turn of the Screw*', *The Arts* 4 (1924): 255.

⁷⁰ Edmund Wilson, 'The Ambiguity of Henry James', *Hound and Horn* 7, (1934): 385-406.

was directly responsible for Miles's death.⁷¹ It was a Freudian view, and the article was so influential that it could be said to have completely shifted the direction that literary discussion of the novel was heading in at the time.⁷² William Veeder concludes that the Governess has psychological problems, and that her expression of her unrequited love towards the Guardian on Miles induced Miles's death.⁷³ These kinds of debates are based on a Freudian interpretation in which the Governess could not gain the love she wanted from the children's guardian. This Freudian interpretation emphasises symbols of identification, for instance, Quint's first appearance on a tower and the Governess's sexual repression, as Wilson proposed.⁷⁴

In 1965, Thomas Cranfill characterised the Governess as increasingly mad and hysterical by using Wilson's Freudian analysis as a foundation.⁷⁵ Leon Edel, who is James's most influential biographer, writes that it is not the ghosts who haunt the children, but the Governess herself.⁷⁶ Scholars have also claimed that James's caring for his sister, Alice, and others suffering from mental illness made him acutely aware of the power of the unconscious mind. Besides, William James, who was James's brother, was aware of the developing ideas about the unconscious mind in Paris and Vienna, and these ideas inspired James to some degree.⁷⁷

The Turn of the Screw: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism, edited by Robert Kimbrough in 1966, discusses various interpretations of

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Sydney E. Lond, "'The Turn of the Screw': The Torment of Critics", *Centennial Review* 4, (1970), 225-40.

⁷³ William Veeder, "The Nurturance of the Gothic", *Gothic Studies* 1, no.7 (Aug 1999), 47.

⁷⁴ Jones, 'Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw"', 19.

⁷⁵ Thomas Mabry Cranfill, and Jr. Robert Lanier, *An Anatomy of 'The Turn of the Screw'*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965, 57. Also see, Peter G. Beidler, *The Turn of the Screw: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Macmillan Education, 1995), 131.

⁷⁶ Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Treacherous Years, 1895-1901* (London: Hart-Davis, 1969), 191-203.

⁷⁷ Terry Heller, *The Turn of the Screw: Bewildered Vision* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 10.

James's *The Turn of the Screw*,⁷⁸ extending the analysis beyond conventional viewpoints. Eric Solomon's synopsis presents two possibilities: either the Governess is a malevolent figure with no ghosts, or supernatural entities exist, and the Governess is an innocent confronting these paranormal forces. Mark Spilka in his essay 'Turning the Freudian Screw: How Not to Do It', argues against psychoanalytic interpretations that label the Governess as neurotic or insane, contending that such readings misinterpret her experiences as hallucinations that harm innocent children.⁷⁹ Spilka argues that such interpretations impose modern attitudes upon the text, obscuring James's original critique of social expectations placed on the Governess's image and her position as a victim of Victorian prudery.⁸⁰

Since the 1980s, there have been extensive conversations regarding the sexuality portrayed in James's *The Turn of the Screw*. Vivien Jones considers and investigates a range of topics in her essay 'Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw"', including whether there is anything sexual between Quint and Miles, and between Jessel and Flora, as well as whether or not the children see intimate scenes between Quint and Miss Jessel:

In *The Turn of the Screw*, the relationship between Quint and Miss Jessel and the children, if not themselves sexual, at least involve the children's knowledge of Quint and Miss Jessel's affair, a knowledge explored with unJamesian explicitness in the film *The Nightcomers*.⁸¹

Jones thus draws attention to the significance of sexuality in the power dynamic of James's story.⁸² Christopher Palmer expands on Jones's claim to shed further light on the theme of sexuality in James's *The Turn of the Screw*:

⁷⁸ Robert Kimbrough, *The Turn of the Screw: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966).

⁷⁹ Mark Spilka, 'Turning the Freudian Screw: How Not to Do It', in Robert Kimbrough, *The Turn of the Screw: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism*, 245.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁸¹ Jones, 'Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw"', 9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Homosexuality, incest, paedophilia, even nymphomania are all to some extent implied (never, of course, overtly stated) in James, but the central burden of interest is indubitably weighted on the first.⁸³

In addition, the perspective of childhood precocity has been carefully examined in recent years, with Roisin Laing arguing that through this precocious function, children in nineteenth-century discourse can reflect a perfect adult self. Precocity appears to be a sexual trait in much of the medical research of the time in nineteenth-century, which is consistent with *The Turn of the Screw*'s unavoidable implication that children have a particular kind of sexual precocity.⁸⁴

Edited by Peter G. Beidler, *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism* (1995) encompasses articles from perspectives including reader response, psychoanalysis, feminist, and Marxist criticism.⁸⁵ In her article 'What then on earth was I?: Feminine subjectivity and *The Turn of the Screw*', Priscilla L. Walton argues that James employs the 'I' narration in the story, adopting a female voice to enable critical speculation on power imbalances. James uses a female perspective and skilfully uses feminine voices to critically foreground discussion on power inequality. In a male-dominated cultural backdrop, employing his authority as a male writer, James skillfully uses a female narrative voice to critically address issues of power imbalance, thus enhancing the credibility of his work. James's nuanced approach adds a layer of complexity to his text by subtly incorporating feminine characteristics that highlight the perceived lack of authority of the Governess.⁸⁶ This multifaceted analysis illuminates the complex interplay of gender, power dynamics, and narrative technique in the works of *The Turn of the Screw*.

⁸³ Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', 103.

⁸⁴ Roisin Laing, 'The Precocious Child in the Late Nineteenth Century', (doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2016), 29-30, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11882/>.

⁸⁵ Peter G. Beidler, *The Turn of the Screw: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism* (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

⁸⁶ Priscilla L. Walton, "'What Then on Earth Was I?': Feminine Subjectivity and *The Turn of the Screw*" in *The Turn of the Screw: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Peter G. Beidler (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 253-4.

Linda Simon's 2007 work, *The Critical Reception of Henry James*, explores the effects of the evolution of literary criticism on interpretation of James's work, investigating the ever-changing preferences, standards, and expectations across generations. The book explores fundamental questions regarding the nature and cultural significance of novels and short stories, as well as the relationships between authors, characters, and readers. It thoroughly investigates the historical development of literary criticism, transitioning from aesthetically inclined reviewers at the end of the nineteenth century to critics in the mid-twentieth century who questioned literature's social impact. Moreover, in 'Gender, Sexuality, Intimacy', there is a thorough exploration of the academic inquiry into James's experiences with sexuality and intimate friendships,⁸⁷ informing the exploration of '5.2 Henry James's Homosexual Tendency'.

Essentially, the examination of James's *The Turn of the Screw* has shifted from a limited emphasis on the narrative's ambiguity to a more wide-ranging investigation of how societal, psychological, and cultural influences influence the interpretation of the story.

*

Academic research on Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, like the academic community's study of James's novella *The Turn of the Screw*, has also gone through different stages with different focuses. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the main discussions were about Britten's life, the musical techniques in *The Turn of the Screw*, and whether the ghosts created in the opera by Britten are real.

In 1979, Peter Evans's *The Music of Benjamin Britten* examines Britten's musical language through musical examples and diagrams. Evans placed his study within a broader social framework, considering Britten's music as part of a larger cultural landscape rather than studying it in isolation. Additionally, the book explored the

⁸⁷ Linda Simon, *The Critical Reception of Henry James: Creating a Master* (Rochester, New York: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 114-36.

literary background and summarised critics' evaluations of *The Turn of the Screw*, significantly advancing academic research on Britten.⁸⁸

Patricia Howard's book, *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, published in 1985, stands as a vital resource for the in-depth study of *The Turn of the Screw*. This work compiles numerous chapters, providing analyses of the opera from various angles, including the novella, the libretto, the music, and the performance.⁸⁹ It offers a wealth of imaginative viewpoints and ideas in the exploration of the musical themes.

While the academic community was fervently exploring Britten's life and the ontological content of *The Turn of the Screw*, the social and cultural discussions on topics of sexuality and gender were becoming more open. Although there was some discussion of the homosexual elements in Britten's works during his lifetime, due to the sensitivity of homosexuality being illegal in the context of the era, discussions of this element were limited to some critical newspapers and magazines. It was not until after Britten's death that academic research gradually increased regarding his sexual orientation and the presence of homosexuality in his works.

From the late 1970s onwards, scholars have directed their attention towards the elements of sexuality in *The Turn of the Screw* and engaged in debates surrounding Quint's sexual orientation, as well as the nature of the relationship between Quint and Miles. Peter Evans, for instance, posits that Quint exerts a malevolent influence on Miles.⁹⁰ In 1985, Christopher Palmer explored what he saw as a sexual relationship between Peter Quint and Miles from a musical perspective in his essay 'The Colour of the Music'.⁹¹ In 1990, in the article 'Why did Miles die? A study of Britten's "The Turn of the Screw"', Clifford Hindley put forward an argument about the factors leading to Miles's death through detailed analysis of the libretto and music, but also explored the theme of the guardianship relationship between Quint and the Governess,

⁸⁸ Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (London: J. M. Dent, 1979), 203-22.

⁸⁹ Patricia Howard, *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁹⁰ Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 215.

⁹¹ Christopher Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Patricia Howard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 101-25.

confirming the concept of a 'triangular' relationship among Miles, Quint, and the Governess.⁹²

In 'Britten's Bad Boys Male Relations in *The Turn of the Screw*', the pervasive theme of oppression and marginalisation in Britten's musical compositions is astutely articulated by Philip Brett. He asserts that the relationship between Quint and Miles revolves around the pursuit of aspiration and liberation and contends that evidence of their unconventional sexual relationship can be readily discerned in both the libretto and the music.⁹³ Furthermore, Brett scrutinises the radical underpinnings of the triangular relationship involving Miles, Quint, and the Governess. In light of this, Brett proposes two potential avenues for subsequent research: firstly, exploring the dynamic between Britten and Quint; and secondly, re-evaluating the specific symbols in Britten's music in light of the nuances of sexuality.⁹⁴ Byron Adams observes that although the essays may have incited consternation among those safeguarding Britten's legacy at their original publication, the perspectives held by Britten's defenders have since evolved.⁹⁵ With the advent of the 21st century and media involvement, an increasing number of opera productions have been preserved, facilitating scholars' gradual shift in focus towards the productions of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* reception in their own right, thus enabling their study.

Jennifer Barnes asserts in *Television Opera* (2003) that early television productions prioritised both the composer and the work itself. However, subsequent film productions may shift focus away from strict adherence to the composer, using existing operas as a starting point to provide locations, characters, and plot, and then incorporating music to emphasise their cinematic treatment. Barnes illustrated this point by using two versions of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* as examples: the 1959

⁹² Clifford Hindley, 'Why Does Miles Die? A Study of Britten's 'The Turn of the Screw'', *The Musical Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (1990): 7-17.

⁹³ Philip Brett, 'Britten's Bad Boys Male Relations in *The Turn of the Screw*', in *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, Philip Brett and Jenny Doctor, 100.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Byron Adams, 'Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays', *Current Musicology* 84 (Fall 2007): 147-51; review of the book *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, 147.

television production by Associated-Rediffusion and the 1982 film production by Petr Weigl. She explains that the 1959 television production, under Britten's guidance, effectively leveraged television resources and largely adhered to Britten's interpretation. Conversely, the 1982 Weigl production as an operatic film had a wholly distinct lineage and a different cinematic perspective. It has introduced numerous interpretive elements, marking a significant departure from the 1959 television production.⁹⁶

In 2009, *Benjamin Britten: New Perspectives on his Life and Work* presented a 'snapshot' of the research being conducted at the time of the call for papers was issued.⁹⁷ David Crilly, a contributor to the volume, illustrates the cinematic influence on Britten in his 'Britten and the Cinematic Frame'. Crilly proposes that the multivalence of the 'cinematic frame' presents a sophisticated manipulation of visual and oral perspectives which is based on Britten's compositional technology. And Britten abundantly uses these kinds of compositional technology in both *Peter Grimes* and *The Turn of the Screw*.⁹⁸

In 2021, Peter Auker's doctoral thesis explored the conceptual framework of cinematic opera, scrutinising the cinematic attributes present within *The Turn of the Screw* that render it conducive to screen production. Auker believes that Britten's experiences at the GPO Film Unit in the 1930s to some extent influenced his later creations in television and film opera.⁹⁹ Thus, he probes Britten's engagement with film as a spectator and a film composer, discerning how these experiences informed his compositional and dramatic choices when crafting *The Turn of the Screw*. Furthermore, he delves into the subsequent cinematic interpretations of the opera, referencing an array of cinematic sequences to elucidate the evolution from the original narrative to stage production. The thesis encompassed interpretations from seven directors spanning

⁹⁶ Jennifer Barnes, *Television Opera: The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), 48-53.

⁹⁷ Lucy Walker, *Benjamin Britten: New Perspectives on his Life and Work* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), 2.

⁹⁸ David Crilly, 'Britten and the Cinematic Frame' in Lucy Walker, *Benjamin Britten: New Perspectives on his Life and Work* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), 56-72.

⁹⁹ Auker, 'Their Dreams and Ours: Britten, Film and "The Turn of the Screw"', 44.

the years 1959 to 2010, including a study of the rediscovered Peter Morley's 1959 Associated-Rediffusion television production.¹⁰⁰

Michael Ewans's article 'Interpretation and performance: *The Turn of the Screw* by Benjamin Britten and Myfanwy Piper' (2021)¹⁰¹ selects recordings of Michael Hampe's 1983 Bayerische Staatsoper production, Neil Armfield's 1992 Opera Australia production, and Louisa Muller's 2019 Garsington Opera production (accessed via YouTube) as objects of study; he also mentions the 2020 Alessandro Talevi Opera North production and Jonathan Miller's 1979 ENO production. He explores whether the ambiguity of the ghosts' reality extends into the opera productions, discusses the variations at the end of the productions where Miles shouts 'you devil', questions whether the Governess suffers from delusions, and how the ghosts seek to possess the children. Ewans believes that Britten intended the ghosts in the opera to be real in order to present moral conflict on stage; he mentions the ghosts' bisexual and paedophilic attributes from the perspective of the libretto and other scholars, and references reviews of opera performances that suggest the children display precocious sexual behaviour. Ewans advocates for 'director's opera' and sees problems in opera performances that do not focus on 'liberating constraint'.¹⁰²

Ewans's article undeniably intersects with many aspects of this thesis, such as the discussions on the 2019 Garsington Opera production, the 2020 Opera North production, and the 1979 English National Opera production. Differently, Ewans looks at opera productions from various countries and focuses on libretto analysis for the purpose of his interpretations; this thesis sets out to trace some of the social reasons behind the creation of opera productions, starting from specifically British socio-cultural and historical contexts to analyse how social changes can influence directors' production choices and interpretation of opera content. It pays attention to the music as well as the libretto of *The Turn of the Screw* to analyse the four specific themes of this

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ewans, 'Interpretation and performance: *The Turn of the Screw* by Benjamin Britten and Myfanwy Piper', 259-279.

¹⁰² Ibid., 269-71.

thesis on a chronological basis and concludes that director-led opera productions bear a positive correlation with socio-cultural development and change.

An increasing number of scholars have studied the cinematic elements in Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw*, highlighting a shift in focus from purely musical analysis to integrating operatic works into the cinematic medium. This not only reflects the adaptability of Britten's works to different media but also facilitates the deconstruction of various opera productions through individual production studies, thereby generating a diverse range of interpretive possibilities. This focus has also inspired this thesis to conduct deconstructive studies on different versions of *The Turn of the Screw* recorded in various media (film, stage recordings), providing new perspectives on the opera.

Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* has primarily undergone three phases of research since its inception. The first phase, from the 1950s to the 1980s, focused on Britten's life as an entry point, interpreting the impact of his life on opera creation, studying the opera's musical technique, and the reality of the ghosts within the opera. The second phase began in the late 1970s, thanks to social development and openness towards sexuality, as well as scholars of James examining the novella of the same name through a lens of sexuality. Scholars began to focus on Britten's sexual orientation and the implicit elements of sexuality in his works. The third phase, starting around the year 2000, saw a decrease in the momentum of research on the opera itself, with a focus shifting towards the production aspects of the opera, such as theatrical techniques (cinematic, staging), and interpretive angles of opera production. Of course, these are the main trends, with scholars exploring other elements in between. Regardless, the exploration of the opera *The Turn of the Screw* continues, closely involved in the context of social and cultural development, continually enriching its interpretations and meanings.

0.5 Six case study productions

The success of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* was not short-lived. According to my analysis, *The Turn of the Screw* has witnessed around 70 national productions and over 300 performances presented within the UK since its UK première in 1954 (for specific statistical details, refer to Appendix A).¹⁰³ This thesis will focus on six British opera productions as target subjects for analysis. These include the 1954-1976 English Opera Group (EOG) production, the 1979-1990 English National Opera (ENO) production, the 2005 BBC Wales TV production, the 2006-2014 Glyndebourne production, the 2010-2020 Opera North production, and the 2019-2022 Garsington Opera production. It is worth highlighting that the 1979 ENO production had performances in the US in 1984 and the Soviet Union in 1990.¹⁰⁴

Considering the extensive number of performances within each production along with potential revivals involving minor modifications, it is not feasible to comprehensively analyse every single performance within the limited scope of this thesis. Therefore, this study will select specific iterations from these six British opera productions as the concrete subjects for analysis. These selected six iterations include the 1954 UK première first staging production, the 1979 English National Opera first staging production, the 2005 BBC Wales TV production, the 2011 Glyndebourne and François Roussillon et Associés revival production, the 2019 Garsington Opera first staging production, and the 2020 Opera North revival production. The selection of these six opera productions for this study is based on several key reasons:

¹⁰³ Production information has been gathered from a range of sources, primarily including the Britten-Pears Archive, the online database of Boosey and Hawkes publisher, Operabase online database, Operavision online database, Marquee TV online database, Medici.tv online database, Opera Magazine, and official websites of specific productions and opera companies. It is important to note that concert performances and live stream broadcasts are not included in this data collection.

¹⁰⁴ '50 Years at the London Coliseum', *English National Opera*, accessed on August 13, 2023, <https://www.eno.org/discover-opera/50-years-at-the-london-coliseum/>.

1. The opera productions fall within the scope of the study's focus on British productions. They were primarily produced by British opera companies and performed primarily within the UK.
2. The chosen opera productions span the years 1954 to 2020, covering a substantial period since the inception of *The Turn of the Screw* in 1954. This wide timeframe allows for an exploration of the evolution and reception of *The Turn of the Screw* over different eras.
3. Comparatively, the selected opera companies are esteemed, equipped with professional production teams and adequate funding. These resources have enabled a sustained and frequent schedule of performances, which not only reflects the quality of the productions but also demonstrates their popularity and acceptance within the market.
4. The opera productions have received relatively substantial feedback, generating numerous reviews and comments. Moreover, there exists a comprehensive archive of opera materials. These resources can be accessed through archival research, interviews with production teams, and online searches, providing ample data for analysis.
5. Additionally, most of the chosen productions are available in audio or video formats on public platforms. Some can be experienced through online streaming or by purchasing DVD versions, enabling readers of this thesis to engage with these opera productions. Notably, the 1979 ENO production lacks complete audio or video availability, with only a few audio fragments accessible on YouTube.

Although Deborah Warner's 1997 production was notable and sparked considerable discussion due to its controversial interpretation, it has not been selected for this study. Similar to the 2020 GlassWork Opera production—which, as a result of COVID-19, transformed from a stage performance into a hybrid film and stage format released

online on Marquee TV and won the Critics' Circle Award for Best Opera Film in 2022—it has been excluded. In the case of Warner's production, the decision not to include it is due to limitations in accessing sufficient archival material and recordings necessary for an in-depth analysis. For the 2020 GlassWork Opera production, the paywall restricting access for the general readership has ruled it out as a subject for study.

Production 1: The 1954 UK première production

The initial case study production discussed in this thesis took place in London in 1954, with its staging closely resembling that of the original Venice première. Benjamin Britten served as the conductor, and Basil Coleman directed the opera for the English Opera Group at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London. This performance took place at the Sadler's Wells Theatre on 6 October 1954.

Key Personnel:

Conductor: Benjamin Britten

Designer: John Piper

Producer: Basil Coleman

Cast:

Prologue/Quint: Peter Pears

The Governess: Jennifer Vyvyan

Flora: Lover Dyer

Miles: David Hemmings

Mrs Grose: Joan Cross

Miss Jessel: Arda Mandikian

Production 2: 1979 English National Opera production

Britten's death in 1976 may have opened up possibilities for departures from the tradition of 'fidelity' to the original productions of his operas, allowing so-called 'heresies' to be seen on the stage. During his lifetime, Britten maintained a significant degree of control over how his operas were staged, often collaborating closely with directors and performers to ensure his artistic vision was realised as fully as possible. After his passing, however, directors and opera companies began to explore new interpretative possibilities, feeling freer to deviate from his established norms. This shift is exemplified by the English National Opera's production at the London Coliseum on 6 November 1979.¹⁰⁵

Key Personnel:

Conductor: Lionel Friend

Director: Jonathan Miller

Designers: Patrick Robertson and Rosemary Vercoe

Lighting Designer: David Hersey

Cast:

The Prologue: Geoffrey Pogson

The Governess: Eilene Hannan

Miles: Michael Ginn

Flora: Iris Saunders

Mrs Grose: Ava June

Peter Quint: Graham Clark

Miss Jessel: Rosalind Plowright

Production 3: 2005 BBC TV Wales Production

¹⁰⁵ However, there is a limitation to my analysis of this production: due to constraints related to the ENO archive and Victoria & Albert Museum archive's circumstances, access to relevant materials was impossible before the thesis submission. As a result, the analysis of this production has some limitations.

This production of *The Turn of the Screw* was presented on BBC2 and subsequently released on DVD, and utilised television's distinctive platform to bring the opera's atmospheric and mysterious qualities to a wider audience while preserving its enigmatic narrative.

Key Personnel:

Director: Katie Mitchell

Conductor: Richard Hickox

Designer: Alison Chitty

Director of Photography: Nick Morrisons

Cast:

Prologue/Quint: Mark Padmore

The Governess: Lisa Milne

Miles: Nicholas Kirby Johnson

Flora: Caroline Wise

Mrs Grose: Diana Montague

Miss Jessel: Catrin Wyn Davies

Old Governess: Keturah Day (non-singing)

Mother of Miles and Flora: Liz Kettle (non-singing)

Maid: Felicity Cutting (non-singing)

Production 4: 2011 Glyndebourne Opera production

The 2011 Glyndebourne production, conducted by Jakub Hrůša and directed by Jonathan Kent, emphasized the story's ambiguity and tension through minimalist staging. Co-produced by Glyndebourne and François Roussillon et Associés, the première of this production was in 2006 under the same direction of Jonathan Kent. While there are no significant differences between the 2006 original and the 2011

revival, the 2011 version is the focus of this study due to the availability of video recordings, which provide valuable material for analysis. Notably, Leo McFall, who was interviewed about the Opera North production, also conducted this Glyndebourne production in 2014, which was revived by Francesca Gilpin.

Key Personnel:

Director: Jonathan Kent

Designer: Paul Brown

Lighting Designer: Mark Henderson

Conductor: Jakub Hrůša

Cast:

Prologue/Quint: Toby Spence

The Governess: Miah Persson

Miles: Thomas Parfitt

Flora: Joanna Songi

Mrs Grose: Susan Bickley

Miss Jessel: Giselle Allen

Production 5: 2019 Garsington Opera production

Garsington Opera staged a production of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* in 2019 and revived the same production in July 2022, effectively bookending the pandemic with a staging closely aligned to the 2019 performances. This revival, accompanied by cast changes that inherently influence the opera's interpretation, was nonetheless closely aligned with the original 2019 production: director Louisa Muller's statements in the interview indicated that the 2022 version preserved the thematic and emotional core of the 2019 iteration (The transcript of the interview can be found in Appendix E).

Key Personnel:

Director: Louisa Muller

Designer: Christopher Oram

Lighting designer: Malcolm Rippeth

Conductor: Richard Farnes

Cast:

Prologue/Quint: Ed Lyon

Governess: Sophie Bevan

Flora: Adrianna Forbes-Dorant

Miles: Leo Jemison

Mrs Grose: Kathleen Wilkinson

Miss Jessel: Katherine Broderick

Production 6: 2020 Opera North production

Originally planned as a staged version, the 2020 Opera North production of *The Turn of the Screw* was reimagined due to the Covid-19 pandemic as a highly innovative and intimate digital adaptation. This revival of the original 2010 semi-staged rendition directed by Alessandro Talevi took a creative approach by blending live performance and pre-recorded elements, demonstrating Opera North's adaptability and commitment to the arts during challenging times. The production offered a fresh perspective on Britten's haunting tale of innocence, corruption, and blurred realities, pushing the boundaries of opera presentation in the digital age. (The transcripts of related interviews can be found in Appendices B, C, and D).

Key Personnel:

Director: Alessandro Talevi

Set & Costume Designer: Madeleine Boyd

Lighting Designer: Matthew Haskins

Conductor: Leo McFall

Cast:

The Governess: Sarah Tynan

Mrs Grose: Heather Shipp

Peter Quint: Nicholas Watts

Miss Jessel: Eleanor Dennis

Miles: Tim Gasiorek

Flora: Jennifer Clark

0.6 Structure

While the exploration of the staging and versions of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* has remained surprisingly uncharted territory, fortunately, in 2021, Peter Auker's doctoral thesis (University of Nottingham) broke the long-standing silence in this field. My research shares a common aspect with Auker's, as both delve into the study of various productions, particularly the 2005 BBC Wales production. However, the approach taken by this thesis differs from that of Auker. He focuses on the cinematic perspective of opera film, whereas my analysis centres on themes such as social class, the supernatural, sexuality, and gender. Despite these differing approaches, our research has the potential to interconnect and enrich the exploration of this opera's production.¹⁰⁶ Subsequently, the adaptation and evolution of reception theory within the operatic genre are discussed. Finally, attention is shifted to the scholarly reception and evolution of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*.

Chapter 1 focuses on the theme of 'Social Class'. It examines the evolution of British social classes from the Victorian era to the 1950s. Furthermore, it delves into the social class divisions present in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and the images

¹⁰⁶ Auker, 'Their Dreams and Ours: Britten, Film, and "The Turn of the Screw"'.

of authority crafted within. The subsequent analysis explores how the libretto and music of the opera reflect social class distinctions. It then examines how social class and authority are portrayed in the six selected operatic productions. Finally, the chapter synthesises and concludes by comprehensively analysing the social status and authority of opera characters across various productions within distinct story contexts.

Chapter 2 centres on the theme of ‘The Supernatural’. It elucidates the evolution of Victorian-era ghost stories, scrutinizing the portrayal of spectral entities within novels. Additionally, it delves into the discourse and reception of these literary spectres by readers following the publication of James’s novella. Subsequently, it explores how the dichotomous ambiguity of the existence of supernatural entities in the novels is transcribed into the operatic realm. Furthermore, it analyses how these supernatural entities are manifested in the six selected operatic productions. Ultimately, the chapter analyses how the ghostly figures are presented and evolve across different productions within varying historical contexts.

Chapter 3 centres on the theme of ‘Sexuality’. It chronicles the historical development of sexuality studies in the UK since 1879, analysing James’s same-sex inclinations within the context of sexuality and exploring Britten’s own experiences as a homosexual man. The chapter investigates how Britten’s *The Turn of the Screw* articulates themes of ‘sexuality’ through its libretto and music. It then examines how ‘sexuality’ is portrayed in the six selected operatic versions. Subsequently, it analyses how different productions, set against varying historical contexts, depict and evolve the theme within the operatic realm. Furthermore, this chapter delves into the ethical implications arising from the portrayal of children in the opera’s narrative.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the theme of ‘Gender’. The chapter traces the historical development of gender studies in the UK since the 1890s, highlighting its focus on women. It explores how Britten’s opera articulates the theme of gender through its libretto and music. Subsequently, the chapter scrutinises the portrayal of gender in the six chosen operatic productions. In conclusion, it analyses how, against varying

historical backgrounds, different works depict and evolve this theme within the operatic domain.

Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive summary of the main arguments and research findings of the entire thesis, returning to the principal research field: the trajectory of *The Turn of the Screw* on the British operatic stage, its production, and reception, from its première in the UK to the present day. The chapter aims to draw conclusions based on the evidence presented in the four distinct themes elaborated upon in the paper.

0.7 Methodology

This research employs an interpretive paradigm with the aim of comprehending and interpreting the evolving essence of Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw* since its UK première in 1954, as well as the changing perceptions of the opera among commentators. The research employs historical and critical musicological approaches applicable to the investigation of multiple aspects of opera staging, production and audience reception over different periods. The interpretive aspect is of utmost importance as it facilitates a thorough understanding and interpretation of the opera from sociocultural and historical contexts. The primary research questions of this study are centred around: what are the influences of social class, the supernatural, sexuality, and gender on the opera's staging and production processes over time, and what can the changing manifestations of these influences tell us about the period of each staging? Related to these questions, I also ask: how do commentators perceive and evaluate these opera productions? To investigate my research questions, I have collected data from both primary and secondary sources, which I then thoroughly analyse using historical and critical musicological approaches:

1. Visits to archives and the primary sources:

In February 2020, I visited Opera North in Leeds and accessed historical materials from their production, including the programme for the 2010 première of their production. I observed the process of the 2020 revival version, from rehearsals and

dress rehearsals to the formal performances. Subsequently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic leading to nationwide lockdowns in the UK, it was not until June 2021 that I had the opportunity to visit the Britten-Pears Archive in Aldeburgh. There, I acquired an extensive collection of materials related to the 1954 UK première production, such as diaries, reviews, interview transcripts, photographs, audio recordings, and videos, as well as some documents pertaining to the 1979 ENO production, such as reviews and interview transcripts. In December 2022, I visited the Theatre Collection at the University of Bristol and the Borthwick Institute for Archives at the University of York. These visits provided me with materials concerning the 1979 ENO production, including stage and costume designs, photographs, programmes, and relevant correspondence.

2. Primary sources accessed virtually:

In February 2023, I established contact with Garsington Opera company. Subsequently, in June of the same year, I coordinated with the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. From these engagements, I acquired performance videos and photographs from the 2019 and 2022 Garsington Opera production, as well as photographs of stage design models from the 1979 English National Opera production. In August 2023, I established contact with the Houston Library at Harvard University and obtained photos related to the UK première production of the opera.

In addition to establishing communication with the aforementioned archives and opera companies and obtaining primary sources online, another significant avenue for gathering information was through the official websites of the various opera companies. These websites provided access to photographs, creative information, interviews with the creative teams, and recorded videos of the operas. This included the official websites of English National Opera, Opera North, Garsington, and Glyndebourne.

Reviews by critics are an important material for assessing opera productions. Through online data platforms such as *Opera Magazine*, *Opera Today*, *British Theatre*

Guide, *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, and *The Daily Telegraph*, evaluative commentaries on various opera productions were obtained post-performance.

3. Secondary sources and online materials:

Secondary sources provide a diverse and extensive range of scholarly discussion and research from a variety of perspectives, encompassing opera research journals , doctoral thesis repositories, and other music research periodicals.

Additionally, online resources provide a wealth of performance data. For instance, the Boosey & Hawkes website archives performance information for the opera between 1987 and 2020. *Operabase* records the status of the British opera market within the global opera scene, including specifics about *The Turn of the Screw* in the UK, offering crucial data and information for this thesis. Furthermore, the YouTube video platform contains numerous video clips and interviews about the various opera productions discussed in this thesis, aiding in understanding both the public performances and behind-the-scenes aspects of these opera productions.

4. Interviews:

I was able to engage directly with individuals involved in productions of the opera through applying the interview research method for data collection, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of their perspectives and experiences within the operatic creative process. I conducted four semi-structured interviews, three of which occurred in February 2020. These interviews were conducted with the opera director of Opera North production Alessandro Talevi, the designer Madeleine Boyd, and the conductor Leo McFall, who also conducted the 2014 Glyndebourne production. In February of 2023, the fourth interview was conducted with Louisa Muller, the opera director for the Garsington Opera production. While summarising the interview contents, I conducted a qualitative content analysis to discern their varying perspectives on the operatic aspects I inquired about.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee for conducting interviews. Confidentiality and voluntary participation of the interviewees were ensured. All interviews were conducted with proper authorisation, and interviewees granted permission for their insights and names to be included in this thesis. Additionally, the collected data from

Through case study and observational analysis of the research subjects, I was able to conduct in-depth analyses of particular opera productions, revealing intricate nuances of staging and performance. I examined the emotional expressions of the performers as well as the stage design, props, lighting, costumes, blocking, gestures, musical arrangement, and vocal performance of the six designated opera productions.

Although extensive data collection and analysis have been conducted, this research is not without limitations. These limitations encompass potential biases that may arise from my own background and subjective experiences, constraints imposed by accessing specific archival materials, potential limitations in viewpoints expressed by interview participants, the limited number of participants in the interviews, and challenges in reviewing analysis results due to expired accessibility of certain materials. For example, complete official opera videos of the 2019 Garsington Opera production and the 2020 Opera North production were available on YouTube for about six months after the performance but were not publicly accessible after that period, making it challenging for others interested in these versions. It is crucial to acknowledge and address these limitations to maintain the scholarly integrity and transparency of this research.

these interviews, as well as other primary sources, were handled with strict adherence to ethical guidelines to protect the privacy and rights of the participants.

CHAPTER 1: The Desire for Power: Attitudes towards Social Class and Authority in *The Turn of the Screw*

No man is an island, entire of itself.¹

—— John Donne

The fragmentation of society into component parts generates distinct social classes based on people's status, privilege, position in the process of economic production, access to power and authority, and proportion of resources.² Not only was social class a significant aspect of the Victorian era (1837-1901) in which James's *The Turn of the Screw* is set, but it also remained influential in the 1950s when Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* was composed. Social class or economic privilege remain significant factors in the study of social issues in the reception of opera nowadays.

This chapter examines social class and authority in different productions of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* since its première in 1954, in order to understand the attitudes towards social class in recipients (including directors and designers), as well as the evolution of social class in society, starting with a brief historical overview of the development of social class since the Victorian era, to understand the context, social status, and constraints of the times in which James's characters are living.

When analysing the social class perspective in the reception of *The Turn of the Screw*, it is crucial to consider, first, the time period which each particular production represents. The identification of the era depicted in an opera production is primarily accomplished through material elements, including set design, costumes, hairstyles and lighting, among others. Furthermore, taking into account the interpretive elements of

¹ John Donne, *The Works of John Donne, D.D., Dean of Saint Paul's, 1621-1631*, ed. Henry Alford (London: John W. Parker, 1839), 575.

² Simon Blackburn, 'Class, social,' in *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016),
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198735304.001.0001/acref-9780198735304-e-581>.

the opera director and creative team can aid in determining the design philosophy of the opera, thereby enhancing the identification of the historical context of the production. It is advantageous to determine the era of the setting in order to gain an understanding of the social class attributed to each character and their corresponding behaviours within the context of that era.

Second, it is important to consider the behaviours displayed by the opera performers in their portrayals, as they often reflect the characteristics of the depicted era or social class. This aspect involves an exploration of the interpretations of the characters and the overall narrative by the directors and actors involved. It includes the blocking, the physical gestures, and emotional expressions of the performers.

Third, the criticisms of critics and audiences regarding the portrayal of social class in opera productions are significant. The reviews and responses from critics and audience provide insight into how the depiction of social class resonates with different groups and contributes to the overall reception and interpretation of the opera. The audience has the opportunity to assess whether the performers adhere to the societal norms and expectations associated with their respective historical periods, as reflected in their behaviours on stage.

Consequently, this chapter will focus primarily on the contextual time periods and stage designs, performer behaviours, and recipient responses in the six productions of the opera. This investigation seeks to examine the concept of 'social class' and how the depiction of authority figures manifests itself in different productions of the opera.

Considering the social context and social background in which each opera production was created may help to clarify the influence of social aesthetics on the opera productions, and perhaps help to explain the social values demonstrated in the opera productions. The social standing of the opera's characters can be determined on the basis of the social contexts of different productions across time. These social contexts can lead to changes in the interpretation and reception of the characters' social status, as well as their relationships with others. These diverse understandings and

interpretations are significantly influenced by the social context in which the opera productions are set, and may reflect the prevalent social values of the production's time. By examining these productions of the opera, it is possible to observe the interaction between perceptions of social attitudes from the 1890s to the 1950s and the era in which the production was first created. By analysing the social class stratification present in the six settings of the opera, I will conclude that the depicted social class of the story's characters did not change significantly across the different stagings, which are set in the 1890s to the 1950s. The productions are listed in the following table (Fig. 1.0 (a)).

Production	Period in which the production is set	Authority
1954 UK Première	c1890s	Miles
1979 ENO	c1890s	Miles
2005 BBC	c1890s	Quint
	Given that this version is filmed using cinematic techniques, camera angles can significantly influence the audience's viewing perspective and experience, making the portrayal and transformation of authority figures more malleable.	
2011 Glyndebourne	c1950s	Quint
2019 Garsington	c1890s	Miles
2020 Opera North	c1920s	The Governess

Fig. 1.0 (a) *The Period and Authority of Each Production*

1.1 Social Class in the UK: Victorian era to the 1950s

Social class is a complex system of hierarchical social stratification that categorises individuals and groups according to their perceived social status. Marxist class theory, which clarifies the theory of class struggle and revolution, was first introduced in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' 1848 pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto*. This theory posits that 'class' is determined by a person's relationship to the means of production, and that individuals' positions within a class hierarchy are determined by their roles in the production process, thereby influencing their political and ideological

consciousness.³ A class can be described as a group of individuals who share similar economic interests, have a heightened awareness of those interests, and take collective action to advance them.⁴ Marxist theorists hold that the structure of the production process is the fundamental foundation for class formation.

However, another important figure in the development of the concept of social class was the German sociologist Max Weber, who argued that ‘class’ is determined by economic position or social prestige as opposed to simple production relationships: in his three-component theory of stratification, also known as Weberian stratification or the three-class system, Weber developed a model that reflects the interplay among wealth, prestige, and power.⁵ Weber argued that there are numerous manifestations of power:

A person’s power can be shown in the *social order* through their status, in the *economic order* through their class, and in the *political order* through their party. Thus, class, status and party are each aspects of the distribution of power within a community.⁶

In addition, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu proposed that the dynamics of power in society are multifaceted and transcend economic considerations. Bourdieu argues that social class is not solely determined by economic factors, but also by social and cultural variables such as education, occupation, and lifestyle. Bourdieu identified two types of capital that contribute to an individual’s social standing: economic and cultural capital. Economic capital consists of assets that can be exchanged for cash and secured as private property. In contrast, cultural capital is subdivided into a number of subcategories, including personal cultural capital, which includes formal education and

³ Frank Parkin, ‘Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique’, in *Social Class and Stratification*, ed. Rhonda F. Levine (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 119-40.

⁴ Edward Andrew, ‘Class in Itself and Class against Capital: Karl Marx and His Classifiers’, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1983): 577-84.

⁵ Charles E. Hurst, Heather M Fitz Gibbon, and Anne M Nurse, *Social Inequality: Forms, Causes, and Consequences* (New York : Routledge, 2019), 215.

⁶ Ibid.

knowledge, objective cultural capital, such as books and art, and institutionalised cultural capital, which includes honours and titles. Overall, Bourdieu's theoretical framework emphasises the significance of comprehending the complex interaction between economic, social, and cultural factors in determining social stratification.⁷

Consequently, scholars have distinguished between social class and socioeconomic status. Social class refers to an individual's sociocultural background, which is relatively stable over time, whereas socioeconomic status reflects an individual's current social and economic position, which can fluctuate over time. This distinction highlights the enduring nature of social class and its multifaceted nature, which encompasses a wide range of cultural, educational, and occupational variables. In contrast, socioeconomic status is typically defined by an individual's income and occupation. Accordingly, while socioeconomic status is a significant determinant of a person's life chances and opportunities, social class provides a more comprehensive framework for comprehending the enduring dimensions of social inequality.⁸

A brief examination of the division and evolution of class in Britain may enhance understanding of the social conditions and moral constraints of various occupations at various times. The novella of Henry James is set during the Victorian era, and the social classes of the characters include an upper-class gentleman (the children's guardian), the affluent children (Miles and Flora), governesses (Miss Jessel, and the unnamed governess), a housekeeper (Mrs Grose), and a valet (Peter Quint). Based on the job descriptions salaries, governesses were classified as belonging to the middle class, while domestic servants (housekeeper, valet) were categorised as working class (Fig.

⁷ Loïc Wacquant, 'Pierre Bourdieu', in *Key Thinkers on Cities*, ed. A. Latham and R. Koch (London: Sage, 2016), 262. The original books are, Pierre Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, *The Inheritors: Students and Their Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), and Pierre Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Culture, and Society* (London: Sage, 1990).

⁸ Mark Rubin et al., "'I Am Working-Class': Subjective Self-Definition as a Missing Measure of Social Class and Socioeconomic Status in Higher Education Research", *Educational Researcher*, vol.43 iss.4 (2014): 196-200. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X14528373>.

1.1 (a)).⁹ Governesses deserve separate mention: they were the unmarried daughters of gentlemen and they had to support themselves through employment. It would be inconceivable for them to work as maids, whereas they could utilise their education while maintaining their dignity as governesses.¹⁰ Governesses were able to retain their middle-class status,¹¹ however, their wages were comparable to the wages of servants and they were expected to be courteous. In addition, they were often responsible for adolescent girls while the boys attended boarding school.

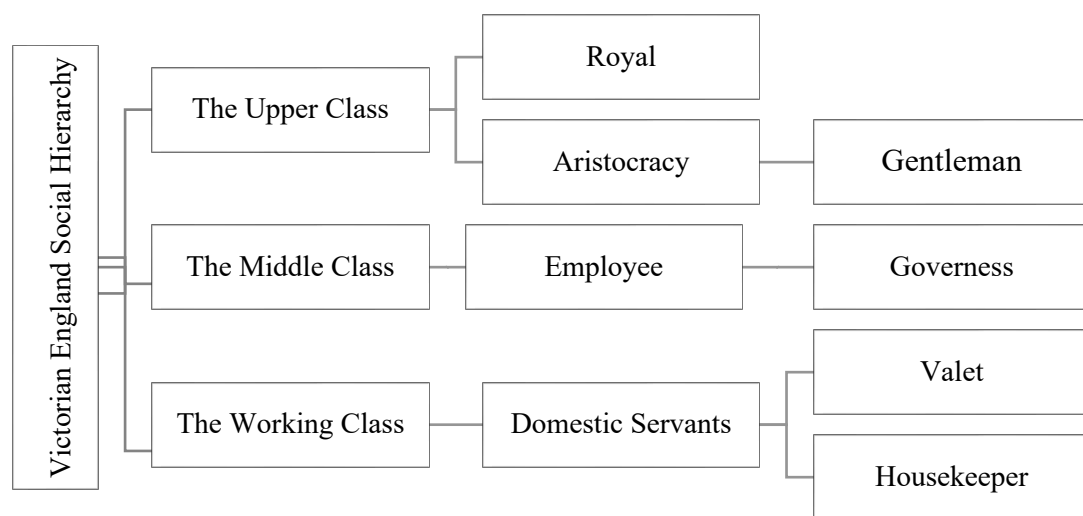


Fig. 1.1 (a) Occupation hierarchy in Victorian English Society

The constant evolution of the structure of British social class since its establishment has been a natural consequence of social development, and the social status and identity of individuals may have been fundamentally varied at different times, resulting in a radical transformation of their social relationships and social values.

⁹ Siân Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers: A Case Study of Lancaster, 1880-1914', *The Economic History Review*, vol.62, no. 2 (2009), 406-7. (405-429). Also see, Leonore Davidoff Lockwood, 'Domestic service and the working-class life cycle', *Bulletin-Society for the Study of Labour History*, vol. 26 (1973), 10-13.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kathryn Hughes, 'Going A Governessing: The Victorian Governess 1830-1900', (doctoral thesis, University of Keele, 1989), 4-13.

By understanding British social class and the social conditions and survival of different occupations at different times, it will be easier to analyse the social status, power, and limitations of the characters' roles in the story. The following is an analysis of the embodiment of the characters' class in the novella, as well as the chain of events resulting from their discontent with the status quo.

1.2 Social Class and Authority in the Novella

It is inevitable that those living in the present will evaluate the characters and events of the past through the lens of the present, and those living in the present cannot read literature or experience opera from the perspective of the strict social hierarchy of the Victorian era. For instance, homosexuality and the desire to advance in status and social class may not appear problematic in our modern social context and with our modern eyes, while the idea of a homosexual servant aspiring to transform into a powerful master would have been astonishing in the Victorian era.

In the novella, Miles and Flora are the orphaned children of an affluent family, suggesting an upper-class background. Their Guardian, who is their wealthy uncle residing in London, is a gentleman. Miss Jessel and the Governess serve as governesses, while Quint and Mrs Grose are upper servants at the Bly estate. According to 'Fig. 1.1 (c) Occupation hierarchy in Victorian English Society,' the Guardian, Miles, and Flora belong to the upper class, Miss Jessel and the Governess to the middle class, and Quint and Mrs Grose to the working class (Fig. 1.2 (a)).

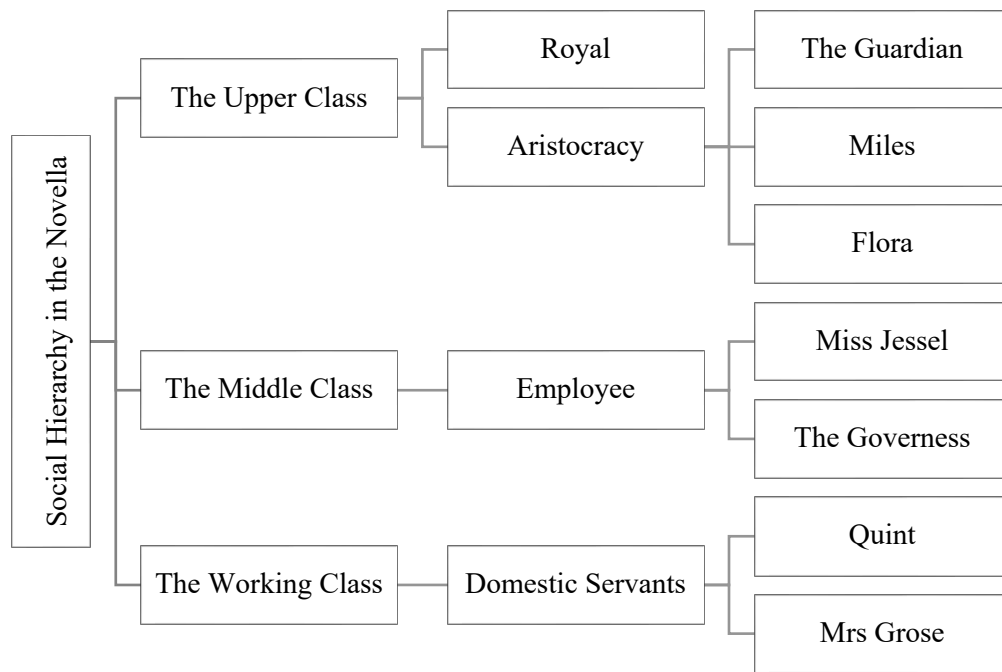


Fig. 1.2 (a) The Characters' Social Hierarchy in the Novella

In the novella, the Guardian resides at a distance in London with absolute authority, socialises with his own close friends, and is not physically present in Bly; he exists only in the hearts and imaginations of the people of Bly.

Since governesses had been employed by the upper classes for centuries, they were a common figure in Victorian life and literature. It appears that governesses led a somewhat enviable life; however, they were technically 'outsiders' due to social and emotional tensions that prevented them from fitting in anywhere.¹² The Governess was a surrogate mother with no biological children, and a family member who was occasionally misidentified as a servant.¹³ In the novella, the Governess and Miss Jessel, who had the same responsibilities as other governesses in Bly, are in the same situation.

Mrs Grose and Quint are both house servants with similar responsibilities: to serve the master of the house. They are members of the working class and may be dissatisfied with their inability to ascend to higher social classes. Quint's character could be

¹² Kathryn Hughes, 'The figure of the governess', London: British Library, 15th May 2014, accessed on April 9, 2023, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-figure-of-the-governess#authorBlock1>.

¹³ Ibid.

interpreted as a depiction of a breach of the highly structured social hierarchy that existed during James's time; while this may not be frightening to us now, it was a real threat at the time.¹⁴ As children of the upper class, Miles and Flora should have a wonderful childhood. But their only relative, their uncle, abandons them after the death of their parents. Despite their privileged status, Miles and Flora are lonely in Bly. In addition, Miles's expulsion from school increases his isolation from his peers.

'The essentially hierarchical plan of English society', James stated, 'is the great and ever-present fact to the mind of a stranger: there is hardly a detail of life that does not in some degree betray it'.¹⁵ The rigid social class system of the Victorian era resulted in harsh social attitudes towards interclass relationships. The 'proper' marriage represented the intersection of Victorian attitudes towards class and sex. In *The Turn of the Screw*, it appears that the influence of the hierarchical plan is pervasive. By suggesting the possibility of three love affairs in the novella — the narrator Douglas's love for the Governess, the Governess's love for the Guardian, and Quint's love for Miss Jessel — it illustrates the frustration of social norms that make relationships difficult, perhaps implying that Victorian standards defining socially proper marriages are too narrow to allow them to experience love.¹⁶

The novella implies that a romantic relationship between Quint, the former valet, and Miss Jessel, the former governess, would have been socially unacceptable. It was scandalous for a lady to violate a sacred social taboo and marry a valet. Mrs Grose and the Governess find it horrifying that Quint and Miss Jessel may have attempted to cross the social gap separating them:

[The Governess:] 'I must have it now. Of what did she die? Come, there was something between them.' [Mrs Grose:] 'There was everything.' [The

¹⁴ Anne Midgette, 'In This Version, the Britten Opera Dons a Dress', *The New York Times*, May 22, 2005, accessed Jan 3, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/arts/music/in-this-version-the-britten-opera-dons-a-dress.html?smid=url-share>.

¹⁵ Henry James, *English Hours* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1905), 158, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/58938/58938-h/58938-h.htm>.

¹⁶ Jane Nardin, 'The Turn of the Screw: The Victorian Background', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 12, (1978): 132.

Governess:] ‘In spite of the difference-?’ [Mrs Grose:] ‘Oh, of their rank, their condition...*She* was a lady... And he so dreadfully below.’¹⁷

The Governess’s unrequited love for the Guardian is another potential love affair that ends in futility due to social class and distance. The very beginning of the Governess’s story demonstrates that the only reason the Guardian is interested in the Governess is to employ her to take care of the children in Bly:

That she [the Governess] should never trouble him [the Guardian]—but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything; only meet all questions herself...She promised to do this...for a moment, disburdened, delighted, he held her hand, thanking her for the sacrifice, she already felt rewarded.¹⁸

The splendid young man could marry the Governess if he so wished, but the Guardian’s social superiority is so ingrained in his character that it would never occur to him to do so.¹⁹ The Governess only saw the Guardian twice before she succumbed to his allure and accepted the task at Bly, and ‘she never saw him again’.²⁰ The conflict in the story originates from the characters’ inability to overcome social taboos to establish a relationship with one another, which also results in the repression of their desires, and sets the stage for what occurs in Bly.

Although the individual power of these characters is insufficient to threaten the Victorian social environment, in the small, confined world of Bly, they compete for positions of authority by expanding the boundaries of power to accomplish their own ends. The Governess was sent to Bly by the Guardian, a symbol of authority, and she assumed Bly’s image of power; as the novella remarks:

There were plenty of people to help, but of course the young lady who should go down as governess would be in supreme authority.²¹

¹⁷ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁹ Nardin, ‘*The Turn of the Screw: The Victorian Background*’, 134.

²⁰ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

Mrs Grose, who had been responsible for Bly, was ‘demoted’ to obeying the Governess. Would an experienced domestic, who has served her previous mistress, succumb to a ‘young, untried, nervous’²² 20-year-old governess with no prior experience? The dialogue between Mrs Grose and the Governess seems to provide some hints about Mrs Grose’s less-than-innocence; as the lowest person in the novella’s hierarchy of power, Mrs Grose may be aware that neither her social status nor her gender are dominant. She had no schooling, and maybe one of the possible ways of gaining power is deliberate dissimulation – she is the one who knows Bly best, after all.

When the Governess queries the presence of the stranger in Bly, Mrs Grose may have intentionally brought up the dead Quint to alert the Governess and weaken her psychological defences:

[The Governess:] ‘I’ve never seen one, but so I suppose them. He’s tall, active, erect...but never—no, never!—a gentleman.’ [Mrs Grose:] ‘A gentleman, a gentleman *he*?... But he *is* handsome?’ [The Governess:] ‘Remarkably!’ [Mrs Grose:] ‘And dressed—?’ [The Governess:] ‘In somebody’s clothes. They’re smart, but they’re not his own.’ [Mrs Grose:] ‘They’re the master’s! ...Quint! Peter Quint—his own man, his valet, when he was here! ... There were waistcoats missed! They were both here-last year.’ [The Governess:] ‘And what became of him?’ [Mrs Grose:] ‘God knows where! He died.’ [The Governess:] ‘Died?’ [Mrs Grose:] ‘Yes. Mr Quint’s dead.’²³

The Governess states that she saw a male stranger, and based on Mrs Grose’s description of his appearance, it seems to have been the dead man called Quint, which makes no sense to Mrs Grose. By stating that Quint was responsible for Bly when he was alive, Mrs Grose reinforces her image as a ‘saviour’ in the Governess’s mind, maybe causing her to loosen her vigilance:

[Mrs Grose:] ‘...I was afraid... of things that man could do. Quint was so clever—he was so deep.’ [The Governess:] ‘On innocent little precious lives. They were in your charge.’ [Mrs Grose:] ‘No, they weren’t in mine!’²⁴

²² Ibid., 11.

²³ Ibid., 44-5.

²⁴ Ibid., 49-50.

Since the novella is written from the Governess's subjective perspective (once the opening section is over), we do not know the certain answer. However, in the subsequent analysis of the opera productions, the depiction of the stage characters will demonstrate the varied attitudes of different versions of Mrs Grose towards the Governess.

In contrast to Mrs Grose's covert desire for power and authority, the Governess fights for authority by competing with Quint for Miles:

[Mrs Grose:] 'He[Quint] was looking for someone else, you say—someone who was not you?' [The Governess:] 'He was looking for little Miles. *That's* whom he was looking for.' [Mrs Grose:] 'But how do you know?' [The Governess:] 'I know, I know, I know! And *you* know, my dear!'²⁵

Perhaps the Governess is so certain that Quint is coming for Miles and not herself because, firstly, Quint's arrival would prevent her from fulfilling her duties and jeopardise her position at Bly; secondly, she seems certain that she would never follow in Miss Jessel's footsteps by falling in love with a lower-class male servant, and besides, she likes the guardian; thirdly, in relation to the man-woman relationship outlined by Mrs Grose, there is also the timidity associated with being a virgin, as well as the desire to quickly withdraw from the possibility of a relationship with Quint.

Maybe Mrs Grose did not deny or contradict the Governess because she believed that hinting at what had happened between Quint and Miss Jessel would frighten and deter the Governess, making the Governess dependent on her and securing her position in Bly; perhaps Mrs Grose did not expect Quint to be so bold when the Governess said, 'He[Quint] was looking for little Miles', a response that was beyond her comprehension: she likely believed that the relationship between Quint and Miss Jessel was sufficiently taboo to deter the Governess. She was even more shocked to hear from the Governess that Quint had come to see Miles, firstly because, given her social status and experience,

²⁵ Ibid., 47.

she would not have expected Quint to do to Miles what he had done to Miss Jessel, and secondly because she had no idea what Quint would do to Miles. She was astonished by the Governess's response and was obviously unprepared for an answer that was beyond her control, so she was momentarily stunned. Therefore, Mrs Grose took it up again in a moment and asked, 'what if he should see him?'

It is evident from the foregoing analysis that both the Governess and Mrs Grose share a dread of their power and status being challenged, as well as the fear of losing control over Bly.

The upper-class characters Miles and Flora, who should have held positions of authority (apart from the fact that they are children), are rather passive in Bly. On the one hand, Mrs Grose reinforces the children's concept of class and the distinctiveness of the children's status. Mrs Grose frequently refers to them and addresses them as 'little/young lady' and 'little/young gentleman' in the novella, and she constantly encourages Miles to maintain his class consciousness, as the Governess explains, '*she* [Mrs Grose] liked to see young gentlemen not forget their station.'²⁶

On the other hand, the children's authority is challenged by the Governess who oversees Bly. In Chapter 20 when the Governess asks Flora where her dead governess is, the Governess accuses her of pretending not to see the ghost, 'She's there, you little unhappy thing—there...and you know it as well as you know me!'²⁷ Apparently, the Governess's outburst shocks Flora and provokes Flora's defences. As a child, Flora is at a disadvantage in terms of power over the adult governess, whose rebuke renders Flora defenceless; however, due to her superior social standing, Flora resists and denies the Governess's accusations, responding that, '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!'²⁸ And the Governess describes Flora in these terms:

²⁶ Ibid., 65.

²⁷ Ibid., 130.

²⁸ Ibid., 132.

[...] she [Flora] was not at these times a child, but an old, old woman... she simply showed me, without an expressional concession or admission, a countenance of deeper and deeper, of indeed suddenly quite fixed reprobation.²⁹

In contrast to Miles, Flora is regarded as if she were Miss Jessel's 'accomplice' by the Governess. The Governess challenges Miles's authority, but to a much lesser extent than that of Flora, not only due to Miles's social status, but also due to his 'male' identity. When Miles asks the Governess when he will return to school, he performs the gentlemanly role with apparent greater maturity, using a tone of affectionate but unquestionable authority to appeal to the Governess: 'Look here, my dear, you know...[when]am I going back to school?' Miles says, 'You know, my dear, that for a fellow to be with a lady *always*...she's[you're] a jolly "perfect" lady; but after all I'm a fellow, don't you see? Who's—well, getting on.'³⁰ The Governess returned, 'And always with the same lady?''³¹ The governess was momentarily at a loss for words, frustrated that Miles wanted to escape her grasp to go back to school to his 'sort', but aware that Miles had the right to request a return to his school.

As the charge of Bly, the Governess is in a position of authority and can make decisions regarding individuals and occurrences within Bly; she also has authority over the household in Bly because it is isolated and has a comparatively weak sense of social structure. However, when Miles asks to return to school, he can possibly escape the confines of Bly's limited world and return to the socially stratified school environment.

Therefore, the Governess may lose her absolute authority over the household in Bly: Miles's social status makes it difficult for the Governess to resist her demands and challenges the Governess's authority. In substance, the conflict between Miles and the Governess is a confrontation between the power of Bly's small world and the power of the social mechanism beyond Bly.

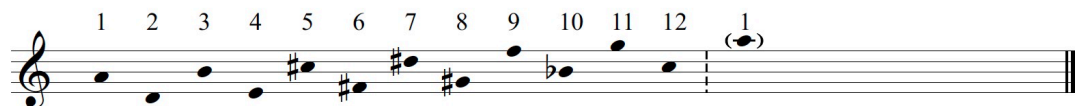
²⁹ Ibid., 130-1.

³⁰ Ibid., 101-2.

³¹ Ibid., 101.

1.3 Social Class in the Libretto and Music in the Opera

The novella by James was adapted into an opera through close translation rather than alteration. Britten recognised the dramatic potential of the source material and composed the opera as a series of short scenes interconnected by orchestral passages. The ‘Screw’ theme is the most significant twelve-note motif in the opera and appears multiple times in vocal and orchestral parts (Ex. 1.1 (a)).³² Britten’s use of this twelve-note row reflects his nuanced approach to serialism. Unlike strict adherence to the twelve-tone techniques of composers like Schoenberg, Britten employed serial elements flexibly within a tonal framework. He integrated the row into the fabric of the music to enhance dramatic effect rather than to dominate the compositional structure. The ‘Screw’ theme serves not only as a recurring motif but also as a unifying element that underpins the opera's tension and character development. From the perspective of compositional technique and dramatic connotation, it supports and heightens the opera’s tension. The present section will concentrate on the status and authority of the opera characters, with particular emphasis on the characterisation that is underpinned by the ‘Screw’ theme.



Ex. 1.1 (a) The ‘Screw’ theme in *The Turn of the Screw*

According to Piper, she determined the nature of the scenes through an analysis of the textual content of the novella, with the exception of the first scene of Act II Scene 1, ‘Colloquy and Soliloquy’,³³ which brings the characters of Quint and Miss Jessel into

³² John Evans named the twelve-notes theme as the ‘Screw’ theme, see John Evans, ‘The sketches: Chronology and analysis’ in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, Patricia Howard, 66.

³³ Recorded by Myfanwy Piper in ‘Writing for Britten’, her chapter in *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, edited by David Herbert (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 9. Also see, Malcolm Herbert Marsh, ‘Britten’s and Piper’s Operatic Fulfilment of Henry James’s Novella’, (doctoral Thesis, Royal Holloway College, University of London, 1983), 7.

the action, whereas they are neither heard nor seen in the novella. Therefore, the depiction of Quint and Miss Jessel's roles through the libretto and music enables the depiction of authority and the competition for power.

The 'Screw' theme appears in Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', where the ghosts collectively sing in A^b major to assert their existence (Ex. 1.1 (b)). The libretto, 'Day by day the bars we break, Break the love that laps them around, Cheat the careful watching eyes',³⁴ signifies the ghosts' ability to overcome obstacles and deceive those who are vigilant. The rhetorical analysis of the theme suggests that the aim of the ghosts is to engage with the children, with the ghosts serving as a manifestation of their own power.

Miss J. *p firmly* *cresc.*
Day by day the bars we break, Break the love that
Täg lich bre chen wir in's Hier, Tag für Tag und

QUINT *p firmly* *cresc.*
Day by day the bars we break, Break the love that
Täg lich bre chen wir in's Hier, Tag für Tag und

Miss J. *f*
laps them round, Cheat the care - ful watch - ing eyes,
Stund um Stund, Bre chen durch der Lie be Schutz,

Quint *f*
laps them round, Cheat the care - ful watch - ing eyes,
Stund um Stund, Bre chen durch der Lie be Schutz,

Ex. 1.1 (b) The 'Screw' theme in Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy'.³⁵

The 'Screw' theme is not exclusive to the ghosts, and the Governess, who is responsible for the management of Bly, becomes embroiled in a contest for dominance with Quint subsequent to her realisation that the ghosts, particularly Quint, pose a threat to her authority. The last 'Screw' theme appears in the Governess and Quint's duet in the last

³⁴ Act I Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy'.

³⁵ Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, Op. 54 (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1955), full score, accessed Aug 19 2021, Alexander Street Press, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cscore%7C309105.

scene, Act II Scene 8, 'Miles'. The Governess and Quint have different viewpoints due to their possessive desires for Miles. And the music demonstrates this: the Governess leads the theme, which is in A major, and which clashes with Quint's theme in A^b. The descending semitone is known to evoke a sense of unease in auditory perception, as it carries with it ominous implications. Furthermore, it is considered harmonically unorthodox to repeat a motif in this way. As keys to introduce the characters, these serve a crucial function; in terms of conventional Western harmony, the A major and A^b major tonalities do not sound comfortable when played together, which reflects the Governess and Quint's opposing desires: they cannot exist comfortably at the same time (Ex. 1.1 (c)).

The image displays a musical score for three systems of dialogue between the Governess (Gov.) and Quint. Each system consists of two staves: the top staff for the Governess and the bottom staff for Quint. The Governess's music is in A major, while Quint's music is in A-flat major, creating a harmonic clash. The lyrics are written in both English and German. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'p' (piano) and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The first system shows the Governess asking 'Who?' and Quint responding with 'On the paths, in the woods, re-mem-ber nie'. The second system shows the Governess asking 'let-ter? steh-len?' and Quint responding with 'At the win-dow on the tower, when the can-dle is out, re-'. The third system shows the Governess asking 'Who do you wait for, watch for?' and Quint responding with 're-mem-ber nie Quint! Quint! He Er'.

Ex. 1.1 (c) The 'Screw' theme in Act II Scene 8, 'Miles'.

The keys of the two 'Screw' themes are A^b major and A major, the former signifying Quint and the latter the Governess's opposition; the A major comes across more

strongly here because it is higher. Patricia Howard points out: ‘The idea of A – A^b opposing key centres generating a dramatic conflict is of course traditional in European music for the last three hundred years’.³⁶ Evans also claims that Quint possesses a characteristic ‘black-note’ tonal region of A^b, while the ‘Screw’ theme overwhelms the Governess in its original rhythmic and A major tone. The A – A^b contrast embodies the conflict between the Governess and Quint,³⁷ and this observation implies that there may be a power struggle between the Governess and Quint.

In addition to the Governesses competing for authority with Quint, Miles’s own authority is also a concern: in Act I Scene 2, ‘The Welcome’, ‘kind’ recurs in Mrs Grose’s claim that Miles and Flora ‘need their own kind’; In Act II Scene 2, ‘The Bells’, Miles says to the Governess, ‘I’m growing up, you know. I want my own kind’. Although Miles’s ‘kind’ is open to a variety of interpretations, one is that Miles desires to return to school and stay with his peers, who are mostly from the same upper-class boys as Miles.

Miles’s sense of class may be reinforced by two factors: the fact that Mrs Grose calls him a ‘little gentleman’, which contributes to the formation of his sense of class, and the fact that the majority of his schoolmates are upper class boys, which further solidified his sense of class. And class gives Miles a sense of superiority and authority; he rarely mentions others and lives in his own universe in Bly. The repeated emphasis on ‘kind’ emphasises the social isolation of all the characters in the libretto: the Governess and Mrs Grose are separated by class and education; Miles and Flora are separated from their Guardian, peers, and school; Quint and Miss Jessel, are separated from reality as supernatural beings, and their relationship was socially unacceptable when they were alive. Even in the isolation of Bly Castle, language and imagery make it clear to the audience that the predicament of all the characters in the story is closely tied to their social class.

³⁶ Howard, *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, 94.

³⁷ John Evans, ‘Structures: An Overall View’ in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, Patricia Howard, 71. Also see, Eric Walter White, *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*, (California: University of California Press, 1970), 181-182.

1.4 Social Class in Productions

1.4.1 1954 The UK première production

The UK première production followed the setting of James's novella and the Victorian style in staging and costumes, with the costumes and blocking of the different characters reflecting their different social classes in the Victorian era; additionally, the actors, through their vocal treatment and interpretation of the story, portrayed the authoritative qualities of the characters and the competition between them for positions of authority. In the context of a hierarchical society, the staging and performances of the UK première production reflect a microcosm of Victorian social class and effectively depict the conflict for authority and power in the small world of Bly.

John Piper and Basil Coleman, the designer and director, used a Gothic-Victorian bay window (Fig. 1.4.1 (a)),³⁸ and the tower and lake sequences reflected the Gothic tradition. With the assistance of Michael Norton's lighting, the creative team was able to realise the concept of scenes appearing and disappearing. These scenes are like a series of colourful Victorian vignettes, with each lighting cue closely synchronised with the music.³⁹

³⁸ Basil Coleman, 'Staging First Productions 2', in *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (London: The Herbert Press, 1979), 42.

³⁹ Ibid.



Fig. 1.4.1 (a) The UK Première Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act I Scene 5, 'The Window'. Photograph of left to right: the Governess (Jennifer Vyvyan) and Quint (Peter Pears). Photographer: Denis de Marney. Source: Getty Images.

The features of the Victorian era described by James in the novella were also retained in Britten's musical composition and Piper's libretto, and they were conveyed to John Piper and Coleman, so that as much Victorian detail as possible could be brought to the stage. James describes the Governess's arrival in Bly on 'the bumping swinging coach', and Britten and Piper capture the detail of the 'coach', which was a prominent mode of transportation during the Victorian era. They developed and presented the inner monologue of a Victorian governess as she travels to the challenging workplace in the Act I Scene 1, 'The Journey':

The Journey

[The lights go up on the interior of a coach. The Governess is in a travelling dress]

Governess

Nearly there.

Very soon I shall know, I shall know what's in store for me.

Who will greet me? The...children...the children.

Will they be clever? Will they like me?

Poor babies, no father, no mother. But I shall love them as I love my own, all my dear ones left at home, so far away-and so different.

If things go wrong, what shall I do? Who can I ask, with none of my kind to talk to? Only the old housekeeper, how will she welcome me? I must not write to their guardian, that is the hardest part of all. Whatever happens, it is I, I must decide.

A strange world for a stranger's sake. O Why did I come?

No! I've said I will do it, and—for him I will.

There's nothing to fear. What could go wrong?

Be brave, be brave. We're nearly there. Very soon I shall know. Very soon I shall know.⁴⁰

Percussion persists throughout this scene, which, on the one hand, reflects the Governess's worry, and, on the other hand, can be interpreted as a carriage bumping along the road (Ex. 1.4.1 (a)). Bringing the images from the music to the stage required a deliberation and refinement. John Piper recalled a conversation with Britten regarding his insistence on using a coach in the scene, but Piper and Coleman protested, with Piper noting later in an interview that 'a coach would be realistic in manner, foreign to everything else, foreign to the evocative and atmospheric sense of the scenery'.⁴¹

[Britten]: 'Look, when she [the Governess] arrives, obviously she didn't come by train, she came by coach or something, a wheeled vehicle you see, at any rate to the outer gate at Bly. We must have a coach.'

[John Piper]: 'But the scenery is not like that, you don't have a coach in this kind of scenery.'

[Britten]: 'Well, I'm terribly sorry, I see a coach there; there must be a coach.'⁴²

⁴⁰John Piper, 'Designing for Britten' in *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (London: The Herbert Press, 1979), 6.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Act I Scene 1, 'The Journey'.

Ultimately, although no actual carriage was used on stage, the painted carriage met both Britten's fascination with carriages and the need for stage-wide stylistic cohesion (Fig. 1.4.1 (b)). In addition, John Piper designed the costumes based on the Victorian social values, thereby delineating the class characteristics of the characters and reflecting their social status.



Fig. 1.4.1 (b) Black and white production photograph of Benjamin Britten's The Turn of the Screw, Act I scene 1, 'The Journey'. Photographer: Angus McBean, copyright Harvard University. Image provided by Britten Pears Arts, courtesy of The Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library.

SCENE I. The Journey. *Die Reise.* The lights go up on the interior of a coach. The Governess is in travelling dress. Das Licht blendet auf und beleuchtet das Innere einer Kutsche. Die Gouvernante ist im Reisekleid.

Free recitative
GOVERNESS

p Near - ly there. Ve - ry soon I shall know, I shall
Fast schön da. Und sehr bald seh ich klar, seh ich

pp always in regular tempo
Timp. (no *♩*.)

Gov. know what's in store for me.
klar, was vor mir steht.

Gov. Who will greet me? The chil - dren... the chil - dren.
Wer em pfängt mich? Die Kin - der... die Kin - der.

Gov. Will they be cle - ver? Will they like me?
Wer - den sie klug sein? Gar mich mö - gen?

mf *sweetly* *express.*
Gov. Poor ba - bies, no fa - ther, no mo - ther.
Die Ar - men, ohn' Va - ter, ohn' Mut - ter.

più f

♦ The quavers marked [quaver] can, if necessary, be repeated to fit with the stage.
B. & H. 18043

Ex. 1.4.1 (a) Act I Scene 1, 'The Journey'.

The first time the Governess experiences Miles's unpredictability is in Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson', when they discuss the origin of the 'Malo' song. After Miles finishes the

‘Malo’ song, the original Governess, Jennifer Vyvyan, asks him, somewhat perplexed and coaxingly, ‘Why, Miles, what a funny song! Did I teach you that?’ Instead of responding to whether the Governess taught him the song, Miles (David Hemmings) changes the sentimental, pianissimo tone of the ‘Malo’ song and tells her in a firm mezzo forte tone: ‘I found it, I like it. Do you?’ Miles, however, does not wait for the Governess’s response, he continues to sing the ‘Malo’ song, as if it does not matter if she likes it or not. By singing and responding to the change in attitude of the Governess, Miles appears to be asserting his independence to the Governess.

The second psychological encounter between the Governess and Miles occurs in Act I Scene 8, ‘At Night’, when the Governess discovers Miles and Flora fleeing the bedroom. She first urges Mrs Grose, in a more subdued tone, to go to Flora, while she goes to Miles. When the Governess finds Miles, she asks, ‘Miles! What are you doing here?’ Here, Britten’s score is not marked with a new expression, which can be interpreted to imply that the mood during the Governess speaking to Mrs Grose and subsequently finding Miles should remain largely unchanged. However, when the Governess sings this line, her mood and tone were extremely stern and reprimanding, with a startling degree of force.⁴³ Again, as in Act I Scene 6, ‘The Lesson’, Miles does not respond positively to the Governess’s question: he says to her in a calm and gentle manner, ‘You see- I am bad, I am bad, aren’t I?’ as he approaches the house while ignoring the Governess.

Upon discovering that the Governess has written a letter to the Guardian in Act II Scene 4, ‘The Bedroom’, Miles realises that his previous verbal challenges to the Governess were ineffective, and that the Guardian’s authority has been entirely delegated to the Governess. Having lost the upper hand in his struggle against the Governess’s authority, Miles reluctantly emphasises that there is much in the letter that

⁴³ Benjamin Britten, ‘Britten - The Turn of the Screw – EOG/Britten’, YouTube video, 1:45:04, posted by ‘incontrario motu’, Mar 16, 2015, accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y47AhE-xN80&ab_channel=incontrariomotu. This is a studio recording of the singers who performed in the 1954 première production in Venice, London, and subsequent UK national tour. The recording was released in March 1955.

she can ‘tell’, and the emphasis on ‘tell’ in the original performances of Miles by David Hemmings indicates that he is preoccupied with how the letter is written about him. In order to preserve his dignity, he steals the Governess’s letter to the Guardian after she has left his bedroom.

The larceny of the letter is indeed unethical, and Miles pays with his life in order to preserve his dignity and authority. In Act II Scene 8, ‘Miles’, the Governess and Miles are left alone in Bly for their final confrontation:

[Governess]: Miles, did you steal my letter? Did you steal my letter? Did you? Did you?

[Miles]: No. Yes. I took it.

[Governess]: Why, why...did you take it?

[Miles]: To see what you said about us.

[Governess]: Miles, dear little Miles, who is it you see? Who do you wait for, watch for?

[Miles]: I don’t know what you mean.

[Governess]: Who is it? Say, for my sake!

[Miles]: Is he there, is he there?

[Governess]: Is who there, Miles? Say it!

[Miles]: Nobody! Nothing!

[Governess]: Who? Who? Who made you take the letter? Who do you wait for, watch for? Only say the name and he will go for ever, for ever.

[Miles]: Peter Quint, you devil! (The boy runs into the Governess’s arms)

[Governess]: Ah, Miles! You are saved! Now all will be well. Together we have destroy’d him.

This confrontation between the Governess and Miles is composed in her A major key. In conjunction with her conversation with Miles, it becomes apparent that Miles stole her letter, putting him in a vulnerable position and enhancing the Governess’s psychological control. In order to investigate the unknown part of Miles, the Governess repeatedly asks Miles to utter the name and, in the UK première production at this point, she restrains him from embracing Quint. Miles yells ‘Peter Quint’ in the end, confirming the Governess’s assumption about whom Miles was watching and waiting for. It is also possible that this is also the answer to her question ‘what happened before I [the Governess] came’ in Act II Scene 4, ‘The Bedroom’, which had remained

unanswered. According to Coleman's interview, 'You devil' was undoubtedly shouted at Peter Quint in the première production in any case (Fig. 1.4.1(c)):

DM: That extraordinary comment, if I can ask you about one other comment, at the end of the opera, when the boy of course says, 'Peter Quint, you devil!' I mean whose idea was it? Because, of course, it doesn't say in the score, you know, 'to the Governess' or 'to Quint'. It's one of those wonderful sort of ambiguities which are so rich in the opera.

BC: Yes.

DM: I just wondered whether that was you or the composer or - ?

BC: No, but I think we always directed it at Quint.

DM: At Quint? [sounding surprised]

BC: At Quint. Yes.

DM: Not at the – it was always Quint and not the Governess?

BC: At Quint. Yes.

DM: Not the – it was always Quint and not the Governess?

BC: Not the Governess. And I think - I mean, really that was something that Ben would have picked up immediately, I think, if he had felt differently.

[.....]

DM: So that first production was definitely directed at Quint.

BC: I'm sure that way we did that, yes, yes. Myfanwy, too, I think would have brought it out, you know, had she disagreed with the way we were acting it, staging it.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Basil Coleman, interviewed by Donald Mitchell, at 9 Barleylands, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, Oct 29, 2000, 99-100. This interview in 2000 is a recall of the 1954 première production of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*.



Fig. 1.4.1 (c) The UK première Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act 2 Scene 8, 'Miles'. Photograph of left to right: Quint (Peter Pears), Miles (David Hemmings) and the Governess (Jennifer Vyvyan) 'Peter Quint, You devil!' Photographer: Denis de Marney. Source: Getty Images.

In the final confrontation between the Governess and Miles, Miles's death symbolises not only the failure of his resistance but also the collapse of the upper class authority he represents. The Governess perceives her victory in supposedly redeeming Miles as a triumph of her personal convictions and sense of justice. However, this perceived victory is illusory, serving as a metaphor for the fleeting nature of subverting the established social hierarchy. The conclusion of the opera reveals the Governess's profound loss; she is left bereft of everything she held at Bly, including her voice, her beliefs, and her dignity.

1.4.2 1979 English National Opera production

1978 and 1979 were particularly fruitful years for the opera, with new productions being staged by Scottish Opera, Barbican Opera Group, Royal Academy of Music, and

Studio Opera Group in 1978; Welsh National Opera, Kent Opera, and English National Opera followed in 1979.

The 1979 English National Opera (ENO) production was dedicated to the memory of Benjamin Britten,⁴⁵ with Jonathan Miller as director, Lionel Friend as conductor, and Patrick Robertson and Rosemary Vercoe as designers; it premiered at the Coliseum in London on November 6, 1979. The fourth performance coincided with the composer's birthday, November 22, and the last with the anniversary of his death, December 4. In a review of the production, Harold Rosenthal noted:

[...] There is the danger that any attempts at a new approach by a producer will arouse criticism, even hostility. For many years, rightly or wrongly, Britten's stage works have been regarded in this country as the preserve of Aldeburgh and the English Opera Group. This has meant, in effect, that any departure from the original stagings, which were regarded as sacrosanct, has been condemned as virtual heresy. Surely the test of a great work for the theatre is that it is strong enough to exist in its own right in many different kinds of staging.⁴⁶

The ENO production followed the period setting of the première production of the opera, with darkened tones on the stage and a largely consistent Victorian Gothic style staging (Fig. 1.4.2 (a) and (b)). In contrast to a typical stage, the ENO's stage was rotated 45 degrees and extended towards the audience. The backdrop comprised photo projections and there were few props; the stage was quite empty and less claustrophobic than in other stagings. Consequently, blocking and gesture were used to depict the relationships between the characters and the authority image.

⁴⁵ 'The Turn of the Screw', theatre programme, *The Turn of the Screw*, n. pag., London: English National Opera, Nov 22 – Dec 4, 1979.

⁴⁶ Harold Rosenthal, 'The Turn of the Screw'. *Opera Magazine*, January 1980, accessed November 21, 2022, 84. <https://reader.exacteditions.com/issues/51431/spread/86>.



Fig. 1.4.2 (a) Set model by Patrick Robertson with costumes by Rosemary Vercoe for The Turn of the Screw, English National Opera, London Coliseum, 6 November 1979.⁴⁷ Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The design considered the scale of the theatre and its stage. It used a raked floor, which extended over the orchestra pit, bringing the action close to the audience and effectively reducing the distance between performers and spectators. This extension was particularly important in a larger theatre, as it enhanced intimacy and engagement. Additionally, silver-grey shining surfaces were projected onto the set, allowing the location to shift to different parts of the gothic house. The use of projections gave the stage an appearance of vastness, compensating for any spatial limitations and creating a more immersive experience within the confines of the theatre.

⁴⁸ The set model images from the Victoria and Albert Museum are available on the V&A official website: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1115194/set-model/>. Accessed on 6 June 2023.



Fig. 1.4.2 (b) Set model by Patrick Robertson. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.

In Act I Scene 1, ‘The Welcome’, Mrs Grose, who is dressed in black with a white collar and a hood, stands behind the stage, while the Governess, Miles, and Flora, who are all dressed in light colours, stand at the front of the stage holding hands (Fig. 1.4.2 (c)). Even though the three characters dress in varying hues of colour in later scenes, Mrs Grose is the only real human-being whose costume is always black. The ghosts, Miss Jessel and Quint, are both dressed in solid black—which is the direct opposite of what ghosts are often seen wearing. This unconventional choice of attire reflects aspects of their spectral nature and individual stories. Quint’s black costume is identical to the style of dress he wore in real life, emphasizing his lingering attachment to the mortal world. Miss Jessel’s dress, however, is extremely basic and unrepresentative of her real-life attire, signifying a loss of identity or status in the afterlife (Fig. 1.4.2 (d)).



Fig. 1.4.2 (c) The 1979 English National Opera Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act I Scene 1, 'The Welcome'. Left to right: Flora (Iris Saunders), Mrs Grose (Ava June), The Governess (Eilene Hannan), and Miles (Michael Ginn). Source: English National Opera.⁴⁹



Fig. 1.4.2 (d) The 1979 English National Opera Production Act II Scene 3, 'Miss Jessel'. Miss Jessel (Rosalind Plowright) in the room. Source: Rosalind Plowright Personal Website.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ This production photograph is available on the English National Opera official website: <https://www.eno.org/collections/eno-turn-screw-1979-production/>. Accessed on 6 June 2023.

⁵⁰ This production photograph is available on the Rosalind Plowright personal website: <https://rosalindplowright.com/media/archive/>. Accessed on 6 June 2023.

Mrs Grose's characterisation is comparatively secondary, for two reasons: first, her unaltered plain black costume makes it easier for other characters to visually catch the attention of the audience; and second, her physical actions as a subordinate under the Governess is more indicative of submission and obedience (Fig. 1.4.2 (e)).



Fig. 1.4.2 (e) The 1979 English National Opera Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act II Scene 7, 'Flora'. Left to right: Flora, Mrs Grose, The Governess. Source: English National Opera.

Flora holds a secondary position as well: the Governess's primary responsibility at Bly is to educate and take care of Flora, as the upper-class girl is unable to attend school; however, Flora has to spend a great deal of time with Mrs Grose at the Governess's direction. The Governess maintains a distance from Flora even when she is with her. Moreover, when a group of Bly people is observed, the others are standing while Flora is always seated to the side Fig. 1.4.2 (f) and Fig. 1.4.2 (g), making her difficult to be observed and therefore easily neglected by the audience.

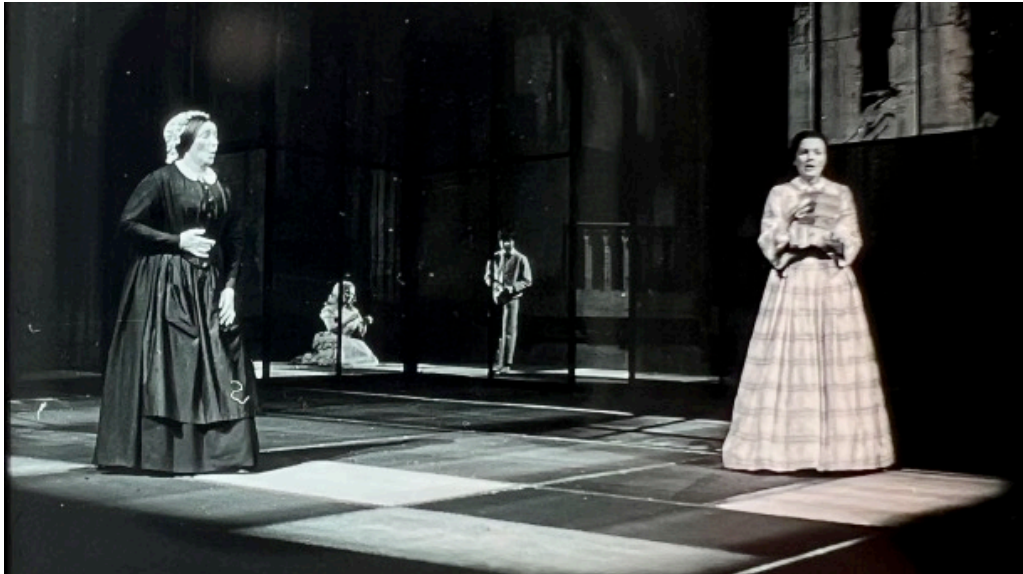


Fig. 1.4.2 (f) The 1979 English National Opera Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act I Scene 3, 'The Letter'. Left to right: Mrs Grose, Flora, Miles, The Governess. Source: Theatre Collection, University of Bristol.



Fig. 1.4.2 (g) The 1979 English National Opera Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act II Scene 2, 'The Bells'. Photograph of left to right: Miles, Flora, Mrs Grose, The Governess. Source: the Theatre Collection, University of Bristol.

The struggle for authority in the ENO production is centred on Miles, the Governess and Quint. Philip Langridge, who portrayed Quint in the ENO production, felt that Peter

Pears did an excellent interpretation of Quint's evil and suggestive nature, leaving him with less room to develop Quint's personality. However, Miller enlightened him that:

[...]What Quint is basically after is the boy's soul. We're not talking about the boy, we are talking about his soul. You want to own him, you want to become [him].⁵¹

For Langridge, Miller's word gave an entirely new meaning to the understanding that Quint, the servant, desired to return to life through Miles, the master, and he did his best to embody this idea.⁵²

As a result of the Guardian's departure from Bly, Quint perceives Miles as a member of the upper class with unquestionable authority. Since Miles is a young child who is still curious about everything, Quint is able to use trickery to establish a relationship with him and accomplish his goals through him.

The ENO Miles, Michael Ginn, appeared less innocent than the Miles of the UK première production for two reasons: first, the tone of the ENO Miles was more subdued and mature, and second, the timbral effect of his voice appeared to be influenced by the ghostliness of Quint.⁵³ In Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Quint appears to summon Miles multiple times in his representative A^b major, to which Miles responds promptly to Quint in E^b. A^b – E^b indicates that Quint manages to attract Miles and that Miles is subordinate to Quint. Miles responds concurrently to Quint's words:

Quint: Miles!

Miles: I'm here O I'm here!

[...]

Quint: The long sighing flight of the night-wing'd bird.

Miles: Bird!

[...]

Quint: In me secrets, half-formed desires meet.

⁵¹ F Paul Driscoll, 'Full Sail' *Opera News* vol. 61, issue 12 (March 8, 1997): 29.
<https://www.proquest.com/magazines/full-sail/docview/224260686/se-2>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Miles's part 0:17-1:19. Benjamin Britten, 'The Turn of the Screw, ENO 1979, Part 1, B. Britten, Ava June, Eileen Hannan, Rosalind Plowright', YouTube video, 15:59, posted by 'Plowrightclips', Jan 29, 2012, accessed June 5, 2023,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_ipCUwQniM&ab_channel=Plowrightclips.

Miles: Secrets, O secrets!

[...]

Quint: I am King Midas with gold in his hand.

Miles: Gold, o yes, gold!

Each of Ginn's responses was accompanied by a ghostly trill descending from the note of E^b, as Britten indicates, further assuring Quint's effective corruption of Miles and soul takeover, and illustrating Quint's struggle for authority and power (Ex. 1.4.2 (a)):

The lights fade in on the front of the house and tower. Quint is on the tower, Miles in the garden below him, in his night things. *Das Licht blendet auf und beleuchtet die Hausfront und den Turm. Quint steht auf dem Turm. Miles im Garten unter ihm, im Nachthemd.*

Quint (unseen) *ppp* *f* I'm here..... O I'm here!.....
Bin hier,..... ich bin hier!.....

Miles! *Miles!*

73 *pp cresc.* *accel.*

Miles *qu*

Quint *f*

Quint *f* *ral. - - very smoothly*
 The brittle bland-ish-ment of coun-ter-feit. In me se - crets,
 Der seich-te See - len-fang aus Trug und Lug. In mir heim - lich

pp *p* *fp*
 Cl.

77 MILES
 Se - crets, O se-crets!
 Heim - lich, o heim-lich!

Quint *pp*
 half - formed de - sires meet. I am the
 Wunsch auf Er - fül - lung 77 trifft. Ich bin der

pp Celesta

Quint *pp*
 soft persis - tent word, The long sigh-ing flight of the night-wing'd
 bannend Flüs-ter-wort, Bin Seuf - zer - flug durch den nächt - gen

78 MILES *cresc.*
 Bird! *cresc.* I'm lis - tening
 Flug! Ich hör zu

Quint *pp*
 bird. Miles! Miles!
 Ort. Miles! Miles!

78 Celesta *pp*
cresc.

MILES *f* Gold, O yes, Gold, o ja,

Quint *p* *f* *ppp*
 I am King Mi - das with gold..... in his hand.
 Ich bin Fürst Mi - das mit Gold..... in der Hand.
 Celesta

w.w. *pp* *sf* *pp*

76 Animated

Miles gold! Gold!

Ex. 1.4.2 (a) Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'.

Quint is not the only one interested in occupying Miles's soul – the Governess competes with Quint for Miles on a constant basis. It is evident from the body language and emotions of the Governess on the ENO stage that she is devoted to Miles and acknowledges his status: when the Governess, Eilene Hannan, is with Miles, she always orients her body towards Miles, who is typically seated or standing erect (Fig. 1.4.2 (h)). In contrast, the Governess treats Flora or Mrs Grose with confidence and an upright posture.

Perhaps the victor of the combat between the Governess and Quint in the production is foreshadowed in Act II Scene 8, 'Miles': the Governess bends over backwards to persuade Miles, whereas Quint stands confidently and expansively behind him, as if invulnerable. The costumes, with the Governess and Quint retaining their original light and black colours, Miles wearing a black-on-top, light-on-bottom ensemble, indicates Quint's control over Miles and proclaims his victory (Fig. 1.4.2 (i)).



Fig. 1.4.2 (h) The 1979 English National Opera Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom'. Photograph of left and right: Miles and The Governess. Source: English National Opera.



Fig. 1.4.2 (i) The 1979 English National Opera Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act II Scene 8, 'Miles'. Photograph of left and right: The Governess, Miles, and Quint (Graham Clark). Source: English National Opera.

1.4.3 2005 BBC production

Despite the fact that neither the novella nor the libretto depicts Quint as a gentleman, he is portrayed as attractive and handsome in both. However, in the production by Katie Mitchell, Quint is portrayed as not only filthy but also rude. Yet, it is precisely this filthy, lower-class Quint that captivates Miles, Miss Jessel, and even the Governess, who are all of higher social standing. The character of Quint in this production is portrayed as someone who craves authority and challenges it by transcending class restrictions and societal morals, thereby emanating a provocative and menacing quality. However, his authority is not derived solely from his appearance, but rather from his manipulation of Bly's people. Given the filmic approach, the audience's perspective is consistently aligned with the images captured by the camera, which focuses primarily on the key characters. By enhancing Mrs Grose's portrayal, emphasising her power struggle with the Governess, highlighting the confrontations between the Governess and Miles, and showcasing Miles's attraction to Quint, this production focuses primarily on key figures of authority in various forms – Mrs Grose, the Governess, and Miles – ultimately establishing Quint as the dominant figure.

Mrs Grose is present in numerous shots and is given greater significance in comparison to other productions. In Act I Scene 2, 'Welcome', Mrs Grose puts her arms around Miles's and Flora's shoulders and looks at the smiling and elated Governess without fawning, like a Bly governor of high standing would. As the Governess describes her arrival, Mrs Grose examines the Governess up and down, and then she approaches the Governess with Miles and Flora in her arms, welcoming her to the home. As the children lead the Governess on a tour of Bly, Mrs Grose casts a fleeting glance at the Governess's luggage and gives a sign to a servant to place it in the appropriate location. In other productions examined in this thesis, Mrs Grose is frequently the only servant on stage, representing the lowest social status among the onstage characters. However, in Mitchell's interpretation, a non-singing young maid is introduced solely

for performance purpose to emphasises that Mrs Grose has been in charge of Bly prior to the arrival of the Governess, highlighting her authority.

In Act I Scene 3, 'The Letter', Mrs Grose comes to deliver a letter to the Governess. Upon entering the room, she stands erect and waits for the Governess to take the letter from her hand. Mrs Grose then picks up her cup of tea as the Governess opens and reads the letter. The Governess informs Mrs Grose that the letter states that Miles has been expelled from school for 'an injury to his friends' and will never be allowed to return to school. Mrs Grose sets the cup down in incredulity, but defends Miles firmly, stating, 'Him an injury – I won't believe it!' After a brief discussion, they agree to keep the matter of Miles's expulsion from school to themselves. Mrs Grose is seen deep in thought after the departure of the Governess, as if the arrival of the letter might reveal some unspeakable secrets. However, her mood soon eases and she appears satisfied. This indicates that she anticipates the Governess will handle the letter with caution, and the Governess's willingness to listen to her words and comply with her attitude brings Mrs Grose a sense of contentment.

In Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', Miles and Flora are singing 'Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son, while playing in the corridor. Mrs Grose see the children playing and her face immediately shows impatience. She passes between Miles and Flora, removing her white apron, and shaking it off, not forgetting to give the children a stern look.

Mrs Grose's treatment of the Governess and the children indicates that she holds a position of authority at Bly and possesses a domineering personality that goes beyond what one might expect of a servant. From the Act I Scene 2, 'Welcome' to the Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', the creative team gives Mrs Grose a more prominent role, and the audience are more likely to view her as a principal character and narrator.

However, her authority is challenged with the appearance of Quint. In Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', the Governess panics and dashes into the room to secure the windows against the outside. Mrs Grose asks the Governess, 'My dear, you look so white and

queer. What's happened?' The Governess reports seeing a strange man standing outside the window:

I have been frighten'd. A man look'd through the window, a strange man. But I saw him before..... On the tower..... His hair was red, close curling, a long, pale face, small eyes. His look was sharp, fixed and strange. He was tall, clean shaven, yes, even handsome, But a horror!⁵⁴

Mrs Grose's expression becomes abruptly grave, and she mumbles 'Quint! Peter Quint! Quint!' before collapsing to the ground, a movement which is not indicated in the score. Mrs Grose's musical contribution is also quiet, with her vocal part intermittently transitioning from *piano* to *pianissimo* (Ex. 1.4.3 (a)). This depiction indicates her departure from her usual composed demeanour to a state of quiet murmuring that conveys disbelief, astonishment, and suspicion. The *staccatissimo* is utilised to not only accentuate the singing of the D[#] on 'horror' in the Governess's music, but also to articulate each 'Quint' exclaimed by Mrs Grose on the same D[#]. Importantly, the D[#] (equivalent to the E^b) and the celesta serve as prominent Quint-related motifs in this opera. Following this, the celesta part is played *staccatissimo* to emphasise the chord on the A[#]C[#]D[#] and CDF notes (Ex. 1.4.3 (a)). This chord lags slightly behind the music of the Governess and Mrs Grose, creating an effect that is somewhat abrupt. It is as if Quint replies to the Governess and Mrs Grose 'I'm here'.

The musical score for Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Celesta (Cel.), marked *pp* and *staccatissimo*. The middle staff is for the Governess (Gov.), with lyrics 'hor - - - - - ror! sal!' and 'ror! sal!'. The bottom staff is for Mrs. GROSE, with lyrics 'Quint! Pe - ter Quint! Quint!'. A 'Change to Piano' instruction is at the end of the Celesta staff. The score is numbered 'B. 1 H. 18306'.

⁵⁴ Act I Scene 5, 'The Window'.

Ex. 1.4.3 (a) Act I Scene 5, 'The Window'.

Mrs Grose cries out, 'Dear God, is there no end to his dreadful way? Dear God...' (Ex. 1.4.3 (b)). The sudden shift in musical dynamics from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* portrays Mrs Grose's intense emotional outburst and her mental breakdown. At this point, the Governess becomes assertive, looks down at Mrs Grose, who is lying on the floor in the same gesture as the dead Miss Jessel, and asks, 'Peter Quint - Who is that? Who is that? Tell me, Mrs Grose! D'you know him, then? Tell me!'. Mrs Grose completes the transfer of authority to the Governess by the act of 'fainting', and alludes to the 'fall' of her authoritative image in Bly – perhaps out of excessive dread of Quint or in order to leave the Governess to handle the thorny matter of Quint. From that point, the Governess appears to be in charge of Bly, at least in front of the camera.

39 Slow and broad (♩: 48) 79

Fl. *ff* *dim.* *pp*

Ob. *ff* *dim.* *pp*

Cl. in B $\flat$ *ff* *dim.* *pp*

Bsn. *ff* *dim.* *pp*

Hm. in F *ff* *dim.* *pp*

Harp *ff*

Perc. Timp. (*frem.*) *ff* *mf* *pp*

Gov. *sharply*
 Pe-ter Quint... Who is that?
 Pe-ter Quint... wer ist das?

Mrs. G. *f* *p*
 Dear God, is there no end to his dread-ful ways?
 Gott, wann en-det end-lich sein bö-ser Weg?

39 Slow and broad (♩: 48)

VI. I *arco* *ff* *dim.* *pp*

VI. 2 *arco* *ff* *dim.* *pp*

Vla. *arco* *ff* *dim.* *pp*

Vc. *arco* *ff* *dim.* *pp*

Db. *arco* *ff* *dim.* *pp*

B. & H. 18306

Ex. 1.4.3 (b) Act I Scene 5, 'The Window'.

Although Quint appears in Act I Scene 4, 'The Tower', and Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', he makes his official debut in Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'. Quint sings and holds Miles's face in his hands, then motions Miles to follow him (Fig. 1.4.3 (a)). Moreover,

Quint is also depicted touching Miles's sleeping head with his hands. Notable is the fact that Quint's hands are filthy and by no means those of a gentleman. In Anne Midgette's review in *The New York Times*, she described Quint as 'coarse, dirty and frightening'.⁵⁵ As he sings 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned' in Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', Quint reveals his complete image: unshaven and filthy, with wide eyes, a sombre expression, dishevelled hair, and black teeth (Fig. 1.4.3 (b)). Accompanied by Quint's singing, the scene strongly suggests he and Miss Jessel are enjoying making love in a dark basement. Simultaneously, the scene intermittently flashes back to the Governess either in a dream state, envisioning, or authentically reliving events akin to those involving Miss Jessel. Quint's hands are depicted unbuttoning Miss Jessel's clothing in these moments, and similarly, his hands are shown on the Governess's attire performing a similar action. Throughout this sequence, the camera perspective is from Quint's point of view, looking down upon both Miss Jessel and the Governess.



Fig. 1.4.3 (a) The 2005 BBC Production, Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Quint's hands and Miles (Nicholas Kirby Johnson).

⁵⁵ Midgette, "In This Version, the Britten Opera Dons a Dress".



Fig. 1.4.3 (b) The 2005 BBC Production, Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', Quint's face (Mark Padmore).

The Governess is in charge of Bly, but she quickly loses control of the situation in Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell'. The conversation in this scene, in which Miles asks the Governess when he can return to school is conducted with Miles gazing down on the Governess, similar to the conversation in Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', in which they attempt to confront each other in the final scene with Miles looking down on the Governess. The state of Miles and the Governess during their two confrontations indicates Miles' authority, which is determined by his class privilege and is unaffected by his youth.

And in Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', when Quint's hands hold Miles's face, Quint became the only character that not only Mrs Grose, Miss Jessel, and the Governess, but also Miles look up to in Mitchell's production. One could contend that Mitchell's Quint breaks Victorian-era social class taboos, given that he is able to have such an intimate relationship with Miles, who is upper class, and Miss Jessel, who is middle class.

1.4.4 2011 Glyndebourne production

The creative team chose a 1950s setting rather than the Victorian period.⁵⁶ Consequently, social class is not as distinct in the Glyndebourne production as it is in those productions with a Victorian setting. Nonetheless, possibly due to the absence of social class as a framework to support the original story, the director, Jonathan Kent, establishes Bly's system of authority sufficiently that it is possible for Bly to achieve a state of internal hierarchy.

In contrast to the other productions, the prologue includes a narrator in modern dress, who pulls out a video tape that begins to play on a black screen behind him. In the next scene, the Governess arrives at Bly via train rather than coach, and James's Victorian Bly castle is replaced in a 1950s-style manner, with the casts wearing modern costumes and Mrs Grose using a vacuum cleaner.

In Act I Scene 2, 'Welcome', Mrs Grose is rearranging and cleaning the house prior to the arrival of the Governess, while Miles and Flora are playing and getting in her way. Mrs Grose sternly reprimands the children and then asks them to prepare a bow and curtesy for the Governess. Mrs Grose appears to be more of a nanny, based on her tone, physical interaction, and behaviour with the children. Mrs Grose's nanny persona is validated by the arrival of the Governess. Mrs Grose naturally takes the Governess's luggage and then her hat.

In Act I Scene 3, 'The Letter', Mrs Grose enters the room and gives the letter to the Governess, who hands Mrs Grose the cup of tea she is holding. This seamless interaction demonstrates Mrs Grose's recognition and endorsement of the Governess. Mrs Grose appears incredulous and overwhelmed when the Governess tells her that Miles has been expelled from school and asks if he is bad. Mrs Grose is eventually

⁵⁶ 'Introducing *The Turn of the Screw*', YouTube video, posted by 'Glyndebourne', posted on August 26, 2011, accessed September 21, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kavFPZHCBHg&ab_channel=Glyndebourne.

relieved when the Governess decides to do nothing about Miles's expulsion from school, and she becomes calm.

The Governess has been the uncontested authority from the moment she enters Bly, and she quickly settles in and acts like a hostess and a controller of events. She is a controlling individual whose desire for control intensifies as the story progresses, particularly with Quint and Miss Jessel's involvement in her life, to the point where she becomes increasingly agitated. It is not until Flora betrays her and Miles dies in her arms that she truly realises the collapse of her authority in Bly.

The first time the Governess's authority is challenged is in Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell', when she tells Mrs Grose in a grave and authoritative tone, with her eyes staring at the two children, 'Dear good Mrs Grose, they are not playing, they are talking horrors.' Mrs Grose responds, 'Oh, never!' with a hint of disbelief, marking the beginning of the erosion of her authority. The Governess then asks Mrs Grose two questions in return and relays the facts she has 'discovered' firmly:

[The Governess] Why are they so charming, why so unnaturally good? I tell you they are not with us, but with the others. With Quint and that woman... They can destroy them.⁵⁷

Mrs Grose says to the Governess, somewhat astonished, 'Miss, you must write to their uncle'. Quint says in Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', 'I waited for the sound of my own last bell'. The constant sound of the bells at this moment seems to foreshadow Quint's image, as the low, powerful bass of the piano and strings sounds like Quint's footsteps approaching (Ex. 1.4.4 (a)). Then the Governess immediately firmly informs her, 'That his house is poisoned, the children mad or that I am!' At this moment, the Governess's attitude suddenly becomes highly assertive and angry, mirroring her reaction in Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', when Mrs Grose mentioned it may be Quint outside the window. This implies that the Governess now believes that Bly house has been tainted by the spirit of Quint.

⁵⁷ Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell'.

Ex. 1.4.4 (a) Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell'.

The musical score is for Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell'. It features the following parts and markings:

- Perc. (Bells):** Starts with a *dim.* marking.
- Piano:** Starts with *pp* and *dim.* markings.
- Gov. (Governor):**
 - Markings: *darkly*, *f*.
 - Lyrics: "That his house is poisoned, the children mad — or that I am!" and "Dass sein Haus ver-pestet, die Kin-der toll — und dass ichs bin!"
- Mrs. G. (Mrs. G.):**
 - Lyrics: "un-cle. schrei-ben."
- VI. 1 (Violin I):** Marked *dim.*
- VI. 2 (Violin II):** Marked *dim.*
- Vc. (Viola):** Marked *pp* and *dim.*
- Db. (Double Bass):** Marked *pp* and *dim.*

The score includes a section marked **39** with the instruction **Recit.** (Recitative). This section includes parts for Percussion, Piano, Governor, and Mrs. G., with dynamics like *ppp* and *pp*. The Governor's part in this section has the lyrics: "I was charg'd not to worry him." and "Er ver-biet sich Be-ruh-i-gung."

Ex. 1.4.4 (a) Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell'.

Yet, it is possible to deduce from the Governess's determined demeanour and tone of voice that she believes the two children, not herself, are in dangerous circumstances. Making the determination that the children are insane and communicating it to Mrs

Grose demonstrates the Governess's confidence in her authority in Bly at the time and in her ability to resolve the matter.

The confrontation between the Governess and Miles, particularly when Miles questions her views and avoids physical contact, undermines her authority. Miles climbs a tree, looks down at the Governess with a superior expression, and asks, 'Do you like the bell? I do! I do!' Then, he comes down from the tree, approaches the Governess with his hands in his pockets, a hint of disdain on his face, and skeptically stares at her, asking, 'Does my uncle think what you think?' The Governess, startled, pushes Miles away, who then turns and walks off with his hands in his pockets, not forgetting to give the Governess a lingering look. This role reversal, with the child becoming the inquirer, unsettles the Governess and leads to self-doubt. The Governess's authority and confidence in the Glyndebourne production are challenged by Miles's confrontational behavior and suggestive questions. Evidently shocked and even frightened by Miles's actions, and after experiencing extreme emotional turmoil, she decides to leave Bly immediately.

Regarding Miles and Flora, however, her controlling and irrational mindset as an authority figure reveals her dominance and hysterical tendency. In Act I Scene 5, 'The Bedroom', the Governess repeatedly questions Miles about what happened at school, while Miles resists and struggles with his ears covered, and the Governess says, 'I want you to help me save you,' grabbing his arms with a fierce expression on her face (Fig. 1.4.4 (a)).

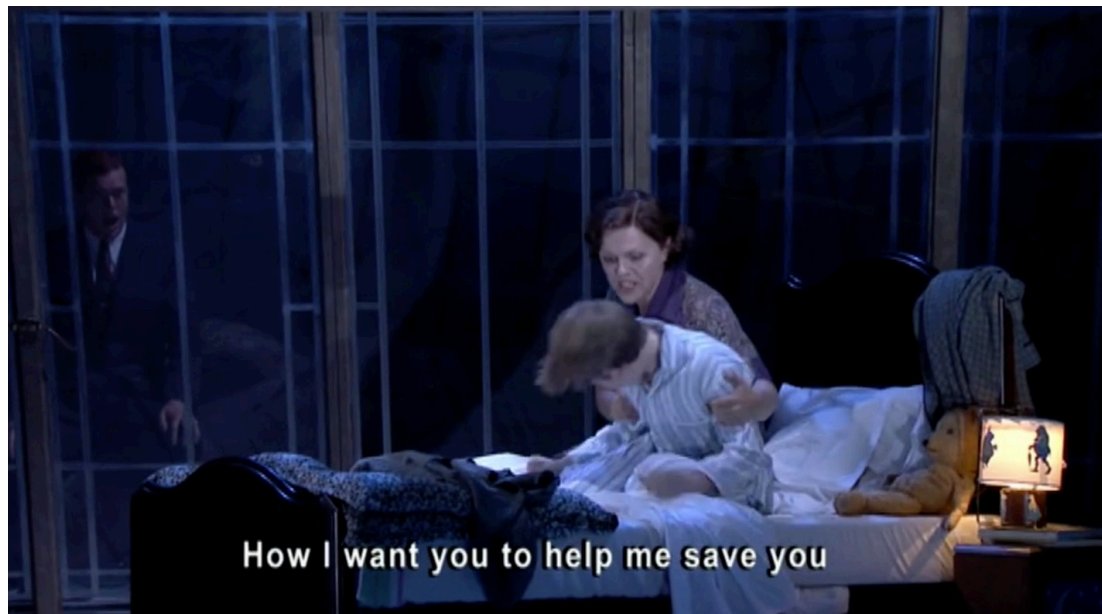


Fig. 1.4.4 (a) The 2011 Glyndebourne Production, Act II Scene 5, 'The Bedroom'. Quint (Toby Spence), the Governess (Miah Persson), and Miles (Thomas Parfitt). Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

It is no accident that the Governess's fierce demeanour reappears in Flora; in Act I Scene 7, 'Flora', the Governess appears to know everything as she stands with folded arms and queries Flora about Miss Jessel:

[The Governess] And where, my pet, is Miss Jessel? She is there! Look, she is there! Look, you little unhappy thing!⁵⁸

Flora denies the existence of Miss Jessel, which enrages the Governess, who violently seizes Flora and shakes her while yelling, 'But Look!' (Fig. 1.4.4 (b)) Flora eventually is unable to endure the verbal and physical abuse and hurls the doll at the Governess, cursing her until Mrs Grose takes her away:

[Flora] You're cruel, horrible, hateful, nasty. Why did you come here? Why did you come here? O, I don't know what you mean! Take me away! Take me away! I don't like her! I don't like her! I hate her! [...] Cruel, horrible, hateful, nasty. We don't want you, we don't want you. Take me away! Take me away from her! Hateful, cruel, nasty, horrible...⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Act I Scene 7, 'Flora'.

⁵⁹ Act II Scene 7, 'Flora'.



Fig. 1.4.4 (b) The 2011 Glyndebourne Production, Act II Scene 7, 'Flora'. Mrs Grose (Susan Bickley), Flora (Joanna Songi), the Governess, and Miss Jessel (Giselle Allen). Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

Flora not only challenges the Governess's authority, but also crushes her pride. After Flora departs, the Governess falls to her knees, holding Flora's doll and yelling hysterically (Fig. 1.4.4 (c)). Failure and sorrow eventually overpower her, and she collapses to the ground in tears:

Am I horrible? Am I horrible? Horrible? No! No! But I have failed, failed, most miserably failed, and there is no more innocence in me. And now she hates me! And now she hates me! Hates me! Hates me! Hates me!⁶⁰

The Governess's aggressive and dominant stance turns increasingly counterproductive. Her desperate attempts to control and protect the children translate into aggressive questioning and physical altercations, symptomatic of her unravelling authority and increasing hysteria.

⁶⁰ Act II Scene 7, 'Flora'.



Fig. 1.4.4 (c) The 2011 Glyndebourne Production, Act II Scene 7, 'Flora'. The Governess. Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

The final collapse of the Governess's authority is realised in the aftermath of Flora's rejection and Miles's death. These events represent the failure of her control and lead to her emotional breakdown.

The Glyndebourne production is centred on the evolving psyche of the Governess. It portrays how her mindset shifts as she takes control of Bly, subsequently leading to the gradual disintegration of her authority. This deterioration is closely linked to the increasingly strained relationships she develops with the children. Through the psychological complexities of the Governess, the production captures the essence of her transforming control, fear, and loss of authority in Bly.

1.4.5 2019 Garsington Opera production

Garsington Opera production's creative team sets the production as a captivating tale set in the approximate period of the 1890s. As the director Louisa Muller claims,

We set it in Henry James's world and time period, which felt important to us, because of the isolation of that world. When we talked about updating it, we

couldn't come up with a modern equivalent for the house in the middle of nowhere, where you're not in contact with other people.⁶¹

Christopher Oram's set design is characterised by its simplicity and effectiveness. The expansive and uncluttered stage is adorned with gilded glass doors, evoking the grandeur of a decaying Victorian mansion, as Alessia Naccarato notes.⁶² Throughout the performance, the static set remains unaltered, emphasising the decision to use minimal props and lighting to convey situations. Instead, tension is carefully crafted through the dynamic movement and interaction of the *dramatis personae*, highlighting the fluid and constantly shifting physical relationships between the characters.⁶³ Given these circumstances, the portrayal of social classes in this production aligns with the Victorian era's class structure. Moreover, Muller presents her own perspective on authority within the self-contained microcosm of Bly:

I think it's because it makes the hierarchy of the house tipped in some way, so that in a strange way, Miles, although he's a child, is head of the household, and that's about social class and about gender, of course. But I think that is really important because the Governess never gets to be in charge properly. She's always subservient in some way to the kids, particularly Miles. I think it also influences the relationship she has with Mrs Grose, so they can be compatriots, and they can be friends, but not completely. There's always a distance between them because of their class differential as well, I think it is important.⁶⁴

The production does indeed reflect Victorian notions of class, as the opera centres on the children, with Miles becoming the unquestioned symbol of authority.

In Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Miles' status is revealed through his interactions with Quint and the Governess. Upon seeing the apparitions, the Governess becomes

⁶¹ Louisa Muller, online interviewed by Yaou Zhang, Feb 27, 2023.

⁶² Alessia Naccarato, 'An Ambiguous Turn of the Screw at Garsington Opera', July 9, 2019, accessed on July 29, 2023, <https://www.schmopera.com/an-ambiguous-turn-of-the-screw-at-garsington-opera/>.

⁶³ Stephen Walsh, 'The Turn of the Screw, Garsington Opera Review – Superb Music Drama on an Open Stage', July 5, 2019, accessed on July 29, 2023, <https://theartsdesk.com/opera/turn-screw-garsington-opera-review-superb-music-drama-open-stage>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

excessively terrified and faints on the left side of the stage. In response to Quint's call, Miles, dressed in his pyjama, walks out onto the stage and approaches the fallen Governess, sitting beside her. Quint appears at this time and effectively captures Miles's attention by using gestures and words that Miles understands. Quint seizes the opportunity by kneeling behind Miles and singing in a persuading, tender, and alluring manner:

'I am the hidden life that stirs,
When the candle is out,
Upstairs and down, the footsteps barely heard,
The unknown gesture, the soft persistent word,
The long sighing light of the night-wing'd Bird.
Miles! Miles! Miles! Miles!'⁶⁵

Quint adeptly employs both words and actions to continuously captivate Miles, intending to instil in him a deep attachment and reliance akin to a spiritual opium, thus achieving his fundamental purpose – to gain control and return to Bly through Miles. Based on Miles's reactions to Quint's gestures and words, it can be concluded that Quint's attempts to attract Miles are successful. The inherent playfulness of children enables Quint to gradually implant the concept of spiritual opium in Miles's mind over the course of the following scenes.

The Governess awakens after Quint and Miss Jessel successfully establish connections with the children and exit the scene. In a state of agitation, she rushes towards Miles and yanks him away from his position. She exclaims in a scolding tone and with a mixture of intense emotions and anger, 'Miles! What are you...' in high tones (Ex. 1.4.5 (a)). However, her demeanour abruptly changes, adopting an entirely different stance: the Governess gently grasps Miles's arms and kneels in front of him, her gaze and voice filled with warmth, concern, and anxiety as she sings softly, 'doing here' (Ex. 1.4.5 (a)).

⁶⁵ Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'.

162

192

Plac.

Ob.

Cl. in Bb

Ban.

Hrn. in F

Timp.

Perc.

Gov.

Miles!

Miles!

Miles! What are you

Miles! Miles, say was

199

89

Harp

Gov.

Miles

Hrn. in F

Harp

Perc.

Miles

Db.

Mrs. Grose takes Flora away.
Frau Gross und Flora verschwinden
(= 60) zusammen vom Fenster.

Miles goes into the house followed by the Governess as the lights fade.
Miles geht ins Haus, von der Gouvernante gefolgt. Das Licht erlischt.

doing here?
tust du hier?

simply

You see — I am bad, I am bad, aren't I?
Du siehst — ich bin schlecht, ich bin schlecht, siehst du?

I am bad, I am bad, ich bin schlecht, ich bin schlecht

CURTAIN

Timp. hard stick

ppp

dim.

pp

pizz.

pp

Ex. 1.4.5 (a) Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'.

Miles has a keen understanding of how to utilise his authority to manage the Governess. When the Governess reacts angrily to his nocturnal excursion but refrains from harshly reprimanding him, Miles realises he can manipulate her emotions by exhibiting certain behaviours she desires but finds difficult to achieve. In Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', as Miles says, 'I am bad, I am bad, aren't I...' while turning away and leaving, the Governess appears confused, disheartened, and even remorseful over Miles's departure. Miles appears to be aware of this, as he pauses and looks back at the Governess after walking a short distance. He extends his hand and gestures for her to return to the house

with him. Despite her fear and surprise, the Governess quickly rises to her feet and dashes towards Miles, grabbing his hand.

In subsequent scenes, including Variation VIII at the beginning of Act II, and Act II Scene 2, 'The Bells', Miles employs familiar strategies to create situations involving private interactions and physical contact with the Governess (Fig. 1.4.5 (a)). These events further contribute to the Governess developing an emotional attachment to Miles, leading her to undertake a series of efforts to save him in Act II Scene 8, 'Miles'.



Fig. 1.4.5 (a) Garsington Production Act II Scene 2, 'The Bells'. The Governess (Sophie Bevan) and Miles (Leo Jemison). Photo by: John Snelling. Image provided by Garsington Opera.

The Governess's ultimate attempt to rescue Miles unfolds in Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', where her confrontation with Quint highlights Miles's status and ultimately culminates in Miles's death. When Mrs Grose departs with Flora to find the Guardian, only Miles and the Governess are left at Bly. The Governess is engaged in an internal monologue: it appears that she has been repressing her emotions for a considerable duration, and

now she boldly declares, ‘Oh Miles, I cannot bear to lose you.’ This emphasises the Governess’s emotional bond with Miles. Subsequently, she sings, ‘You shall be mine, and I shall save you.’ The tone of her voice gradually decreases in volume, and her emotions gradually transition to a more controlled manner. This approach not only contradicts the emphasis on the E note ‘save you’ in Britten’s score (Ex. 1.4.5 (b)), but also deviates from other productions analysed in this thesis - it becomes apparent that the Governess is ostensibly rescuing Miles, yet in actuality, it seems to be a means of redeeming her own spirit. It appears as though she is struggling with a societal prohibition, compelled to restrain her intense emotions. The depiction of the Governess in the Garsington production differs from the resolute and intense determination to rescue Miles that is emphasised in other researched productions.

121 Slow and regular (♩ = 60)

Harp *pp*

Perc. *pp* Timp. tr. tr.

Gov. *f* passionately

O Miles I can not bear to lose you. You shall be mine, and I shall save you.

121 Slow and regular (♩ = 60)

Db. *pizz. unmuted*

Mrs. Grose goes quickly to Flora and takes her off.

* This low E can be taken (throughout) by the Bass drum.

Ex. 1.4.5 (b) Act II Scene 8, ‘Miles’.

Miles comes to the Governess. He displays a mature, composed, and captivating presence, emanating an aura of refined upper-class demeanour. Addressing the Governess, he says, ‘So my dear, we are alone’. In contrast, the Governess positions both hands on the front of her dress, exhibiting a subtle sense of uneasiness and apprehension. She tentatively asks, ‘Are we alone?’ Miles walks in the opposite direction of the Governess, gazing outward. He replies, ‘Oh, I’m afraid so.’ With the confirmation, it is as if the Governess is freed from constraints, and she pours out her emotions to Miles, ‘Dearest Miles, I love to be with you’ (Ex. 1.4.5 (c)). She takes a

few eager steps towards the direction of Miles, extending her arms as if to embrace him. However, she then let her arms drop with a sense of defeat, turning away with a trembling voice to sing, 'What else should I stay for?' (Ex. 1.4.5 (c)).

Miles approaches her, and once again takes her hand. He says to her calmly, 'So, my dear, for me you stay'. The Governess, in turn, takes Miles's hand and proceeds to caress his face, grasping his shoulders. With a fervent emotion, she says, 'I stay as your friend, I stay as your friend, Miles. There is nothing I cannot do for you, remember' (Ex. 1.4.5 (c)). However, Miles remains composed and restrained, taking a step back and naturally releasing the Governess's hand. Miles senses the disappointment in the Governess and said, 'I will tell you everything'. He then comes closer and holds the Governess's hand again, which rekindles a spark of hope in her. Suddenly, Miles turns away and uttered, 'But not now'. Once again, the Governess is plunged into disappointment.

186

Gov. Dear - est Miles, I love to be with you.....
 Lieb - ster Miles, wie gern bin ich mit Dir

Miles Do you? cl. Und Du?

Gov. What else should I stay for?
 was blieb ich denn sonst hier?

MILES I stay as your friend, I stay as your
 Ich bleib als Dein. Freund, ich bleib als Dein

Gov. So, my dear, for me you stay?
 So, mein Schatz, Du bleibst für mich?

Gov. friend. Miles, there is no - thing I would not do for you, re -
 Freund. Miles, es gibt gar - nichts, das ich nicht tät für Dich, das

B. & H. 18043

Ex. 1.4.5 (c) Act II Scene 8, 'Miles'.

The Governess feels disheartened, not only because of Miles's unpredictable attitude that leaves her confused but also because she continuously struggles to obtain the desired responses from him. The interaction between the Governess and Miles shows Miles's push-and-pull strategy that becomes intolerable for the Governess. This situation elicits feelings of unease and anxiety within her, leading to a transition from self-control to heightened agitation and a growing perception of vulnerability. The confrontation also emphasises how, during the conversation, Miles progressively

establishes dominance over the Governess, reinforcing his position as the ultimate authority at Bly and the one who possesses the power of communication. Through the manipulation of the Governess's emotions via his actions, Miles further solidifies his authoritative image in this production.

1.4.6 2020 Opera North production

As previously noted, the Opera North production moves the story from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1920s. Talevi adds more sinister hints behind the smudged windows of Boyd's Victorian mansion set. As Charles Hutchinson notes in the blogpost 'Review: Martin Dreyer's verdict on Opera North's hellish *The Turn Of The Screw*':

[Boyd's] costumes are regulation late Victorian, shading into Edwardian, but her hair-styles are notable: the Pre-Raphaelite cast of Miss Jessel's Titian tresses, Quint's bright orange thatch and side-burns, Flora's Alice-curls, all contrast firmly with the Governess's prim blonde bun.⁶⁶

The casts of the Opera North production largely reflect the class distinctions in James's story. As Talevi confirms, social class is a significant factor in the production:

[Alessandro Talevi] The Governess feels insecure in her relationship to the children, because the children are in a higher class; and also, in her relationship to Miss Jessel, because Mrs Grose reminds the Governess that Miss Jessel was actually a real lady, the Governess feels like insecure and jealous. And so, I think the Governess, as a result, tries to enforce her power over the children, because of her inner insecurity.⁶⁷

Mrs Grose's physical performance and deferential gestures place the Governess in a position of authority from the very beginning of the production. In Act I Scene 2, 'The Welcome', Mrs Grose is frantically preparing for the arrival of the Governess,

⁶⁶ Charles Hutchinson, 'Martin Dreyer's verdict on Opera North's hellish *The Turn of the Screw*', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, *Charles Hutch Press* (blog) February 21, 2020, accessed June 27, 2023, <https://charleshutchpress.co.uk/review-martin-dreyers-verdict-on-opera-norths-the-turn-of-the-screw/>.

⁶⁷ Alessandro Talevi, interviewed by Yaou Zhang, Leeds: *Leeds Grand Theatre*, Feb 13, 2020.

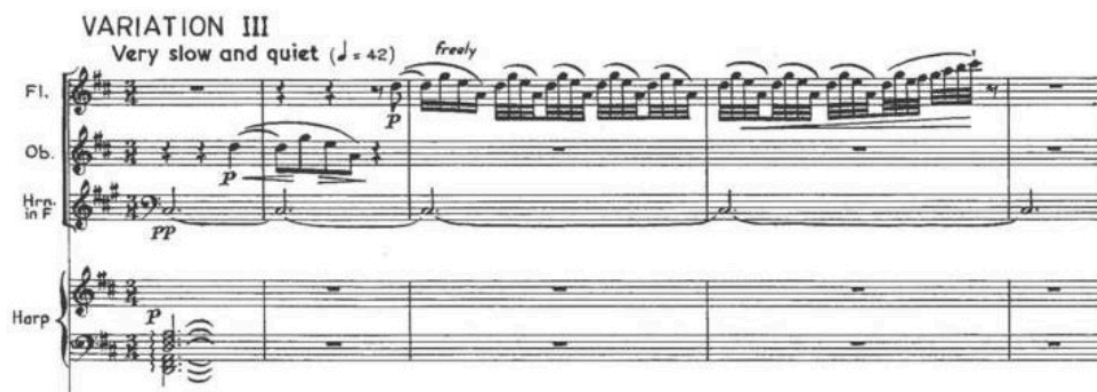
inspecting Miles's bow and Flora's curtsy in order to meet the Governess. As the Governess approaches, Mrs Grose hurriedly and solemnly instructs the children to take their assigned positions, while she herself straightens her hair and costume. Mrs Grose runs to the Governess, wipes her hands on her apron, extends her hand to shake hands with her, and curtsies, 'How do you do, Miss. Welcome to Bly.' The harp's arpeggio, at this point, expresses Mrs Grose's joy, and indicates the heart's leaps and ripples (Ex. 1.4.6 (a)). In this scene in which she greets the Governess, Mrs Grose helps to project an image of authority onto the Governess who is about to assume her position at Bly by taking the arrival of the Governess with seriousness, humility, and excitement.



Ex. 1.4.6 (a) Act I Scene 2, 'The Welcome'.

The deference displayed by Mrs Grose, coupled with the children's affection for her and their seemingly innate innocence and obedience, empower the Governess to establish Bly as her own sanctuary. Gradually, she gains confidence in assuming the role of a matriarch and governing Bly accordingly. Nevertheless, the music in Variation III portrays two discernible emotions, hinting at something antithetical concealed beneath the Governess's outwardly cheerful demeanour in Act I Scene 4, 'The Tower'.

The first emotion in Variation III resembles the chirping of birds and is performed in the upper register by the oboe and flute using the melodic motif D-G-E-A and its extension (Ex. 1.4.6 (b)), which conveys an easily recognisable sense of happiness.



Ex. 1.4.6 (b) Variation III.

In Act I Scene 4, 'The Tower', the Governess's sense of satisfaction and control over Bly's work and life reaches their peak, and she exclaims, 'How beautiful it is!' The motif from Variation III for woodwinds is used to express her sense of happiness (Ex. 1.4.6 (c)). Through her constant self-suggestion that Bly is her home, and her active participation in the management of Bly by the support of Mrs Grose and the children, she is content: 'Each day it seems more beautiful to me. And my darling children enchant me more and more.'⁶⁸ All of the Governess's limbs and demeanour are extremely relaxed and stretched, indicating a high level of confidence.

⁶⁸ Act I Scene 5, 'The Tower'.

SCENE IV THE TOWER
DER TURM

The lights fade in again on the house. The tower is now visible. It is evening. Sweet summer. Enter the Governess, strolling.

Das Licht blendet auf und beleuchtet das Haus und den Turm der nun sichtbar wird. Milder Sommerabend. Gouvernante spaziert herein.

Fl. *p*

Ob. *p*

Bsn. *pp*

Hrn. in F *pp*

Harp *p*

GOVERNESS *p*

warm

warm

warm

warm

warm

warm

p

How beau - ti - ful it is.
 Wie wun - der - schön es ist.

Ex. 1.4.6 (c) Act I Scene 4, 'The Tower'.

However, beginning at rehearsal bar 21 in Variation III, the music undergoes a transition towards discord and unease. This is achieved by changing the principal note from D to C[#], thereby creating an unsettling and uneasy atmosphere (Ex. 1.4.6 (d)). Therefore, the second emotion, created by the harp, timpani and strings, lies beneath the bird-like melodies like an ominous tidal wave, conveying a sense of underlying danger.

Ex. 1.4.6 (d) Variation III.

Through this variation, the plight of the Governess in the subsequent scene is revealed. At some level, the Governess actually realises that something disturbing is happening to her, but she suppresses her fears:

[The Governess] My first foolish fears are all vanish'd now, are all banish'd now- Those fluttering fears when I could not forget the letter – When I heard a far off cry in the night and once a faint foot-step pass'd my door.⁶⁹

The Governess presents herself as the mistress in Bly, imagining a relationship with the Guardian that goes beyond that of employer-employee, and placing herself in a position where she can only be happier through the presence of the upper-class guardian. In addition, by distinguishing herself from Mrs Grose, with whom she interacts frequently, the Governess creates a clear distinction between the two. This distinction is made clear

⁶⁹ Ibid.

when she expresses her role as helping the Guardian in caring for Bly, while also emphasising her loneliness in Bly:

[The Governess] Only one thing I wish, that I could see him – And that he could see how well I do his bidding, his bidding. The birds fly home to these great trees, I too am at home. Alone, tranquil, serene.⁷⁰

While attempting to differentiate herself from Mrs Grose, it is arguable that the Governess, like Mrs Grose, has class consciousness deeply ingrained in her subconscious. In Act I Scene 5, ‘The Window’, when Mrs Grose reveals Quint’s lifelong relationship with Miss Jessel and Miles, the Governess is overcome with shock and deep fear; the music becomes eerie and disturbing, the oboe and horn play the motif of the Governess’s singing ‘The Ceremony of Innocence is Drawn’, while the clarinet’s uninterrupted vibrato expresses anxiety and unease (Ex. 1.4.6 (e)). This indicates that the Governess’s expression is unmistakably gloomy and angry, and that she is no longer the happy and innocent governess she once was.

Agitated

44 (J. J.) *very smooth*

Ob.

Cl. in Bb (trill)

Hrn. in F *very smooth*

GOVERNESS *p (whispered)*

I know no-thing of these things. Is this shel-tered place the wick-ed
 Ich weiss nichts von sol-chen Dingen. Ist dies stil-le Haus die bö-se

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Fl. *ppp*

Ob. *ppp*

Cl. in B♭ *ppp*

Hrn. in F *mf*

Harp *p*

Perc. *ppp*

Gov. *pp*

world where things un - spoken of can be? Only this much!
 Welt, wo Un - aus - sprech - li - ches ge - schieht? A - bereins ist ge -

Mrs. GROSE *pp*

Dear God!
 Mein Gott!

Vla. *ppp*

Vc. *ppp*

Db. *ppp*

Fl. *cresc.*

Ob. *cresc.*

Cl. in B♭ *cresc.*

Hrn. in F *cresc.*

Gov. *cresc.*

know: things have been done here that are not good, and have left a taste
 - wiss: Man - cher - lei gab's hier, das war nicht gut, das hat wohl die Luft



Ex. 1.4.6 (e) Act I Scene 5, 'The Tower'.

The Governess's conviction regarding Quint's possible return for Miles stems from her belief that Quint's intentions were motivated by social class differences. As Miles now holds the highest social status within Bly, the Governess perceives Quint's return as an attempt to target and corrupt Miles, similar to his influence over Miss Jessel, who was his social superior. This leads her to believe that Quint intends to take advantage of Miles. Meanwhile, Mrs Grose's emphasis on Miss Jessel as a true lady, combined with the continuous clarinet trill and eerie musical atmosphere, seems to convey the Governess's insecurity about her own authority and the fear of possibly underperforming in comparison to the former governess's authority established on class grounds. These class-based remarks make the governess aware of her inadequacies and heighten her sensitivity.

In this production, Quint is portrayed as an impudent and ruthless character who disregards all boundaries in his relentless pursuit of Miles as his own. Through his persistent attempts to exert control over Miles, his use of threats and intimidation against the Governess, and his manipulation of Miss Jessel, Quint portrays himself as an inherently evil, controlling, and unyielding power-seeker. Quint demonstrates a willingness to defy societal norms and laws in his relentless pursuit of his goals, employing any means necessary.

In Act I, Scene 8, ‘At Night’, the relationship between Quint and Miles intensifies considerably. During this scene, Quint sings to Miles, emphasising the notes E^b and C when he sings the words ‘strange’ and ‘bold’ in the line ‘I’m all things strange and bold’ (Ex. 1.4.6 (f)). Notable is Miles’s own song, ‘Malo’ in Act I Scene 6, ‘The Lesson’. The final notes of his song, ‘Malo in an apple tree’ and ‘Malo than a naughty boy’, also contain E^b and C. It is worthwhile to investigate the symbolism behind the phrase ‘apple tree’, which traditionally represents concepts such as knowledge, temptation, the fall of man, and sin in the context of Eden (Ex. 1.4.6 (g)).

The musical score for Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', features three staves. The top staff is for Miles, the middle for Quint, and the bottom for piano accompaniment. Quint's vocal line includes the lyrics: 'I'm all things strange and bold, fremd und hold, Welt'. The piano accompaniment includes markings for 'quicker', 'accel.', and 'Hn. (muted)'. The score is in a key with two flats and a 3/4 time signature.

Ex. 1.4.6 (f) Act I Scene 8, ‘At Night’.

Given the complexity of these symbolic associations, it would be difficult for a ten-year-old boy like Miles to comprehend such matters. Miles demonstrates an interest in ‘strange’ knowledge, whereas Quint has the audacity to fulfil Miles’s desires expressed in the ‘Malo’ song by encouraging him to engage in inappropriate behaviour.

Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo I would ra - ther be
Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo ich würd lie - ber sein

Via. E.H. pp

Harp

Miles

Ma - lo, Ma - lo in an ap - ple tree Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo, in dem Ap - fel - baum

Via. E.H. Via. p

Miles

Ma - lo, Ma - lo than a naugh - ty boy Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo als ein bö - ser Bueb

Via. E.H. Via. p

Ex. 1.4.6 (g) Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson'.

The subsequent unsettling scene represents the culmination of Quint's corrupting influence on Miles. Miles begins to unbutton his clothing gradually and deliberately, and eventually he discards his top. This action sets the stage for a musically and dramatic climax as Quint and Miles perform a synchronised gesture. They extend their arms and move them up and down in unison, with Quint taking the lead to demonstrate his influence over Miles (Fig. 1.4.6 (b)). The line 'the long sighing flight of the night-winged bird', sung on the notes A^b and concluding on E^b, is a bold expression of Quint's emotions. Quint urgently sings his exotic theme to Miles, who responds multiple times. This sequence demonstrates that Quint's goal of corrupting and controlling Miles is proceeding as planned.



Fig. 1.4.6 (b) The 2020 Opera North production, Act I Scene 8, 'At night', Quint (Nicholas Watts) and Miles (Tim Gasiorek), Photo by Tristram Kenton.

Convinced that he is successful in this mission, Quint is inspired to be fearless as if he has supreme power, and he ascends to the top of the bed, where everything else is dark, but Quint's body shines brightly as if he is the king of Bly. He then steps closer to the sleeping Governess and sings his and Jessel's musical theme 'on the path, in the woods' in her ear, formally asserting his dominance over the Governess (Fig. 1.4.6 (c)).



Fig. 1.4.6 (c) The 2020 Opera North production Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Miss Jessel (Eleanor Dennis), the Governess, and Quint.

During the subsequent confrontation, Quint gains the upper hand over the Governess. This is evident in Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom', in which the Governess's attempt to save Miles fails. She wants Miles to confide in her, but he responds with avoidance and irritation. In addition, in Act II Scene 5, 'Quint', Quint successfully manipulates Miles into stealing the letter written by the Governess to the Guardian. This accomplishment solidifies Quint's position as the dominant force.

The final disintegration of the Governess's authority and the continued display of Quint's influence are demonstrated in Act II Scene 8, 'Miles'. The emphasis in the Opera North production on the confrontation between the Governess and Quint allows for the portrayal of Quint a character who is ambitious to an extent unseen in the earlier stagings that I have examined. The death of Miles and the departures of Flora and Mrs Grose precipitate the complete demise of the Governess's position of authority at Bly.

1.5 Chapter Summary

Based on the analysis provided in this chapter, it is evident that out of the six opera productions, four of them set the time period in the 1890s, aligning with the era of James's novella. The 1954 production by English Opera Group adheres to the background of James's original story. The 1979 ENO production is premised on commemorating Britten, thus following most of Britten's own setting choices for the opera. In the 2019 Garsington production, the director expresses a desire to revisit and pay homage to tradition by presenting both the era of Britten and that of James. The collaboration within the entire team further confirms this approach.

From a 'social class' perspective, these productions correspond to the social class dynamics of the Victorian era to a certain extent. They all mould Miles, the upper-class authority figure at Bly, in accordance with the social hierarchy of the era. The 2005 BBC production, which is also set in the 1890s, provides a distinct reinterpretation of

the opera. This production departs from conventions and adopts a more unconventional and innovative approach. The transcendence of social class adds complexity to the characters' conflicts between the era's influence and their own identities. The centre of authority undergoes several transformations, shifting from Mrs Grose to the Governess, then to Miles, and finally settling on Quint.

The 2010 Opera North initial production and the 2020 revival production are equally innovative. Opera North moves the story's setting from the 1890s to the 1920s. The creative team uses the social trends and aesthetics of the 1920s to construct material elements, placing the Governess at the forefront of Bly and establishing her as the central figure and authority, effectively diminishing the leadership of Miles, an upper-class character originally portrayed in the novella and opera. In this production, Miles assumes a more childlike role, even if he is a manipulative child, and this reframes the opera from the perspective of the Governess and reinterpreting it as a story of 'adult and child' dynamics, deviating from the original story's emphasis on social class.

The most avant-garde innovation is found in Glyndebourne's production, which shifts the story's setting directly to the 1950s. In 1950s Britain, the old social class system has been largely abandoned due to modernization. As a result, characters such as the Governess, who arrives at Bly by train, Mrs Grose, who functions as a member of the family, and Quint, who wears formal attire, lack traces of the older, more rigid social class system. Due to the absence of social class constraints, Quint becomes the protagonist, acting more boldly and exerting a greater influence on Bly than in other versions. Without the constraints of social class, he gains the opportunity to exercise more power and emerges as Bly's dominant figure.

Innovation continues to shape the landscape of opera productions as time passes. While some productions adhere to tradition, following stage instructions and settings in the score, there is a faction that embraces the concept of 'the death of the author', constantly innovating in opera productions. In this chapter, innovative opera productions reinterpret the operas in a variety of ways: 1. Maintaining the original

historical and social context without altering the plot, while generating new perspectives by exploring details and employing dramaturgical techniques that logically frame the new viewpoints, thereby giving the opera new meanings, as in the BBC production. 2. Altering the original historical context and influencing the development of the story and character shaping by changing material elements (such as set design, costumes, and makeup) influenced by different social contexts and aesthetics, as evidenced by the Glyndebourne and Opera North productions.

CHAPTER 2: Is ‘Whether the Ghosts Exist’ Important? Attitudes towards the Supernatural in *The Turn of the Screw*

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear,
and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.¹

—— H.P. Lovecraft

2.1 Ghost Story in English literature

Supernatural horror exists in human brains as a synonym for fear and the unknown; supernatural horror fiction exists in literature indelibly, like genes in human bodies. Literature has been produced by individuals who have been seeking meaning in lives by sublimating social phenomena and exploring uncharted realms, offering a realm in which to express multifarious thoughts and emotions. The term ‘supernatural horror fiction’ encompasses components of weird fiction, horror fiction, vampire literature, ghost story, and other genres. The ghost story, as one of ‘the unknown’ forms, has existed since ancient Greece, and it primarily evolved in the Romantic era, before being more widely embraced and flourishing in the Victoria era, which is regarded as the golden age of the ghost story. The term ‘supernatural’ refers to something superior or above nature, and was seen by Victorian critics as involving the preternatural, spiritual, or paranormal. Victorian gothic authors publicly stated their belief in the supernatural.²

Critics have noticed the influence of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* on Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* as a work of Gothic fiction.³ *The Turn of the Screw* is

¹ Howard Philips Lovecraft, ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’, *The H.P. Lovecraft Archive*, accessed August 12, 2021. <https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx>.

² ‘The Supernatural’, in Victorian Literature, in *Oxford Bibliographies*, accessed August 12, 2021. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199799558/obo-9780199799558-0157.xml>.

³ Gothic fiction is a type of narrative fiction that deals with supernatural or horrific happenings and has a claustrophobic atmosphere of oppression or evil. This subject is often expressed in confined and haunted settings like castles, crypts, convents, or gloomy mansions, as well as scenes of ruin and decay. See ‘Gothic fiction’, in *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Dinah, and Katy Hooper, (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

inspired by Jane Eyre's themes of class and femalehood, as well as its setting in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ Despite the fact that James's *The Turn of the Screw* originated in a commission to create a ghost story, James's ghosts are distinct from the conventional Gothic in that they appear to be live beings. Other than that, James created two narrators in the novella: the first narrator, who is nameless and only appears in the prologue, describes the scene in an old house where the houseguests are gathering and telling ghost stories on Christmas eve, then the nameless narrator draws one of the guests, Douglas, forth to tell the story of the Governess; the second and principal narrator is the Governess: she is the central character of the story and the story is told from her point of view. The principal narrator and first-person narrative technique lead the interpretations of the story in multiple ways: are the ghosts real? Is the Governess crazy and has Henry James 'designed' a horror through the Governess's eyes in the novella? These questions lead to a huge ambiguity in readers' minds, which may be the best-known example of ambiguity in a ghost story, as noted by L. Andrew Cooper.⁵ When the Governess describes the scenes she witnessed, it instills a sense of horror in the reader—horror rooted in the actual existence of the ghosts. Her commentary on these phenomena induces a feeling of puzzlement in the reader, puzzlement about the ghosts' intentions and about the Governess's credibility.⁶

2012). <https://www-oxfordreference-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199608218.001.0001/acref-9780199608218-e-3192?rskey=n68Cms&result=1>.

⁴ Millicent Bell, 'Class, Sex, and the Victorian Governess', In Pollak, Vivian R. (ed.). *New Essays on Daisy Miller and The Turn of the Screw*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 100. <https://www.proquest.com/lion/docview/2137983970>. Also, it is possible that Charlotte Brontë was the original model for the Governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, because Brontë was a governess to the cousin of Edward Benson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and according to her own account she was unkindly treated. James first had the idea of *The Turn of the Screw* from a story that Benson told him. See Linda Kauffman, 'The Author of our Woe: Virtue Recorded in The Turn of the Screw', in *Discourse of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 212. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctvv412hx>.

⁵ L. Andrew Cooper, *Gothic Realities: The Impact of Horror Fiction on Modern Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), 137.

⁶ Donald Costello, 'The Structure of *The Turn of the Screw*', *Modern Language Notes*, 75,4 (1960): 313.

The Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was founded in 1882 by a group of academics with the purpose of investigating Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and verified ‘true’ ghost stories.⁷ To integrate the latest discoveries in physical and psychological sciences with their hopes for confirmation of a supermundane existence, the organisation established a language of ‘psychical research’. They referred to haunted houses as ‘phantasmogenetic centres’,⁸ and they theorised mediumship as the result of ‘telepathy’ or ‘subliminal uprushes’ from unknown psychical powers, and these activities influenced the late Victorian Gothic revival significantly. William James, Henry James’s brother, was a leading figure of the Society, and he shed light on Henry James’s thoroughly psychical late ghost stories.⁹ In the novella *The Turn of the Screw*, Henry James produced a powerful reinterpretation of Victorian traditions, beginning with an intentionally Dickensian evocation that this was a story told around the fire to houseguests at Christmas eve, but then blurring the line between the Governess’s subjective delusion and any objective sense that ‘the ghosts exist’.¹⁰

⁷ SPR is a non-profit organisation in the United Kingdom; it was the first society to conduct organised scholarly research into human experiences that challenge contemporary scientific models. See ‘About the SPR’, <https://www.spr.ac.uk/about-spr>.

⁸ Psychical researcher F. W. H. Myers used ‘phantasmogenetic centres’ in his theory of phantasmal appearances: a psychic faculty of detaching elements of personality and using them to transform a certain part of space into a phantasmogenetic centre. In this centre, in a manner not material or optical, the phantasm of the psychorrhagist appears and may become collectively visible. See ‘Psychorrhagic Diathesis’, *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* 2 (2001): 1260.

⁹ Roger Luckhurst, ‘The Victorian supernatural’, in *British Library in The Gothic theme*, accessed August 12, 2021. <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-victorian-supernatural>.

¹⁰ ‘Ghost Stories’, in *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Dinah Birch and Katy Hooper, 4th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). <https://www-oxfordreference-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199608218.001.0001/acref-9780199608218-e-3070?rskey=dF3Zsr&result=1>.

2.2 Contextual analysis: Attitudes towards the Supernatural in James's novella *The Turn of the Screw*

One of the primary questions addressed in scholarship on this novella is how real the ghosts are. Are Peter Quint and Miss Jessel real in the sense that they are ghosts of the dead who have returned to torment the living? Or are they only real in the sense that the Governess experiences hallucination that cause them to appear exclusively to her? Do they haunt the children or haunt the Governess's imagination?¹¹

On the one hand, there is reasonable evidence to establish the reality of the ghosts. The Governess and Mrs Grose recognise Quint after he has appeared twice, and Miss Jessel is recognised by the Governess after her first appearance. The Governess describes a 'living man' to Mrs Grose, then Mrs Grose asks many questions to confirm her hypothesis before barking Quint's name. Only after Mrs Grose's identification of Quint does the Governess realise that he is already dead and his appearance should not be as a human being anymore, at which point she almost shrieks.¹² The identification of Miss Jessel is not as certain as Quint but still reasonable. The Governess's discussion with Mrs Grose about Miss Jessel's appearance is vague: the Governess presumes that she has seen Miss Jessel's ghost before the conversation with Mrs Grose. The Governess does not describe a portrait as detailed as Quint's, rather, she interprets the intentions of Miss Jessel. While this description arouses the scepticism of Mrs Grose,¹³ the Governess still feels she has the enough evidence to support her belief that she has seen the ghostly figure of Quint, and Miss Jessel too.

On the other hand, there are indications that the Governess is subjective: 'It's far worse than I dreamed. They're lost;' 'The more I go over it the more I see in it, and the more I see in it the more I fear. I don't know what I don't see, what I don't dear'; 'I had

¹¹ Beidler, *The Turn of the Screw: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, 127.

¹² Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1947), 40-45.

¹³ Mrs Grose asks the Governess with doubts, '(Miss Jessel) without coming nearer?' and 'how can you be sure?' James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 57.

seen exactly what I had seen'.¹⁴ Moreover, James changed his phrasing to make the Governess's experiences come across in a more subjective way in the 1908 edition. James changed 'I became sure' to 'I felt sure'; 'I perceived' to 'I felt'; 'I found myself' to 'I knew' and so on, a shift in verbiage that suggests that James wants readers to distrust the Governess.

Though it is not certain that the ghosts are really there in the Governess's eyes, she has no reason to tell a lie to terrify herself. It is hard to say whether the ghosts really exist in reality or exist in the Governess's mind, but the issue should be whether what she saw was real rather than whether she saw anything, and critics have still tried to prove certain theories about the story from this perspective.

Early reviews emphasised the novella's power to frighten and focused on the horror of the children, as some believed the young children were involved in sexual relationships with living beings and later with their ghosts. Leon Edel provides evidence in his biography of James that James did not share the common concept of childhood innocence. James's own childhood had made him painfully aware of the violence that children may perform in their imaginations.¹⁵ Robert Nathan Bryllion Fagin was a prominent advocate for the apparitionist interpretation; he saw the story as a Hawthornesque allegory about good and evil, and the ghosts as active agents to that effect.¹⁶ And Robert Heilman interprets the children in this novella as the symbolic representations of Adam and Eve, Bly as the symbol of Eden, Quint as the symbol of devil, and the whole tale as the reflection of 'the struggle of evil to possess the human soul'.¹⁷ Several scholars like Joseph J. Firebaugh, Maxwell Geismar, Eli Siegel, Glenn A. Reed, Oliver Evans, Charles G. Hoffman, Alexander E. Jones, Dorothea Krook, John

¹⁴ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 57-62.

¹⁵ Heller, *The Turn of the Screw: Bewildered Vision*, 10.

¹⁶ Nanthan Bryllion, 'Another Reading of The Turn of the Screw', *Modern Language Notes* 56 (1941): 200. Also see Beidler, *The Turn of the Screw: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, 133.

¹⁷ Robert Heilman, 'The Turn of the Screw as Poem', *University of Kansas City Review* 14 (1948): 278.

J. Allen, and Charles K. Wolfe, set out to prove the real existence of the ghosts in their scholarship, and note problems with psychoanalytic interpretation from the Governess's perspective. For instance, it does not make sense that Douglas gives a positive report of her character in the prologue if we see the Governess as a danger to the children; it is not reasonable that Mrs Grose admits that the spirits of Quint and Miss Jessel corrupt the children by the end of the story as she is sceptical initially.¹⁸

Critics could not agree on whether or not the Governess imagined the ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw*. And it seems that it is impossible to read the story without taking sides and to approach the story critically without knowing where one stands on it. The two basic readings are so radically different that both sides seem to end up agreeing on one thing: it is a creepy, scary, horrible ghost story, while it is also a fine psychological case study of a neurotic young woman. After all, it is difficult to say that a woman is both sane and insane, or the ghosts are both real and imaginary. However, with the interpolation of a third position, *The Turn of the Screw* has been seen as both a ghost story and a psychological study. Instead of 'A or B' that if the ghosts are real then the Governess is sane, or the other way around, contemporary criticism of *The Turn of the Screw* tends to say, 'A and B'.

Several scholars suggest that the story allows both interpretations in readings simultaneously. Terry Heller points out that the text hesitates between supporting the ghosts' existence, and rejecting them.¹⁹ Christine Brooke-Rose claims that the ambiguity so frequently argued over was a foundational part of the text that had been ignored.²⁰ In the 1970s, critics linked the structuralist Tzvetan Todorov's idea of the

¹⁸ Beidler, *The Turn of the Screw: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, 132-3.

¹⁹ Terry Heller, *The Turn of the Screw: Bewildered Visions* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 14-15.

²⁰ Christine Brooke-Rose, 'The Squirm of the True, II: A Structural Analysis of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*', *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 1 (1976): 513-46.

‘fantastic’ to *The Turn of the Screw*, indicating the relevance of ‘hesitation’ in supernatural fictions, which they discovered in James’ novella.²¹ As Todorov claims,

[*The Turn of the Screw*] does not permit us to determine finally whether ghosts haunt the old estate, or whether we are confronted by the hallucinations of a hysterical Governess victimized by the disturbing atmosphere which surrounds her.²²

This ‘A and B’ view has encouraged several scholars to pay attention to the ‘double-directedness’ of the linguistic and psychological indications that James gives his readers. From the 1980s onwards, critics increasingly refused to ask questions about diegetic elements of the text, instead acknowledging that many elements simply cannot be known definitively.²³ In the 1980s, focus shifted away from whether the ghosts were real and onto how James generated and then sustained the text’s ambiguity. A study into revisions James made to two paragraphs in the novella concluded that James was not striving for clarity, but to create a text which could not be interpreted definitively in either direction.²⁴

Since the novella’s publication, readers and critics have speculated on its meaning. From 1898 to the 1930s, readers and critics debated the narrative content of the work itself and whether the ghosts existed. From the 1930s to the 1960s, an increasing number of critics used Freudian psychoanalysis to analyse the text, arguing that the ghosts mentioned in the novella were most likely due to psychological problems with the Governess. During this period, there were still voices that supported the existence of the ghosts. These two different angles have stimulated academic interest in the novel,

²¹ Tobin Siebers, ‘Hesitation, History, and Reading: Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 25, (1983), 559–573.

²² Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil), 1970. Trans. Richard Howard as *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 43.

²³ John Carlos Rowe, ‘Psychoanalytical Significances: The Use and Abuse of Uncertainty in *The Turn of the Screw*’, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 144.

²⁴ Norman Macleod, ‘Stylistics and the Ghost Story: Punctuation, Revisions, and Meaning in *The Turn of the Screw*’, in Anderson, John M.; Macleod, Norman (eds.), *Edinburgh Studies in the English Language* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), 133–55.

moving it from the stage of ‘Do the Ghosts Really Exist’? to the stage of two contradictory possibilities, i.e. ‘it is the Governess’s psychological issues’ or ‘ghosts’ real existence’. Since the 1980s, critics shifted their attentions onto how James generated and then sustained the text’s ambiguity. When critics stop grappling with whether ‘ghosts really exist’ or ‘the psychological problems of the Governess’, they give themselves the opportunity to delve deeper into Henry James’s text structure and give the novel more space to be interpreted.

2.3 Exploring the Ambiguities of the Ghosts and Imagination in the Opera

The opera navigates through the complexities of the supernatural and the psychological, particularly in the music that precedes and follows Act I Scene 8, titled ‘At Night’. In Act I, Variation VII (before Act I Scene 8, ‘At Night’), the music is predominantly in the key of A^b, and the gong, celesta, and harp continuously develop the themes of Miss Jessel and Quint, while the French horn reinforces the ‘Screw’ motif (Ex.3.3 (a)). This musical arrangement not only signifies the looming dominance of these spectral intruders but also marks their formal intrusion into the lives of Bly’s inhabitants, heralding a shift in the opera’s atmosphere and foreshadowing the unfolding drama.

VARIATION VII

131

Slow ($\text{♩} = 48$)

Hm.in Fl. *open marked but sustained*
pp

Harp *pp*

Perc. *Gong*
pp *pp*

Cel.

Db. *Slow* ($\text{♩} = 48$)
p

Hm.in Fl. *cresc.* 71 *always louder*

Harp *cresc.* *always louder*

Perc. *Gong* *louder each time*

Cel.

Db. *louder each time* 71 *cresc.*

Ex. 2.3 (a) Act I, Variation VII.

After Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', there is Variation VIII, which transitions into a darker tone with the key of A^b minor, led by the ghostly presence of Quint. The clarinet, embodying Quint's theme, alongside the harp with its pentatonic scale and the gong

symbolising Miss Jessel, collectively sets the stage for the ghosts' forthcoming appearances (Ex. 2.3 (b)). This variation, positioned after Act I Scene 8, seamlessly segues into Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', thereby establishing an anticipatory mood for the audience.

ACT II

VARIATION VIII
CURTAIN

Slow (the cadenzas all free)

The musical score for Variation VIII, titled 'CURTAIN', is for Act II. It is marked 'Slow (the cadenzas all free)'. The instrumentation includes Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, Horn in F, Harp, Gong, Percussion (Timpani), Celesta, Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Doublebass. The score features a variety of musical textures, including woodwind and string entries, a harp solo, and a gong. Dynamics include pp, p, and tr.

Ex. 2.3 (b) Act II, Variation VIII.

The opera further explores the complex situation of the ghosts in the additional scenes Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', and Act II Scene 5, 'Quint', making Britten

and Piper's story debatable: some critics believe that these are the concrete and straightforward evidence of the interpretation that the ghosts are real, but Howard proposed that the scene 'Colloquy and Soliloquy' is further evidence of the Governess's delusion. She argues that:

The Governess sings, 'lost in my labyrinth, I see no truth' – which can be read as a denial of the objective reality of the receding scenes. Echoing the ghosts' words, she declares, 'innocence, you have corrupted me' and concludes with what might almost be a definition of the second interpretation: 'I know nothing of evil yet I feel it, I fear it, worse – imagine it'.²⁵

Musically, this scene is characterised by dissonant sound effects from the woodwinds and a haunting rhythm established by the plucking of the double bass (Ex. 2.3 (c)). Such musical elements not only contribute to the scene's eerie atmosphere but also raise questions about the nature of Quint's presence. Is Quint a tangible entity perceived by Miles, or a manifestation of the Governess's own malevolent tendencies?

²⁵ Howard, *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, 49.

18 Lively (♩=132)

Fl. *sim.*
Ob. *sim.*
Cl. in A *pp*
Bsn. *pp*
Hn. in F (muted) *p*
Harp *pp* *pès de la table*

MISS JESSEL *cresc.*
I too must have a soul to share my woe. Des-pised, be-trayed,
Mein Leid braucht auch ein Herz, das mit ihm schlägt. Ver-fen, ver-kauft,

18 Lively (♩=132)

Vi. I *arco*
Vi. 2 *arco*
Vla. *arco*
Vc. (pizz) *p* *mf*

Fl. *sim.*
Ob. *sim.*
Cl. in A *mf*
Bsn. *mf*
Hn. in F *mf*
Harp *mf*

Miss J.
un-wan-ted, she must go For-e-ver to my joy - - less spi - rit bound.
ver-ach-tet, sie soll gehn Auf e-wig mir ver- ket - - tet, sel - - chem Bund.

Vi. I *mf* without mute
Vi. 2 *mf* without mute
Vla. *mf* without mute
Vc. *f*

B & H, 18306

Ex. 2.3 (c) Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy'.

If Quint is a tangible presence, is he perceivable by Miles? Alternatively, could Quint represent the malevolent aspect within the Governess herself? The narrative reaches a complexity following Miles's death, as the Governess's utterance, 'What have we done

between us?', opens up interpretations of a shared culpability between her and Quint. This acknowledgment of a mutual malevolence hints at a deeper, psychological confluence between the Governess's internal guilt and the external manifestations of evil, thereby enriching the opera's exploration of ambiguity.

2.4 Attitudes towards the Supernatural in Productions since the première

2.4.1 1954 The UK première production

The examination of the details in Britten's UK première production of *The Turn of the Screw* should yield insights into his contemporaneous perspective on the work, exploring whether the interpretations of the existence of ghosts were perceived by Britten as genuine or as the hallucinations of the Governess.

As mentioned above, Britten and Piper mostly follow the original structure of the novella with two chapters omitted and two additional scenes added when they created the opera. Britten balanced two interpretations and, I believe, tried to enhance the ambiguity of the story in his composition. Therefore, it is useful to analyse whether the premiere production conveyed the two interpretations, and whether the production had any preference for either of the two interpretations.

To a great extent, the production reflected Britten's music and fundamental idea; as the director of the première production, Basil Coleman, said 'He [Britten] never disagreed or disapproved of anything that I can remember that we suggested'.²⁶ It is obvious that maintaining the ambiguity between 'the ghosts are real' and 'the Governess is hallucinating' was a priority for the creative team in the première production; in other words, the issue of 'whether the ghosts are real' was crucial. On the one hand, the creative team tried different ways to address the ghosts' appearance on stage, while the shape of the ghosts was blurred on the other, as will be explained below.

²⁶ Basil Coleman interviewed by Donald Mitchell, Aldeburgh 29 October 2000, 4.

When readers imagine the ghosts in the novella, it is easy for them to believe they are real; yet, when audiences see the characters appear on stage, it is harder for them to believe they are not real. The creative team uses gauzes to metaphorize and create a mysterious atmosphere, which is one of the most remarkable elements of the première production settings (Figure 3.4.1(a)). As Coleman states,

I think it was my idea that we started just with the front door and a gauze that suggested garden, and John painted the most beautiful gauze, and I think the idea of gauzes was so right for the production and for the incredible ephemeral quality of music, too. And then that went back and then we revealed the bay window in three sections with a different gauze again across the stage for that, and then finally the tower was there, and the lake in the distance. And I think Ben [Britten] approved of all that.²⁷

Ghosts appear in the form of vapour or smoke in the classical world; using gauze across the stage is another technique to allude to the old castle, Quint's character in the tower, and Miss Jessel's character near the lake. It appears that the ghosts are there on stage, but it also appears that they are not quite present since the ghosts' forms are vague. Coleman and the creative team made efforts to remove the 'human' visual effect of the ghosts on stage:

A gauze was also used for the first scene of Act II with the ghosts of Jessel and Quint, where it helped considerably to create an illusion of "nowhere" called for in the libretto...For the third scene another gauze pulled offstage above the window unit revealed the tower on which the ghost of Quint would appear, thus completing the facade of the house on one side of the stage.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Basil Coleman, 'Staging first production 2', in David Herbert, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979), 41-2.



Figure 3.4.1(a) The Stage design of The UK Première Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw. Photograph of scenery to show the set as the lights fade in on the porch at Bly. Photographer: Angus McBean, copyright Harvard University. Image provided by Britten Pears Arts, courtesy of The Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library.

Nonetheless, the question of whether Britten and Piper fully adhere to the ambiguity of the ghosts in James's novella sparked debates among critics after the London première production. Cecil Smith contended that the opera did not convey the malevolence of the ghosts:

Benjamin Britten's new opera is a failure... He has not clearly distinguished the supernatural from the natural elements... occasionally it's silly – as when Peter Pears, as the ghost of a butler – sounds (and rather looks) as though he were giving a highbrow song recital at the Aldeburgh Festival.²⁹

Sheila Lynd suggested that Britten's story was not James's story, but rather, it was a morality play:

James's story makes one's flesh creep because he never says exactly what possessed the children – they "speak horror", but one is left to imagine what. Benjamin Britten has turned it into a morality play, a struggle of Good (the

²⁹ Cecil Smith, 'It's a Failure – But It's Magnificent', *Daily Express*, Oct 7, 1954.

innocent new governess) and Evil for the children's souls, with two rather talkative ghosts, and even an attempt to repeat the "horrors" spoken by their little victims.³⁰

Scott Goddard suggested that audiences should approach the work as an opera, setting aside comparisons to Henry James:

[T]his is an opera, and it is best to forget Henry James and to concentrate on the fact that this is an inspiration of Myfanwy Piper who, with John Piper's scenery and Britten's music, has made a new work.³¹

Percy Cater asserted that the portrayal leaned too heavily towards the material, observing,

The ex-Peter Quint (so obviously despite the red wig and the early Victorian – is it? – get-up, Peter Pears) and the wretched ex-Miss Jessel have to be materialised in a manner fatal – if the word be allowable – to the ghostly character.³²

Philip Hope-Wallace contended that in this production, the ghosts were not mere silent apparitions, but rather, they engaged in a dynamic range of activities: 'they gibber, they wail, they sing, they are actively on the prowl, quoting Yeats and dodging in and out among the gauzes'.³³ Other critics shared similar sentiments. Malcolm Raymond remarked:

The one unconvincing aspect of the production, especially in the first of the two acts, was Peter Pears's Peter Quint. It needed a very considerable imagination to accept him as a ghost. Arda Mandikian's Miss Jessel was by comparison far more ghostly.³⁴

There were also concerns raised about how the ghosts were presented on stage. One critic noted:

³⁰ Sheila Lynd, 'This Britten is Fascinating', *Daily Worker*, October 7, 1954.

³¹ Scott Goddard, 'Forget the story and listen to Britten', *News Chronicle*, Oct 7, 1954.

³² Percy Cater, 'Repulsive Tale That Doesn't Chill Us', *The Daily Mail*, Oct 7, 1954.

³³ Philip Hope-Wallace, 'Henry James at the Opera: Benjamin Britten's 'Turn of the Screw' Reaches Sadler's Wells', *Manchester Guardian*, Oct 8, 1954.

³⁴ Malcolm Raymond, 'Benjamin Britten's New Opera: Challenge of the Phantoms', *Glasgow Herald*, Oct 8, 1954.

The biggest of them concerned the bestowal of flesh and blood...What emerged was certainly not James's elusive psychological horror, but a horror thoroughly convincing and cohesive in its own different kind, a horror which no mishaps of gauze or lighting, nor even an exceedingly ill-contrived appearance of Quint through the stone-work half-way up a curiously isolated tower, could deprive of its potency. Mr. Britten and his librettist, Myfanwy Piper, not to mention John Piper, the designer, have between them achieved what on the face of it might have seemed an impossible adaptation.³⁵

Furthermore, another critic pointed out,

There is a flaw, however, in this operatic version; not a fatal one, but a serious one. Granted that the ghosts, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, must inevitably sing in an opera, but their visibility and audibility should, surely, be more limited than the librettists and producer make them. Dimly visible in his tower, Quint was a horror, but to see him dancing around the stage singing a duet with Miss Jessel rendered the drama less powerful.³⁶

Regarding the portrayal of ghosts on stage, Coleman acknowledged that they appeared to be too much in the flesh. In moments of repose, for example, during Quint's initial appearance on the tower and Jessel's emergence from the lake, the visual illusion was indeed convincing. However, challenges arose in scenes like the final scene in Act I, where it was considered crucial for the apparitions to draw nearer to the Governess and Mrs Grose in their fervent struggle to maintain control over the children. Despite efforts to employ diverse lighting techniques, their increased proximity rendered them more corporeal.³⁷

In 1956, Basil Coleman made slight alterations to his production to diminish the concrete presence of the ghosts. A review in *The Times* noted that in the first scene of the second act, where the ghosts took on a more solid form, they no longer engaged in physical actions, and their conversation remained in the realm of shadow.³⁸

³⁵ J. F. W, "The Turn of the Screw" First Performance in England', *Birmingham Post*, 7 Oct, 1954.

³⁶ 'Our London Music Critic', 'English Opera Group "The Turn of the Screw"', *The Scotsman*, 9 Oct, 1954.

³⁷ Coleman, 'Staging first production 2', 42.

³⁸ 'English Opera Group', *The Times*, 27 Sep 1956, 5.

2.4.2 1979 English National Opera production

From its première in 1954 to 1979, spanning over two decades, *The Turn of the Screw* had firmly established itself in the repertoire of the few major opera companies in the UK—with the exception of the Royal Opera House (see Appendix A for details).³⁹ The enigmatic production at English National Opera in 1979 displayed a remarkable degree of variability, with subtle nuances in performance capable of significantly influencing the overall interpretation of the piece.⁴⁰

Richard Baker observed that this opera stands out as a quintessential producer's opera, noting its suitability for groundbreaking production methods. Miller's production introduced a setting reminiscent of a metallic prison, with back walls transforming into transparent screens for projecting visuals.⁴¹ The atmosphere was unmistakably eerie, highlighted by doors and furniture that moved independently, gliding smoothly like ghosts on an ethereal train.⁴²

Taking inspiration from early Victorian photographers like Fox Talbot, designer Patrick Robertson photographed the Gothic-style Ashridge Park in Hertfordshire constructed by James Wyatt & Son. Utilising a specialised film development process, Robertson obtained monochrome images ideal for projection, complete with the grainy texture reminiscent of Victorian-era photography. The metallic quality of the aluminium screens further enhanced this effect.⁴³

Miller said to Robertson, 'It's a piece about ghosts, so you can use your projections to tremendous effect'.⁴⁴ The side-screens facilitated singers' entrances, meanwhile, the projections from various angles contributed to the illusion of depth. The slide

³⁹ Rodney Milnes, 'The Turn of the Screw: A Song of Innocence and Experience', *Kent Opera Programme: The Turn of the Screw*, 1979. Found in The Theatre Collection, University of Bristol, 13 Dec 2022.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Michael Romain, 'Conversation: Patrick Robertson and Rosemary Vercoe', in *A Profile of Jonathan Miller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 117.

⁴⁴ Romain, 'Conversation: Patrick Robertson and Rosemary Vercoe', 117.

projections, emulating a cinematic quality, imparted a filmic atmosphere. As noted in Chapter 1, the stage's physical elements were limited to a few movable furnishings, ensuring a minimalist presence.⁴⁵

In retrospect, Miller expressed profound satisfaction with the production, citing it as one of his most gratifying experiences at the ENO. In the interview with Michael Romain, he spoke about:

[...] a small unit of people, very concentrated, and I was able to produce a hallucinatory world of the supernatural...I've always been interested in examining just what it is that brings the hair up on the back of your spine.⁴⁶

Robertson worried that the ghosts were literally in costume and objectively present on stage,⁴⁷ and although they were dressed in neutral black, their presence still made them appear too realistic. This was the same issue of 'the ghosts being too realistic' that was already present in the première production of the opera. And it was challenged by the critics, even if by the 1970s, critics were no longer demanding that stage designers faithfully replicate fictional characters on stage as per the textual descriptions:

Hard enough when every movement, every detail of dress, is liable to conflict with historical reality or with the ideal pictures of heroes and heroines in the audience's imaginations. Harder still, when the characters are shadowy, impalpable, doubtfully present in any physical sense – that is to say, ghostly; as are Peter Quint and Miss Jessel in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*.⁴⁸

Efforts were made by the creative team to evoke the ghostly presence on stage. According to a review of Miller's production in *Wimbledon News*,

The different scenes are projected on to the set and so give a courtyard, hall or bedroom at will. The transparent screen enhances the ghostly feeling which the opera is trying to project.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Romain, *A Profile of Jonathan Miller*, 64.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁸ Hugo Cole, 'A Network of Associations', *Country Life*, 22 Nov 1979.

⁴⁹ W. H. P., 'Opera in Henry James's mood', *Wimbledon News*, Nov 1979.

The musical and dramatic progression invited the audience to accept Quint as the concrete and symbolic core of James's narrative.⁵⁰ Quint's enigmatic voice was heard before his chilling appearance.⁵¹ In Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', when the Governess battles with the ghost for Miles's soul, Quint advanced towards the child at the front of the stage. Instead of his extremities gradually dissipating, as in Victorian spirit photographs, Quint stood upright and straight with his boots gleaming,⁵² exuding a profoundly chilling aura (Fig. 2.4.2 (a)).



Fig. 2.4.2 (a) The 1979 English National Opera Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act II Scene 8, 'Miles'. Left to right: The Governess, Miles, and Quint. Source: Arenapal.

As Flora was separated from Bly and Miles died in the embrace of the Governess, the children could not perceive salvation, but rather defeat at the hands of living adults.⁵³ In Miller's production for the ENO, the pivotal concept revolved around the phrase, 'Peter Quint, you devil!' Taking this phrase as the linchpin, Miller directed the child

⁵⁰ Burton, 'A Network of Associations'.

⁵¹ Richard Baker, 'A Brilliant Score which Relieves Miller's Gloom', *Now!*, 16 Nov 1979.

⁵² Burton, 'A Network of Associations'.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

singing Miles to divide it, acknowledging Quint, as prompted by the Governess, yet turning to her as he added, ‘you devil!’⁵⁴ This interpretation deviates from the established presentation of this scene; in the recording conducted by Britten in 1955, David Hemmings, portraying Miles, delivers the phrase in a seamless manner.⁵⁵ Miller’s interpretation suggested that the children’s inclination towards their spectral companions, rather than the company of living adults, was not solely due to supernatural influence, but also represented a rejection of the children by an adult (the Guardian).⁵⁶

2.4.3 2005 BBC production

Although Britten’s *Turn of the Screw* was not initially conceived for the screen, it has been regarded by critics, scholars, and directors since its première as an opera with cinematic qualities.⁵⁷ In 1959, a television version of *Turn of the Screw* was filmed by Peter Morley, marking its screen debut. Through television technology, the spectral figures were distorted and superimposed, deepening the eerie and enigmatic portrayal of the ghosts. When directing the stage production in 1979, Miller incorporated ideas for stage design and projection influenced by cinematic techniques.

The 1982 Unitel production directed by Petr Weigl, a collaborative production of the Royal Opera House, maximized the cinematic elements of the opera. It employed lip synchronization, prioritizing narrative over musicality. The film production begins with over seven minutes devoted to depicting the former lives of the ghosts. Quint and Miss Jessel’s behavior with the children, which transcends the boundaries of a servant and a governess, depicts their transgressions and malevolence at Bly. This opening boldly showcases a concrete depiction of the ghosts, diverging significantly from the

⁵⁴ Mansel Stimpson, ‘Drama and Meaning in *The Turn of the Screw*’, *Opera Quarterly*, 1 October 1986, vol.4, iss.3, 75-82. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/4.3.75>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁶ William Mann, ‘The Ghosts of Childhood’, *Times*, 13 Nov 1979.

⁵⁷ Peter Morley, *A Life Rewound* (London: British Film Institute, 2010), 76.

previous emphasis on maintaining an aura of ‘ambiguity’ and ‘mystery’ surrounding the spectral entities.

Filming opera presents a challenge in handling sung speech within a naturalistic setting. Similarly, in ghost stories, the portrayal of the spectral entities poses a distinct challenge.⁵⁸ The 2005 BBC Wales production of *The Turn of the Screw*, directed by Katie Mitchell, places a relatively greater emphasis on the opera’s music itself and the development of the story. As Martin Hoyle comments:

Opus Arte’s new release in collaboration with the BBC is miles better than the Royal Opera’s over-praised version, almost equalling Jonathan Miller’s haunting ENO staging with its misty Victorian photo backdrops. Katie Mitchell’s direction revels in filmic freedom (internal monologues expressed by imposing their voices on characters who don’t move their lips; a memory of the siblings’ dead mother). Plenty of misty mood mud, wet woods around the country house...⁵⁹

The portrayal of the ghosts is more nuanced, with a deliberate ambiguity before their identities are revealed, followed by a depiction of Quint and Miss Jessel as grimy, vulgar, audacious, and radical figures after their identities come to light. Suspense is introduced right from the beginning of this film opera. In the ‘Prologue’, a female character in a long black dress and an unidentified male figure in a black coat are seen, with their heads out of the shot. As the scene transitions, images of Flora and Miles are interspersed with the headless characters. This foreshadows that these two mysterious figures are about to become involved in the story with the children. Following this, a doll is shown submerged in dirty water (Fig. 2.4.3 (a)), prefiguring Act I Scene 5, ‘The Window’, in which the corpse (or ghost) of Miss Jessel is seen in similarly murky water (Fig. 2.4.3 (b)). Then, as the ‘Screw’ theme emerges, the previously headless figure in

⁵⁸ Midgette, ‘In This Version, the Britten Opera Dons a Dress’.

⁵⁹ Martin Hoyle, ‘Music: Classical & Opera Listings – Opus’ way; Two new DVD releases on the Art te label’, *Time Out*, April 27, 2005, 133, accessed Jan 3, 2023. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/index?crd=df088f42-8c6c-43d9-81ff-baf4784857a0&pdpermalink=9fca71a8-988a-4f33-a1d2-aeca44106402&pdmfid=1519360&pdisurlapi=true>.

black lies dead, face down amidst fallen leaves, a cluster of daffodils by its head (Fig. 2.4.3 (c)).



Fig. 2.4.3 (a) The 'Prologue', a doll in the lake. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.



Fig. 2.4.3 (b) Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', Miss Jessel (Catrin Wyn Davies). Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

Subsequently, as the 'Screw' theme reaches its climax, the camera reveals the disembodied face of a doll beside the daffodils (Fig. 2.4.3 (d)). Details later in the film suggest that the face-down body is the corpse of Quint.



Fig. 2.4.3 (c) ‘Prologue’, Quint (Mark Padmore). Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.



Fig. 2.4.3 (d) ‘Prologue’, a doll’s head beside the daffodil. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

It can be observed that in this production, the faces of the two figures in black are not directly revealed to the audience in the ‘Prologue’. Instead, montage techniques are employed to create a sense of suspense and ambiguity, inviting the audience to speculate about the identities of the figures in black.

In contrast to the other productions examined in this thesis, in Mitchell’s production of Act I Scene 5, ‘The Window’, the dialogue between Mrs Grose and the Governess, as well as Mrs Grose’s gesture, subtly introduce the characters of Quint and Miss Jessel. This suggests that they are the two unidentified black figures seen in the ‘Prologue’.

In Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', an unidentified man appears outside and peers intently into the room; at this moment, the celesta is heard being played without restraint or inhibition. The music uses a pentatonic scale, minor thirds layered with perfect fourths, and semitones to create an exotic feeling, suggesting that this stranger does not belong here (Ex. 2.4.3 (a)).

Flora (further off) 35 when she looks up and sees Quint
als sie aufsieht und Quint im

Miles (further off) 35 Celesta (same speed)

appear suddenly in the window.
Fenster entdeckt.

They gaze at each other:
Sie sehen sich an.

he disappears.
Er verschwindet.

The Governess
Sie läuft hinaus
Tempo 36 as before (♩ = 96)
dim. w.w. p

B. & H. 18043

Ex. 2.4.3 (a) Act I Scene 5, 'The Window'.

The discovery alarms the Governess, who promptly closes the window and door, severing the visual connection between the interior and exterior. She then describes the stranger's features to Mrs Grose with a trembling voice. Mrs Grose, initially composed and calm, suddenly deflates, and avoids eye contact with the Governess. As the Governess describes the stranger as a 'horror', Mrs Grose suddenly utters a name, 'Quint! Peter Quint! Quint!', having identified the stranger as the description becomes more specific. Simultaneously, the celesta plays the musical motif previously associated with the stranger peering into the house (Ex. 1.4.3 (a)). The scene transitions to the image of the man in a cloak seen lying face down by the daffodils in the 'Prologue'. Mrs Grose falls to the ground while exclaiming, 'Dear God, there is no end to this dreadful way?' Hence, it is arguably implied that the stranger outside the window is indeed the cloaked figure seen in the 'Prologue', and the one Mrs Grose believes to be the deceased Quint.

Although the unidentified female figure is not explicitly mentioned in the music or libretto in this scene, Mitchell implies the unspoken thoughts of Mrs Grose through the visual language of the camera, aligning her physical gestures with the unidentified female figure seen earlier (Fig. 2.4.3 (e)), suggesting that the 'dreadful way' encompasses not only Quint, but also another deceased character, Miss Jessel.



Fig. 2.4.3 (e) Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', Mrs Grose (Diana Montague). Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

And Mrs Grose's hint foreshadows the Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake', in which the Governess directly identifies the unidentified female on the opposite shore of the lake as Miss Jessel. After sending Flora away, the Governess returns to the shore, gazes across, and exclaims in inner monologue, 'Miss Jessel! It was Miss Jessel! She returns too, she too, she too'.

In James's novella, the Governess, without confirmation from Mrs Grose, assumes that the figure on the opposite shore of the lake is Miss Jessel based on her prior experience of seeing Quint, leading to a debate among critics regarding whether the Governess actually sees Miss Jessel or if it is a product of her imagination. This controversy extends to interpretations of Britten's music and Piper's libretto, as well as previous opera productions. However, Mitchell subtly hints at the presence of Miss Jessel through the physical gesture of Mrs Grose. Therefore, in this scene, it is relatively reasonable to assert that the Governess 'sees' rather than 'imagines' Miss Jessel on the opposite shore.

Subsequently in Variation VII, as the Governess departs, Miss Jessel arrives at the same spot where the Governess and Flora were previously situated. She picks up the doll that Flora hastily dropped in the lake and cradles it in her arms, then reclines on the same seat. Suddenly, Flora appears before Miss Jessel. Miss Jessel returns the doll to Flora, and Flora gently caresses Miss Jessel's face before departing (Fig. 2.4.3 (f)).



Fig. 2.4.3 (f) Variation VII, Miss Jessel and Flora (Caroline Wise). Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

In Act I Scene 8, ‘At Night’, Quint’s voice is heard, summoning the slumbering Miles. A grimy hand (later confirmed in Act II Scene 1 to be Quint’s hand) touches Miles’s head. When Miles awakens, he places the pillow under his blanket, pretending he is still in bed. He then follows the voice, exiting the bedroom and climbing the stairs towards the rooftop. Once again, the dirty hand emerges, cradling Miles’s face with both hands. As Miles approaches the rooftop via the ladder, the scene adopts a chilly colour palette, portraying Miles in a sombre and eerie manner (Fig. 2.4.3 (g)), which effectively illustrates Quint’s evil influence on Miles.

As Flora approaches Miss Jessel in the same scene, the hues become warmer (Fig. 2.4.3 (h)). This seems to indicate that Miss Jessel is not as mysterious or frightening, and that Flora may even feel pity and attachment towards her and that she allows herself to touch Miss Jessel. Additionally, with Miss Jessel frequently appearing in rooms at Bly and her face being shown on multiple occasions, the dynamic between Flora and Jessel appears to be more of a two-way interaction.



Fig. 2.4.3 (g) Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Miles (Nicholas Kirby Johnson). Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.



Fig. 2.4.3 (h) Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Flora. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

Furthermore, there is a mutual interaction between Miss Jessel and the Governess. In Act II Scene 3, 'Miss Jessel', Miss Jessel is seen wandering in the classroom where the Governess teaches the children. Just as Miss Jessel sings, 'So I shall be waiting, waiting, hov'ring, ready for the child', she notices Flora's doll and is about to approach it when the Governess summons the courage to enter the room and sternly questions Miss Jessel, 'Why are you here?' In response, Miss Jessel appears startled, as if caught doing something wrong, and she retreats, locking eyes with the Governess. The Governess continues to emphatically assert to Miss Jessel, 'It is mine, mine, the desk', and 'They

are mine, mine, mine, the children, mine the children'. Additionally, she commands Miss Jessel to 'Begone!'.

In contrast to other examined productions, Mitchell's Miss Jessel attempts to communicate with the Governess in a manner marked by grief, sorrow, and appeal. She approaches the Governess with measured steps, eventually leaning over her. After the Governess exclaims in horror, 'you horrible, terrible woman!' Miss Jessel collapses from the Governess, tenderly caresses Flora's doll, and laments 'Alas' before leaving.

In contrast to the ghostly Miss Jessel, who endures suffering and helplessness at Bly, Mitchell portrays Quint as a manipulative and ruthless tormentor who abuses Miles. In Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom', when the Governess hands the letter written to the Guardian and questions Miles about what happened at school (so that she can understand why Miles was expelled), he sits on the chair beside the bed, holding the Governess's letter, looking hesitant. At this moment, Quint's summoning voice grows louder, speaking on his dominant E^b note, announcing 'Miles, I am here, I am here'. As the Governess continues her questioning, Miles appears restless and uneasy. Meanwhile, Quint anxiously repeats his words beside Miles, 'I'm waiting, I'm waiting, waiting'. Suddenly, Quint calls out on E^b, 'Miles', and a hand emerges from the darkness, grabbing Miles by the ear (Fig. 2.4.3 (i)); startled, Miles screams and jumps onto the bed, burying his head, while simultaneously, the candle goes out (Ex. 2.4.3 (b)). The governess hastily asks why the candle has been extinguished. With his head still buried, Miles softly and reluctantly claims, "'Twas I, who blew it, who blew it, dear!'



Fig. 2.4.3 (i) Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom', Miles. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

76 The candle goes out.
Miles schreit auf und die Kerze geht aus.

Gov. *f*
how I want you to help me save you!..... Oh, what is it? What
doch auch Du sollst Dich ret - ten hel - fen! Ach, was ist es? was
MILES (shrieking) x

Quint
wait - ing, wait - ing, Miles!
war - te, war - te, Miles! 76

Ex. 2.4.3 (b) Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom'.

In Variation XII, Quint is fixated on the letter written by the Governess. The music employs a regular, repetitive percussion rhythm to convey Quint's eager and urgent desire to know the contents of the letter. Quint continuously mutters, 'What has she written?' and 'What does she know?' (Ex. 2.4.3 (c)). In addition, the strings play with an agitated back-and-forth motion, reflecting Quint's volatile and compulsive demeanour.

78 Intime (voiceless) (ohne Stimme)

Quint
(unseen)

What has she writ-ten? What has she writ-ten?
Was ist ge-schrie-ben? Was ist ge-schrie-ben?

ppp

S.D.
with brush

79

Quint
(unseen)

What has she writ-ten? What has she writ-ten?
Was ist ge-schrie-ben? Was ist ge-schrie-ben?

(Str.)

pp

* In the first production, throughout this Variation and the following scene, Quint appeared as a silhouette.
In der ersten Inszenierung der Oper war Quint als Silhouette während dieser Variation und der folgenden Szene sichtbar.
B. & H. 18043

QUINT
(unseen) *f* freely

She has told all she knows, all... she... knows!... What does she
Al-les wohl was sie weiss, was... sie... weiss!... Was weiss sie

Wind

fp

ppp

S.D.

81

Quint
(unseen)

know? What does she know? What does she know? What?
denn? Was weiss sie denn? Was weiss sie denn? Was?

pp

cresc.

ff

Ex. 2.4.3 (c) Variation XII.

Quint, determined to conceal the contents of the letter from prying eyes, rushes into Miles's bedroom, where the boy is fast asleep. He rudely awakens Miles, forcefully throws back his covers, and repeatedly urges him with the words, 'Easy to take'. During this, the percussion maintains its steady, repetitive rhythm, and the strings' strumming creates a sense of unease. Following this, Quint abruptly shoves the still drowsy Miles out of the room, indicating that he should retrieve the Governess's letter. Later, in Act II Scene 5, 'Quint', we learn that Miles successfully steals the letter, tears it apart, and sets it on fire.

In Mitchell's production, there is an intensified portrayal of the female ghost, Miss Jessel. This provides the audience with more insight into Miss Jessel's tragic fate and arguably evokes sympathy, depicting her as a figure of misfortune. On the other hand, Quint is portrayed as a sinister, enigmatic, and malevolent entity. The characters of Miss Jessel and Quint are continually presented to the audience from the beginning of the 2005 BBC production, gradually strengthening their images and influence on Bly as the story progresses. Their presence seems to be an undisputed fact, existing in the lives of everyone at Bly.

2.4.4 2011 Glyndebourne production

According to Jonathan Kent, the director of *The Turn of the Screw* at Glyndebourne, the work stands out as the most flawless among Britten's operas. He contends that contemporary audiences are drawn to the darker aspects of the narrative, finding exhilaration in the portrayal of supernatural elements and the creation of a claustrophobic atmosphere on stage.⁶⁰

In the Glyndebourne production, the portrayal of ghosts is remarkably lifelike, reflecting the intention of set and costume designer Paul Brown, who sought to avoid

⁶⁰ 'Insight into *The Turn of the Screw*', YouTube video, posted by 'Glyndebourne', posted on November 4, 2014, accessed September 21, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LiA8G5F15k&t=7s&ab_channel=Glyndebourne.

categorizing the production simply as a ghost story.⁶¹ Through the strategic use of subdued and warm lighting, the Glyndebourne production eschews the conventional approach of employing a hazy Victorian aesthetic or gothic ambiance to delineate between the realms of the human and the supernatural. Instead, it sets out to bring forth the fears and terrors directly onto the stage.⁶²

Francesca Gilpin, the creative team member, emphasizes that their team aimed to maintain a level of ambiguity, intentionally leaving unanswered questions for the audience to ponder. This includes uncertainties about the actual presence of the ghosts, or whether they exist solely within the psyche of the Governess.⁶³

In contrast to the production's stage design and Quint's formal attire, Miss Jessel adheres more closely to Victorian-era characteristics. She is depicted in a traditional manner, wearing a long black dress with dark, flowing curls and is drenched in a ghostly aura, aligning with the novella's and libretto's depiction of Miss Jessel meeting her demise in the lake. The musical motif associated with Miss Jessel makes its first complete appearance in Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake'. Although her full presence is not revealed on stage, the act of her pressing against the glass above her conveys her return to Bly. Simultaneously, Flora, who had been playing nearby, becomes immobilised when Miss Jessel's musical theme emerges, and she makes her eyes stare blankly towards the front of the stage, as if her soul has momentarily departed her body. Flora displays the same vacant expression and fixed gaze in Act II Scene 7, 'Flora', when Mrs Grose comes looking for her. Shortly after, when the Governess arrives and presses Flora with the question, 'Where is Miss Jessel?', she reacts with strong reluctance to tell. However, she does not engage in any direct physical contact with Miss Jessel on her own initiative.

⁶¹ 'Introducing *The Turn of the Screw*', YouTube video, posted by 'Glyndebourne', posted on August 26, 2011, accessed September 21, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kavFPZHCBHg&ab_channel=Glyndebourne.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ 'Insight into *The Turn of the Screw*', YouTube video, posted by 'Glyndebourne'.

Flora and Miss Jessel share indirect eye contact and physical interaction. In Act I Scene 8, ‘At Night’, Miss Jessel takes the initiative to seek out Flora. Separated by glass, Miss Jessel gazes at Flora. Flora lifts her head to meet her gaze and raises her hand to touch Miss Jessel’s hand through the glass. This indirect connection between Flora and Miss Jessel maintains the ambiguity of Flora’s attitude towards Miss Jessel.



Fig. 2.4.4 (a) Act I Scene 8, ‘At Night’, Flora and Miss Jessel (Giselle Allen). Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

In Act II Scene 1, ‘Colloquy and Soliloquy’, after failing to gain Quint’s attention, Miss Jessel turns to make Flora bear her pain, ‘I too must have a soul to share my woe. Despised, betrayed, unwanted, she must go forever to my joyless spirit bound’. As depicted in Section 3.3, the music associated with Miss Jessel conveys a gloomy and mournful atmosphere, portraying Miss Jessel in the Garsington production as emotionally unstable, coercive, and neurotic. Miss Jessel climbs onto Flora’s bed while she sleeps, using her grimy hands to touch the slumbering Flora (Fig. 2.4.3 (b)). Flora twitches in her dream, seemingly expressing that Miss Jessel exerts her influence on her when she is defenceless and unaware.

Kent’s production reveals that the connection between Flora and Miss Jessel is driven more by Miss Jessel’s personal initiative. Miss Jessel’s portrayal is more akin to

a failed attempt at revenge against the person (Quint) responsible for her tragic fate; instead, she seeks a scapegoat in Flora. She presents a figure of sorrow, helplessness, eeriness, and a complete mismatch with Bly.



Fig. 2.4.4 (b) Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', Flora and Miss Jessel. Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

In Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', Quint first appears on the stage, peering into the house from outside Bly. He looks calm, confident, and with determined eyes, he searches for something. After making eye contact with the Governess, he quickly departs. The Governess rushes outside to check but finds nothing, then anxiously returns inside and encounters Mrs Grose, who hurries forward to inquire what happened:

[The Governess]	I have been frighten'd.
[Mrs Grose]	What was it? What was it?
[The Governess]	A man – look'd through the window, a strange man. But I saw him before – On the tower.
[Mrs Grose]	No one from the village?
[The Governess]	No.
[Mrs Grose]	A gentleman, then?
[The Governess]	No! indeed no!
[Mrs Grose]	What was he like?
[The Governess]	His hair was red, close curling, a long, pale face, small eyes. His look was sharp, fixed and strange. He was tall, clean

shaven, yes, even handsome. But a hor-ror!
[Mrs Grose] Quint! Peter Quint! Quint!

The score indicates that Mrs Grose's vocal line should transition from weak to strong with a *crescendo*, and the melody F[#]-D[#]-B-G carries a slightly contemplative and questioning undertone. However, in Kent's production, Mrs Grose's demeanour differs from what is indicated in the score and from other interpretations. When she asks 'What was he like?', her expression is serious, resolute, and even tinged with anger. The vocal part does not follow the gradual intensification suggested by the expression marking, but remains at a high intensity. It seems as though she already has an answer regarding this intruder, and her questioning serves to confirm her suspicions with the Governess. While the Governess describes the stranger's features, Mrs Grose's emotions do not fluctuate, nor does she seem puzzled. As soon as the Governess finishes her description, Mrs Grose confidently and unwaveringly states Quint's name, then shows a look of desperation. This suggests that the diligent and kind-hearted Mrs Grose harbours a strong aversion towards Quint, whose image is likely one of fear and aversion, and whose influence could be extremely powerful. It can be inferred that his presence is not so much surprising as it is unwelcome.

Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', further addresses the power of Quint's manipulation through his supervision of the Miles's bedtime. Quint stands at the head of the bed and uses his hand to control Miles who at first sleeps peacefully, and then begins to toss and turn. 'The ceremony of innocence is drawn' culminates this scene, which expresses the corrupted longing of the ghost and send Miles into apparent nightmare.

Quint's portrayal is bolder and more contemporary in character. He strides confidently to the front of the stage, speaking loudly and directly to Miles, making direct eye contact, and even engaging in physical contact. Miles does not seem taken aback by this interaction; instead, he accepts it quite naturally. Quint's image leans closer to that of a 'person' rather than a 'ghost'. The exceptionally close relationship

between the two will be analysed in detail in Chapter 3, which focuses on the theme of ‘Sexuality’.

There is a significant contrast in the characterisation of the two ghosts in Kent’s production. Their relationship appears to be less intertwined, with each focusing more closely on their respective target child.

2.4.5 2019 Garsington production

This production revisits the initial premise that caused James’s novella’s readers to ponder and be perplexed: whether the ghosts are real or merely illusions perceived by the Governess. As the director, Louisa Muller says:

I think it was really important to me to preserve the ambiguity of the whole piece. [...] I wouldn’t say that we did anything that felt very clearly like it couldn’t possibly be real like it had to be supernatural, but certainly we skated on the edge throughout.⁶⁴

The set design by Christopher Oram deviates from many stage directions by implying scene changes through the use of few props and lighting, with the backdrop remaining largely unchanged. Muller allows the music to drive the plot and shape the personalities of the characters through voice and gesture. This simple setting not only maintains dramatic tension, but also allows the audience to focus more on character development and plot. The critic Stephen Walsh has described the production as ‘the most powerful production of this work that I can remember seeing’.⁶⁵

Quint’s first appearance on the tower in Act I Scene 4, ‘The Tower’, and his second appearance on the tower in Act I Scene 5, ‘The Window’, both occur outside the misty, arched window, creating a murky, ambiguous atmosphere for Quint.

⁶⁴ Muller, interview.

⁶⁵ Stephen Walsh, ‘The Turn of the Screw, Garsington Opera Review – Superb Music Drama on an Open Stage’, July 5, 2019, accessed on Oct 4, 2023, <https://theartsdesk.com/opera/turn-screw-garsington-opera-review-superb-music-drama-open-stage>.

The significant spatial transformation in the stage design occurs with the use of water. In the first act, there is a small body of water on stage, but by the second act, it has nearly engulfed half of the stage. Muller provides further insight into this design's rationale:

One thing we did was we changed the space, like changed the world. So that it started in Act I there was a small sliver of water, and then for the second half the water had encroached into the space. I think you could look at that as either supernatural or just a visual representation of what is happening in the Governess's mind.⁶⁶

Critics also view the increase in the area of water as evidence of the expanding influence of supernatural forces. As Alessia Naccarato notes,

[It's] a metaphor for Miss Jessel's growing influence as her power over Flora begins to take hold. Miss Jessel often appears from the lake, dragging her gown through it and leaving a trail of water in her wake, making her mark on the physical world.'⁶⁷

In addition to the stage design and changes in scenes, the performances of the opera casts contribute to the ambiguity of the story and the authenticity of the ghosts. These performances enhance the depiction of the influence of the ghosts on Bly. Muller remarks on the realism of the ghosts in this production as follows:

I think we were very clear that the ghosts never touch the children or the Governess; they only touch each other. Also no one other than the Governess looked directly at the ghosts or indicated that they were looking at them. This was done to preserve the possibility that the ghosts were not real. But, in other ways, it felt like it didn't matter. What mattered was that the Governess saw them, and they were real for her. That was the relationship and the interesting thing to bring about.⁶⁸

In Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake', the Governess and Flora come to the lakeside. Flora lovingly puts her doll to sleep, and the Governess watches her with a smile on her face.

⁶⁶ Muller, interview.

⁶⁷ Naccarato, 'An Ambiguous Turn of the Screw at Garsington Opera'.

⁶⁸ Muller, interview.

As the music grows lighter and slower, starting from rehearsal number 64, the piccolo and clarinet play a dissonant passage, as if an outsider has abruptly intruded; simultaneously, the harp produces high and low notes, mimicking the deliberate steps of someone walking back and forth (Ex. 2.4.5 (a)). At the same time, Flora places her doll in the lake, signalling it to stay quiet. She then presses the doll firmly, as if to drown it. As the theme of Miss Jessel begins to play in rehearsal number 65 (Ex. 2.4.5 (b)), Flora suddenly lifts her head, her gaze turning fierce and terrifying. Slowly, she raises the drowned doll, directing her eyes and body towards the right side of the stage (Fig. 2.4.5 (a)). The Governess senses something amiss and looks in the same direction. Realising that something is wrong, she hastily calls out to Flora, 'Flora! Come along! We must go now, go and find Miles!' Flora quickly snaps back to reality and leaves the stage.

64 gradually getting slower

Picc. *pp*

Ob. *dim.*

Cl. in Bb *pp* *dim.* *pp*

Bsn. *pp*

Harp *ppp*

Flora *ppp*

How good you are.
Wie gut du bist.
Go to sleep.
Schlaf jetzt ein.

pulling the coverlet on, arranging reeds over her head... she turns round deliberately to face the audience as Miss Jessel
und dann niedergelegt. Nach dem Lied macht sie noch viel Wesens mit der Puppe, während sie ihr die letzten Sätze zuraunt, bis Miss

64 gradually getting slower

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Db. *pp*

Picc. *ppp* Take Flute

Cl. in Bb *ppp*

Harp

appears at the other side of the lake.
Jessel auf der anderen Seite des See's erscheint. Flora wendet sich lautlos und mit Absicht ab, bis sie dem Auditorium zugekehrt ist, fort
von Miss Jessel.

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

B. & H. 18306

Ex. 2.4.5 (a) Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake'.

65 (♩ = 60) (FLUTE) 66 Quick and agitated (♩ = 96)

Fl. *f* (sust. *f*)

Ob. *f* (sust. *f*)

Cl. in B♭ *p* *mf* *f* (sust. *f*)

Bsn. *pp* *p* *mf* *f* (sust. *f*)

Hrn. in F open *pp* *p* *mf* *f* (sust. *f*)

Gong

Perc. *pp* *p* *mf* Timp. *f*

Piano *pp* *p* *mf* *f*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

GOVERNESS (getting up) *f*

Flora!
Flora!

The Governess looks up from her reading and sees Miss Jessel, who disappears.
Dann sieht die Gouvernante, die Flora's Schweigen gewahr wurde, auf und entdeckte Miss Jessel, die sogleich verschwindet.

65 (♩ = 60) 66 Quick and agitated (♩ = 96)

Vi. I unmuted *mf* *f* (sust. *f*)

Vi. II unmuted *mf* *f* (sust. *f*)

Vla. unmuted *p* *mf* *f* (sust. *f*)

Vc. unmuted *p* *mf* *f* (sust. *f*)

Db. unmuted *pizz. f*

B. & H. 18306

Ex. 2.4.5 (b) Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake'.



Fig. 2.4.5 (a) 2009 Garsington Opera Production, Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake', The Governess (Sophie Bevan) and Flora (Adrianna Forbes-Dorant). Photo by: John Snelling, Image provided by Garsington Opera.

After Flora leaves, the Governess loses control of her emotions. She frantically screams, 'Miss Jessel! It was Miss Jessel! She returns too she too she too! And Flora saw, I know she saw and said nothing, nothing, said nothing!' Her emotions are extremely heightened, then she turns despondent and helpless. She sings with a sob in her voice, 'They are lost, they are lost, lost, lost!' and then faints to the ground. 'They' is likely a reference to Flora and Miles, as stated by the Governess. It should be noted, however, that Miles and Quint have not yet performed on stage together, and that Miss Jessel, who is associated with Flora, is not visible to the audience.

Variation VII begins after the Governess faints, signifying the arrival of the ghosts, with Quint taking the lead in the key of A^b major. The harp performs the section with

the Quint motif, while the celesta introduces the pentatonic scale that foreshadows the appearance of Quint. The gong represents Miss Jessel, and the French horn freely expresses the 'Screw' theme, heralding the official return of the ghosts (Ex. 2.4.5 (c)). The appearance of Quint outside the window causes the Governess to awaken and approach him while locking eyes (Fig. 2.4.5 (b)). Soon after, she notices Miss Jessel's entrance and quickly moves to the side. The Governess collapses to the ground once again, overcome by the shock.

The staging effects in Variation VII and Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', purposefully maintain an air of ambiguity, allowing for the interpretation that the Governess may have genuinely seen Quint and Miss Jessel upon waking, only to faint once more due to excessive fright. After the Governess faints again, a connection is established between the ghosts and the children. Another possibility is that, influenced by Mrs Grose's account of Quint and Flora's eerie behaviour by the lake, the Governess dreams of Quint and Miss Jessel beckoning Miles and Flora. Through the Governess's continuous presence and performance on stage, these two possibilities form a self-contained narrative loop, thus preserving the story's ambiguity to a significant extent. Moreover, the ambiguity is also reflected in the connection between the ghosts and the children; there is no evidence to suggest that the children actively form a connection with the ghosts, as they have never seen them, and the ghosts have never physically interacted with the children.



*Fig. 2.4.5 (b) 2009 Garsington Opera Production, Variation VII, Quint (Ed Lyon).
Photo by: Johan Persson, Image provided by Garsington Opera.*

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[illegible]

Ex. 2.4.5 (c) Variation VII.

Many critics and audiences believe that the ghosts in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* are real. This is because Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', is specifically designed for Quint and Miss Jessel to confide in each other. In Muller's interpretation, the presence of the Governess helps to balance the ambiguity of the story.

In Variation VIII, the Governess observes Miles and Flora playing in hiding. Intrigued, she approaches to take a closer look, only to find the children wearing eerie doll masks (Fig. 2.4.5 (c)). Startled, the Governess quickly retreats, but as the children remove their masks, revealing innocent and smiling faces, she suddenly becomes overcome with intense sorrow. She rushes to the piano, where she weeps quietly. The use of masking evokes the tradition of Greek theatre, where masks were fundamental to performance, allowing actors to embody multiple roles and convey complex emotions. This theatrical device is reminiscent of Harrison Birtwistle's incorporation of Greek masking in his opera *The Minotaur*, in which Birtwistle employs masks to symbolize the Minotaur's dual nature, with the bull's head mask representing his monstrous exterior and human consciousness trapped within. Similarly, in *The Turn of the Screw*, the children's masks add an unsettling layer to their portrayal, blurring the lines between innocence and corruption.



Fig. 2.4.5 (c) 2009 Garsington Opera Production, Variation VIII, Miles (Leo Jemison), Flora (Adrianna Forbes-Dorant), and the Governess. Photo by: John Snelling, Image provided by Garsington Opera.

The lighting shifts from warm to cold, transitioning into Act I Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy'. Here, the Governess encounters Miss Jessel who engages in a conversation with Quint. Throughout this encounter, the Governess stands motionless, holding her breath, observing Quint and Miss Jessel. It is only after the ghosts' emotional outbursts and their subsequent departure that the Governess finally allows herself to vocalize her own emotions:

[The Governess] Lost in my labyrinth I see no truth, no truth, Only the foggy walls of evil press up on me. Lost in my labyrinth I see no truth, no truth. O innocence, you have corrupted me, you have corrupted me. Which way shall I turn, shall I turn? I know nothing of evil, nothing, Yet I fear it, I feel it, worse, imagine it.

The Governess's soliloquy, particularly the line 'I feel it, worse, imagine it', further contributes to the ambiguity of the ghosts. The note E is emphasised, and as the passage nears its end, her voice grows quiet yet powerfully emphatic (Ex. 2.4.5 (d)). This seems to suggest her own confusion regarding the veracity of the ghosts she perceives. Once again, the Governess slumps over the piano, mirroring her state of distress while weeping at the piano in Variation VIII. This could perhaps be interpreted as the Governess being so alarmed by the sight of the children in their ghostly masks that she faints, believing the children to be under the influence of the ghosts. In this interpretation, the ghosts' dialogue in Act I Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', is merely a nightmare experienced by the Governess as she is unconscious. Therefore, it is possible that through this one nightmarish episode, the Governess once again blurs the authenticity of the ghosts.

Ex. 2.4.5 (d) Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', *The Governess*.

The authenticity of the ghosts is effectively obscured in Muller's production through the gradual descent of the Governess into delusion and hysteria, which she attributes to rising stimuli and fear. By means of the shift between the Governess's dreams and reality, the production effectively introduces the notion that the ghosts could come from her own imaginative powers.

2.4.6 2020 Opera North production

The Culture Editor of *The Journal*, David Whetstone, noted that in performances of Opera North's 2010 production of *The Turn of the Screw* at Leeds Grand Theatre, audiences on the right side of the auditorium were unable to see the ghosts through the huge window from which they occasionally emerged.⁶⁹ Peter Lathan, editor of the *British Theatre Guide*, observed that it is fundamental stagecraft to keep dramatic and pivotal moments within the sightlines of the entire audience, as those seated outside the central block of dress circle seats had restricted views. Furthermore, Lathan was dissatisfied during the pivotal moment of Peter Quint's first appearance at the window, as the light spots revealed a shoulder, an arm, and a leg, but not Quint's face, while the

⁶⁹ David Whetstone, 'Britten Chamber Opera Thrills and Chills', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Journal*, November 12, 2010, 47.

audience seated on the right saw nothing.⁷⁰ In 2020, I observed that the lighting issue on Quint's first appearance had been resolved, along with the lighting spots on Quint's half face, which created a dual ghost and human figure. I sat in a variety of seats in Leeds Grand Theatre to watch this production from a number of angles in 2020, but the issue of obstructed sightlines persisted, especially when seated in the upper circle. Due to the opacity of the bed's roof, it was difficult to discern what occurred under it.

Both indoor and outdoor scenes happen in the same location on the stage, and this single set creates claustrophobic tension that might not be expected in a production that follows the original stage directions. A large four-poster bed in the centre of the stage, from whose roof Flora suspends puppets resembling herself and Miss Jessel; Miles and Quint's birds masks; a rocking horse and a writing desk; a large horn above a turntable, on which Miles dances; an elevated tower; and opaque church windows are just some of the furnishings selected to represent Bly's claustrophobic environment.

The setting did not garner everyone's praise: some critics questioned both the dramatic and visual aspects of Opera North's production. The editor and music critic of *Opera* magazine, John Allison, criticised Talevi's concept as a profligate idea to attribute 'the strangest goings-on in Henry James's ghost story to the overactive imagination of the Governess'.⁷¹ The *Guardian* critic Andrew Clements argued that this production erased the ambiguities of the novella and libretto, focusing instead on the hysteria of a Victorian woman; he also argued that the setting was 'more or less naturalistic and dominated by the Governess's four-poster bed, [and] full of odd, ugly angles and simply too cluttered to let the drama stand out in sharp relief'.⁷²

⁷⁰ Peter Lathan, 'Theatre review: *The Turn of the Screw* at Theatre Royal, Newcastle, and touring', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, British Theatre Guide, 2010. <https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/ONturnscrew-rev>.

⁷¹ John Allison, 'Gripped by the Screw; classical Opera North's Freudian take on Britten's classic is packed with ideas', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, October 10, 2010, 23.

⁷² Andrew Clements, 'Opera: Pallid Turn of the Screw doesn't believe in ghosts: *The Turn of the Screw* Grand, Leeds 3/5', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Guardian*, October 5, (2010): 34.

However, these flaws could not obscure the effect of the whole: the critic Rupert Christiansen found Talevi's interpretation enthralling, praising it for its powerful and unsettling depictions that conjured up a strange and compelling image of the marginalised countryside.⁷³ Britten scholar, Michael Kennedy, also praised the Opera North production, stating that Talevi's was the most disturbing, alarming, spooky, and explicit he had watched since the first *Screw* production in 1954.⁷⁴ It is true in general that comparatively small theatres can create a claustrophobic and surreal ambience through the inspired use of a set that is a cluttered landscape of nightmare-images from the story. Kennedy asserts that *The Turn of the Screw* is better suited for intimate venues. Because the Leeds Grand Theatre is considered smaller compared to major opera houses such as Covent Garden, it effectively enhances the opera's eerie and unsettling atmosphere.⁷⁵

The creative team focuses on the idea of how powerful the children's secrets are, and how the disconnect between how adults' minds work and children's minds work leads to great confusion and ambiguity.⁷⁶ The director Alessandro Talevi claims that he feels there is big difference between the novel and the opera:

[The opera] doesn't quite convey the sense of ambiguity that the novel does. For me, this is because the ghosts are so tangible in the opera; they have to sing and speak words. In contrast, in the novel, they just appear, and we are left to imagine what they are like. In the opera, they are very flesh and blood.⁷⁷

What is more, the basic narrative is divided in the novel, as it was a story told by the Governess to the narrator. Already that introduces a level of subjectivity, so we have to read what the Governess says and we have to decide ourselves whether it is real or not,

⁷³ Rupert Christiansen, 'Compelling drama from a cast possessed', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Daily Telegraph*, October 4, (2010): 31.

⁷⁴ Michael Kennedy, 'The Turn of the Screw', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, *Opera Magazine*, December (2010): 1536-7.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Madeleine Boyd, interviewed by Yaou Zhang, Leeds: *Leeds Grand Theatre*, Feb 13, 2020.

⁷⁷ Alessandro Talevi, interviewed by Yaou Zhang, Leeds: *Leeds Grand Theatre*, Feb 11, 2020.

whether she was imagining, or whether the ghosts were there. Talevi believes the success of the novel is that readers don't know whether the ghost is for real or in the Governess's mind, even though a lot of pages are spent describing the ghosts; whereas in the opera, it is presented like a story of separate characters, so this level of subjectivity is lost. In order not to lose this level of subjectivity, Talevi puts the Governess on stage all the time, thus recipients are able to get the sense that maybe the Governess is imagining everything, or maybe the ghosts are real.

In Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Quint employs various tactics to entice Miles: he tells captivating stories, dances, and animates a toy horse, successfully capturing the attention of the ten-year-old boy. Miles responds to Quint's call, and a mutual understanding is established between them. Talevi discussed the symbolic significance of the toy horse in the interview with me:

It's a children's toy, but I think like anything to do with children, it can be perceived as either an innocent object or something sinister [...] Particularly when it moves on its own, I think it suggests that it is almost like a symbol of ghosts, akin to what you see in horror films. Quint talks about the horse, the riderless horse, so it's like we understand that it's related to him. When Miles plays with it, we understand later that it's maybe one of the games that Quint plays with Miles. That toy, it finds itself as a symbol of the relationship with Quint.⁷⁸

This interpretation by Talevi highlights the dual nature of the toy horse - as an emblem of childhood innocence and as a more ominous symbol, it becomes one of Quint's tools to captivate and pursue Miles, embodying his efforts to attract and hold the young boy's attention. This representation serves as a metaphor for Quint's manipulative tactics, using objects of childhood innocence to create a bond with Miles.

The creative team makes an extraordinary blocking and staging in Variation VIII and Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy'. Quint and Miss Jessel, the male ghost and the female ghost, are the primary characters of Act II Scene 1, which is an addition to the libretto not contained in James's novella. The director keeps the Governess on

⁷⁸ Talevi, interview.

stage with her back to us, nodding her head and swinging her body, indicating that the Governess is asleep. Before Miss Jessel sings, she strokes around the Governess's back while the music of the strings is twisted and sorrowful. Throughout the duration of the dialogue between Quint and Miss Jessel, the Governess has been asleep (Fig. 2.4.6 (a)). The stage gives the audience two possibilities to interpret: real ghosts appear while the Governess sleeps, and ghosts exist in the Governess's dream.

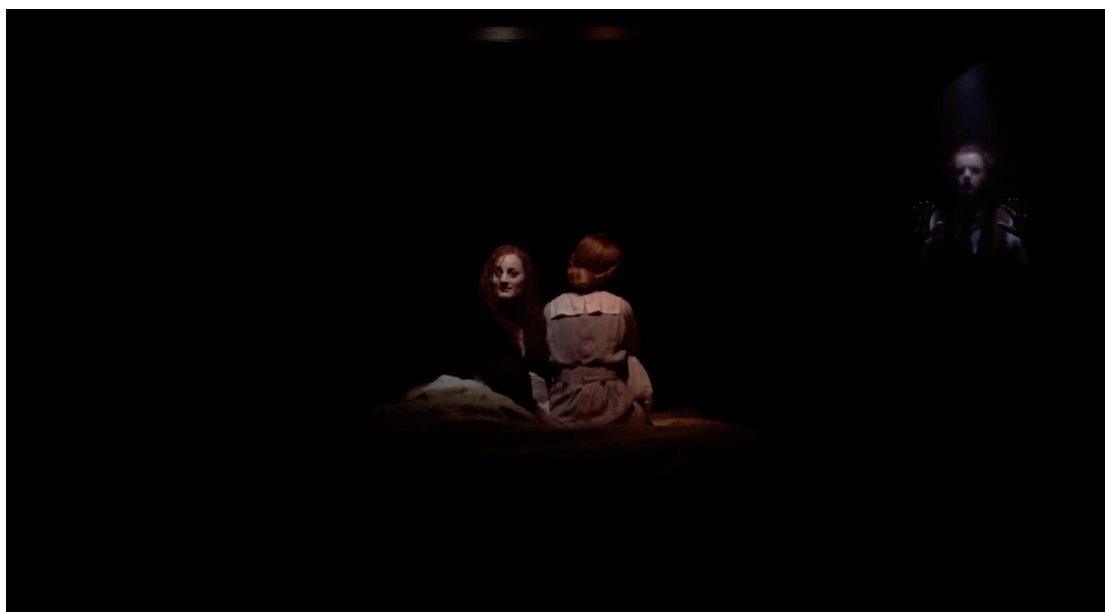


Fig. 2.4.6 (a) 2020 Opera North Production Photograph, Variation VIII, Miss Jessel (Heather Shipp), The Governess (Sarah Tynan), and Quint (Nicholas Watts). Screenshot from the online video of 2020 Opera North Production.

It seems understandable for the Governess to be dreaming of ghosts in this bed setting, given that she sees Quint through the window in the tower for the first time in Act I Scene 4, 'The Tower', which uses the bed setting as well. The Governess is immersed in a terrified and paranoid emotion after realising that the man outside the window is not the Guardian; in the meantime, a hand suddenly appears behind her through the bed curtain, and she is frightened again. Fortunately, it is Miles who appears, coming to play, with his toy horse swinging behind the stage. From this scene onwards, I contend that the narrative diverges in various directions: superficially, the Governess's persona becomes increasingly sensitive and fragile, disturbed yet disappointed by the appearance of a sinister stranger whom she mistook for the guardian. This unrequited

yearning for the Guardian manifests as a psychological issue for the Governess. Concurrently, the motion of the rocking horse subtly signifies Quint's lurking presence:

[The horse] is a children's toy, but I think like anything to do with children, it can be perceived as either an innocent object or something sinister, if you know what I mean, sinister. Particularly when it moves on its own, I think it suggests that it is almost like a symbol of ghosts, akin to what you see in horror films. Quint talks about the horse, the riderless horse, so it's like we understand that it's related to him. When Miles plays with it, we understand later that it's maybe one of the games that Quint plays with Miles. That toy, it finds itself as a symbol of the relationship with Quint.⁷⁹

The toy horse is not the only symbol of the ghost - the bird masks of Miles and Quint are also significant. According to the costume designer Madeleine Boyd, the director is very interested in bird masks in this staging (Quint didn't have a bird mask in the first staging of this production in 2010). Boyd states that in the way the children need to put on a superman cap in order to feel brave enough to do something, Miles puts the mask on to steal the letter (Fig. 2.4.6 (b)), which the Governess writes to the children's guardian in Act II Scene 5, 'Quint'. Actually, the creative team did design the bird mask for Quint and Jessel, but they gave up this idea at some point in 2010 staging. Now the bird mask becomes more about a tool that Miles uses to find the bravery to steal the letter and link to an idea of Miles being controlled by something. Boyd believes that the director attempts to further make the story ambiguous by using a mask to reinforce the idea of Miles is being controlled, and by using puppets to emphasis the idea of Flora is being controlled as well.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Talevi, interview.

⁸⁰ Boyd, interview.



Fig. 2.4.6 (b) 2020 Opera North Production Photograph, Act II Variation XII, Miles (Tim Gasiorek), and Quint. Photo by: Tristram Kenton. Image provided by: Opera North.

The director makes Miles's toy horse and Flora's puppet swing and bounce many times on stage. When Flora is fascinated by the Dead Sea in Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake', she manipulates the puppet with the same dress as herself, making it toss and bounce (Fig. 2.4.6 (c)), perfectly matching the harp and strings and creating an atmosphere of swaying in line with the score (Ex. 2.4.6 (a)). I propose that the puppet represents Flora's internal conflict: externally, she is the epitome of a well-behaved girl, but as the Governess falls into sleep, a puppet resembling Miss Jessel approaches one dressed as Flora. This interaction suggests Flora's hidden rebelliousness, revealed in her nocturnal encounters with Miss Jessel, where she embraces a more mischievous persona.

60 Quietly ($\text{♩} = 54$)

Fl. *mf*
 Ob. *mf*
 Cl. in Bb *mf*
 Bsn. *mf*
 Hrn. in F *open p*
 Harp *pp*

Flora
 - e - ver I choose. To - day by the dead salt sea, To-mor-row her wax - en lids may
 Ist schon so müd. Heut' liegt sie am To - ten Meer; und mor-gen sie schliesst ihr wach-sern
 Flora rocks her doll. Flora wiegt die Puppe.

60 Quietly ($\text{♩} = 54$)

Vln. 1 *arco muted p*
 Vln. 2 *arco muted p*
 Vla. *arco muted p*
 Vc. *arco mf*
 Db. *arco mf*

61

Ob. *p*
 Bsn. *p*
 Harp *mf*

Flora
 close On the plains of Mus - co - vy. And now like a Queen of the
 Lid, von der Go - bi Sand - sturm schwer. Jetzt stolz, ei-ne Sul - tanin

61

Vln. 1 *f*
 Vln. 2 *f*
 Vla. *f*

Musical score for Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake'. The score includes parts for Harp, Flora (soprano), Violin 1, Violin 2, and Viola. The lyrics for Flora are: "East she lies, With a Turk to guard her bed, But next, when her short-liv'd day-light liegt sie hier, und ein Türk be - wacht ihr Bett, doch dann wird es Tag und sie ist". The score features a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The music is marked with "dim." (diminuendo) at several points.

Ex. 2.4.6 (a) Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake'.



Fig. 2.4.6 (c) 2020 Opera North Production Photograph, Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake', Flora (Jennifer Clark). Photo by: Tristram Kenton. Image provided by: Opera North.

Boyd suggests that Miles's toy horse and Flora's puppets symbolise the children's subjugation to trauma. Adults can easily seek assistance, articulating their experiences, but children often resort to miming, unable to verbalise their need for help when they cannot comprehend their own experiences. Thus, Flora's play-acting symbolises her own traumatic experiences, while Miles reenacts his expulsion from school, an implicit cry for help. Their actions underscore their inability to explicitly request assistance in processing their trauma.

The staging of Variation XIV uniquely showcases Miles dancing instead of playing the piano, a deviation from the première production's established tradition. This directorial choice opens up multiple interpretations. On one hand, Miles's dance could represent his struggle to articulate and process a traumatic experience, expressing through movement what he cannot through words, in the hope of being understood and rescued from the trauma's grasp. On the other hand, it might imply that Miles is under the influence or control of the ghosts, his dance a manifestation of their spectral sway over him.

In the Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', of this production, the staging is notably distinct: both the Governess and Quint position themselves near Miles, each fervently trying to sway him to their perspective (Fig. 2.4.6 (d)). Contrasting with other productions where Quint often stands in the shadows or maintains a physical distance, here he stands on equal footing with the Governess. They both exert verbal and emotional pressure on Miles, seemingly oblivious to the child's mental and physical distress. This portrayal starkly highlights Miles as a vulnerable, almost lamb-like figure, caught between the demands of a ghost and a Governess who becomes increasingly authoritarian in her insistence that he reveal 'The name'.



Fig. 2.4.6 (d) 2020 Opera North Production Photograph, Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', Quint, Miles, and the Governess. Photo by: Tristram Kenton. Act II Variation XII, Miles (Tim Gasiorek) and Quint. Image provided by: Opera North.

Furthermore, the director places the Governess and Quint on the same side but leaves Miles alone. Miles neither looks at the Governess nor the ghost when he shouts out the name 'Peter Quint', but then Miles turns his body towards both the Governess and Quint, and yells 'You devil!' it is possible Miles says what the Governess wants him to say, or Miles eventually admits that 'the name' is Peter Quint - either way it could be interpreted that he couldn't take any more pressure from either the hallucinating Governess, or the endless chasing from the ghost.

Miles's death can thus be interpreted as a consequence of being overwhelmed by forces beyond his comprehension and control. The director's decision to visually equate the Governess and Quint while leaving Miles isolated illustrates the child's plight, caught in a tug-of-war between two dominating presences, ultimately leading to his collapse.

The Opera North production presents an intriguing take on the ghosts, portraying them in a manner that is both recognisable and assertive, deviating from the more

ambiguous depiction in their 2010 staging. This approach sidelines the traditional ambiguity around the ghosts' existence, choosing instead to portray them almost like tangible human characters. The ghosts in this staging are not only vivid but also exhibit a boldness and aggression that is quite pronounced.

Interestingly, the production does not focus solely on resolving the opera's ambiguity - whether the ghosts are real or figments of the Governess's hallucination. Instead, it vividly showcases the ghosts and concurrently amplifies the Governess's fragility and sensitivity. The director frequently employs dream sequences to illustrate the Governess's imaginings, bringing the ghosts to the forefront of the stage and even having the female ghost physically interact with the sleeping Governess. This staging choice effectively blurs the line between reality and hallucination, allowing the audience to perceive the ghosts as either genuinely existent or mere products of the Governess's disturbed psyche.

This dramatic and impactful approach offers a dual interpretation of the story, where both the reality of the ghosts and the possibility of the Governess's hallucinations are viable. This duality does not necessarily conflict; rather, it adds layers to the narrative. The constant presence of the Governess on stage, coupled with the tangible portrayal of the ghosts, opens up the interpretation that the ghosts could indeed be real or simply hallucinations.

In this production, the children's fixation with symbolic objects like the toy horse, bird mask, and puppets serves as a poignant reflection of their underlying trauma. These symbols represent the children's lack of autonomy and their manipulation by external forces. The children's actions suggest an unspoken cry for help, as they navigate their experiences, whether rooted in supernatural encounters or the Governess's hallucinations. The trauma the children endure is a central theme, irrespective of the ghosts' actuality. If the ghosts are real, the children are direct victims of their horrifying experiences. Conversely, if the ghosts are figments of the Governess's imagination, the

children suffer from her irrational behaviour and forceful actions. Both scenarios culminate in the same outcome: the children are recipients of trauma.

The Opera North production thus takes a nuanced approach, where the supernatural elements are not merely components of a ghost story or ambiguities between reality and hallucination. Instead, the interplay between the supernatural (if it exists) and the Governess's actions creates a complex dynamic that amplifies the children's trauma. This staging choice shifts the focus from the conventional ghost story narrative to a more profound examination of the children's psychological state. It highlights how the interaction of both supernatural and psychological factors in the opera contributes to the children's distress, drawing attention to their plight and inviting a deeper exploration of their experiences and responses.

2.5 Chapter Summary

The analysis in this chapter reveals that the shifting of the historical settings, as well as the point in time at which productions were created, can influence critics' sense of the ghosts' authenticity in the opera: despite some productions' similar historical settings for the action, different directors and productions of the opera, influenced by the social context of different creative times, offer varying interpretations and ideas about the portrayal of the ghosts.

In the 1950s, readers not only discussed the authenticity of the ghosts in the novel, but were also influenced by Freudian theories, leading to an alternative interpretation that the ghosts were figments of the Governess's imagination. The 1954 English Opera Group production set the opera in the 1890s, striving to emphasise the ambiguity regarding the existence of the ghosts in both James's novella and the opera. However, when the ghosts appeared on stage and moved about singing, their presentation was so realistic that the interpretation of the Governess fantasizing about them seemed perhaps somewhat feeble.

The 1979 English National Opera production, also set in the 1890s, continued the ambiguity surrounding the ghosts' reality in Britten's work. By having Miles shout 'Peter Quint, You devil!' towards the end, directing it at the Governess and shifting the perspective from 'what transpires at Bly through adult eyes' to 'how the children see the adults at Bly', the audience was given the opportunity to consider that perhaps it was the Governess who appeared abnormal in the eyes of the children, and that she might be imagining the ghosts, ultimately leading to the tragic outcome at Bly. This production built on and enhanced the previous production, further blurring the ghosts' authenticity in the opera's narrative.

It can be observed that the early opera productions of 1954 and 1979 revolved around the question of the status of the ghosts, influenced by the way that James's novella has been interpreted since its inception to the first half of the 20th century. These early productions made efforts to present an interpretation that blurred the lines between 'the ghosts are real' and 'the ghosts are imagined by the Governess'. While it might be challenging for the audience to believe that the ghosts do not exist when they are walking and talking on stage, the use of stage design, body language, and dialogue among the characters aligned with the initially ambiguous music and libretto. This resulted in a balance in presenting both interpretations effectively on stage.

The 2005 BBC production, still set in the 1890s, seems less interested in maintaining ambiguity and instead grants more reality to the ghosts, staging a struggle between the ghosts and the Governess and Mrs Grose for the children. The production creates a sense of oppression through the use of dark and confined spaces, and employs camera techniques to juxtapose static features of the ghosts in death with their lively movements and exaggerated body language, highlighting their presence. The portrayal of the male ghost, Quint, in this production is mysterious and malevolent, while the depiction of the female ghost, Miss Jessel, is more nuanced, emphasizing emotional release and elevating the importance of the traditionally secondary female ghost. Mitchell depicts Quint as a negative source of power and gives Miss Jessel great

potential for arousing sympathy, adding diversity to the opera's narrative perspective, giving each character relative significance, and highlighting the production's feminist hues (gender discussions will be further explored in the next chapter).

The 2019 Garsington Opera production, setting the opera's background in the 1890s once again, aims to return to the original ambiguity of the ghosts' authenticity. Garsington's portrayal of the ghosts does not shy away from their presence on stage. To maintain the ambiguity, the production team uses the Governess's moments of fainting and sleeping on stage to create dreams where the ghosts appear, blurring the boundaries between the real and imagined worlds.

The 2020 Opera North production, which sets the opera in the 1920s, draws on Freudian theories prevalent in the 1920s about dreams. By having the ghosts appear on stage while the Governess remains asleep on stage, the production creates an interpretation where the ghosts might be a product of the Governess's dreams, or they might be active while she sleeps. This production strongly establishes Quint as bold and assertive, and Miss Jessel as mournful and vindictive, while presenting the Governess as emotionally fragile and helpless. The production maintains ambiguity to some extent, but also sets it aside to allow the stage to present both the ghosts' reality and the possibility of the Governess imagining them. This leads to a diverse range of possible interpretations, with the focus shifting towards the perspective of the children's appeal for help and away from speculation about the authenticity of the ghosts. The 2011 Glyndebourne production, by bringing the opera's setting closer to the 1950s, successfully updates Quint's image to that of an outwardly genteel but internally corrupt pseudo-gentleman. Quint's portrayal leans more towards that of an arrogant 'man' rather than a ghost. The relationship between Quint and Miles is portrayed as daring and suggestive of abuse. This aspect becomes an inescapable topic in this production, and its significance may surpass the preservation of ambiguity, providing a pathway for a more diverse interpretation of the opera (which will be discussed further in Chapter 3).

CHAPTER 3: Unquiet Sexual Liberation: Attitudes towards Sexuality in *The Turn of the Screw*

I am no bird; and no net ensnares me:

I am a free human being with an independent will.¹

——Jane Eyre

Men had been dominating power structures and discourse from the Victorian era until the Equal Rights Movement in the 1960s, and women in society were viewed as weak compared to males, as detailed in the previous chapter in ‘Social Class’. In both Henry James’s novella and Myfanwy Piper’s libretto, male characters occupy dominant positions in the context of sexuality, while female characters have disadvantageous statuses, as this chapter will demonstrate: the Governess regards the absent guardian as a symbol of love, but this love is unrequited; Quint spurns Miss Jessel and appears to obsess over a male child instead. However, with the development of the Equal Rights Movement and the legalisation of homosexuality following the première of the opera, subsequent stagings in different productions gradually make Quint’s sexual attraction to Miles clear and bold, as well as Quint’s permissiveness regarding sexuality and his grooming of Miles’s precocious attribute, which have been widely represented on stage and discussed in opera studies literature.² In addition, the Governess’s character of repression and Miss Jessel’s relationship with Quint are introduced to the audience.

In this chapter, the history of sexuality in the UK from 1879 onwards will be introduced, attitudes towards sexuality in the novella and opera will be discussed, and attitudes towards sexuality since the première of the opera will be examined through six different productions across time.

¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 253.

² See Brett, ‘Britten’s bad boys male relations in *The Turn of the Screw*’, 97-8. And Palmer, ‘The Colour of the Music’, 101-25. And Hindley, ‘Why Does Miles Die? A Study of Britten’s *The Turn of the Screw*’, 7-17.

3.1 Sexuality Studies Since 1879

In the Victorian era, sex was seen as a means of reproduction, with the body viewed more as a tool for procreation.³ Sexual pleasure was considered a waste of time and energy, while having children and working were deemed proper activities.⁴ By the late nineteenth century, concepts of sex and eroticism emerged in Germany and the USA, and socio-economic developments prompted changes in Victorian ethical views.⁵ Professional doctors began to argue that ‘normal’ love between men and women should include ‘normal’ passion, defining healthy and normal sexual attraction as existing solely between two sexes.⁶ Anyone who did not adhere to sexual norms was considered by the Victorians to be a sexual deviant.⁷ To this day, the majority of society is heterosexual, and heterosexual behaviour remains the most common type of sexual activity. A survey by the UK’s Office for National Statistics in 2022 found that 93.4% of British people identify as heterosexual. Heterosexual interactions between a man and a woman continue to be the most prevalent form of sexual social behaviour.⁸ The prevalence of heterosexual social behaviour does not, however, imply that only heterosexuality is normal. The struggle for the normalisation of rights for the homosexual community has been ongoing since the 20th century. Henry Havelock Ellis devoted himself to the study of the psychology of sex, and in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 2: *Sexual Inversion* (1927) he suggested that homosexuality was neither a disease nor a crime but rather a phenomenon of sexual inversion. This was the first English medical book claiming the ‘innocence’ of homosexuality. He insisted that,

³ Jonathan Ned Katz, ‘The Invention of Heterosexuality’, in *Routledge International handbook of Heterosexualities Studies* (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 58.

⁴ Ibid., 59-60.

⁵ Ibid., 60-4.

⁶ Ibid., 61-2.

⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁸ Amanda Sharfman, and Pamela Cobb, ‘Sexual Orientation, UK’, *The Office for National Statistics*, 2023

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/datasets/sexualidentityuk>.

The invert is not only the victim of his own abnormal obsession, he is the victim of social hostility. We must seek to distinguish the part in his sufferings due to these two causes.⁹

Therefore, Ellis's analysis and theory challenged the viewpoint of Krafft-Ebing that homosexuality is a disease.¹⁰

Despite Ellis's explanation of sexual inversion, society still had a long way to go before accepting homosexuality. *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall was the first novel in the English language recognised as having a lesbian subject in 1928, which a British court judged obscene because it promoted 'unnatural practices between women'.¹¹ Regardless of the fact that the book was prohibited in England until 1959, Hall was considered as the first author to shatter the wall of silence about homosexuality, and the obscenity trials brought her to the attention of the public.¹²

In the following decade, attitudes to homosexuality began to be more relaxed in some circles. Queer club culture was vibrant in London in the 1930s. *Urania*, a gender studies journal, was active from 1916 to 1940 with the goal of challenging gender stereotypes and promoting the abolition of gender.¹³ During World War II, it has been estimated that as many as 1,179,000 men and women serving in the British Armed Forces had some sort of same sex intimacy.¹⁴

Moral attitudes toward prostitution and homosexuality hardened after World War II. According to a Public Morality Council officer, the police were once again

⁹ Henry Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. II: *Sexual Inversion*, 3rd ed. (London: Project Gutenberg, 1927), 88. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/13611/13611-h/13611-h.htm#2_CHAPTER_II.

¹⁰ Ibid., 52-3.

¹¹ Diana Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 192-241.

¹² Sherri Machlin, 'Banned Books Week: *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall', *New York Public Library*, Sep 26, 2013, accessed Jan 17, 2022, <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2013/09/26/banned-books-week-well-loneliness>.

¹³ Niamh Carey, 'The Politics of Urania', *Glasgow Women's Library*, accessed Jan 17, 2022, <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/explore-the-library-and-archive/lgbtq-collections-online-resource/the-politics-of-urania/>.

¹⁴ No name, 'Review of History of the Second World War: United Kingdom Medical Series', *Journal of the American Medical Association* 169.15 (1959): 1808-9, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.1959.03000320110032>.

‘conducting a campaign against those engaged in this deplorable offence’ in 1945.¹⁵ Police targeted gay individuals, charging anybody caught with being ‘concerned together in committing an act of gross indecency’.¹⁶ The oppression of gay people in Britain persisted in the 1950s: hundreds of individuals were imprisoned, and the Sexual Offences Act recognised the crime of sexual assault between women in 1956. Although the *Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*, often known as the Wolfenden report, was issued in 1957 and urged the government to legalise homosexuality, British authorities remained virulently anti-homosexual.

Liberal individuals and groups from many fields made efforts to confront the oppression. Examples of these initiatives included the first English language homosexual film *Victim*, which premièred in 1961, and the first lesbian social and political organisation *The Minorities Research Group*, which was founded in 1963. In 1964, the Homosexual Law Reform Committee advocated for the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the abandonment of the medical concept of homosexuality as a disease. As a result of the persistent efforts of individuals in many areas over decades, the Act to modify the law of England and Wales to legalise homosexuality, known as the 1967 The Sexual Offences Act, was introduced.¹⁷ Nevertheless, despite being decriminalised in 1967, stigma and prejudice against gay men and lesbians remained pervasive in the succeeding decades,¹⁸ resulting in decades of fighting for sexual liberation.

Since the 1970s, the study of sexuality in the sociology realm has increasingly captured the attentions of a number of other disciplines by using relevant materials in

¹⁵ Maureen Waller, *London 1945: Life in the Debris of War* (London: John Murray, 2020), 256.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁷ The law in the United Kingdom was extended to legalised homosexual in Scotland in 1980, and in Northern Ireland in 1982.

¹⁸ Alison Park, and Rebecca Rhead, ‘Personal Relationships: Changing attitudes towards sex, marriage and parenthood’, *British Social Attitudes 30* (London: NatCen Social Research, 2013), accessed October 15, 2022, <https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/key-findings/introduction.aspx>. NatCen Social Research (National Centre for Social Research) is the largest independent social research organisation in the UK.

the following three ‘sexological’ traditions: the biomedical, the psychoanalytic, and the social survey of various sexual behaviours, which have been discussed in Paul Robinson’s *The Modernization of Sex* in 1976 and Janice Irvine’s *Disorders of Desire* in 1990.¹⁹ The second tradition of psychoanalysis, in particular, has been preoccupied with the sociological concerns of the links between sexual drives, repression, and social order. In addition, the *British Social Attitudes Survey* has monitored people’s attitudes toward society, politics, and morality since 1983 as a means of evaluating how they perceive Britain to function. According to the *British Social Attitudes*’ latest report, more than four-fifths of respondents to the survey said sexual relations between two adults of the same sex was ‘not wrong at all’, compared to two-thirds in 2018.²⁰ From 1983 to 1987, there was a downward trend in acceptance of homosexuality, whereas from 1988 to 2017, there has been an upward trend in acceptance of homosexuality. One of the reasons is that the advent of HIV in the 1980s caused widespread panic in British society. Terrence Higgins was one of the first people to suffer and die in the UK in 1982, and subsequently there were frequent panic attacks about the transmissions of HIV, with the belief that gay men were putting themselves at risk through their ‘choices’.²¹

The other reason might be that Margaret Thatcher once complained ‘children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay’.²² These concerns heralded the introduction of Section 28

¹⁹ John Scott, and Gordon Marshall, ‘Sex, sociology of’, In *A Dictionary of Sociology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199533008.001.0001/acref-9780199533008-e-2075>. Also see, Paul A. Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989). And Janice M. Irvine, *Disorders of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Modern American Sexology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Muslihah Albakri, Suzanne Hill, Nancy Kelley, and Nilufer Rahim, ‘Relationships and Gender Identity: Public Attitudes within the context of Legal Reform’, *British Social Attitudes 36* (London: NatCen Social Research, 2019), 18, accessed Jan 10, 2023, <https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-36/key-findings.aspx>.

²¹ Park and Rhead, ‘Personal Relationships: Changing attitudes towards sex, marriage and parenthood’, 14.

²² Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to the Conservative Party Conference’, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, October 9, 1987, accessed October 15, 2022, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106941>.

of the Local Government Act 1988, which stated that local government ‘shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality’ or ‘promote the teaching in state schools of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’.²³

As for the decline in support in 2018 for ‘not wrong at all’ in relation to same-sex relationships (a drop from 68% to 66%), the BSA suggests that there may be a similar correlation between changes in social norms towards transgender attitudes and attitudes towards homosexuality. Public attitudes towards transgenderism ebb and flow. As a result, public phobia or unease towards transgender people may have steadily decreased over time. In addition, progressive policymaking may influence public attitudes, as marriage equality has for same-sex and opposite-sex relationships.²⁴

*

The subsequent section addresses the challenging subject of the transgression of sexual norms’ boundaries. The academic discourse surrounding this theme is extensive and diverse, rendering it impossible to encapsulate fully within this context. I have highlighted certain items of literature in the following paragraphs because of the insights these items can provide for the purposes of interpreting *The Turn of the Screw*. Specifically, I introduce the issues of paedophilia and sexual abuse, and the disturbing concept of precocious sexuality. Different productions of the opera feature actions based on these concepts, and the actions themselves transcend social and ethical norms, and presumably elicit profound reflections on the part of audiences. In sections 3.4 and 3.5, I will analyse the presentation of these concepts in the text and music of the opera and productions.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Park and Rhead, ‘Personal Relationships: Changing attitudes towards sex, marriage and parenthood’, 19.

Child Molestation and Child Abuse

Inflicting abuse and neglect on children under the age of 18 constitutes child abuse, and all forms of ‘physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power’, can be defined as child abuse, in terms of World Health Organization.²⁵

Child Abuse in the UK was discussed in a landmark report titled ‘Child Maltreatment in the United Kingdom: A Study of the Prevalence of Abuse and Neglect’ in 2000, the first major national report to explore child physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect in the UK.²⁶ The report points out that these different types of maltreatment are intertwined and overlapping so that sexual abuse can involve a degree of physical abuse, and all forms of abuse involve emotional abuse simultaneously.²⁷ Furthermore, the most common circumstances of abuse happen within acquaintance, and the majority of sexual abusers are men, females are known to participate in physical and emotional maltreatment.²⁸

Children who suffer from maltreatment may exhibit symptoms such as aggression and hostile behaviour, bad temper, depression, anxiety or unusual fears, sleep problems and nightmares, self-harm or attempts at suicide.²⁹ Furthermore, children who suffer sexual molestation display signs and symptoms of, for instance, sexual behaviour/knowledge that is inappropriate for the child’s age, or inappropriate sexual behaviour with other children.³⁰

²⁵ ‘Child Maltreatment’, *World Health Organization*, September 12, 2022, accessed September 26, 2022, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>.

²⁶ Pat Cawson et al., ‘Child Maltreatment in the United Kingdom: A Study of the Prevalence of Abuse and Neglect’, *United Kingdom: NSPCC*, 2000.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-8.

²⁹ ‘Child Abuse’, *Mayo Clinic*, May 19, 2022, accessed September 27, 2022, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/child-abuse/symptoms-causes/syc-20370864>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Child sexual abuse has long been acknowledged as immoral. In 1885, it was recognised in the UK as being illegal. From the 1940s to the 1960s, it was believed that child sexual abuse was not widespread and only affected certain social circles, such as the ‘lower social classes’.³¹ In the 1990s, the preconceived stereotypes that there was such a thing as a ‘seductive child’ and that child sexual abuse was ‘harmless’ persisted.³²

In the 1960s and 1970s, some malevolent forces advocated repositioning child sexual abuse within the context of a broader societal debate about sexual liberation. The Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) was one organisation that advocated paedophilia as a legitimate form of sexual attraction. PIE was backed by the Albany Trust, the National Council for Civil Liberties, as well as other notable institutions and individuals.³³ During the 1970s and 1990s, the belief that child sexual abuse was caused by problems within individual families gained attention. In the late 1980s, a few individuals in the political, legal, and social work sectors viewed certain responses to child sexual abuse as ‘overzealous’ or ‘moral panic’.³⁴ Those who raised concerns about child sexual abuse were disparaged as ‘prissy and middle class’.³⁵ This kind of speech greatly diminished the scope of problem solving. From 2000 to 2010, perceptions and attitudes regarding child sexual abuse became more sensitive. Some

³¹ Jo Lovett, Maddy Coy and Liz Kelly, ‘Deflection, Denial and Disbelief: Social and Political Discourses about Child Sexual Abuse and Their Influence on Institutional Responses: A Rapid Evidence Assessment’, *Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse*, Feb (2018), 11- 4, accessed Jan 11, 2022, <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20221028182252/https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/5381/view/social-political-discourses-about-child-sexual-abuse-their-influence-institutional-responses-full-report-.pdf>.

³² Ibid., 11-4.

³³ Alexis Jay, Malcolm Evans, Ivor Frank, and Drusilla Sharpling, ‘Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse Linked to Westminster: Investigation Report’, *Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse*, Feb (2020), 104-22, accessed Jan 11, 2022, <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/document/allegations-child-sexual-abuse-linked-westminster-investigation-report.html>.

³⁴ Lovett, Coy and Kelly, ‘Deflection, Denial and Disbelief: Social and Political Discourses about Child Sexual Abuse and Their Influence on Institutional Responses: A Rapid Evidence Assessment’, 15.

³⁵ Alexis Jay, Malcolm Evans, Ivor Frank, and Drusilla Sharpling, ‘Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale’, *Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse*, April (2018), 65, accessed Jan 11, 2022, <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/document/cambridge-house-knowl-view-and-rochdale-investigation-report-april-2018.html>.

have attempted to deflect and rationalise responsibility away from perpetrators and institutions. These individuals believed that abuse was perpetrated by a small group of dysfunctional, problematic individuals or by corrupt or unruly institutions.³⁶ Nonetheless, this viewpoint is increasingly being contested, and institutions are being held accountable.³⁷ Initiated in 2015, ‘Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse’ (IICSA) is committed to focusing on child sexual abuse, and its efforts have resulted in a greater public awareness of child sexual abuse. In January 2021, the UK government released its Strategy for Combating Child Sexual Abuse, and in July 2021, demonstrating the Government’s resolve to improve and address the problem. The issue of sexual abuse of children has risen up the public agenda.³⁸ The IICSA survey argues that the inclusion of child sexual abuse in artistic forms can promote social reflection on the issue and can have a positive impact:

Storylines and literary portrayals involving child sexual abuse also have an important role to play in influencing public attitudes and understanding of such abuse. Children and young people told the Inquiry’s engagement team that, although they thought some portrayals of child sexual abuse in drama had been dealt with ‘*in a sensitive and compelling way*’, the topic needed to include a focus on the long-term impacts of abuse.³⁹

Paedophilia

People who have paedophilia traits may or may not engage in sexual activity, and it is essential to differentiate between sexual preference and sexual behaviour. Being sexually attracted to children (paedophilia) is not illegal in and of itself, because people

³⁶ Lovett, Coy and Kelly, ‘Deflection, Denial and Disbelief: Social and Political Discourses about Child Sexual Abuse and Their Influence on Institutional Responses: A Rapid Evidence Assessment’, 12-3.

³⁷ Ibid., 16-7.

³⁸ Alexis Jay, Malcolm Evans, Ivor Frank, and Drusilla Sharpling, ‘Attitudes to Child Sexual Abuse’ in ‘The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse’, *Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse*, October (2022), accessed Jan 11, 2022, <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/inquiry/final-report/ii-inquirys-conclusions-and-recommendations-change/part-c-prioritising-protection-children/c6-attitudes-child-sexual-abuse.html#IicsaReferencesReference3>.

³⁹ Ibid.

cannot be arrested for having unacted upon sexual fantasies about children. Moreover, there are no laws that pertain to a person's thought processes. However, individuals can be arrested if they act on their thoughts, which results in the sexual abuse of a child. It is the pursuit of self-interest that constitutes an offence.⁴⁰ According to *Psychology Today*, the following is a summary of the characteristics of paedophilia:

P[a]edophilia is an ongoing sexual attraction to pre-pubertal children. It is a paraphilia, a condition in which a person's sexual arousal and gratification depends on objects, activities, or even situations that are considered atypical. P[a]edophilia is defined as recurrent and intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviours involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children—generally age 13 years or younger—over a period of at least six months. P[a]edophiles are more often men and can be attracted to either or both sexes.⁴¹

According to the Office for National Statistics (UK) figure, 3.8% of child sexual offences in the UK in 2019 were committed by women.⁴² Élisabeth Roudinesco states that when women become paedophiles, it is typically because men who have enslaved them encourage them to do so.⁴³ A significant proportion of females who sexually abuse children belong to the so-called 'teacher/lover group' and the women may perceive the relationship as being founded on love and may not recognise its abusive or inappropriate nature.⁴⁴ There are 'male-coerced offenders' who are passive women in abusive relationships who would do anything to make their partner happy.⁴⁵ Xanthe

⁴⁰ 'Is It Illegal to Be a Paedophile?' *Stop It Now! UK & Ireland*, accessed Jan 11, 2022, <https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/concerned-about-your-own-thoughts-or-behaviour/help-with-inappropriate-thoughts-or-behaviour/get-the-facts/is-it-illegal-to-be-a-paedophile/>.

⁴¹ 'Paedophilia', *Psychology Today*, Sep 2, 2022, accessed Jan 12, 2023, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/conditions/pedophilia>.

⁴² Nick Stripe, 'User Guide to Crime Statistics for England and Wales: March 2020', Nov 4, 2021, accessed Jan 11, 2023, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/methodologies/userguidetocrimestatisticsforenglandandwales>.

⁴³ Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Our Dark Side: A History of Perversion*, translated by David Macey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 144.

⁴⁴ Donna M. Vandiver, Glen Kercher, 'Offender and Victim Characteristics of Registered Female Sexual Offenders in Texas: A Proposed Typology of Female Sexual Offenders', *Sex Abuse* 16, (2004): 121–137. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SEBU.0000023061.77061.17>

⁴⁵ Xanthe Mallett, 'Women also sexually abuse children, but their reasons often differ from men's.' *The Conversation*, Feb 19, 2017, accessed Jan 11, 2023,

Mallet proposes that one of the reasons why women can be driven by a need for intimacy is that they are attempting to compensate for unfilled emotional needs elsewhere. In Mallett's opinion, a key distinction between male and female child sexual abusers is their power dynamic with their victims. Sex crimes committed by men are classified as crimes of power over the victim. While female sex offending can be motivated by a desire for dominance, the desire for intimacy appears to Mallett be more important.⁴⁶

3.2 Henry James's Homosexual Tendency

Henry James never married. Not only is there no evidence in his own letters, notes, and other personal writings that he was sexually active, but there is also no evidence in the form of known intimate relationships or children. Such a pristine past is indicative of James's peculiar life: most biographies of James emphasise the significance of same-sex relationships in his emotional life. Sheldon Novick, one of James's biographers, claims that James had affairs with other men.⁴⁷ However, the first major biographer of James, Leon Edel, contested this. James is portrayed as repressed, sexually indifferent, and possibly celibate in his five-volume biography.⁴⁸

James's expressions of desire for other men in his correspondence grew increasingly bold, eager, and ardent beginning around 1899. After learning that Morton Fullerton's ex-mistress was blackmailing him,⁴⁹ James wrote a letter to Fullerton, lamenting his missed erotic opportunities:

<https://theconversation.com/women-also-sexually-abuse-children-but-their-reasons-often-differ-from-mens-72572>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Hugh Stevens, 'Sexualities and Sexology', in *Henry James in Context*, ed. David McWhirter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 301, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511763311.032>.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Also see in Leon Edel, 'Oh Henry! What Henry James didn't do with Oliver Wendell Holmes (or anyone else)', *Slate*, Dec 12, 1996.

⁴⁹ Morton Fullerton is Henry James's young friend, who are often exchange sexual gossip in their letters. Henry James, *Henry James Letters*, 4 vols, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1984), 473. Also see in Stevens, 'Sexuality and Sexology', 301-2.

I think of the whole long mistaken perversity of your averted reality so to speak, as a miserable personal waste, that of something – ah, so tender! – in me that was only quite yearningly ready for you, and something all possible, and all deeply and admirably appealing in yourself, of which I never got the benefit.⁵⁰

In a letter to his young gay friend Hugh Walpole, James said,

We must know, as much as possible, in our beautiful art, yours and mine, what we are talking about – and the only way to know is to have lived and loved and cursed and floundered and enjoyed and suffered. I think I don't regret a single 'excess' of my responsive youth – I only regret, in my chilled age, certain occasions and possibilities I didn't embrace.⁵¹

Many more letters of similar correspondence between James and his friends that do not record specific sexual acts, but allude to intimacy, recollections of the excesses, occasions, and possibilities of his youth, and use of a common language with allusions suggest that James was free to acknowledge and discuss his own sexual orientation within his particular circle of friends.

As Stevens notes, '[...]writing became the place where James explored what he was afraid to explore in life.'⁵² James's fiction, which spans his entire career, is concerned not only with marriage and adultery, but with desires that cannot be categorised as either heterosexual or marital. In the 1980s, scholars used Freudian theory to re-examine and interpret James's work, paying particular attention to linguistic and sexual interaction. In Lloyd Davis's 1988 publication *Sexuality and Textuality in Henry James: Reading Through the Virginal*, sexuality is a key notion to explain and interpret James's writing. Davis stated that, like Freud's work, James's work can be seen as the representation and revelation of social and psychological dimensions, and then reread as a consequence of these same dimensions. The conventional Jamesian narrative of innocence is reconstructed as the characters' and the texts' entry into the sociosexual order. Davis concludes that 'the psyche, sexuality and

⁵⁰ Stevens, 'Sexuality and Sexology', 302.

⁵¹ James, *Henry James Letters*, 679-80. Also see in Stevens, 'Sexuality and Sexology', 302.

⁵² Stevens, 'Sexuality and Sexology', 301.

discourse are dynamically intertwined and with the overt foregrounding of social, sexual relationships in James's novels, sexuality becomes a key notion in explicating his textual praxis.⁵³

Hugh Stevens published his book *Henry James and Sexuality* in 1988, in which he offers a bold approach to James's work. Stevens believes that James's literature contains marginalized sexual identities, as well as aggressive desires. In his view, James had no qualms about writing about incestuous, masochistic, and homosexual desire. Furthermore, James mocked and sarcastically reacted to the contemporary morals that he was confronted with.⁵⁴

3.3 Benjamin Britten and Homosexuality

Britten and Pears were born in the 1910s and grew up in the era depicted in their friend E. M. Forster's literary works. During his lifetime, Forster read Britten a draft of *Maurice*, which described the difficulties homosexual people faced at the time, when legal and social restrictions prevented them from living openly. But despite encountering obstacles, they could overcome them with love.⁵⁵ Britten and Pears maintained their relationship between each other in a discrete yet uncompromising manner. As described by Forster in *A Room with a View*,

You can transmute love, ignore it, muddle it, but you can never pull it out of you. I know by experience that the poets are right: love is eternal.⁵⁶

In a letter to Pears from 1943, Britten described their relationship as a 'marriage', despite the fact that the contents of this letter and their other fifty or so letters containing

⁵³ Lloyd Davis, *Sexuality and Textuality in Henry James: Reading Through the Virginal* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 4.

⁵⁴ Hugh Stevens, *Henry James and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), preface, ix-xi. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511583117.

⁵⁵ E. M. Forster, *Maurice* (Terminal Note, 1960), ed. P. N. Furbank with introduction and notes by David Leavitt (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 220. Also see in Nicholas Clark, 'The Open Secret' in *Benjamin Britten in Context*, ed. Vicki P. Strocher and Justin Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 35-6, doi:10.1017/9781108634878.004.

⁵⁶ E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), 247.

implied references to their relationship would have resulted in extremely severe consequences if they had become public knowledge. Britten and Pears declared their love for one another in writing, openly expressing their feelings or emotions despite any opposition their relationship may have encountered:

[...] although I really don't mind not existing if you don't exist too, I hate having to rely on my memories, even of a day or two ago – Do you agree, Bee? ~~But~~ So by all means let us die together, but also let us live together too hein?⁵⁷

During most of Britten's lifetime, political and cultural norms regarding homosexuality were harsh and restrictive. Despite his assertions that his homosexuality could benefit his art,⁵⁸ Britten was reluctant to discuss his homosexual relationship with Peter Pears, who, in the *Advocate* interview in 1980, asserted specifically that Britten disliked the use of the word 'gay'.⁵⁹ In the 1950s, the rabidly anti-homosexual Home Secretary Sir David Maxwell Fife urged the police to enforce Victorian laws that made homosexual acts illegal. Britten and Pears came under police surveillance in 1953; Britten was so disturbed by the police visits that he discussed the possibility that Pears engage in a sham marriage with his assistant Imogen Holst.⁶⁰

The homosexual movement was able to celebrate a significant victory in 1967, when the Sexual Offences Act was finally passed to legalise homosexuality. Even so, not only did harsh social opinion continue to prevail, but it was also impossible for Britten and Pears to fully expose themselves to the light of day overnight because they had spent the majority of their lives under repression and in hiding. Both Britten and Pears were likely aware that coming out as homosexual could negatively affect their

⁵⁷ Peter Pears to Benjamin Britten, May 10, 1944, Letter No. 49. Vicki P. Stroeher, Nicholas Clark, and Jude Brimmer, *My Beloved Man: The Letters of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016), 71.

⁵⁸ Brett, 'Britten's Bad Boys Male Relations in *The Turn of the Screw*', 91.

⁵⁹ Peter Pears, in Tony Palmer, *A Time There Was ... A Profile of Benjamin Britten* (London Weekend Television, for *The South Bank Show*, 1980), broadcast April 6, 1980, Britten Pears Arts Archive (*GB-Alb*). Transcript of soundtrack, 54. Also see in Clark, 'The Open Secret', 34-5.

⁶⁰ Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber, 1992), 335.

careers if they were to do so. They continued to present themselves as artistic collaborators, and Britten remained silent about his sexuality until his death.

After Britten's death, the scholarly exploration of Britten and his music has expanded significantly. In 1977, Philip Brett made a pioneering contribution by addressing the topic of *Peter Grimes* in his work 'Britten and Grimes'. In this publication, Brett shed light on Britten's homosexual identity, delving into how he believed it influenced his musical compositions and why Britten chose not to openly acknowledge his homosexuality. In 1985, Palmer studied *The Turn of the Screw* and claimed the Miles-Quint relationship lies at the deepest nerve-centre of both story and music. Palmer highlighted the underlying homosexual and paedophilic tendencies of Quint.⁶¹

In 1991, Mervyn Cooke edited a diverse collection of essays, *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*. Among them, Clifford Hindley's essay 'Eros in Life and Death: *Billy Budd* and *Death in Venice*' examines the relationship between Britten's homosexual orientation and his operas, discussing the queer elements and the characters homosexual tendencies within the operas.⁶² Mervyn Cooke's 'Distant Horizons: From Pagodaland to the Church Parables' explores the use of Balinese gamelan elements in Britten's music, interpreting oriental music as a symbol of the exotic and mysterious.⁶³ This aligns with the analysis of other scholars (such as Palmer), who interpret Quint's use of gamelan music elements to summon Miles as conveying 'exoticism', suggesting his expression of unconventional emotional expression. This coincides with the view that Quint harbours a homosexual love for Miles, further substantiating this interpretation.

Edited by Vicki P. Stroeher and Justin Vickers, the essay collection in the book *Benjamin Britten in Context*, published in 2022, covers a wide range of topics related

⁶¹ Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', 104.

⁶² Clifford Hindley, 'Eros in Life and Death: *Billy Budd* and *Death in Venice*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, 147-64.

⁶³ Mervyn Cooke, 'Distant Horizons: From Pagodaland to the Church Parables' in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, 167-87.

to the life and works of Benjamin Britten. For instance, Justin Vickers and Nicholas Clark delve into the relationship between Britten and Peter Pears, shedding light on their public musical partnership and the private romantic relationship that existed beneath the veil of social taboo.⁶⁴ J. P. E. Harper-Scott conducts an analysis of the realities of homosexuality during the time of Britten, including prosecution, censorship, self-censorship, and the emergence of divergent sexual cultures due to class distinctions.⁶⁵ This resonates with the biographical analyses by Justin Vickers and Nicholas Clark, which propose a symbiotic relationship between Britten's experiences of love, secrecy, and social exclusion and his musical narratives.

Recent literature provides other important and more specific points of intersection for this thesis, since it deals specifically with productions of Britten operas. Imani Mosley examines the première productions and subsequent reception of four of Britten's operas in "'The Queer Things He Said': British Identity, Social History, and Press Reception of Benjamin Britten's Postwar Operas' (2019): *Billy Budd* (1951), *Gloriana* (1953), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960), and *Owen Wingrave* (1971).⁶⁶ Mosley focuses on how these operas each present different modes of homosexualisation and forms of homosexual disruption. This thesis, through the investigation of queer elements in Britten's operas, explores their reception and impact on British identity and social historical perceptions, fostering academic research into reception studies and British identity. Mosley acknowledges the dynamic interaction between the composer, his works, and society. She further emphasises how Britten's operas and subsequent performances have become mediums for negotiating and reflecting upon social changes, attitudes towards homosexuality, and the construction of social value.

⁶⁴ Justin Vickers, 'Peter Pears' in *Benjamin Britten in Context*, ed. Vicki P. Stroeher and Justin Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 21-28. And Nicholas Clark, 'Open Secret', in *Benjamin Britten in Context*, 29-36.

⁶⁵ J. P. E. Harper-Scott, 'The Politics of the Closet', *Benjamin Britten in Context*, 343-50.

⁶⁶ Mosley, "'The Queer Things He Said'".

3.4 Sexuality in words and music of *The Turn of the Screw*

The only acceptable way for an increasing number of middle-class women whose birth and education defined them as ladies but whose families could not support them in leisure was to become a Governess.⁶⁷ The Governess was a childless surrogate mother, a young woman with restricted marriage prospects, and a family member who was occasionally mistaken for a servant.⁶⁸ In the novella *The Turn of the Screw*, the reason why the Governess takes on her role is not just for the salary, but because she has succumbed to the Guardian's charms.

He was handsome and bold a pleasant, off-hand and gay and kind... [she] saw him all in a glow of high fashion, of good looks, of expensive habits, of charming ways with women.⁶⁹

The situation of the Governess is similar to that of Miss Jessel while she was alive, chosen like her for being 'young and pretty', according to Mrs Grose, as well as 'a lady.' Miss Jessel's sexual desire is aroused by Quint, and leads to her death in pregnancy. Even if 'she [the Governess] was full of doubt to do and be responsible for everything and not to worry the Guardian, she was carried away because he is gallant and handsome, and deep in the busy world, should need her help.'⁷⁰ The Governess's unrealistic fantasy emerges, 'when for a moment, disburdened, delighted, he held her hand, thanking her for the sacrifice, she already felt rewarded.'⁷¹ The initial mental stimuli of the sexual enlightenment secures her position in Bly, but she never sees the Guardian again.

In Britten's letter to Piper, he wrote, 'I've got one idea about the school-room scene, which you may not like, but which we must discuss soon, as it affects the structure of

⁶⁷ Kathryn Hughes, *Victorian Governess* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), xvi, accessed September 7, 2022, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5309699>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁶⁹ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 9.

⁷⁰ Myfanwy Piper, *The Turn of the Screw*, prologue.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

the music.’⁷² Piper was drafting the libretto of *The Turn of the Screw* at that time, and what Britten meant when he mentioned ‘school-room scene’, according to Reed’s reasonable speculation, was probably Miles’s ‘Malo’ song.⁷³

In order to make the ‘Malo’ song one of the crucial components in the opera, Britten and Piper revised it many times. Therefore, the process of the ‘Malo’ song’s composition may have required negotiation and several attempts at finding a version that worked for both Britten and Piper. An early draft in Piper’s notebooks records that Piper and Britten incorporated a solo song for Miles in Act 1 Scene 6, ‘The Lesson’, that they considered restaging at the final scene.⁷⁴ Piper wished to use the ‘Fool’ song as Miles’s solo song in the final scene (Act II Scene 8, ‘Miles’);⁷⁵ she states in her notebooks that,

I’d like if possible some sort of repetition of the fool song. I think it is the only good thing I have written so far and cling to it a bit but because it expresses for me the particular odd mixture [of] old-fashioned imaginativeness, bible-knowledge and poetry that such a small boy might have had.

However, the text of the ‘Fool’ song completed by Piper does not appear in the opera composed by Britten. The original scene itself did not disappear, but Britten chose not to use the text of the ‘Fool’ song. What is more, she wrote after they finished the final version of the libretto that:

[Britten] asked that Miles should have a short, very simple song, the tune and echoes of which could steer him through the work. Long before the many attempts to find the right words had been written and discarded [...] Britten himself had

⁷² Benjamin Britten, Philip Reed, Mervyn Cooke and Donald Mitchell ed., *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press in association with The Britten-Pears Foundation, 2008), 205.

⁷³ Ibid., 206.

⁷⁴ Myfanwy Piper’s notebooks are at ‘Britten-Pears Library’, see Ibid., 206.

⁷⁵ The text of Miles’s ‘fool song’ in Myfanwy Piper’s draft libretto: O say I am a fool, and a fool is a knave, o say I am a fool, and a fool is not brave, but I am a Daniel and a Lion too, and so I say beware to you, beware of the brave knave of the only brave knave’.

decided to use the ‘Malo’ rhyme from an old-fashioned Latin grammar that an aunt of mine produced.⁷⁶

Taking into account these primary sources by Britten and Piper, I argue that they held different ideas in their attempts to create Miles’s solo song: Piper clung to use of the ‘Fool’ song, whilst Britten decided to use the ‘Malo’ song. This signifies that Britten had his own understanding of this story and retained a personal connection to the ‘Malo’ song. Eventually, Britten would insert the ‘Malo’ rhythm into several scenes, which as he mentioned in his letter to Piper, affects the whole structure of the opera.

What I have examined above is one of the examples of their different intentions and opinions during the compositional process. Differences between Britten and Piper made Britten think further and made the opera’s connotation more meaningful and ruminative. For instance, in the final scene, the Governess sings the ‘Malo’ song after she realizes Miles is dead. Therefore, the ‘Malo’ song is not only Miles’s exclusive theme, which indicates that he is a precocious child, but it also has to be considered in relation to the Governess, and hence invites audience members to consider the meaning of Miles’s death in relation to the other characters.

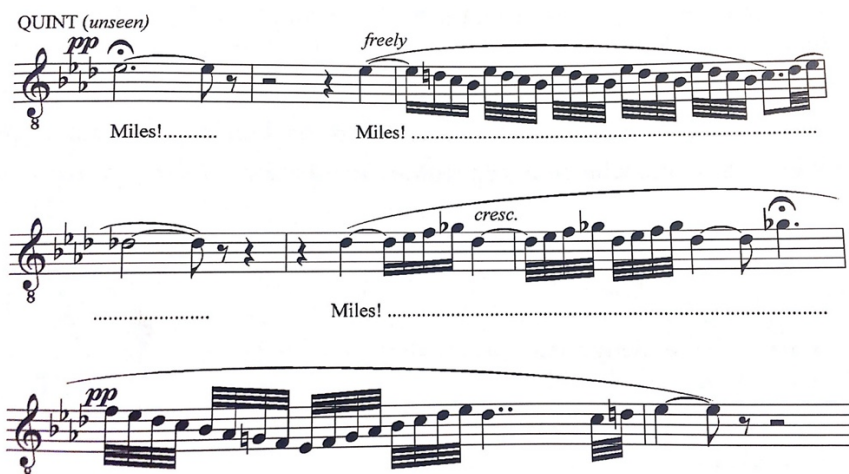
Britten not only bestowed upon Miles the exclusive ‘Malo’ song to express his character’s personality but also transformed the silent ghosts of the novella into vocal presences in the opera, thereby highlighting Quint’s seductive influence. In the opera, the sound of the celesta signifies the ghostly image of Quint. For instance, when Mrs Grose first mentions Quint, a celesta melody accompanies the orchestral music. In Act I, Scene 4, ‘The Tower’, when the Governess mistakes Quint for the Guardian, the celesta melody emerges prominently.

In Act I Scene 8, ‘At Night’, the harp tremolandos, the celesta arpeggios, the gong strikes, and the horn sets up gorgeous sounds before Quint’s first scene with Miles.

⁷⁶ David Herbert, ed., *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1998), 10.

Brett states that the cantilena in which Quint calls to Miles is exotic.⁷⁷ Quint's celesta theme does not sound evil or ominous; rather it is melodious and meaningful. Christopher Palmer points out that traditionally, the timbre of the celesta is a symbol of 'heaven'.⁷⁸ Quint's musical theme is based on the key of A^b major, accompanied by a gentle summons. After a brief pause, repeated rapid descending ornamental notes express Quint's call and desire (Ex. 3.4 (a)).⁷⁹

John Evans comments on the celesta melody, observing that the tranquil terrace scene in the opera is sharply contrasted with the restless tones of the celesta. This musical choice effectively highlights Quint's appearance on the tower, drawing the attention to his spectral presence.⁸⁰ Hindley claims that whatever the text may yield, the music is beautiful, and the yearning of Quint's melismata on Miles' name when Quint is first heard in the opera suggests love.⁸¹



Ex. 3.4 (a) Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Quint's summon.

The musical intervals used in Quint's theme evoke associations with Indonesian Gamelan music.⁸² In traditional Gamelan, there are two primary five-tone scales:

⁷⁷ Brett, 'Britten's Bad Boys Male Relations in *The Turn of the Screw*', 100. Brett employs the descriptor 'exotic', attributing this choice to the apparent influence of Pérotin's organum, originating from the twelfth century.

⁷⁸ Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', 109.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

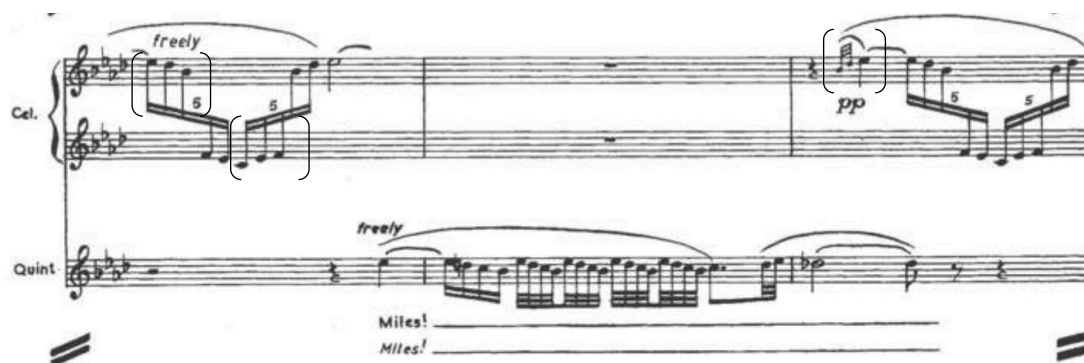
⁸⁰ John Evans, 'The Sketches: Chronology and Analysis', in *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 68.

⁸¹ Hindley, 'Why Does Miles Die? A Study of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*', 11.

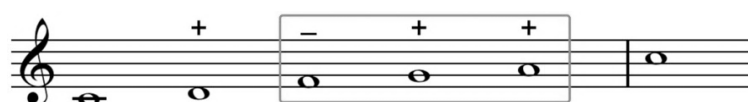
⁸² Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', 107.

Slendro and Pélog. Some of the notes in these scales fall ‘between the cracks’ of a piano, meaning they do not correspond to the twelve notes of the Western scale. Taking the Western key of C major as an example, the first note of the Pélog scale can correspond to C, the third to E, the fourth to G, and the fifth to A. However, the second note falls between D[#] and E, making it challenging to replicate accurately in a traditional Western orchestra.

In the celesta and harp descriptions of Quint, the pattern used is a minor third plus a major second, played in arpeggios form at different pitches (Ex. 3.4 (b)). Moreover, gongs and drums play a role similar to a basso continuo, underpinning the music throughout. This pattern of a minor third plus a major second aligns with the intervals between the third, fourth, and fifth notes of the Pélog scale in Gamelan music (Ex. 3.4 (c)). This musical choice adds an exotic and unique texture to Quint’s theme, differentiating it from conventional Western musical norms and contributing to the eerie and otherworldly atmosphere associated with his character.



Ex. 3.4 (b) Act I Scene 8, ‘At Night’.



Ex. 3.4 (c) Pélog scale in Gamelan music.

Britten’s use of oriental elements in his music not only enriches the musical diversity of his work but also imparts a spiritual significance that diverges from Western traditional values. Both Brett and Hindley, in multiple articles, point towards the

interpretation of Quint's homosexual love for Miles in the opera, providing theoretical support for subsequent scholarly studies into Quint's 'homosexual' nature.⁸³ Homosexuality was illegal during the Victorian era in Britain, making Quint's homosexual inclination not only ethically and morally reprehensible in the societal context of the time but also legally taboo.

Moreover, the celesta and harp accompaniment is reminiscent of the gamelan, or rather, gamelan-stylization.⁸⁴ This kind of 'oriental' music has a long history in Western culture: it is often to metaphorise something strange, distant, little-known and foreign,⁸⁵ and here Britten apparently uses it in his music to suggest 'feminine' charms, as Brett has suggested.⁸⁶ The Eastern or 'orientalist' elements additionally present the character of Quint as blurry, little-known, and mysterious, I would argue. Britten's use of the celesta portrays the characteristics unacknowledged and unendorsed by traditional Western society and undeniably aids in constructing Quint's homosexual identity. This approach crafts an image of Quint as a marginal figure, challenging the norms and provoking thought about societal constructs and taboos surrounding sexuality during that period. This nuanced musical representation adds a layer of depth to Quint's character, positioning him not just as a simple antagonist but as a complex individual shaped by and reacting against the societal norms of his time.

Miles's 'Malo' song first appears in Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson', and constitutes his primary vocal segment and musical theme. Notably, the lyrics of the 'Malo' song include masculine nouns (Fig. 3.4 (a)). Valentine Cunningham argues that Britten's use of these covert masculine terms in Miles's 'Malo' song is a direct response to the era's 'homosexual panic'. However, some scholars argue that the homosexual identity of

⁸³ As previously discussed, both Hindley's 'Why Does Miles Die? A Study of Britten's "The Turn of the Screw"' and Brett's 'Britten's Bad Boys: Male Relations in "The Turn of the Screw"' devote substantial attention to the exploration of Quint's homosexual tendencies and the complex relationship between Quint and Miles.

⁸⁴ Palmer, 'The Colour of the Music', 107.

⁸⁵ Renata Skupin, 'Representations of the Orient in Western Music: Methods of Music Analysis in Theory and Practice', in *The Orient in Music – Music of the Orient*, edited by Małgorzata Grajter (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 4.

⁸⁶ Brett, 'Britten's Bad Boys Male Relations in *The Turn of the Screw*', 100.

Miles is not evident, as there is no indication that Britten's contemporaries were aware of these hidden meanings in the Latin text. Furthermore, they suggest that it would have been a risky move for Britten to incorporate homosexual elements into the opera, particularly during a period of heightened 'anti-homosexual' sentiment. They believe that doing so would have posed a significant risk to Britten's reputation and future career, especially in the social context of that time.⁸⁷

Exc. (a) Many Nouns in <i>is</i> we find to the Masculine assigned :	
amnis, axis, caulis, collis,	<i>river, axle, stalk, hill</i>
clūnis, crīnis, fascis, follis,	<i>hind-leg, hair, bundle, bellows</i>
fūstis, ignis, orbis, ōnsis,	<i>bludgeon, fire, orb, sword</i>
pānis, piscis, postis, mēnsis,	<i>bread, fish, post, month</i>
torris, unguis, and canālis,	<i>stake, nail, canal</i>
vectis, vermis, and nātālis,	<i>lever, worm, birthday</i>
sanguis, pulvis, cucumis,	<i>blood, dust, cucumber</i>
lapis, cassēs, Mānēs, glis.	<i>stone, nets, ghosts, dormouse</i>
(b) Chiefly Masculine we find, sometimes Feminine declined,	
callis, sentis, fūnis, finis,	<i>path, thorn, rope, end</i>
and in poets torquis, cinis.	<i>necklace, cinder</i>
(c) Masculine are most in <i>ex</i> :	
Feminine are forfex, lēx,	<i>shears, law</i>
nex, supellex : Common, pūmex,	<i>death, furniture, pumice</i>
imbrex, ōbex, silex, rumex.	<i>tile, bolt, flint, sorrel</i>

• As melos, *melody*; epos, *epic poem*.

Fig. 3.4 (a) Schoolboy Richard Kihl left materials from Kennedy's Shorter Latin Primer in 1954, which were then loaned to Britten. These nouns, marked by Britten, are sung by Miles in Act I Scene 6.⁸⁸

However, some scholars claim that the 'Malo' song depicts Miles's developing homosexual identity from both textual and musical perspectives. Brett states that this opera places an exploration of the modern construction of sexuality in a central position. Miles's 'Malo' song is based around:

[...] the obsessive tune, with triadic harp accompaniment and plaintive viola/cor anglais countermelody, [which] suggests very powerfully the abjection of the

⁸⁷ Benjamin Britten, Philip Reed, Mervyn Cooke and Donald Mitchell ed., *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976*, 209.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

boyish masturbator ... every rising melodic figure suggesting awakening knowledge is complemented by a downward turn epitomizing abjection.⁸⁹

The 'Malo' song is established in A^b, which is associated with Quint's 'note'. The first bar ends in E^b and the second bar ends in A^b, which could be understood in terms of E^b being the dominant of A^b; when Miles mentions 'apple tree' the note ends in E^b again (Ex. 3.4 (d)). Under the influence of the story of the golden apples in the Garden of Hesperides, the 'apple tree' is Eden's symbol for knowledge, immortality, temptation, the fall of man and sin. These symbols align perfectly with Miles's predicament in the opera.

⁸⁹ Brett, 'Britten's Bad Boys Male Relations in *The Turn of the Screw*', 94.

[51] Slowly moving (♩ = 60)
MILES (to himself, hesitating)

pp
Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo I would ra - ther be
Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo ich würd. lie - ber sein

Vla.
E.H.
pp

Harp

Miles
p
Ma - lo, Ma - lo in an ap - ple tree Ma - lo,
Ma - lo, Ma - lo in dem Ap - fel - baum Ma - lo,
Vla.
E.H.
pp *p*

Miles
Ma - lo, Ma - lo than a naugh - ty boy Ma - lo,
Ma - lo, Ma - lo als ein bö - ser Bub Ma - lo,
Vla.
E.H.
p *p*

[52]
GOVERNESS *p freely*
Why, Miles, what a fun - ny song!
Ach, Miles, was ein komisch' Lied!

Miles
Ma - lo in ad - ver - si - ty
Ma - lo in Ge - fahr al - lein
E.H.
p **[52]** Vla.

Ex. 3.4 (d) Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson', Miles's 'Malo' song.

Ultimately, the music concludes in A^b, signifying the conflict in the final scene and suggesting that A^b has come to exert a dominating influence over Miles, leading to his

demise at the opera's conclusion. The 'Malo' song thus encapsulates Miles's premature awareness, uncertainty, and ambivalence regarding his sexual identity. Notably, in the opera's last scene, the Governess's tone also shifts to A^b, implying a connection between her and Miles's death. I would argue that the 'Malo' song is not just meaningful but indicative of Miles's sexual awakening.

3.5 Sexuality in Productions

3.5.1 1954 The UK première production

The production emphasises 'innocence' and is a drama about lost innocence; yet the contemporary British critics appear to have purposefully avoided talking about sexuality in the opera or the novella; any allusions are evasive, for instance,

He [Miles] sings his long part naturally and clearly and slyly conveys himself as a problem child.⁹⁰

The London based music magazine, *The Score*, mentioned Miles's precociousness in 1954 based on the Venetian première,

There is the sixth scene, with the strange little song sung by Miles on 'Malo... malo', which opens frightening vistas on his precociousness, and on his capacity to go astray, to think and dream in a way which is far too deep for his age... In the second scene of the second act, which opens with the luminous sound of bells, one should note that last dialogue between the Governess and Miles, where his unnerving precociousness becomes clear as he sings a short song of Russian stamp, which is perfectly suited to the occasion.⁹¹

Contrary to the perception of British critics, it appears that Italian commentators had more outspoken reactions to the same production of the opera in Venice. Italian critics

⁹⁰ P. B., 'Boy of 12 Dominates New Opera', *The Star*, Oct 7, 1954.

⁹¹ *The Score* no.10 (December 1954), 75. Britten-Pears Arts Archive, accessed on 7 July 2021.

‘were openly appalled and affronted’ by the sexual indication in the opera.⁹² French critic Antoine Golea claimed that ‘it is evident that the composer’s customary intense preoccupations – with homosexual love and the futility of struggling against it – are equally manifest in this work’.⁹³

Even so, according to Basil Coleman, the director of the Premiere Production, the element of sexuality does not appear to have been overemphasised in the première production:

For me it’s not [...] important sexually [...] The actual need to love someone and to have love returned, I think, is very very strong and should be there; but other than that, no.⁹⁴

In the 1970s, after scholars determined that there was indeed a sexual element in Britten’s opera, new perspectives on sexuality were introduced in subsequent productions. After Britten’s death, critics and scholars gradually addressed his reluctance to discuss sexuality, as the social climate of the time became less sensitive and restrictive towards the discussion of sexuality. This change in attitude highlights the opera’s multifaceted nature, as it evolves over time. The following productions will demonstrate some different interpretations of this theme’s evolution.

3.5.2 1979 English National Opera production

Following the ENO’s debut of *The Turn of the Screw*, Harold David Rosenthal, the English music critic and editor of *Opera Magazine*, noted that,

With Eilene Hannan as a young, vulnerable Governess and Michael Ginn as a very knowing Miles (quite the most convincing I have ever seen), the sexual overtones

⁹² Harriet Boyd-Bennett, *Opera in Postwar Venice: Cultural Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2018, 28.

⁹³ The review was originally published in French by French music critic Antoine Golea in *L’Express* magazine. This English version can be found in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, by Patricia Howards, 137.

⁹⁴ Basil Coleman, interviewed by Donald Mitchell, First Draft in *Britten-Pears Arts Archive CLM/8/1/30*, October 29, 2000, 33.

of the piece emerged more clearly than ever before – there was also a sense of an incestuous relationship between brother and sister.⁹⁵

Rosenthal was not the only one to have perceived sexuality in Miller's production; in his review in *The Guardian*, Tom Sutcliffe suggested that Miles's words are sexually suggestive:

Never have Britten's children less served to be called The Innocents. When Miles asks, 'Now *chase* me', it's a sexual invitation. Likewise 'Tom was *beat*.' Dr Miller finds it's a Bergmanesque psycho-drama about incest rather than paedophilia.⁹⁶

The journalist and musicologist Stephen Walsh commented on 'the suggestive games and a malign streak in the children'.⁹⁷ Writing in *The Observer*, he noted that,

Miller makes it almost clear that he regards this [the suggestive games] as sexual, where Britten and Myfanwy Piper equivocate (Quint's temptations of Miles seem a very harmless assortment).⁹⁸

Miller confirmed this idea to some extent: the director suggested the precocity of the children in his interview with Michael Romain. Romain asked Miller how he responded to the Freudian elements of the opera, and Miller answered:

Not directly – only in so much as I acknowledged the idea of the unacknowledged sexual impulses that would bubble up to the surface in all sorts of ways in a child's imagination. But you can't avoid that – if you're a literate creature of the twentieth century, Freud implicitly determines your choices without you thinking 'I'm being Freudian.' Anyway, being Freudian for most people simply means phallic symbols and things like that – it's just sickening the way that Freud is misinterpreted today.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Harold Rosenthal, 'The Turn of the Screw', *Opera Magazine*.

⁹⁶ Tom Sutcliffe, 'The Turn of the Screw', *The Guardian*, Nov 8, 1979, 11, accessed Dec 5, 2022. <https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/turn-screw/docview/186142049/se-2>.

⁹⁷ Kate Bassett, *In Two Minds: A Biography of Jonathan Miller* (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 1114, (eBook conversion by CPI Group).

⁹⁸ Stephen Walsh, 'Giving two turns to the Screw', *The Observer*, 11 Nov 1979, accessed Dec 5, 2022. <https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/giving-two-turns-screw/docview/476563366/se-2>.

⁹⁹ Romain, *A Profile of Jonathan Miller*, 65.

Miller's *The Turn of the Screw* was not a flash in the pan, and the fact that this production still held the stage at least ten years after it was created is evidence of the enduring quality of his work. The ENO production has been recognised as one of ENO's most resilient achievements.¹⁰⁰ As a director, Miller seeks to establish a long-term relationship with the operas he directs,

with a capacity to last for, say, 15 years. That seems to me to be a sign of doing something of some importance... I think there are classic productions, that go on looking good, solid, convincing, inevitable - probably because they address something which is independent of fashion, which is some sort of permanent, accurate truth about the way we are. That's very unfashionable now - the idea of behavioural realism, psychological accuracy. But if you want a 'concept', those are the concepts which I value - getting it right, getting us right. That's the only interesting concept in the world, really.¹⁰¹

Sometimes the concept of 'getting it right' demands the courage to defy convention and fidelity. Miller did not view Miles as an evil, filthy, or sexually abused juvenile, but rather as a messenger between Miss Jessel and Quint, and he comments that 'Miles has probably just blundered into the attic and overhead sounds of intercourse, the snapping of suspenders, and been intrigued by these games of bottoms.'¹⁰² The tangibly physical 'love tug' between the Governess and Quint's ghost over Miles's body prompted Peter Pears to send a seven-page letter to Lord Harewood of complaint about Miller's production of the opera, that Benjamin would be turning in his grave.¹⁰³ Miller describes it as 'a Niagara of petulant, violent, contemptuous disagreement with the production. The vehemence with which it was written was to do with the fact that a nerve had been touched. We'd got to what the Screw was about'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Robert Benderson, 'The Turn of the Screw', review of 1979 ENO's *The Turn of the Screw*, *Opera Magazine*, 1 (1991): 458-60.

¹⁰¹ Mark Pappenheim, 'MUSIC/The Gastarbeiter', *The Independent*, Feb 12, 1993, accessed Dec 5, 2022. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/6b0df88f-1afb-4a6d-a03b-8d911f8e8541/?context=1519360&federationidp=KCFX2659464>.

¹⁰² Bassett, *In Two Minds: A Biography of Jonathan Miller*, 592.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Mark Pappenheim, 'A Few Screws Loose; Henry James's chilling "trap for the unwary", *The Turn of the Screw*, continues to bedevil its readers and adapters', *The Independent*, Feb

Even after decades, Miller's *The Turn of the Screw* remains a source of great interest;¹⁰⁵ it still stands out among the dazzling variety of *The Turn of the Screws*, and has paved the way for discussions about sexual intercourse, incest, and other sexually-related topics in later productions, inspiring a variety of interpretations in subsequent productions.

3.5.3 2005 BBC production

If Miller's interpretation was an unorthodox interpretation of Britten's opera, Katie Mitchell's later production went even further in her representation of sexuality. The sexuality in Mitchell's production of the opera differs from previous productions and scholarship concerning the possible homosexual relationship between Miles and Quint; rather, it uses a montage of filming techniques unavailable in stage performances to present the figure of Miles's mother, which metaphorically leads to Miles having an Oedipal complex, and the sexual repression of the Governess.

In Act I Scene 1, 'Welcome', the Governess is in the carriage heading to Bly, singing 'Who will greet me? The children...the children', and the scene shifts to Flora and Miles arriving at a gravestone with flowers in their hands. The Governess then sings 'poor babies, no father, no mother', and the scene shifts to Miles laying flowers on the headstone. The scene returns to the Governess singing 'If things go wrong, what shall I do?' and again to Miles looking at the gravestone with longing, while Flora displays her rational and restrained behaviour compared to Miles. If this scene shows Miles' nostalgia for the deceased, Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson', reveals who the deceased is and why Miles is so attached.

15, 1994, 24, accessed Dec 5, 2022. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/b27cdda3-87a0-49e8-8ffd-14023fa0b1c2/?context=1519360&federationidp=KCFX2659464>.

¹⁰⁵ Claire Seymour called Jonathan Miller's 1979 ENO production 'incestuous psychodrama' in 'Atmosphere and Tension in Glyndebourne Touring's *The Turn of the Screw*', *Seen and Heard International*, Nov 11, 2014, accessed Dec 30, 2022, <https://seenandheard-international.com/2014/11/atmosphere-and-tension-in-glyndebourne-tourings-turn-of-the-screw/>.

When Miles sings the ‘Malo’ song in ‘The Lesson’, he holds a pile of horse chestnuts in his hand, and there is a flashback to himself in a tree playing his toy drum. Miles then picks up a hare’s skull and fiddles with it before putting it down and picking up a crow’s egg. There is another flashback, as if suggesting he imagines he is in a tree passing the egg to a man, who then crushes it in his hand, the sap dripping out through the gap in his hand like semen from a masturbation session (Fig. 3.5.3 (a)), then Miles panics and runs away, with the man hunting him confidently without hurrying. Although the man does not reveal his face, it is possible to identify him as Quint based on his attire and filthy hands. When the Governess asks if the Malo song was taught by her, he sings sadly and lingeringly, ‘No, I found it, I like it, do you?’

There are multiple Miles-related messages to decipher in the ‘Malo’ song, including the horse chestnut, the hare’s skull, the crow’s egg, and the egg’s sap. I would suggest they can be interpreted as follows, which further identifies Miles’s precocity and Oedipal complex, as well as Quint’s sexual abuse of Miles: The horse chestnut symbolises something that appears to be edible but is actually poisonous, similar to Adam and Eve’s forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden; the hare’s skull suggests that Miles is the prey of Quint’s hunting chase; the crow’s egg symbolises Miles’s curiosity about new things; and the instantaneous ooze of the bird’s egg crushed by Quint suggests the moment of ejaculation.



Fig. 3.5.3 (a) Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson', Quint's hand. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

After Act 1 Scene 6, 'The Lesson', in Variation 6, Flora kneels on the bed edge, handing Miles a photograph of his mother. Miles then looks at the photograph as he recalls or imagines his time with his mother, and Flora leaves Miles alone in his bed. Miles holds a picture of his mother next to his head and plays with a crow's egg melancholically between his two hands under his belly as he recalls their time together, indicating that this is a masturbating gesture and Miles's mother is his fantasy.



Fig. 3.5.3 (b) Variation VI, Miles. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.



Fig. 3.5.3 (c) Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson', Miles and his mother (Liz Kettle). Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

In Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', with Quint's musical theme, Quint dreamily calls out to the sleeping Miles, and the image shows a dream of Miles in a small, dark room (a room that is later associated with Quint and Miss Jessel having sex), and then we see images of Miles fleeing in panic. This implies that Quint was sexually abusive towards Miles. Quint's hand appears on the corner of the table where the hare's skull is placed, followed by his hand slowly stroking the sleeping Miles's head, rubbing it gently as the mood of the music becomes enticing. Miles responds to Quint's call and follows his lead to the roof, walking calmly towards the eaves as if ready to jump, when the Governess spots him and grabs him, horrifiedly asking, 'Miles, what are you doing here?' Miles calmly responds, 'You see, I am bad, I am bad, aren't I?' Then the image shifts to Miles's mother's reflection in the water. The music here is derived from the interval relationship of the fourths in the 'Malo' song, and is accompanied by the arpeggio of the harp (Ex. 3.5.3 (a)), resulting in a beautiful, dreamy, and yearning atmosphere that feels in no way 'bad'.

Ex. 3.5.3 (a) Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'.

Miles's Oedipus complex is arguably evident in Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom': Miles's back is reflected in the bedroom mirror, in front of which symbols of the forbidden fruit, the horse chestnut, and the bird's egg are displayed, and Miles sits absentmindedly playing with his toys on the edge of the bed; a flashback suggests that he is imagining himself handing the bird's egg to Quint and the egg oozing out of his hand. Subsequently, he suddenly pulls the photograph of his mother out of the bed,

accompanied by an English horn variation on the 'Malo' theme. As the orchestra reaches the climax of the variation, Miles appears overcome with emotion and abruptly sings 'Malo, Malo, Malo than a naughty boy', at which Miles and his mother are depicted playing together with a gleeful smile (Ex. 3.5.3 (b)). Soon the music descends from its climax; Miles appears despondent and is shown placing flowers on the grave of his mother. After he is interrupted by a knock at the door, as the 'Screw' theme plays and the Governess enters, Miles quickly conceals the picture with a cold expression on his face.

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system, labeled '70 MILES', shows Miles singing 'Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo than a' with piano accompaniment. The second system shows Miles singing 'naugh - ty boy...' with piano accompaniment. The third system shows Miles singing 'Ma - lo in...' with piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamic markings like *mf*, *p*, *dim.*, and *pp*.

70 MILES

Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo than a

Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo als ein

The Governess is seen approaching the room.
Die Gouvernante wird näher kommend sichtbar.

Miles

naugh - ty boy...
bö - ser Bub...

dim.

Miles

Ma - lo in...
Ma - lo in...

pp

Ex. 3.5.3 (b) Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom'.

The Governess has bad news for Miles: she has written a letter to the Guardian. Miles is curious and daunted about the letter's contents, and he later steals and burns it; in the final scene, when the Governess asks him why he stole her letter, he blurts out, 'To see what you said about us'. The reference to 'us' in Britten's score and numerous productions refers to the relationship between Miles and Quint; while in Mitchell's production, this 'us' may refer to Miles and his mother. Based on Miles's appearance in Variation VI, Flora touches Miles's forehead after she hands him the photograph of his mother (Fig. 3.5.3 (d)), then in Act II Scene 4, the Governess touches Miles's head as well, before the Governess hands him the letter (Fig. 3.5.3 (e)).



Fig. 3.5.3 (d) Variation VI, Miles holds a photo. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.



Fig. 3.5.3 (e) Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom', Miles holds a letter. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

In this way, Miles's shouting 'Peter Quint, You Devil!' at Quint in the final scene and his death are imbued with another possibility: guided by Quint, the endless thoughts of his mother become the object of a precocious boy's erroneous masturbatory fantasy. Miles is aware that this is wrong, and his rationality and sensibility struggle between the 'Malo' song, 'I am bad' and 'the naughty boy'. However with Quint's repeated coaxing, Miles makes repeated mistakes, and he eventually concludes that being discovered by the Governess is unacceptable. Quint's sexual abuse of Miles suggested in the film is presumably to blame for his precocity and Oedipal complex. The exposure of Miles's sexuality, the death of his morality, and the release of his soul results in his death.

In addition to Miles, Mitchell's production depicts the Governess's sexual repression, and Quint and Jessel's relationship. In Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', Quint and Miss Jessel alternately sing 'the ceremony of innocence is drawn' in a darkened room while Quint unzips Jessel's dress and touches her breasts Fig. 3.5.3 (f), and further sexual activity between them is implied. Prior to this scene, the imagery depicts the Governess entering alone into the room where Quint and Miss Jessel had intercourse, seeing the old belongings they left behind. This suggests that the Governess seems to understand what transpired between Quint and Miss Jessel. When the scene reaches the soliloquy, Quint's hands have undone the Governess's dress while she slept Fig. 3.5.3 (g). The music moves up and down at a rapid speed, and the Governess's voice can be heard that 'lost in my labyrinth, I see no truth, no truth', describing her throbbing anxiety and release in sleep.

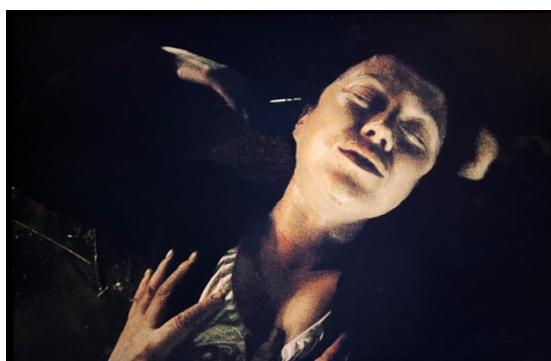


Fig. 3.5.3 (f) Variation VIII, Miss Jessel. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.



Fig. 3.5.3 (g) Variation VII, the Governess. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

3.5.4 2011 Glyndebourne Production

The relationship between Quint and Miles in the Glyndebourne production has been widely discussed by critics, who have noted their strong bond and bold interaction that possibly reveals sexual overtones. Richard Fairman, the critic of *The Financial Times*, remarks upon the 2011 revival that,

[T]he bathing of the boy Miles and the later scene in his bedroom lift the veil from the story's sexual undercurrents to the point where the opera starts to become quite uncomfortable viewing.³⁶³

Martin Kettle, the British journalist and author, shares a similar viewpoint to Fairman that,

This [production] is a much more sexual production than many of its more traditionally enigmatic predecessors. The ghosts, if ghosts they are, get much closer to the children than Britten would have dared to allow. Miss Jessel clammers onto Flora's bed, while Peter Quint supervises Miles's bathtime.³⁶⁴

The association between the ghosts and children in the Glyndebourne production is extremely powerful, yet in a negative way, especially between Quint and Miles. Quint and Miss Jessel's behaviour inevitably involve child maltreatment including at a sexual level, physical level, and psychological level. The sexual molestation will be examined here as this chapter focuses on sexuality. The 'hand' gesture, to be explained shortly, is the magic catalyst between Quint and Miles, and reveals Quint's paedophilia and Miles's sexual precocity. In comparison to Quint and Miles, the intense relationship between Miss Jessel and Flora is less overtly sexual, even if child maltreatment and precocity are likely to be present.

The staging reveals how the children are maltreated and precocious. In Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson', Miles stands in the centre of the stage, in front of the enormous, moving glass prop. Miles recites the Latin words he has learnt that greatly appeal to the Governess; Flora interrupts to attract the attention of the Governess. Flora asks the Governess to do history rather than Miles's Latin but the Governess ignores her. In

³⁶³ Richard Fairman, 'The Turn of the Screw, Glyndebourne, Sussex, UK', *Financial Time*, August 15, 2011, accessed September 22, 2022, <https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/b28164af-f7be-4ddd-974a-ccdfb92dbe6b/?context=1519360&federationidp=KCFX2659464>.

³⁶⁴ Martin Kettle, 'Saturday Reviews: Review: Opera: The Turn of the Screw Glyndebourne Festival 4/5', *The Guardian*, August 13, 2011, accessed September 22, 2022, <https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/b87c3a74-28b1-4279-8e2d-aa0f49b604ad/?context=1519360&federationidp=KCFX2659464>.

response to the Governess's request for 'more Latin', Miles sorrowfully sings the 'Malo' song soon afterwards.

The exotic element in the music of 'Malo' has been discussed in the previous section 5.4.2, however, in the Glyndebourne production the sexual implication is addressed on stage. In this scene there is a painting on the wall with a recognisable big handprint in red, and Miles slowly raises his right hand to overlap the red handprint. Under the red handprint is another painting of four people holding hands on the grass, with a boy and a girl standing in the centre and a woman and a man standing on either side. The woman wears a long black gown, and the man wears a black suit and tie.

Whose big handprint is it and what does it signify? Who are the adults depicted in the painting? The doubts that Miles sows in the minds of the audience are dispelled very soon. Miles continues to sing 'Malo' melancholically, looking at his right hand and gently touching it with his left hand. The music is in A^b major with a pause on A^b (rehearsal number 51), which is Quint's symbol note, as discussed in the previous section. The Governess is flustered and anxious, and she asks Miles why he sings this song. Miles replies to the Governess, 'I found it, I like it. Do you?' with an inscrutable face, still singing while slowly approaching the Governess. Miles pauses in front of the Governess after finishing his song; he puts his hands on the desk and leans forward, staring straight into the Governess's eyes as the viola and cor anglais lines move up and down. Then the cor anglais goes from *pianissimo* to *forte* and back to *pianissimo* (rehearsal number 53), while Miles tries to touch the Governess's face and raises his right hand but then withdraws it. Miles's behaviour comes across as overly mature: it seems like a man to a woman rather than a ten-year-old boy should be like to his Governess. Apparently, Miles is not as innocent as in the Governess's eyes.

It is time to review the questions regarding the large handprint and the adults depicted in paintings. Quint is primarily responsible for the symbolism of the red handprint in the painting as he frequently makes a hand gesture, revealing something that happens between Miles and him. The four figures in the painting are, from left to

right, Miss Jessel, Miles, Flora, and Quint. The painting depicts Quint and Miss Jessel wearing identical costumes to those they wear on stage. And throughout the opera, the ‘handprint’ serves as the symbol of the bond between Miles and Quint in the Glyndebourne production.

After the failure of attracting attention from the Governess, as instructed in the score, Flora throws down the doll in anger and shouts out towards the Governess, ‘look at me!’³⁶⁵ The score indicates a frisky Flora with a high-pitched voice (Ex. 3.5.4 (a)), yet, the director portrays Flora in this staging as aggressive and short-tempered rather than the opera’s and the novella’s depiction of her as an aristocratic child.

Ex. 3.5.4 (a) Act I Scene 6, ‘The Lesson’.

The Governess stops Flora’s unfinished line, then turns to Miles. Flora desolately picks up the doll and silently moves further way from the Governess and Miles.³⁶⁶ Therefore,

³⁶⁵ Act I Scene 6, ‘The Lesson’,

³⁶⁶ Before Flora moves further, the Governess sits on her chair and slightly to the right, while Flora is obstructed by a mini house prop and plays with her doll on the left side, where is close to the stage edge and far away from the Governess.

it is reasonable to deduce from the way Flora is prevented from expressing her emotions by the Governess that it may not have been the first time that Flora has been emotionally neglected. Furthermore, Flora's bad temper and aggressive behaviour may be caused by long-term emotional neglect.

Therefore, Flora may be more vulnerable to manipulation by Miss Jessel in this production, as she is short of love from a mother figure. After Flora saying 'go to sleep' to her doll in Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake', Flora feels something and approaches the 'Dead Sea'. Then Miss Jessel struggles to climb out of the 'Dead Sea' while Flora turns to the audience sluggishly, accompanied by Miss Jessel's musical theme. The seemingly hypnotised behaviour of Flora hints at a connection between Flora and Miss Jessel in the subsequent scene.

Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', can be described as one of the extraordinary scenes of the Glyndebourne production, which is bold about the relationship between the ghosts and the children. Furthermore, it is explicit about Quint's paedophilia and Miles's precocity, Miss Jessel's emotional abuse behaviour (up to this point) and the maltreated Flora.

The stage is divided into left and right sections, with the left half representing a bathroom and the right half representing the outside, separated by operable exterior doors. As Quint calls out to Miles, his shadow appears outside the bathroom door and also at the back of the stage, accompanied by his musical motif. Miles peeks out of the bath to respond, 'I'm here, I'm here'. While the door of the bathroom is opened, Quint rushes in and opens his arms and hands wide, approaching Miles very quickly, with exaggerated gestures and facial expression, and a loud voice that may be terrifying and unsettling to the audience; yet Miles looks at Quint calmly. Then, Quint picks up the bath towel and walks to the bath while gesturing for Miles to rise. Miles, nearly naked, stands up naturally. Quint rapidly wraps Miles up in a towel, taps his index finger on Miles's nose, and carries Miles out of the tub; Miles smiles and wraps his arms around Quint without any sign of unfamiliarity.

The interaction between Quint and Miles is characterised by a sexual underflow and reveals the erotic attraction that lies dormant in the relationship between servant and master. Richard Morrison, an English music critic, claims that it is more reminiscent of a quasi-father's love than a pervert's desires,³⁶⁷ but the staging of the subsequent scenes throws his opinion into doubt.

Miles is captivated by Quint's soft, persistent words and enticing gestures, and follows Quint's steps towards the exterior portal, opening his arms and hands likewise and responding with 'I'm listening, I'm here' melancholically to Quint's soft call with Quint's musical theme. The reinforcement of Quint's persuasive call with his longing face and stretched limbs tempts Miles to approach Quint's embrace directly. Quint continues to persuade Miles by emphasising the note E^b and asking, 'what goes on in your dreams? Keep silent – I know and answer that too'.³⁶⁸ Quint is elated with the success of his seduction after Miles responds to him on E^b, and he strokes Miles's hair with an erotogenic smile (Fig. 3.5.4 (a)). The interactions between Quint and Miles reveal both Quint's ability to manipulate and his paedophilia, as well as Miles's sexual precocity, as a result of their sexual attraction, rather than a father's love for a child.



³⁶⁷ Richard Morrison, 'The Turn of the Screw at Glyndebourne', *The Times*, August 13, 2011, accessed by October 3, 2022, <https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/bcd4bc47-e856-4b3a-9496-8a3de2daa1eb/?context=1519360&federationidp=KCFX2659464>.

³⁶⁸ Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'.

Fig. 3.5.4 (a) Glyndebourne Opera production, Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Miles, and Peter Quint. Photographer: Alastair Muire. Source: Glyndebourne Opera.

When Miles opens the door to the outside world, like opening a Pandora's box, the barrier in front of Miss Jessel into the ghosts' territory vanishes simultaneously. Miss Jessel, a resentful pregnant woman who was despised and humiliated by Quint, gradually enters the spotlight, rather than remaining 'unseen', as stated in Britten's score. With a lamenting call to Flora from outside the bathroom, her musical theme develops and persists (Ex. 3.5.4 (b)).

79 MISS JESSEL (unseen) (unsichtbar) *pp*
 Flo - ra! Flo - ra!
 Quint *pp*
 Miles! Miles!
pp Gong
 Miss J. (unseen) Flo - ra, Flo - ra! Flo - ra!
 Quint Flo - ra, Flo - ra! *pp*
 Miles! Miles!
ppp *(pp)*
 B. & H. 18043

Ex. 3.5.4 (b) Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'.

Flora raises her head from the bathroom sink, her hair wet just like Miss Jessel's, and responds to Miss Jessel on Ab with 'I'm here, oh I'm here' to the tune of Miss Jessel's theme. Miss Jessel then permits her agony to be shared with Flora, thereby

strengthening their bonds and attempting to differentiate their relationship from that of Quint and Miles.

Their dreams and ours can never be one,
They will forsake us, forsake us,
O come, come to me, come!
[...]
Their knowledge and ours can never be one.
They will despise us, despise us,
O come, come to me, come!³⁶⁹

Flora's and Miss Jessel's hands meet with the glass of the window between them, mirroring Miles's overlapping Quint's handprint in Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson'. Then the ghosts call the children:

Quint: I shall be there! You must not fail!
Miss Jessel: You must not fail! I shall be there!

The children respond:

Miles: Yes, I shall be there, I shall never fail, never fail!
Flora: I shall never fail, yes, I shall be there, shall be there!³⁷⁰

This scene ends with Quint's musical theme and the 'Screw' theme, while Miss Jessel and Flora reach out their arms and hands to each other, and Quint stands behind Miles and both reach forwards, revealing the bonds are tightening between the ghosts and the children (Fig 3.5.4 (b)).

³⁶⁹ Miss Jessel, Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'.

³⁷⁰ Peter Quint, Miss Jessel, Miles, and Flora, Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'.



Fig. 3.5.4 (b) Glyndebourne Opera production, Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'. Flora, Miss Jessel, Miles, and Quint. Photographer: Alastair Muire. Source: Glyndebourne Opera.

Miles demonstrates precocity in the following two scenes when alone with the Governess. In Act II Scene 2, 'The Bells', Miles displays a hostile attitude towards the Governess, singing 'You trust me, my dear, but you think and think of us', and challenges that, 'and of the others', and then provokes the Governess with the question, 'does my uncle think what you think?' He takes a step forward and holds the Governess's hands with his two hands and stares at the Governess with his bottomless eyes, the same stare as in Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson'. Apparently, Miles's behaviour is beyond a 10-year-old boy, and he seems to know everything, and walks away confidently, while the Governess freezes in place. In Act I Scene 4, 'The Bedroom', between the gap of singing the 'Malo' song, Miles flies to the window and looks out through it to where Quint appears very soon; he sings 'Malo' again, revealing his waiting for Quint. Yet, Quint's appearance on stage is not mentioned in Britten's score. The Governess's coming disrupts Miles's singing; she asks what queer life Miles is thinking of in his head, and kneels beside Miles's bed. The harp plays chords B-D-E and D-E-A by turns in D^b major, creating an indecisive and peculiar atmosphere; Miles gets back into his bed in a melancholy manner, adjusting the Governess's hair like an

adult while responding to the Governess that ‘My dear, you know. You’re always watching, watching, watching’. Miles’s behaviours show permissiveness of manner to the Governess, indicating that he is afflicted by corruption from Quint, who is ‘free with everyone’.³⁷¹

Quint and Miss Jessel are manipulators: Quint displays the character of paedophilia even though potentially not involving actual sexual intercourse. Miss Jessel exposes the sexual offending tendency as well, yet the fundamental root is not as same as Quint. Miles and Flora’s precocious behaviour reflects the abuse they endured from Quint and Miss Jessel, serving as a manifestation of their trauma.

3.5.5 2019 Garsington Opera

The Garsington Opera production, set in the Victorian era of the 19th century, maintains a tone and character demeanour that aligns with the decorum and restraint typical of the period. In this version, the theme of ‘love’ is woven throughout the opera. This focus on love rather than explicit sexuality aligns with the Victorian era’s values, where love was often idealised and romanticised, while overt expressions of sexuality were typically subdued or unacknowledged due to social norms.

In both Henry James’s novella and the opera by Benjamin Britten and Myfanwy Piper, ‘love’ is depicted in various forms, ranging from the complex and potentially forbidden love represented by the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel to the Governess’s nurturing love for the children, and her romantic feelings towards the children’s guardian. Muller’s production places a particular emphasis on the Governess’s affection for the Guardian and Quint’s affection for Miles, while steering clear of overtly sexual elements.

In the Prologue, a directorial choice is made where the character traditionally serving solely as the narrator of the story is given dual roles: that of the narrator and the Guardian. Simultaneously, the Governess is positioned on the stage during this

³⁷¹ Act I Scene 5, ‘The Window’.

narration. This setup allows for an interaction between the narrator and the Governess, which reveals their relationship to the audience.

As the narrator introduces the Governess's character as 'untried, innocent, she had gone first to see their guardian in London', the Governess makes her entrance. When the narrator describes the guardian's traits, he takes on the guardian's persona, 'a young man, bold, offhand, and gay, the children's only relative'. This is followed by a piano sequence, characterised by a romantic yet melancholic arpeggio pattern, which leads into the meeting between the Governess and the Guardian. This musical interlude seems to set the tone for their encounter, suggesting that it is destined to be a romantic yet sorrowful experience for the Governess (Ex. 3.5.5 (a)).

Prologue

Un-ried, in-no-cent, she had gone first to see their guar-dian in Lon don; a young man, bold, off-hand
 Unerfahr'n, ahnungslos, besuchte sie erst ein-mal den Vor-mund in Lon-den: ein Welt-mann, jung, ge-wandt

Piano

mf cresc.

and gay, The chil-dren's on-ly rel-a-tive.
 und froh, der Kin-der einz-ger Verwand-ter.

f p

Red. *

The Die

Ex. 3.5.5 (a) Act I, 'Prologue'.

After the Guardian finishes explaining the situation at Bly and a governess's duties, he approaches her and sings 'and do her best'. He then tenderly strokes the Governess's cheek, prompting her to react with quickened breath. Her eyes sparkle as she intensely gazes at the Guardian, her expression a mix of shyness and infatuation. Subsequently, she lowers her head and shyly averts her gaze, yet soon after, she seems to relish the

moment, delicately touching her own cheek where the Guardian had caressed her (Fig. 3.5.5 (a)).



Fig. 3.5.5 (a) Garsington Opera production, Act I, The Prologue, the Governess. Photo by: John Snelling. Image provided by Garsington Opera.

The narrator's further explanations, combined with the Governess's reactions, reveal her initial confusion about her responsibilities at Bly. However, the thought that the guardian – 'so gallant and handsome, so deep in the busy world' – should need her help evokes a shy yet deeply affectionate response from her. She steals glances at the Guardian with a coy and enamoured expression, gently touching her cheek once more. Coming back to reality, she takes a deep breath, as if solidifying her inner decision. Accompanied by the screw motif and the narrator's words, 'at last, I will, she said', the Governess nods firmly, indicating her resolve. This conveys the Governess's internal struggle and eventual commitment to the role at Bly, highlighting the complexities of her motivations and her emotional attachment to the Guardian.

By embodying the narrator as the Guardian, the Prologue transcends its role as a mere narrative introduction; it becomes a depiction of the intricate bond between the Governess and the Guardian, setting the stage for the unfolding drama. This interaction hints at the backstory and the emotional undercurrents that drive the Governess's actions and decisions throughout the opera.

In Act I Scene 5, 'The Tower', the Governess wanders alone, reflecting on the beauty of life at Bly and feeling completely adapted and integrated into her surroundings. However, the sustained tremolo in the strings creates an atmosphere of unease and tension, as she recalls unsettling incidents at Bly, such as 'when I heard a far off cry in the night and once a faint footstep pass'd my door'. Just as this sense of disquiet begins to spread, it is abruptly interrupted by strong yet swiftly softening notes in the harp and string section, suggesting a force that halts this unease. The Governess sings, 'Only one thing I wish. That I could see him. And that he could see how well I do his bidding'. She performs this line tenderly and emotionally, her eyes revealing admiration and affection. Leaning against a stone pillar, she closes her eyes in rapture, gently touching her cheek, mirroring the way the Guardian had caressed her face in the Prologue.

This scene captures the Governess's deepening attachment to the Guardian and her longing for his approval and presence. Her actions and the accompanying music together reflect her inner turmoil – a mix of contentment with her role at Bly and a growing sense of isolation and yearning for the Guardian's attention. Her romantic feelings towards the Guardian seem to overshadow her awareness of the eerie events unfolding around her. This lack of attention to the mysterious happenings at Bly sets the stage for her deeper involvement with the ghost.

In Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell', the Governess, taking a moment before they enter the church to play, confides in Mrs Grose that the children are now with the ghosts. Following this, Mrs Grose ushers the children to the church, leaving the Governess still immersed in her own fearful emotions. Miles then returns to have a conversation with

the Governess, but the talk does not go smoothly. When Miles asks when he can return to school, the Governess does not give a direct answer, instead expressing her trust in him. However, Miles appears to sense the Governess's underlying doubts about him and Flora, leading to his exasperation. Shaking his head, he stands up and walks away from the Governess, remarking, 'You trust me, my dear, but you think, and think, of us, and of the others'. He then raises his head and asks, 'does my uncle think what you think?' before approaching the Governess and touching her cheek in a manner reminiscent of the Guardian's earlier gesture (Fig. 3.5.5 (b)). This action startles the Governess, who quickly retreats, while Miles, unfazed, walks away, leaving her in a state of shock and disbelief.



Fig. 3.5.5 (b) Garsington Opera production, Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell', The Governess and Miles. Photo by: John Snelling. Image provided by Garsington Opera.

This scene portrays the Governess's internal conflict and fear. She feels an overwhelming responsibility to protect the children from supernatural influences. At

the same time, her feelings for the Guardian, discerned by Miles, symbolise a confrontational and provocative stance from Miles. It shows how the Governess's growing emotional attachment to the Guardian is drawing her deeper into the eerie and perplexing situation at Bly. Her increasing isolation and the widening rift between her and the children are depicted. Consequently, the Governess experiences a sense of despair, feeling an urge to escape the complexities and challenges she faces at Bly.

Upon witnessing Miss Jessel's apparition in her room, the Governess realises that she cannot leave Bly, as she still holds a sense of duty towards the responsibilities entrusted to her by the Guardian. Caught between terror and despair, she ultimately decides to write a letter to the Guardian, hoping for a meeting to inform him about the events at Bly. The process of writing the letter is accompanied by a significant shift in the musical tone, with the harp playing tenderly in the background, mirroring her gentle approach to writing this crucial message. The stage lighting changes from the starkness of her confrontation with Miss Jessel to a warm, sunlit ambience, symbolising the Guardian as a pillar of support in her life at Bly, a beacon of light offering her warmth. However, her expression is tinged with sadness, as this letter signifies a breach of her promise to the Guardian, a deviation from the commitment she had solemnly made.

The Governess's decision to write to the Guardian encapsulates her internal conflict between personal emotions and professional duties. She hopes the Guardian will intervene to save Bly from the supernatural forces preying on the children. Yet, she is simultaneously burdened by the fear of disappointing him, having deviated from his instructions. However, this act also presents a possibility of reuniting with the Guardian, whom she longs for. This conflict reaches its climax with the writing of the letter, which signifies a potential redemption for the children but may lead to the Guardian's disappointment to her. Until a response is received, she faces the daunting prospect of confronting Bly's challenges alone.

In Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', the Governess learns that Miles has intercepted her letter to the Guardian. Interestingly, this revelation does not incite anger in the Governess;

instead, she appears relieved. Perhaps she interprets Miles's admission of taking the letter as an opening to connect with him on a deeper level. This interaction rekindles her hope of breaking through to Miles, compelling him to acknowledge Quint's influence. She sees this as an opportunity to save Miles through her efforts, thereby fulfilling her promise to the Guardian without disturbing him, perceiving this as a chance to demonstrate her unwavering commitment to the Guardian's trust. Her belief is that resolving the situation with Miles will restore peace at Bly, ensuring the Guardian's continued gratitude for her dedication. This would allow her love for the Guardian to persist unchallenged, maintaining the delicate balance between her professional responsibilities and her personal desires.

Therefore, when Miles utters 'Peter Quint, you devil!', the Governess, feeling a burden lifted, joyfully embraces him, proclaiming 'Miles, you are saved'. However, her world collapses when she realises that Miles has died in her arms. Overcome with grief, she weeps uncontrollably, and then, in a state of shock, stands motionless and expressionless. She surveys her surroundings before leaving the stage in a daze. This scene symbolises not only the failure of her professional duties but also the disintegration of her personal emotions. She has let down the Guardian, whose expectations she could not meet. The children she loved have left her, and the deep-seated affection she harboured at Bly, crumbles with her mission's failure. In this tragic moment, the Governess loses everything.

The Garsington production embodies the spirit of the nineteenth-century Victorian era, capturing the tone and character behaviour reflecting the decorum and restraint of that period. This production integrates the theme of 'love', reflecting the era's tendency to idealise and romanticise love while keeping expressions of sexuality subdued, in line with social norms. From the forbidden connection between the ghosts Quint and Miss Jessel, to the Governess's nurturing affection for the children and her unrequited love for the Guardian, this production highlights the Governess's fondness for the Guardian and Quint's affection for Miles, steering clear of explicit sexual content.

3.5.6 2020 Opera North Production

The story thrives on ambiguity, yet in this production, Talevi and the creative team do provide hints and suggest possible interpretations. Talevi claims:

I try not to be too direct about it, because there is definitely an element of sexual tension between Miles and Quint, and also between Miles and the Governess, or more precisely, the Governess's feelings towards Miles, as if she's projecting her feelings for his guardian onto him. However, I think one of the key responsibilities of a director in this production is to avoid making concepts too obvious. You can't be too straightforward, because the moment you do that, and you start defining things explicitly, the story loses its power. The power of the story lies in its ambiguity and double meanings.³⁷²

Despite Talevi's claim of not portraying sexual elements in character relationships on stage too directly, critics appear to have received things differently. In 'Opera North Deliver a chilling *Turn of the Screw*', David Truslove argues that the visible pregnant ghost of Miss Jessel appears to have lesbian eyes for the Governess due to the presence of sexual themes in Talevi's work, as evidenced not only by the bed that dominates the stage, but also by the interactions of the cast.³⁷³ According to Kennedy, writing in *Opera Magazine*, Talevi is particularly direct when the children are with the ghosts: Flora makes the puppets of Quint and Miss Jessel copulate, and she erotically kisses the puppet of Miss Jessel when she plays with this puppet; Miles kisses and hints at the Governess going to bed with him; Miles and Flora dress as Quint and Miss Jessel, and they play games that are inappropriate for their age.³⁷⁴

The costume designer Madeleine Boyd's personal view contrasts with Kennedy's perception that Flora riding on Miles's back on stage has sexual connotations:

³⁷² Talevi, interview.

³⁷³ David Truslove, 'Opera North Deliver a chilling *Turn of the Screw*', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, *Opera Today*, February 2020.

https://operatoday.com/2020/02/opera_north_deliver_a_chilling_turn_of_the_screw/.

³⁷⁴ Michael Kennedy, 'The Turn of the Screw', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, *Opera Magazine*, December 2010, 1536-7.

I think it only suggests sexuality for those who are sexually aware. Flora rides on Miles because she is playing horse. What the audience projects onto that makes them culpable for interpreting it sexually, and the same goes for the Governess's interpretation.³⁷⁵

Regarding this, Boyd believes that the director's ambiguous design concept perhaps places the responsibility on the audience to interpret whether the children's actions between themselves on stage carry sexual connotations:

I think what our production does is make the audience culpable, and that's what we wanted. What Miles and Flora do is simply play, as children do. They explore things and often perform actions that, to an adult eye, might have connotations of sexuality or remind us of a sexual act, but not to children. By staging something with real ambiguity, where the play could be interpreted completely innocently, it makes the audience culpable because we see things that are not so innocent. The children themselves don't do anything wrong. So, I think sexuality plays a role only insofar as any sexual awareness in the audience will inform their interpretation of what Flora and Miles are experiencing.³⁷⁶

Boyd defends the innocence of the interactions between Miles and Flora, suggesting that children are inherently pure. However, she also acknowledges that for child actors to portray characters who have been harmed is challenging and requires utmost caution,³⁷⁷ implying that the child characters in the opera have been subjected to harm by adults. Talevi mentioned that, when the wooden horse moves on its own, it suggests that it is almost like a symbol of ghosts. Quint talks about the riderless horse, which may be one of the games that Quint plays with Miles as we can understand later. This can be viewed as one of the symbols of the relationship with Quint.³⁷⁸

After the Governess falls asleep, the Quint theme is played on celesta and with gong, followed by the 'Screw' theme on horn in Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'. The voice of Quint's call to Miles is soft and ethereal. Miles sneaks into the room to ensure the

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Boyd, interview.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., '[The child playing Miles] is obviously a child who isn't traumatized and hasn't seen too much. So asking a child to play a damaged child is quite a tall order and must be done really sensitively and carefully'.

³⁷⁸ Talevi, interview.

Governess is asleep, and when he hears Quint calling his name, he looks out through the window. Miles checks on the Governess once more whilst climbing on top of a chest on the right-hand side of the stage. Miles stands still toward the exterior, places his hand halfway up to the window, and responds to Quint, 'I'm here, oh I'm here'.

It is reasonable to conclude that Quint's seduction of Miles is successful: Miles expresses his interest when Quint says, 'I am King Midas with gold in his hand' by responding 'gold, oh yes gold!' on E^b and sliding downwards musically, forming a line that is partially related to Quint's theme. In the same way, Quint sings, 'In me secrets, half-formed desires meet'. Quint expresses here his fall into sin and desire. Surprisingly, Miles responds to Quint again with 'Secrets, o secrets!' on E^b and then slides down further than the previous time, as if they have reached an agreement.

The unhealthy gesture that follows next is the result of Quint's corruption of Miles. Miles slowly undoes his buttons, then removes his sleepwear and drops it onto the floor. This leads to the startling musical and dramatic climax between Quint and Miles: Quint and Miles open their arms and wave them up and down almost simultaneously – Quint's action is slightly ahead of Miles's, which can be interpreted as Quint leading Miles to do the flying gesture (Fig. 3.5.6 (a)). And Quint expresses without reservation his feelings in the line 'the long sighing flight of the night-wing'd bird' starting on A^b and concluding on E^b. Then, Quint urgently sings his exotic theme to Miles once more, and Miles responds repeatedly.

Everything Quint sings is intended to lure the young child Miles; in fact, the aria begins with a bold melisma of 'Miles! Miles! Miles! Miles!' As Daniel Albright argues, this aria, like the vast majority of operatic arias, is purposeful and determined due to the intensity of his voice.³⁷⁹ Through Quint's aria to Miles in this scene, it is evident that their emotions have shifted several times between Quint's 'desire-evil' and Miles' 'expect-escape' extremes. In the production, the change in mood between Quint and

³⁷⁹ Daniel Albright, *Music's Monisms: Disarticulating Modernism* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 130.

Miles actually resolves towards unity of purpose, as opposed to swinging from one extreme to the other. As a result, Act I, Scene 8 ‘At Night’ reveals how Quint manipulates Miles by imparting sexual knowledge and suppression.



Fig. 3.5.6 (a) Opera North production, Act I Scene 8 ‘At night’, Quint, the Governess, and Miles. Photo by: Tristram Kenton. Image provided by: Opera North.

When the Governess discovers Miles squatting half-naked beside the chest, he crosses his arms over his chest and leans his body against the chest, saying proudly, ‘you see, I am bad, I am bad, aren’t I?’ as if to say ‘oh, you found my secret now, okay, you caught a double face me’. Then, he affectionately kisses the Governess on the lips, a rather adult and erotic behaviour. At this point, the percussion instruments play a crescendo followed by a diminuendo, simulating a pounding heart. The Governess is surprised and perplexed because she did not expect it to occur. Then, without removing his gaze from the Governess, Miles goes to bed with a mature smile on his face.

Variation XII and Act II Scene 5, ‘Quint’, provides additional evidence that suggests Quint manipulates Miles. In Variation XII and Act II Scene 5, ‘Quint’, only Quint’s voice is heard to ask about the letter’s content and convince Miles to take the

letter. The strings' pizzicato plays 'Malo' notes, creating a strange and bizarre atmosphere. On stage, Miles is flustered and confused, and shakes his head from side to side, indicating that he is experiencing uncertain and unsettling emotions. When Quint complains to Miles that 'she has told everything she knows, everything she knows', Miles hides his face with his hands and weeps. The light hits Miles' face from the side, half bright and half dark, just as it does when Quint first appears. Quint expends great effort to persuade Miles that the letter is 'easy to take', but Miles is undecided and wavering. Then, Quint and Miles put on masks of birds, which inspire confidence and motivation in Miles. Quint gently persuades Miles to 'take it', and after a brief moment of hesitation, Miles runs over and steals the letter in one swift motion.

Although the 2020 staging was a revival, there was no bird mask for Miles in the original 2010 production due to the limited budget; according to Boyd, the bird mask is a link between Miles and Quint:

So the bird mask is vestigial from that idea, using birds as a symbol of flight, nightfall, and sexual freedom. It evolved from that and has now become more about a tool Miles uses to find the bravery to steal the letter. [...] By giving him a mask, it certainly suggests that [Quint manipulates Miles]. What's interesting is that in this particular revival, the third time *The Turn of the Screw* has been performed, the director gave Quint the mask. This definitely furthers the ambiguity of the ghosts' existence. [...] So, the mask, especially the bird mask, strengthens the link to the idea of Miles being controlled by something.³⁸⁰

In the final scene of the opera, Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', both Quint and the Governess oppress Miles. As a ghost, Quint walks boldly to the front of the stage and joins the human Governess and Miles. The Governess sings the 'Screw' theme to force Miles to reveal 'the name' while Quint sings relentlessly in an attempt to seduce and attract Miles. This blocking is significant and bold enough to put Quint, Miles, and the Governess in a line, suggesting the crossing of the line between moral and immoral, life and death. After Miles yells 'You devil, Peter Quint!' Quint declares to Miles, 'Miles, we have

³⁸⁰ Boyd, interview.

failed'. 'Now I must go, farewell', he says sadly, as he moves away from the light into the shadows and sings the musical theme of Quint, which was once full of desire, but is now filled with regret as he withdraws from the stage.

Miss Jessel's stigmas of sexual offending are based on a more complex foundation than those of Quint. Miss Jessel was heterosexual and had an intimate relationship with Quint; however, he abandoned her after she became pregnant. She became not only isolated from Quint, but also from moral society. Miss Jessel was unable to develop an intimate relationship with Quint or any other people in Bly. Therefore, it is highly probable that Miss Jessel has become involved in the 'male-accompanied offenders' ring in order to seek compensation and intimacy, and Flora would be the ideal victim. Miss Jessel's intentions are concealed within the storyline, but they gradually emerge and are sparked by Flora.

Miss Jessel expresses her desolation at being abandoned, her lonely helplessness, and her desire for someone to share her burden while neurotically flailing her hands. The only interaction in Opera North's production between Miss Jessel and the Governess occurs in Act II, Variation VIII, when Miss Jessel leans erotically on the Governess' shoulder and strokes her back while the Governess is asleep. Truslove asserts that Miss Jessel appears to have lesbian eyes for the Governess.³⁸¹ Although Miss Jessel's attention had always been focused on Quint and Flora, her actions towards the Governess further indicate her interest in women and explain Miss Jessel's loneliness stemming from being overlooked, as well as her longing for intimate relationships.

I contend that the Flora shaped by Talevi is the most mature Flora of all the productions discussed in this thesis, and is also the one most profoundly influenced by Miss Jessel. Flora exhibits behaviours far beyond what would be expected for her age, largely as a result of Miss Jessel's influence: Michael Kennedy, for example, points out that in the Variation IV and Act I Scene 5, Flora and Miles engage in copulation gestures

³⁸¹ Truslove, 'Opera North Deliver a chilling *Turn of the Screw*'.

that clearly go beyond the expected behaviour of an eight-year-old girl.³⁸² Variation V is a further scene that demonstrates Flora's maturity and evil intent: Flora first waves her arms like a bird and then acts like a puppet; she then indicates to Miles to do the same gesture, and she applauds for him after he does so; Flora applauds for Miles again when he pretends to be riding on the rocking horse and whipping, at which point the reflected shadow resembles the erotic riding game Flora and Miles do in Act I Scene 5. Then Flora instructs Miles to wave as a bird once more, and Miles follows Flora. In this variation, the staging suggests that the eight-year-old Flora leads the ten-year-old Miles to do things, rather than the other way around.

Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake', reveals that Flora is not an innocent child in this production. Flora plays with her doll atop the stage-dominating bed, while the Governess is in a chair with her book. At rehearsal number 59, the music becomes slower and quieter, and then at rehearsal number 60, a dreamy, flickering sound is created by combining the gradually decreasing dynamic from the woodwinds in the mid register with harp arpeggios (Ex. 2.4.6 (a)); during this passage, Flora slowly puts down the doll that resembles her and jiggles it, and this swing-like movement gestures towards hypnosis. Then Flora sings 'that's right my darling, how good you are, go to sleep', with the music gradually becoming slower and decreasing to *pianississimo*. Flora quietly confirms that the Governess is asleep by glancing at the Governess, and then she gets the Miss Jessel-like puppet out. In rehearsal number 66, Miss Jessel's musical theme 'F# G# C D G (E^b)' appears for the first time, while Flora lets the Miss Jessel-like puppet find the Flora-liked puppet and lays the Miss Jessel puppet down on its body.

Even though the opera does not demonstrate what action Miss Jessel takes towards Flora, Act II Scene 7, 'Flora', demonstrates the result of Miss Jessel's corruption: Mrs Grose's call of Flora in F and B^b. And B^b (A[#]) is the Governess' description of Miss Jessel when she sees her, indicating that Flora is to some extent influenced by Miss

³⁸² See Michael Kennedy, 'The Turn of the Screw', review of *The Turn of the Screw*, 1536-7.

Jessel. Flora erotically kisses the Miss Jessel-like puppet. Upon hearing Mrs Grose's call, she reluctantly stops kissing the puppet, hides it, and pretends to play with the Flora-like puppet. Flora's action demonstrates that she is aware that her kissing behaviour or playing with Miss Jessel's puppet is inappropriate, but she is willing to take the risk anyway. When the Governess and Mrs Grose arrive, Flora acts as if nothing has occurred. When the Governess asks Flora where Miss Jessel is, Flora is shocked, and Miss Jessel appears in the darkness on the opposite side of the stage. Flora separates from the Governess and runs from the Governess's side to the left to join Miss Jessel. Flora denies hearing what the Governess said, and then she curses the Governess as Miss Jessel's musical theme plays in the background.

[Flora]: You're (the Governess) cruel, horrible, hateful, nasty.
 Why did you come here? I don't know what you mean.
[Miss Jessel]: They know nothing. Don't betray me.³⁸³

Flora denies the existence of Miss Jessel, while, and the Governess pushes Flora to where Miss Jessel is, yells 'but look!' and turns Flora to the dark corner. Flora immediately flees from the Governess to the centre of the stage, where the light and dark lines intersect, symbolising the line between life and death. When Flora sings to the Governess, 'I can't see anybody, I can't see anybody, nobody, nothing, I don't know what you mean', Flora is at this moment under an evil spell and, in a frenzy, standing in the centre of the stage but slightly to the left, and facing Mrs Grose and the Governess, who are to the right of the stage, in the same direction as Miss Jessel, indicating Flora is with Miss Jessel. The Governess is positioned at the extreme edge of the stage, furthest from Flora. Flora becomes agitated and screams, 'Take me away, I don't like her!' She then throws her puppet at the Governess and exclaims, 'I hate her!' Then, Flora puts on the same dress as Miss Jessel does in Act II, Variation XV when she appears in the dark.

³⁸³ Act II Scene 7, 'Flora'.

Flora's actions and reactions are evidence of Miss Jessel's evil influence and its effects. The inappropriate behaviours of Flora reflect both Flora's sexual precocity and Miss Jessel's possible sexual offender tendencies.

Thoughts and desires of the Governess for the Guardian reach the peak in Act I Scene 4, 'The Tower' and Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'. In Act I Scene 4, 'The Tower', the Governess sits on the bed and sighs that her life in Bly is better than she can imagine, and there is only one thing she wishes, 'that I could see him, and that he could see how well I do his bidding, his bidding'. The Governess then closes her eyes with a smile, places her right hand in the position of her right ear, and then slides the hand gently and slowly towards her neck and chest, accompanied by the theme of 'the ceremony if innocence is drawn'. Very soon, the Governess lies down and stretches herself, lamenting that she is 'alone, tranquil, serene'. Immediately, a male shadow appears outside of the window, and the Governess exclaims, 'Ah, 'Tis he!' with raw emotion. However, Quint's symbol of celesta rings out, revealing that the shadow does not belong to the Guardian; the Governess is disappointed and shocked.

As mentioned above, the bird-in-flight gestures between Quint and Miles are erotic, but what is not mentioned in the previous section is that the Governess, while sleeping on the bed in Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', performs the same gesture, which can be interpreted as a subconscious desire on her part to bind with the Guardian.

The Governess then awakens to find Miles topless in a corner with a mature and naughty smile, looking at her and saying, 'you see, I am bad, aren't I?' Miles then approaches the Governess and kisses her lips in an erotic manner. He then moves to the bed while staring at the Governess with a seductive smile, as if he is completely aware of the internal world of her mind, leaving the Governess frozen in place with a stunned look. This is a significant scene that triggers the Governess's physical sexual arousal and emotional shift from the unreachable Guardian to the lively substitute who accompanies her.

When the Governess and Miles are alone, the Governess's possessive actions and desire for intimacy with Miles can be observed instead of her correcting Miles's improper behaviour. The Governess's emotion continues to transfer from the Guardian to Miles in Act II Scene 2, 'The Bells', with Miles's kiss in Act I Scene 8, 'At Night' feeding as the catalyst. When Miles complains to the Governess that he grows up and wants to go back to school to find his own kind, the Governess quickly walks to Miles's back, stroking his shoulders gently with two hands, saying 'yes, you're growing up'. Prior to this scene, it is crucial to note that the Governess has not initiated physical contact with Miles.

In Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom', Miles sneaks into the room, lights a candle, and sits in front of the window with a worried face while singing his 'Malo' song. The Governess approaches Miles, touches his foot, sits next to him, strokes his back, then sits closer to him, hugs and strokes his shoulder and arms from behind, and tells him she wants to save him.

Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', is where the Governess's attraction to Miles reaches its peak. After letting Mrs Grose leave with Flora, she uncontrollably pours out her emotions with tears in her eyes, 'Oh Miles, I cannot bear to lose you, you shall be mine, and I shall save you'. As soon as Miles enters the room, the Governess calms herself down. Miles dresses like Quint, with his hands in his pockets, and speaks to her like an adult: 'So, my dear, we are alone.' The Governess asks Miles, 'Do you mind being left alone?' The Governess then cautiously approaches Miles and expresses her desire to be with him, 'Dear Miles, I love to be with you. What else should I stay for?' It is clear from this movement that the Governess has shifted from coming to Bly for the Guardian to staying for Miles. Miles has filled the Governess's feelings towards the Guardian.

As Miles sorts his clothing like an adult, he asks the Governess, 'so, my dear, for me you stay?' The Governess immediately comes to Miles and emphasises that, 'I stay as your friend. Miles, there is nothing I would not do for you, remember?' In the meantime, the Governess affectionately wraps her arms around Miles from behind.

Miles breaks away from the embrace of the Governess and goes away, yet the Governess comes to Miles's side again.

The Governess confirms that Miles is now with her, walks towards Miles and holds him tightly, saying that 'Miles, you are saved.' Sadly, this victory is only an illusion, as Miles dies shortly after. The Governess desperately cries and asks, 'what have we done between us?', at which point the failure of her emotional attachment becomes all too apparent.

3.6 Chapter Summary and Discussion

The Governess's affection for the Guardian and the portrayal of Miles as a precocious child have been embedded in the essence of the opera since its creation and have consistently threaded through the various productions of the opera since its première, becoming an important and unignorable thread that has propelled the development of the opera.

In the 2020 Opera North production, the overly mature characteristics of Miles and Flora are starkly portrayed through explicit actions such as kissing and semi-nudity. Likewise, the 2011 Glyndebourne production conveys Miles's precocity through scenes of bathing, dressing, and affectionate, dependent embraces. Additionally, the 2005 BBC production employs metaphors, such as bird eggs, to symbolise Miles's early maturity. It is evident that other productions have also indirectly reflected this aspect of Miles's character.

The Governess's unrequited love for the Guardian results in a repression of her own desires, leading to a degree of sexual suppression. This interpretation was not explicitly presented in earlier productions of the opera, such as the 1954 première and the 1979 ENO production. The sociocultural context of the time, despite some research on the topic, posed challenges for directors to bring such themes to the stage, whether due to the scruples of the directors or the social norms of the era. However, in productions following the turn of the twenty-first century, interpretations of the

Governess's character have become more nuanced. Directors have been able to enrich her portrayal by crafting dream sequences and fantasies, granting a character, who is sexually repressed in reality, a measure of freedom and momentary liberation in an imagined world. Such portrayals are exemplified in the 2005 BBC production and the 2020 Opera North production (which first premièred in 2010).

In opera productions of the twenty-first century, discussions on sexual themes have become increasingly prevalent and varied in perspective. For instance, the 2005 BBC production not only explores the Governess's release from sexual repression in her dreams, but it also implies the process of intercourse between Quint and Miss Jessel. This portrayal to some extent represents a rebellion against the traditional moral constraints and sexual bindings imposed on women, thereby articulating a theme of sexual liberation.

Sexual liberation may be a trend of the times and an inevitable direction of social evolution. However, it is crucial to remain vigilant; sexual liberation should not be without boundaries, nor should it serve as an excuse for malevolent actions. It ought to be practised within limits. Compared to children, the behaviour and psychology of adults are often more complex, with true intentions possibly shrouded in layers of lies, deceit, and temptation, making it challenging for children to discern. In opera productions, the relationship between Quint and Miles has consistently been a focus for directors and commentators alike - the former concerned with how to portray this relationship, and the latter with how to interpret it. An interpretation that cannot be overlooked is the analysis from the perspective of paedophilia.

Quint's relentless pursuit and calling of Miles, coupled with his seductively musical theme, seem to add plausibility to this perspective. In the 2011 Glyndebourne production, Quint is portrayed as excessively watching Miles while he sleeps and bathes. Quint's apparent enjoyment in caressing Miles's hair after seducing and embracing him undoubtedly reinforces the likelihood of his paedophilic tendencies. In the 2020 Opera North production, during the night when Quint calls to Miles, the latter is seduced and

led to remove his shirt, further hinting at Quint's manipulative influence. Other productions also depict a relationship between Quint and Miles that transcends the master-servant dynamic, suggesting an emotionally dependent connection.

Presenting paedophilic elements in opera productions is an audaciously controversial move. Clifford Hindley explored this theme 'Why Does Miles Die? A Study of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*' (1990), suggesting that Quint's feelings for Miles could be interpreted as 'love'. However, his interpretation has been seen more recently as normalising paedophilia and the article has generated significant controversy.³⁸⁴ The productions examined in this thesis can alert us to the dangers of adults engaging in inappropriate behaviour with children under the guise of 'love', and can prompt reflection on how children respond to the enticement of adults with paedophilic tendencies. The inappropriate seduction of children by adults, as well as psychological and physical abuse are themes that are depicted in various productions examined in this thesis: the 2005 BBC production features Quint's verbal seduction of Miles; the 2011 production continues this theme of Quint's seduction; the Governess in the same year exhibits hysterical psychological abuse towards Miles and Flora; and the 2020 Opera North production portrays Quint's verbal seduction, verbal abuse, and physical manipulation of Miles, along with Miss Jessel's manipulation of Flora.

The inappropriate conduct of adults towards children can lead to irreversible harm, resulting in varying degrees of developmental issues. For instance, in the 2005 production, Miles exhibits precocity, fantasising about his mother, which suggests an Oedipal inclination. In 2011, Flora is portrayed with a tendency towards aggression. By 2020, Miles shows signs of emotional distress and potential schizophrenic tendencies, often in severe anguish but then suddenly smiling. Flora is depicted as defiant and

³⁸⁴ Ian Pace, 'Clifford Hindley: The Scholar as Pederast and the Aestheticisation of Child Sexual Abuse', March 3, 2014, accessed Jan 19, 2024, [https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/6689/1/Clifford%20Hindley%20-%20Pederasty%20and%20Scholarship%20\(2014\).pdf](https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/6689/1/Clifford%20Hindley%20-%20Pederasty%20and%20Scholarship%20(2014).pdf).

unruly. Both Miles and Flora display evident signs of precocious maturity, revealing such tendencies to adults.

All of this raises an urgent question for discussion: whether it is ethical to involve child performers in quite explicit actions (for example, in the Opera North production, the actor playing Miles removes his shirt under Quint's direction, and actively kisses the Governess on the lips). The issue of child abuse only began to be talked about and recognised as a significant problem around 2000, and this is reflected in the increasingly explicit nature of the productions. Perhaps directors believe they are addressing a topic that requires public attention, but the presence of child actors introduces further moral dilemmas: how can opera companies protect them when children are involved in increasingly explicit opera productions? Despite interviewees in the interviews with production teams indicating that they simply inform the child actors of the actions and direct them to perform such straightforward acts, could specific performance actions impact the child actors?

How can a balance be struck between artistic freedom and the protection of vulnerable individuals (child actors)? This question can be addressed from the perspectives of 'ethical considerations' and 'consent and understanding'.

1. Ethical considerations: Children may not fully comprehend the meaning of the themes they are involved in portraying. Even if they understand, their emotions may not be mature enough to handle these themes adequately. Participation in explicit acts could have psychological impacts, potentially affecting their understanding of boundaries, consent, and personal integrity.
2. Consent and understanding: While child performers can give consent to participate in a performance, their capacity for informed consent (understanding and consent without coercion) is limited by their age and maturity. Parents and guardians play a crucial role in the consent process, but this also raises questions about their ability

to fully comprehend the potential long-term effects such roles may have on children.

To address these ethical dilemmas, opera companies and production teams can take the following measures to protect child performers:

1. Guidelines and policies: Establishing clear guidelines for the involvement of children in performances (especially those with explicit content) helps set boundaries and expectations. These guidelines should cover the audition process, rehearsals, performances, and interactions between child performers and adults.
2. Psychological support: Providing child psychologists or counsellors to work with child performers throughout the production process can help address any emotional or psychological impacts arising from their roles. Additionally, educating children and their guardians about the content and context of the production ensures they understand the themes and actions involved, along with their underlying reasons.
3. Alternatives: Consider using adult actors to portray child roles in certain scenes or employing technical and stagecraft techniques to imply rather than explicitly depict sensitive actions.
4. Regulations and oversight: Adhere to legal standards and regulations concerning child labour and child performances, involving supervisory bodies where possible, to ensure ethical standards are met.

While it can be argued that dealing with troubling and distressing themes requires authenticity, sometimes necessitating the involvement of child actors to convey the full impact of a story, it is crucial to balance this with the paramount need to protect child performers from potential harm. Minimising risks to child actors while respecting the

artistic goals of the production and ensuring a supportive environment is key. Ultimately, the ethical involvement of child performers in opera or any artistic work depends on the collective efforts of directors, parents, and the performers themselves to maximise the protection of children within the demands of artistic expression.

CHAPTER 4: Anonymous was a Woman:¹ Attitudes towards Gender in *The Turn of the Screw*

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.²

——Simone de Beauvoir

Discourse surrounding gender has taken centre stage in contemporary society, driving essential conversations on identity, representation, and social structures. As we navigate this evolving landscape, it becomes imperative to trace the origins of such discussions, revisiting works that have subtly interrogated these themes. James's novella *The Turn of the Screw* and Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw* ostensibly centre around the eerie and the supernatural, but serve as tapestries that subtly capture the nuances of gender dynamics. Through the haunting narratives and resonant melodies, James and Britten prompt readers and listeners to confront prevailing gender norms, offering a window into the attitudes of their respective eras. This chapter examines gender discourse in relation to *The Turn of the Screw* and productions of the work, illuminating the ongoing dialogue on gender in the arts and society.

4.1 Gender History since the 1890s in the UK

Gender history in the UK provides an insightful context to understand the interplay between social structures, events, and attitudes. The evolution of gender roles and relations has been marked by both contestation and conformity, and by the end of the twentieth century, a radical shift towards gender egalitarianism could be discerned.

¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 36-7. The original text is, 'I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman'.

² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 301.

In the medieval period, gender roles were rigidly demarcated. The domestic sphere was largely seen as the domain of women, while men dominated the public sphere.³ The Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century and nineteenth century had profound implications for gender roles. The shift from household-based production to factory production meant that the domestic sphere, traditionally associated with women, lost its primacy in the economic life of the country.⁴ While many women entered factories, they were often subjected to worse conditions and lower pay than their male counterparts.⁵

The feminist movement, in its various waves, stands out as one of the most influential forces driving the transformation of exploration of gender norms and equality. The first wave of feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was largely centred on legal inequalities, focusing primarily on women's suffrage. Suffragettes like Emmeline Pankhurst and her Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) played a pivotal role in bringing about this change. Their militant strategies, ranging from hunger strikes to public demonstrations, eventually culminated in the Representation of the People Act 1918, granting certain women the right to vote.⁶

In 1910, an inaugural cohort of working-class females began to access higher education, though the number who did so was notably limited.⁷ The two World Wars of the twentieth century accelerated the challenge to existing gender norms. With men away at war, women took on roles traditionally reserved for men, from working in munitions factories to serving as nurses on the frontline.⁸ In 1939, women secured the

³ Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 107-55.

⁴ Peter N. Stearns, *The Industrial Revolution in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 21-41.

⁵ Edward H. Hunt, *British Labour History, 1815-1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 102-3.

⁶ Harold L Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866-1928* (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2014), 88-91.

⁷ Sue Bruley, *Women in Britain Since 1900* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1999), 17.

⁸ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (New York: Routledge, 1981), 44-50.

right to equal compensation,⁹ and by 1944, with the amendment to the Education Bill by the House of Commons, they advocated for and achieved a prohibition on sex differentiation in pay scales.¹⁰ In the post-war period, enhanced access to higher education led to increased educational and occupational opportunities for women.¹¹

The second wave of feminism, spanning from the 1960s to the 1980s, broadened the conversation beyond legal rights to more deeply entrenched societal norms and structures. This movement grappled with issues such as sexuality, workplace rights, reproductive rights, and domestic violence. Writers and thinkers like Germaine Greer, with her work *The Female Eunuch* (1970), critiqued the ways in which social structures reinforced gender inequality;¹² Sheila Rowbotham explored the roles of women in revolutionary movements in her work *Women, Resistance and Revolution* in 1972;¹³ Lynne Segal discussed the challenges and nuances of the feminist movement, questioning monolithic representations of women's experiences in *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on contemporary Feminism* in 1987.¹⁴ This period also saw the establishment of key institutions that promoted gender studies as an academic discipline.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw the third and fourth waves of feminism emerge. These waves further diversified the understanding of gender, embracing intersectionality – the idea that gender intersects with other identities such as race, class, and sexuality. This period has been marked by an emphasis on individual autonomy, body positivity, and challenges to binary notions of gender.¹⁵ Stuart Hall's

⁹ Harold L. Smith, *British in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 68-9. The right to equal compensation clearly did not translate into reality in all respects.

¹⁰ Ibid., 168-70. The amendment's outcome forced the Minister to intervene in the Burnham Committees' activities, mandating them to establish pay scales equally applicable to both men and women.

¹¹ Ibid., 2.

¹² Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970).

¹³ Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Verso, 1972).

¹⁴ Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (London: Virago, 1987).

¹⁵ Shelley Budgeon, 'The Dynamics of Gender Hegemony: Femininities, Masculinities and Social Change', *Sociology*, vol. 48 no. 2, (2014): 317-34. <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1177/0038038513490358>.

work 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in 1990 on representation, identity, and difference has been influential in gender studies, and he argues that identities, including gender, are never static or fixed but are subject to the continuous play of history and power;¹⁶ Beverley Skeggs focused on the intersections of class, gender, and sexuality in *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997), examining how working-class women navigate and resist social judgments and classifications.¹⁷

Gender Studies emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, though its roots can be traced back to earlier feminist and social reform movements.¹⁸ The expansion of gender studies as an academic field in the UK is closely tied to these movements. As the feminist movement highlighted the systemic nature of gender inequalities, academia began to reflect on the historical, sociological, and cultural factors that shaped these inequities. Initially framed as Women's Studies, the discipline sought to address the glaring omission of women's voices, experiences, and contributions from traditional academic narratives.¹⁹ Universities across the UK began offering courses on gender studies, leading to the field's institutionalisation and continued growth. For instance, the University of York started its Women's Studies programme in 1984, which was among the first of its kind.²⁰ From 1990s to 2000s, the UK universities began to include gender studies, not just as stand-alone programmes but integrating them into various disciplines like history, sociology, and literature. Institutions such as the London School of Economics (LSE) have notable Gender Institutes.²¹ Since the 2010s, gender studies in the UK continues to evolve, reflecting global developments and intersections with

¹⁶ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222-37.

¹⁷ Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender* (London: Sage, 1997).

¹⁸ Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 777-780. (773-797).

¹⁹ Marilyn J. Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 45-9.

²⁰ University of York, 'Women's Studies at York: A History', University Archives, 2010.

²¹ London School of Economics, 'History of the Gender Institute', LSE Archies, 2015.

other fields, like queer studies, post-colonial studies, and critical race theory. This period sees the field becoming more multidisciplinary and intersectional.²²

Grounded in feminist theory, gender studies critically examined the structural inequalities and social norms that perpetuated gender disparities.²³ Over time, the field broadened its scope to encompass the study of masculinity, the complexities of sexuality, and the fluidity of gender itself.²⁴ Gender studies in the UK has its distinct trajectory shaped by the nation's socio-political, historical, and cultural landscape. From legal rights to a more intricate understanding of social structures and identities, the journey has been both challenging and transformative.

4.2 Gender in the Novella

James's novella *The Turn of the Screw* offers fertile ground for gender studies analysis. Set against a Victorian backdrop, the narrative serves as a means to examine how gender norms, roles, and social expectations shape the actions and perceptions of characters.

Central to the novella's horror is the Governess's account of the supernatural. Whether or not the ghosts are real, her credibility is questioned, echoing the era's gender biases. Historical tendencies to dismiss women's perspectives as hysterical or unreliable taint interpretations of the tale,²⁵ paralleling the Victorian medical establishment's views on female hysteria, where women's accounts were often discredited due to presumed emotional instability.²⁶ James's portrayal, whether intentionally or otherwise, engages with this gendered scepticism.

²² Clare Hemmings, 'Telling Feminist Stories', *Feminist Theory* 6, no. 2 (2005): 115-39. <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1177/1464700105053690>

²³ Sandra Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 67-70.

²⁴ R. W. Connell, *Masculinity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 22-5.

²⁵ Oscar Cargill, 'The Turn of the Screw and Alice James', *PMLA*, vol. 78, no. 3 (1963): 242. <https://doi.org/10.2307/460866>. In this article, Cargill suggests that the portrayal of the Governess's hysteria might be influenced by Henry James's sister, Alice James, and her struggle with her mental health. 238-49.

²⁶ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 51-73.

Early feminist critics, reassessing Western cultural narratives, pointed out troubling portrayals of women and highlighted instances of misogyny. Post-1970s feminists increasingly applied a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ to uncover how interpretations may reveal underlying gender prejudices.²⁷ In James’s novella, despite the narrator’s anonymity and unspecified gender, readers until the 1990s predominantly assumed the narrator to be male.²⁸ Beth Newman’s article posits that, aside from a lack of feminine indicators, there is no substantial reason to presume the unnamed narrator is male, given the insufficient evidence of a homoerotic subtext between the narrator and Douglas.²⁹

The social tendency to judge women harshly for perceived moral transgressions compared to men,³⁰ becomes evident when exploring the spectre of Miss Jessel and her suggested liaison with Peter Quint:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| [The Governess] | ‘I must have it now. Of what did she die? Come, there was something between them’. |
| [Mrs Grose] | ‘There was everything’. |
| [The Governess] | ‘In spite of the difference-?’ |
| [Mrs Grose] | ‘Oh, of their rank, their condition... she was a lady... And he so dreadfully below’. ³¹ |

Miss Jessel is depicted as a figure of moral decline, having sought a relationship with a man of lower social status, thereby deviating from the era’s prescribed innocence and purity for women.³²

In the Victorian context, a governess was tasked with providing young girls with the necessary skills to shine in social settings and secure suitable matrimonial matches.

²⁷ Susan Bordo, ‘Feminist Skepticism and the “Maleness” of Philosophy’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 85, no.11 (1988): 619. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2026936>. 619-29.

²⁸ Beth Newman, ‘Getting Fixed: Feminine Identity and Scopic Crisis in “The Turn of the Screw”’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 26 no. 1 (1992): 45-6, <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.2307/1345604>. 43-63.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁰ Lynn Nead, ‘The Magdalen in Modern Times: The Mythology of the Fallen Woman in Pre-Raphaelite Painting’, *The Oxford Art Journal* 7:1 (1984): 26.

³¹ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 61.

³² Jane Nardin, ‘“The Turn of the Screw”: The Victorian Background’, *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1978): 133. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24777116>. 131-42.

Boys, in contrast, were prepped in foundational subjects—such as reading, writing, and basic classical languages—until they were sent off to boarding school at around age eight.³³ The Governess in the novella, however, exhibits an acute preoccupation with the Guardian and Miles's correspondences, marginalizing her principal duties to some extent. It is clearly stated that the Governess's responsibilities include the oversight of Bly and the education of Flora:

[...] of course the young lady [The Governess] who should go down as governess would be in supreme authority. She would also have, in holidays, to look after the small boy, who had been for a term at school.³⁴

However, as Miles is expelled from his school and consequently obliged to remain at Bly, the Governess's focus shifts disproportionately towards him, resulting in a relative neglect and aversion towards Flora. The Governess's perception of Flora shifts from affection to aversion, not due to any change in Flora, but rather because of their deteriorating relationship. She becomes cognisant of Flora's antipathy and assumes a defensive posture:

Flora continued to fix me with her small mask of disaffection, and even at that minute I prayed God to forgive me for seeming to see that, as she stood there holding tight to our friend's dress, her incomparable childish beauty had suddenly failed, had quite vanished.³⁵

The text's upholding of gendered expectations in its portrayal of the Governess's role at Bly illuminates the nuanced ways in which women navigated professional and personal spheres, often contending with conflicting duties and expectations.

The novella's depiction of the female characters' experiences, couched within the restrictive gender norms of the Victorian era, serves as a narrative reflecting the

³³ Evie Grace, 'What Was Life Like as a Victorian Governess?' *Penguin*, Jan 2, 2018, accessed on Nov 3, 2023, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2018/01/what-was-life-like-as-a-victorian-governess>.

³⁴ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 10.

³⁵ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 132.

marginalization of women's voices. The story's engagement with themes of credibility, identity, and social roles underscores the persistent inclination to view women through a lens of scepticism and moral rigour, often dismissing their autonomy.

Feminism is a recurrent theme in Gothic fiction, a genre that gained popularity from the mid-eighteenth century, beginning with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1765. Walpole's narrative showcased women as potent figures in a male-dominated setting, a trend followed by subsequent Gothic tales.³⁶ In *The Turn of the Screw*, Henry James mirrors this feminist trend. As an independent protagonist, the Governess epitomises the emerging feminism of the Victorian era. Her comparison of Bly to a 'great drifting ship',³⁷ predominantly female-occupied and lacking a strong male presence, symbolises the gradual social shift towards female authority. The metaphor of a drifting ship, traditionally given feminine pronouns, further implies this transition.³⁸ James' portrayal of the Governess reflects the era's attitudes towards women; her surprise at being 'strangely, at the helm' symbolises women's unfamiliarity with authority during that period.³⁹

James contrasts the Governess's newfound autonomy at Bly, which she describes as 'a different affair from my own scant home',⁴⁰ with her previous 'small, smothered life'.⁴¹ This indicates that the living environment available to Victorian-era female characters was limited, mirroring the social constraints imposed on women during this period. The transition from a confined life to experiencing 'space and air and freedom' at Bly demonstrates the Governess's broadening horizons and awakening self-awareness from living in familial 'dependence' to an 'independent state' of managing

³⁶ Kate Ellis, 'Female Empowerment: The Secret in the Gothic Novel', *Phi Kappa Phi Forum*, vol. 90 iss. 3 (2010): 8-9.

³⁷ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 18.

³⁸ 'The Rise of Feminism in the Turn of the Screw and the Victorian Era', Art of Reading Spring 2016 Projects Harvard University, Spring 2016, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://hum11c.omeka.fas.harvard.edu/exhibits/show/readings/the-rise-of-feminism-in-the-tu>.

³⁹ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 18. Also see in 'The Rise of Feminism in the Turn of the Screw and the Victorian Era'.

⁴⁰ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

Bly alone. Although this female self-awareness and independence of spirit arose in the absence of male authority at Bly, and she remains attracted to the Guardian's masculine allure, however, it also shows that the Governess's self-consciousness and spirit of independence gradually emerge when there is no real male authority present (the guardian does not appear at Bly). The Governess's situation seems to be a collision between Victorian male discourse and female value: the deeply ingrained notion instilled by a patriarchal society that women should depend on men, making them overlook their own value. Yet, when women are removed from the context of male authority, they can perform the same work as men and realise their personal value. This highlights the novella's underlying theme of female self-awareness and independence.⁴²

4.3 Gender in the Opera

In the libretto, male characters typically represent authority and freedom, and draw significant attention. For instance, the Guardian, despite his absence from the physical narrative of the opera, maintains a continuous influence among the residents of Bly, evoking respect and fear. He is a symbol of an authoritative figure: as the master of Bly, he has the potential to intervene in its events, yet he deliberately chooses not to become a saviour, as established in the Prologue. The libretto employs concise language to craft his authoritative status and his detachment from Bly:

[H]e was so much engaged of fairs, travel, friends, visits, always something, no time at all for the poor little things.⁴³

The absence of male authority in the libretto opens the possibility for a female successor to take charge of Bly. Despite the influence of the Victorian era's backdrop, where women were often seen as appendages to men, the character of the Governess, who oversees Bly and serves as a governess, actually commands a substantial income. This

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ 'The Prologue'.

is evidenced by James: 'But the salary offered much exceeded her modest measure'.⁴⁴ Furthermore, she represents an independent woman with a career, not reliant on male support. While her initial decision to accept the position may have been influenced by the generous remuneration, her fondness for the Guardian, and her curiosity about the mysterious upper class, it is her eventual need to manage Bly alone that prompts her gradual move towards independence.

The Governess continuously strives to control Bly, her actions representing an effort to emulate the management typically associated with male governors, reflecting a pursuit of gender equality. Despite an unsatisfactory outcome, marked by Miles's death and Flora's departure, which symbolises the Governess's failure at Bly and, to some extent, reflects misogyny, the narrative predominantly mirrors the struggle of women against the dictates of their era. This is exemplified by the Governess's emerging capabilities in independently managing Bly, her burgeoning sense of autonomy in thought and action, her protective instincts akin to a family head when confronting spectral threats, and the awakening of her self-awareness through her taboo affection for the Guardian. All of this can be read as reflecting women's daring attempts to break free from the shackles of their time.

The struggle of the Governess in the opera, attempting to assert control in a male-dominated society and facing eventual failure, sets the stage for a broader theme of isolation and the yearning for 'one's own kind' that permeates the narrative. This theme is poignantly encapsulated in the recurring phrase 'My kind'. In the opera's first scene, the Governess expresses her apprehension and sense of isolation:

Nearly there. Very soon I shall know, I shall know, I shall know what's in store for me... If things go wrong, what shall I do? Who can I ask, with none of my kind to talk to?⁴⁵

⁴⁴ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 11.

⁴⁵ Act I Scene 1, 'The Journey'.

In Act I Scene 3, 'The Letter', the Governess at Bly faces her first challenge when she receives a letter from the school informing her of Miles's expulsion. Mrs Grose's interaction with the Governess during this scene is telling:

[Mrs Grose] What shall you do then?

[The Governess] I shall do nothing.

[Mrs Grose] And what shall you say to him?

[The Governess] I shall say nothing.

Mrs Grose's progressively intense inquiries reflect her cautiousness and bewilderment (Ex. 4.3 (a)). In contrast, The Governess's forceful responses, delivered forte and emphasising 'no-thing', not only soothe Mrs Grose but also signify the Governess's autonomy in decision-making. Her steadfast adherence to her own principles and her commitment to the Guardian mark the beginning of her true independence in managing Bly. This scene highlights the Governess's evolving role and her approach to the unexpected challenges she encounters.

31

20

Mrs. GROSE

What shall you do then?...
Was wer-den Sie tun?

*

GOVERNESS

I shall do no - thing.
Ich tu rein gar nichts.

And what shall you say to him?
Was sa - gen Sie nun zu ihm?

pp

I shall say no - thing.
Ich sag ihm gar nichts.

f

Bra - vol!..... And I'll stand
Bra vol!..... Und ich bin

pp

Ex. 4.3 (a) Act I Scene 3, 'The Letter'.

In Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell', the Governess converses with Mrs Grose, expressing her suspicion that the children are now in contact with the ghosts, Quint and Miss Jessel. This part of the score, featuring the bassoon, contains dynamic leaps, and ornamented percussive rhythms, audibly manifesting the characters' nervous tension and unease (Ex. 4.3 (b)).

37

Bsn. *cresc.*

Perc. Bells *cresc.*

Gov. With Quint and that wo-man. Do? —
Mit Quint und dem Fräulein. Die? —

Mrs. G. 37 Quint and that wo-man? But what could — they do?
Quint und dem Fräulein. Doch was kön — nen die?

Via. *cresc.*

Vc. *mf* *cresc.*

Db. *cresc.*

Bsn.

Perc. Bells

Piano

Gov. — They can des - tray — — — — — them.
— Sie ganz zer - sto — — — — — ren.

Mrs. G.

VL I

VL II

Via.

Vc.

Db.

Ex. 4.3 (b) Act II Scene 2, 'The Bells'.

Mrs Grose suggests that the Governess should communicate with the Guardian. However, the Governess, with a dark tone, contemplates whether the house is poisoned or if she herself is descending into madness. Upon the mention of the Guardian, the Governess's demeanour softens as she recalls her promise: 'I was charged not to worry

him'. Mrs Grose echoes this sentiment, and the music transitions accordingly, moving from *piano* to an even softer *pianissimo*. Emotionally charged, the Governess sings softly yet with a firm and poignant resolve: 'I shall never write to him!' (Ex. 4.3 (c)).

Ex. 4.3 (c) Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell'.

This scene portrays the Governess at a crossroads, facing the supernatural encounters of the children, which are beyond her control. She is caught between her apprehension of the unknown and her obligation to manage Bly independently, honouring her commitment to the Guardian. This juxtaposition of her fear and sense of duty encapsulates the complexity of her role and the challenges she faces at Bly.

The theme of seeking one's kind recurs when Mrs Grose suggests that Miles and Flora 'need their own kind', is emphasised here in Act II Scene 2, 'The Bells', Miles expresses his own desire, saying, 'I'm growing up, you know. I want my own kind.' Miles's longing for 'kind' can be interpreted in various ways: a wish to return to school and his peers, or a desire for male companionship. The Governess suspects that Quint's

corruption led to Miles's expulsion from school, adding another layer to the theme of isolation.

In James's novella, the Governess's primary responsibility is to educate Flora, since Miles usually attends boarding school and has his own social circle there, making him less dependent on Bly and emphasizing that he has his 'my kind' at Bly. However, both in the novella and the opera, the Governess often shows a preference for Miles. Flora, who requires more attention, is left in the isolated environment of Bly. Upon the arrival of the Governess, who was supposed to provide new companionship for Flora, her attention to Flora is minimal. Instead, Mrs Grose is frequently left responsible for Flora. Flora's character is thus one of tragedy, repeatedly abandoned and emotionally wounded, as seen when she is coerced into admitting seeing Miss Jessel in Act II Scene 7, 'Flora'. Her eventual emotional outburst towards the Governess reflects her dissatisfaction with reality and her reaction to the perceived hostility.

This recurrent emphasis on 'kind' highlights the isolation experienced by all characters in the libretto: the female characters Governess and Mrs Grose, divided by class and education, are further isolated within Bly, away from the broader society; Miles and Flora are separated from their Guardian, peers, and school; supernatural beings like Quint and Miss Jessel are alienated from the real world. Piper's libretto, and the imaginative space beyond the text, powerfully convey the theme of each character's isolation within the Bly castle.⁴⁶

The gender analysis of the discussed sections of the libretto and music reveals an interplay of themes around authority, independence, and isolation. The Governess's efforts to assume control in Bly, traditionally a male role, reflect a challenge to gender norms and a struggle for equality. However, her failure and the subsequent tragic events underscore the persistent challenges and societal biases against women. The recurring motif of 'My kind' in the libretto further accentuates themes of isolation and the desire for belonging, as experienced differently by male and female characters. This motif

⁴⁶ Howard, *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, 29.

illustrates the distinct experiences of gendered isolation, with characters longing for connection with those of their own ‘kind’, whether defined by gender, class, or the supernatural. Overall, the libretto portrays a nuanced exploration of gender dynamics, authority, and the quest for identity in a restrictive social framework.

4.4 Gender in Productions

4.4.1 1954 The UK première production

After the UK première of Britten’s *The Turn of the Screw* in London, David Hemmings, who played Miles, received widespread attention. Overnight, newspapers enthusiastically discussed and celebrated the 12-year-old boy’s successful debut: ‘David Hemmings... sang with an unaffected charm. It was his first opera’;⁴⁷ ‘Astonishing dramatic acting by David Hemmings [...] at Sadler’s Wells Theatre holds the audience spellbound’.⁴⁸ Hemmings’s widely acclaimed debut not only reflects his excellent performance in the opera but also highlights the production’s emphasis on the character of Miles.

In the analysis of Chapter 1 ‘Social Class’, I position Miles as a key authority figure at Bly within the 1954 production. This is evidenced through strategic stage blocking, a tool that subtly communicates social hierarchies. Miles, often alongside Flora from the upper class, consistently occupies a dominant position on stage, overshadowing other characters. This visual arrangement underscores his superior status within the social structure of Bly, and Miles’s prominence over other characters, especially female ones, can be interpreted as a reflection of the gendered power structures prevalent in the setting.

The interactions between the Governess and Miles are particularly telling in this regard. In the 1959 Associated-Rediffusion television production directed by Peter

⁴⁷ Andrew Smith, ‘Horror-opera Triumphs’, *Daily Herald*, Oct 7, 1954.

⁴⁸ P. B., ‘Boy of 12 Dominates New Opera’, *The Star*, Oct 7, 1954.

Morley—which I viewed during my research at Britten-Pears Arts—the Governess, a female character, is often placed alongside or behind Miles during their dialogues. This blocking choice, especially when she turns her back to the audience to foreground Miles, can be seen as a visual representation of the subordinate position women often held in social and domestic hierarchies (Fig. 4.4.1 (a)). The deliberate lack of physical contact between the Governess and Miles further highlights the gendered boundaries and the strictures of propriety that governed male-female interactions. Conversely, the Governess's more relaxed and casual interactions with Flora depict a different aspect of gender relations, possibly suggesting a greater freedom in relationships among female characters.



Fig. 4.4.1 (a): Production photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act 2 Scene 4, 'The Bedroom'. Photograph of left to right: the Governess (Jennifer Vyvyan), and Miles (David Hemmings). 'My dear; you know. You're always watching, watching, watching'. Photo by: Denis de Marney, Source: Getty images.

The spatial arrangement of the ghosts in the play offers an insight into gender dynamics. The ghosts, primarily positioned at the back or distant parts of the stage, symbolise their separation from the human realm, but this staging also reflects deeper gender-related themes. Quint, a male ghost, is consistently associated with the tower in his appearances. Some scholars interpret the ‘tower’ as a phallic symbol,⁴⁹ representing masculine qualities. In contrast, Miss Jessel, a female ghost, is frequently associated with water (Fig. 4.4.1 (b)). Water, often described as a ‘natural mirror’, is portrayed as the origin of a woman’s essence – ‘from which, like Venus, she had emerged and to which, like Ophelia, she was destined to return’.⁵⁰ This element is traditionally perceived as a feminine symbol in various references.



Fig. 4.4.1 (b) *Music and Musicians* review of the première production. Photograph of left to right: Miles, Flora (Olive Dyer), Quint (Peter Pears), and Miss Jessel (Arda Mandikian). Source: Britten-Pears Archive, EOG/17 Press cuttings.

⁴⁹ Auker, ‘Their Dreams and Ours: Britten, Film, and *The Turn of the Screw*’, 167-9.

⁵⁰ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 189.

This distinction in their respective domains—Quint in the tower and Miss Jessel near water—extends beyond mere spatial positioning to signify deeper gender connotations. In scenes where both appear, Quint is often placed above Miss Jessel, as seen in Act II Scene 1, ‘Colloquy and Soliloquy’, where he is positioned higher, holding Miss Jessel’s hands from above.⁵¹ This configuration can be interpreted as a representation of male dominance within their relationship, emphasizing gender over social status. This is particularly notable given that, in terms of social class, Jessel holds a higher position than Quint.

The character of lived Miss Jessel is an embodiment of female independence, as evidenced by her acceptance of the challenging position at Bly. However, her involvement with Quint and the subsequent criticism she faces lead to the disintegration of her independent persona. It not only highlights the constraints imposed on women in a patriarchal society but also illustrates how her social standing and independence are compromised by her personal choices and the gendered expectations of the time. The Governess, as the successor to Miss Jessel, represents a clear advancement in women’s consciousness. Despite her youth, she commits to managing Bly, promising the Guardian to maintain order, “‘I will”, she said’, in the prologue, and exerting considerable effort towards this end.

Like Miss Jessel, the Governess does not completely break free from the constraints of her time. Her desire to keep Miles, the only male at Bly, from returning to school, is driven by personal motives, reflecting both a self-serving desire and an adherence to male power. This includes her struggle with the ghost Quint over Miles in the final scene, evolving into a possessive desire for the boy (Fig. 4.4.1 (c)). The outcome is seemingly victorious yet ultimately a failure, as noted in P. B.’s review titled “Boy of 12 Dominates New Opera’, published in *The Star* on Oct 7, 1954:

⁵¹ I observed this in the 1959 Associated-Rediffusion television production.

Won over by the Governess, the boy denounces the manservant's ghost as a devil. The evil spirit is thus exorcised. The lad should be safe. But he dies apparently of fright in his protector's arms. The dismissed devil wins after all.⁵²



Fig. 4.4.1 (c) The UK Première Production, Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', Photograph of left to right: Quint, Miles, and the Governess. Photographer: Denis de Marney. Source: Getty Images.

The Governess's management is not without its limitations, constrained by her limited prior management experience and her unequal treatment of the boy and girl. In the UK première, when Flora seeks attention from the Governess, she is often ignored: the Governess's fondness for Miles is evident, her gaze and body language often lean towards Miles, while Flora sits at a distance, her body and gaze oriented in a different direction from theirs (Fig. 4.4.1 (d)).

⁵² P. B., 'Boy of 12 Dominates New Opera', *The Star*, Oct 7, 1954.



Fig. 4.4.1 (d) The UK Première Production, Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson'. Photograph of left to right: Flora, The Governess, and Miles, singing, 'Malo; I would rather be...' Photographer: Denis de Marney: copyright: Getty Images.

The absence of male figures in Bly severely affects the children's development, particularly the lack of fatherly love. The mysterious Guardian never appears on stage, and Miles's seemingly well-behaved but mysteriously distant demeanor, and Quint's reckless boldness exacerbate this absence, collectively elevating the status of male characters who do appear in the production.

Through my observation of the 1959 television production by Morley and visual materials from the 1954 UK première production, it is evident that the Governess shows an obvious preference for males over females. In these productions, her interactions and focal points often favour Miles over Flora, leading to a gender imbalance in her attention and care. This bias results in Flora feeling lonely and neglected, while Miss Jessel's sorrowful narrative adds a layer of melancholy to the story. These elements, combined with the Governess's behavior, cast a tragic shadow over the female roles at the premiere. The Governess's portrayal highlights the prevailing gender norms and social expectations of the time, emphasizing the difficulties women face in seeking independence and the impacts of deviating from traditional roles.

4.4.2 1979 English National Opera Production

Previous discussions have shown that interpretations of James's novella have shifted focus over time, including early explorations of the ambiguity regarding the existence of ghosts in the opera, interpretations using Freudian theory to understand the Governess's mental struggles, and the possibility of the Governess experiencing sexual repression. Viewing the role of the Governess from a female perspective, the tragic conclusion of James's novella seems to pass judgement on the fate of its female protagonist. However, it can be discerned that the Governess, prior to the tragedy, was diligently performing her duties like a Victorian male role, exercising the power vested in her and striving to manage Bly effectively. Despite the stark differences between Bly and her previous environment, she makes every effort to quickly adapt to and manage her new setting at Bly.

From the available materials gathered, it is evident that Miller's focus on the stage, besides delving into the ambiguity in James's novella, features the portrayal of the Governess as confident, pure, capable, and authoritative. This approach aligns, to a significant extent, with James's perspective on independent women in his novella. The Governess is endowed with the highest authority at Bly by the Guardian, enabling her to independently handle various matters at Bly and to educate and care for the two children. For the Governess, the opportunity to work at Bly signifies a departure from her original family, constrained by limited conditions. This also represents a chance for rebirth, an opportunity to distinguish herself from other women who lived dependent on men during the Victorian era. The Governess finds Bly novel, and upon her arrival, she is warmly welcomed by Flora, Miles, and Mrs Grose. Flora and Miles, one on each side, pull the Governess forward, placing her in the centre, where she exhibits immense anticipation Fig. 1.4.2 (a). She displays herself to the audience with great confidence and openness, a stark contrast to the restrained and subdued character of Mrs Grose, who bears the deep imprint of traditional Victorian female notions.



Fig. 4.4.2 (a) The 1979 English National Opera Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act I Scene 1, 'The Welcome'. Left to right: Flora (Iris Saunders), Mrs Grose (Ava June), The Governess (Eilene Hannan), and Miles (Michael Ginn). Source: English National Opera.

In the portrayal of adult female characters, the Governess's characterisation differs from that of Mrs Grose and Miss Jessel. The Governess is dressed in light colours, while Mrs Grose and Miss Jessel are clad in black. This contrast seems to represent two different types of women: the Governess symbolises an independent, capable woman who can single-handedly manage Bly and represents a redeeming female figure, whereas Mrs Grose and Miss Jessel embody women marked by the traditional values of the Victorian era. Mrs Grose, as a domestic servant, is limited in her education and deeply entrenched in class-conscious thinking. She refers to Miles as 'master' and 'gentleman', and addresses the late Miss Jessel as 'lady'. On the other hand, Miss Jessel's clandestine relationship with the servant Quint was not accepted by society due to the significant social class differences between them. Furthermore, Miss Jessel's premarital pregnancy

was a direct violation of the moral and ethical standards of the time. Miss Jessel is a victim who challenged the Victorian values, leading to her demise.

In this production, the Governess emerges as a redemptive figure, breaking free from traditional confines and assuming control, a representation of female empowerment that was ahead of its time. However, her path to growth encounters significant obstacles from the remnants of old forces. The appearance of ghosts, along with Quint's struggle to possess Miles, signifies the persistence of these old forces and the control of male authority over social status. Miles's soul and body, influenced by Quint, symbolise the loss of control by the Governess, a female authority figure, and the dominance of male power in society. The Governess's mental state begins to deteriorate; she no longer stands tall with confidence but becomes distressed, tearful, and pleading, especially evident in Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', where she appears in a subjugated position, kneeling and begging Miles to name Quint, contrasting with the upright and confident stance of Quint (Fig. 4.4.2 (b)).



Fig. 4.4.2 (b) The 1979 English National Opera Production Photograph of The Turn of the Screw Act II Scene 8, 'Miles'. Left to right: The Governess, Miles, and Quint. The Governess appears in a subjugated position, kneeling. Source: Arenapal.

Ultimately, when Miles names Quint, leading to Quint's departure, it seems to symbolise the triumph of this new female force over the Victorian era's male-dominated discourse. However, with Miles's death, the Governess's newfound independence and authority collapse dramatically. This may reflect James's recognition of the bravery and courage of women during the Victorian era, acknowledging that breaking free from the era's constraints is a challenging process filled with setbacks. The path forward requires trailblazers to continually break through these bindings.

On the one hand, Miller's production acknowledges the rise of female power, endowing the Governess with significant authority and status. However, on the other hand, her eventual failure in the struggle against male-dominated discourse reflects the inevitable setbacks under the influence of Victorian era values, with the production even possibly serving as a caution that Victorian women's seeking to become independent and authoritative could invite disaster.

4.4.3 2005 BBC Wales production

As one of the two female-directed productions among the six case studies in this thesis, Katie Mitchell's BBC Wales production diverges notably from the majority of opera productions that typically centre around Miles. Mitchell's production shifts the focus to a female perspective. It not only bestows substantial attention on the often-overlooked character of Flora, but also enriches Mrs Grose with a more pronounced role and psychological depth within Bly. This production examines the Governess's inner world deeply and introduces the character of Miles's deceased mother, portrayed through flashbacks using montage techniques interspersed throughout the performance. This production could aptly be described as a 'women's production', elevating the narrative from a female viewpoint to an unprecedented level.

In Act I Scene 1, 'The Journey', Mitchell uses the advantages of cinematography to focus intently on the Governess's facial expressions. The Governess's internal

monologue is heard, but not visibly sung: the Governess reveals her innermost thoughts through the voice in her mind. Her expressions fluctuate from apprehensive about managing Bly, to tearfully empathetic when she resolves to treat the orphaned children as her own (Fig. 4.4.3 (a)), to perplexed about the events unfolding at Bly, and finally to self-encouraging as she braces for her new life alone in the unknown environment of Bly. These close-up shots capture the Governess's innocence, compassion, and kindness.



Fig. 4.4.3 (a) Act I Scene 1, 'The Journey', The Governess (Lisa Milne) sings, 'Poor babies, no father no mother'. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

This method of singing, with the sound separated from what is seen, also conveys a certain ambiguity, as the critic Anne Midgette notes:

[This is] a deft way of both restoring some ambiguity to the ghosts and dealing with arias, which in any opera often sound more like someone's inner neuroses than like actual speech.⁵³

It allows the audience to delve into the complex emotional landscape of the Governess, reflecting her multifaceted personality and the internal conflicts she faces. This

⁵³ Midgette, 'In This Version, the Britten Opera Dons a Dress'.

approach not only enhances the character's depth but also invites the audience to engage more intimately with her emotional journey.

Upon meeting the Governess, Mrs Grose assumes the role of the head of the household, a responsibility that compels her to maintain a vigilant and solemn demeanour. Initially, upon encountering the Governess, she utters 'How do you do, Miss, Welcome to Bly!' Britten's score describes Mrs Grose as curtsying to the Governess during their first meeting, with a tone and mood that become more effusive (Ex. 4.4.3 (a)). However, in Mitchell's interpretation, Mrs Grose is not overtly warm but rather serious and formal, scrutinising the Governess with an evaluative gaze (Fig. 4.4.3 (b)).

The image shows a musical score for Mrs. Grose's entrance. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, with lyrics in English and German. The middle staff is for the piano accompaniment, and the bottom staff is for the harp. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'p' (piano). The lyrics are: 'be here. sein.....', 'Mrs. GROSE (curtseying) knixend', 'How do you do, Miss, Welcome to Bly!', and 'Schön gu-ten Tag, Miss. Willkommen in Bly!'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'mf' and 'p'.

Ex. 4.4.3 (a) Act I Scene 2, 'The Welcome'.



Fig. 4.4.3 (b) Act I Scene 2, 'The Welcome', Photograph of left to right: Miles (Nicholas Kirby Johnson), Mrs Grose (Diana Montague), and Flora (Caroline Wise). Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

This portrayal of Mrs Grose by Mitchell emphasises her authoritative and scrutinising nature. The contrast between her sombre approach and the traditional expectation of warmth and effusiveness adds a layer of complexity to her character, reflecting the gravity of her role in Bly.

In Chapter 1 ('Social Class'), Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', is highlighted as a significant moment where Mrs Grose reveals the history of the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel, facilitating a transfer of authority at Bly. The Governess, departing from her usual gentle and kind demeanour, expresses her determination angrily yet firmly, stating her intent to protect both the children and the Guardian (rehearsal number 46). This declaration marks a significant shift in her role. Subsequently, Mrs Grose begins to reveal her more vulnerable side, embodying the soft and delicate aspects often associated with femininity. This evolution in Mrs Grose's character leads to a newfound trust in the Governess and signifies a formal passing of authority.

At this juncture, despite the Governess's shock at the existence of the ghosts, the extraordinary circumstances ignite her feminine strength. She assumes the mantle of

the head of the household, indicating her readiness to face the challenges at Bly. This scene is crucial in depicting the Governess's transformation from a caretaker to a figure of authority, highlighting her resilience and adaptability in the face of unforeseen and supernatural challenges.

In Mitchell's production of the opera, an innovative approach is introduced, namely, the portrayal of Miles's deceased mother through montage techniques, seen in Miles's recollections. In this production, Miles is often seen holding his mother's photograph and reminiscing about various moments spent with her, signifying her profound importance in his life. This notion becomes crucial when considering the connection between Miles and Quint.

When Quint, singing his theme that is tinged with a feminine softness, summons Miles, the latter follows uncontrollably, as seen in Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'. Here, Miles, lured by Quint, nearly jumps from the rooftop but is fortunately discovered in time by the Governess (Fig. 4.4.3 (c)). Afterwards, Miles calmly tells the Governess, 'You see- I am bad, I am bad, aren't I?' The scene then transitions to Miles reflecting on the image of his mother reflected in water (Fig. 4.4.3 (d)), a mirror that also symbolises an inversion of reality. He is aware of his mother's death, yet the recollections are in warm tones, contrasting the cold, dark hues of reality.



Fig. 4.4.3 (c) Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'. Miles and the Governess. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.



Fig. 4.4.3 (d) Act I Scene 8, 'At Night'. Miles's Mother. Screenshot from the DVD of 2005 BBC production.

When summoning Miles, Quint's theme is notably soft and feminine in tone, suggesting a potential strategy of seduction rather than a direct reflection of Quint's own characteristics. Philip Brett's assertion that Quint's musical theme possesses 'feminine' charms suggests an underlying complexity in Quint's character, as portrayed through his music.⁵⁴ This notion of femininity within Quint's theme, I believe, could be indicative of his method of seduction or manipulation, particularly in his interactions with Miles. The 'feminine' aspect of the music may symbolise a softer, more alluring approach. This interpretation raises the intriguing possibility that Miles is not so much seduced by Quint himself but rather by the secret that Quint offers – the chance to see his deceased mother. Therefore, it could imply that Quint's summoning of Miles to the rooftop, with the promise of seeing his mother, foreshadows Miles's eventual death as a voluntary act. Such a perspective suggests a more complex dynamic between Quint and Miles, where the allure is not just in the ghostly presence of Quint, but in the deeper emotional and psychological motivations of Miles, particularly his longing for maternal connection.

⁵⁴ Brett, 'Britten's Bad Boys Male Relations in *The Turn of the Screw*', 100.

In Act II Scene 4, 'The Bedroom', Miles's longing for his mother is again evident. When the Governess presents a letter to the Guardian to Miles, he sits silently on the bed. Suddenly, a glockenspiel sounds, Quint's voice is heard, and a hand in the darkness startles Miles, pulling at his ear and causing him to scream. This reaction is starkly different from his previous following of Quint. Notably, Quint does not sing his thematic music in this instance, suggesting that he is not using the image of Miles's mother to compel obedience, hence Miles's intense fright.

Miles's dependency appears rooted not in Quint himself but in the hope Quint symbolises – the possibility of reuniting with his mother. This longing for maternal connection transcends the superficial malevolent manipulation typically associated with ghostly figures like Quint. In Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', when Miles cries, 'Peter Quint, you devil!', it could be interpreted as a realisation that Quint's promise to enable a reunion with his mother was deceitful. This moment underscores the profound impact of gender and maternal absence in the narrative. Miles's ultimate demise can be viewed not as a tragic end but as a hopeful journey towards reuniting with his mother.

Mitchell's production thus presents death not as a fearful end but as a pathway to reuniting with a maternal figure, a theme deeply interwoven with gendered narratives. The portrayal of Miles's mother becomes instrumental in deciphering his fate, offering a reasoned explanation for his death. The interpretation of death as a reunion adds a complex layer to Miles's story, deeply rooted in the gendered implications of longing for a lost maternal figure and the emotional turmoil stemming from this absence. The analysis of Miles emphasizes the significance of maternal figures and the profound influence of gendered dynamics on personal identity and fate.

In Mitchell's production, the portrayal of female characters diverges from traditional depictions of women as appendages to men, characterized by lamentation and neglect. Instead, these women are enveloped in love and possess the agency to acknowledge and address their own needs. Flora is no longer portrayed as an overlooked girl or merely an accessory beside Miles. Instead, she is surrounded by

layers of affection: the remnants of love from the deceased Miss Jessel, the attentive care of Mrs Grose, and the nightly companionship provided by the Governess. Consequently, Mitchell's Flora appears to be a more carefree, brighter, and more empathetic girl than Miles, seemingly less burdened by complex thoughts.

The Governess's attentive and nurturing care for Flora is poignantly depicted in Act I Scene 4, 'The Tower'. In this scene, the Governess articulates her growing affection and appreciation for her surroundings and the children in her care:

[The Governess]: How beautiful it is. Each day it seems more beautiful to me. And my darling children enchant me more and more. My first foolish fears are all vanish'd now.

This tender expression of sentiment is further exemplified as the scene unfolds with the Governess sharing a room with Flora. Here, she watches over Flora as she sleeps peacefully, a testament to the caring and protective environment she has fostered for her. This scene is not just a depiction of the tranquil setting but also a reflection of the Governess's dedication and attentiveness to Flora's well-being, highlighting her role as a caregiver who ensures a safe and nurturing space for the girl under her care.

Act I Scene 6, 'The Lesson', further reinforces this theme of gender equality. Flora and Miles are seated side by side in the classroom, a setting that symbolises equality, in contrast to other productions studied in this thesis where Flora is often relegated to a corner while the Governess focuses on Miles. When Flora seeks attention by standing on a table, the Governess's response is firm but not overly harsh, showcasing Flora's candid and impulsive nature. After Miles sings the 'Malo' song and retreats to his room in distress, it is Flora who quietly comforts him, offering her mother's photograph for consolation. This scene suggests a maturity and thoughtfulness in Flora, highlighting her ability to comfort others.

These descriptions underscore that Flora experiences a relative sense of security at Bly, partly because it has always been her home and comfort zone. Mitchell's production thus elevates the narrative of gender equality by depicting female characters,

particularly young girls like Flora, as emotionally mature, caring, and equal in their relationships, challenging traditional gender roles and perceptions.

In Mitchell's production, Miss Jessel is portrayed differently compared to other productions studied in this thesis, notably in her relationships with Quint and Flora. Mitchell's Miss Jessel is depicted with a maternal attachment to Flora, reminiscent of a mother's fondness and concern for her own child. This is evident in Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', where Flora is visibly happy upon Miss Jessel's arrival. Flora's eagerness to follow Miss Jessel, even wading through shallow water, indicates a willing and positive response, suggesting a deep bond between them. Miss Jessel's character is not crafted as malevolent but rather as a sympathetic figure, unable to sever her maternal ties to Flora, indicating a close and affectionate relationship during her lifetime. This production effectively foregrounds the inner worlds of female characters, drawing the audience's attention to their complex emotional landscapes.

In Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', the interaction between Quint and Miss Jessel deviates from themes of disdain or abandonment. Miss Jessel does not appear in a pleading stance towards Quint. It focuses on Miss Jessel's physical movements and facial expressions, with Quint often turned away from the camera, signalling the director's intent to emphasise the female character. Mitchell's production includes a suggestive scene implying a sexual encounter between Miss Jessel and Quint (this will be analysed in detail in the next chapter under the theme 'Sexuality'). Miss Jessel is portrayed as a willing and enjoying participant, and later it is hinted that the Governess experiences this scene as an erotic dream. This narrative approach confronts female physiological desires directly, countering the Victorian era's moral constraints and oppression of women. It signifies the emergence and progress of female equality consciousness, expressing an evolving awareness and advocacy for gender equality.

Overall, Mitchell's production stands out for its nuanced exploration of gender themes. It emphasises the strength, complexity, and independence of female characters,

offering a more equitable and realistic portrayal of women, and thereby advancing the narrative of gender equality in the opera.

4.4.4 2011 Glyndebourne production

Jonathan Kent's production, while sharing Mitchell's emphasis on the portrayal of female characters, distinguishes itself by focusing on the depiction of madness originating from psychological issues, particularly in its characterisation of the Governess. Contrary to the typical portrayal of the 19th-century governess as composed and innocent in other productions discussed in this thesis, Kent's production presents her with traits indicative of madness. This Governess is depicted as being highly sensitive, irritable, prone to outbursts, and exhibiting neurotic behaviour. As the opera unfolds, her increasing madness significantly affects both her self-perception and her interactions with the children, leading to heightened irritability in Flora and Miles. The narrative culminates with Flora's departure and Miles's death, which can be interpreted as a tragic consequence of the pressure exerted by the Governess's troubled psyche.

In a male dominated society, 'madness' was often synonymous with women, an association deeply entrenched in cultural contexts.⁵⁵ This link between women and madness has been historically influenced by social norms that marginalise female experiences and emotions. In contemporary culture, madness is frequently perceived as a feminised trait,⁵⁶ reflecting the ongoing biases that equate mental distress with femininity. This gendered perspective on mental health is notably evident in opera, particularly through the trope of the 'mad scene'. This is defined by Stephen A. Willier as 'an operatic scene in which a character, usually the soprano heroine, displays traits of mental collapse, such as amnesia, hallucination, irrational behaviour, or

⁵⁵ Jane Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 64.

⁵⁶ Susan McClary, 'Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen' in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 84.

sleepwalking'.⁵⁷ The mad scene often reinforces this gendered stereotype. These scenes typically depict female characters as emotionally unstable or irrational, perpetuating the notion of inherent female 'madness' in cultural narratives and further illustrating how gender biases are embedded in artistic expressions.

In Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', after Mrs Grose identifies the stranger as Peter Quint, a sudden, intense emotional shift follows in the Governess. She adamantly states that Quint's visitation concerns Miles and becomes highly agitated and angry, eyes wide, declaring:

[The Governess] That man, impudent, spoiled, depraved. Mrs Grose, I'm afraid, not for me, for Miles-he came to look for Miles, I'm sure of that, and he will come again! But I see it now, I must protect the children, I must guard their quiet, and their guardian's too.

Her mood then softens as she sings 'see what I see, know what I know, that they may see and know nothing', and she withdraws, kneeling to tidy up, seemingly ignoring Mrs Grose. The Governess's behaviour resembles a stress response where a person, overwhelmed by a significant shock, retreats inward as a means of self-preservation, illustrating the Governess's descent into madness.

The Governess's madness manifests again in Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake'. In this scene, without knowing Miss Jessel's appearance or confirming with Mrs Grose whether the figure she saw was indeed Miss Jessel, the Governess subjectively concludes that the deceased Miss Jessel has returned. When she becomes convinced that Flora has encountered Miss Jessel, her psychological state intensifies, leading her to critically scrutinise Flora's silence on the matter: her expression grave, eyes wide, she definitively states, 'They are lost', before packing her belongings in a panic and departing swiftly (Fig. 4.4.4 (a)). The Governess's actions bear a sense of suspicion and

⁵⁷ Stephen A. Willier, 'Mad Scene', *Grove Music Online*, 2002, accessed Dec 6, 2023. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000007756>.

judgement towards Flora, highlighting a scene that underscores the Governess's descent into a paranoia of her own imagination.

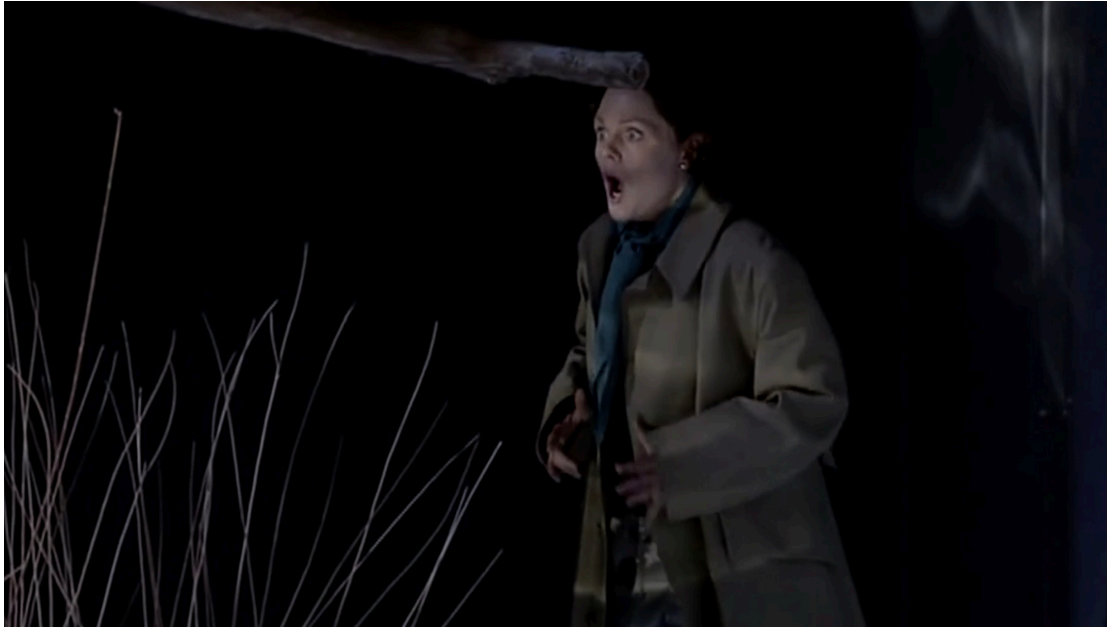


Fig. 4.4.4 (a) Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake', when the Governess (Miah Persson) believes that Miss Jessel returns. Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

In Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', during the conversation between Miss Jessel and Quint, the directorial decision to keep the Governess on stage throughout allows for dual interpretations. It could imply that she is aware of Miss Jessel and Quint's scheming to control the children, or it might suggest that the ghosts' conspiracy is a part of the Governess's dream. Whether the Governess actually discerns the ghosts' plan or it is a figment of her dream, this incident further exacerbates her descent into madness:

[The Governess] Lost in my labyrinth I see no truth. Only the foggy walls of evil press upon me. Lost in my labyrinth I see no truth. Oh innocence, you have corrupted me. Which way shall I turn? I know nothing of evil, yet I fear it, I feel it, worse, imagine it.

Following the Governess's perceived sighting of the ghosts, her emotional breakdown is strikingly portrayed on stage. A notable aspect of this portrayal is the lighting design, which intentionally leaves her eyes in shadow, causing them to appear like two dark

voids (Fig. 4.4.4 (b)). This visual effect not only emphasises the depth of her emotional turmoil but perhaps is meant to recall Munch's painting *The Scream*, symbolically reflecting her descent into a state of confusion and despair.



Fig. 4.4.4 (b) Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', the Governess. Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

The rapid ascents and descents of the strings in this scene mirror the Governess's tumultuous state of mind (Ex. 4.4.4 (a)), encapsulating her confusion and inability to grasp the situation. This musical expression also conveys her growing fear, illustrating the psychological turmoil she is experiencing, and further emphasises the theme of mental instability.

24

Gov. *f sf* I know no - - - - - thing of e - vil, no - thing, - - -
 24 Ich kenn' Bö - - - - - ses so we - nig, we - nig, - - -

Vi. I *ff sf dim.*

Vi. 2 *ff sf dim.*

Vla. *sf*

Vc. *ff sf dim.*

Db. *ff sf dim.*

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Gov. *dim.* Yet I fear it, I feel it, worse, i - magine it.
 Doch ich fürcht' es, ich füh' es, schlim - mer, ich se - he es.

Vi. I

Vi. 2 *pp*

Vla. *p f dim.*

Vc.

Db.

Ex. 4.4.4 (a) Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy'.

In Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell', while the children are playing and Mrs Grose is expressing her appreciation for the beauty of life, the Governess is portrayed with a face full of suspicion, scrutinising the children. Mrs Grose offers comfort after noticing the Governess's sombre and heavy expression. However, the Governess, with a tone of conviction, informs Mrs Grose:

[The Governess] They are not playing. They are talking horrors... I tell you they are not with us, but with the others. With Quint and that woman... They can destroy them.

The music at this point introduces a heavy, fate-like sound, underscoring the gravity of the situation (Ex. 4.4.4 (b)). After the Governess reveals her inner thoughts, there seems to be a sense of foreboding regarding the children's fate. Her expression turns stern and ruthless as she says, 'That his house is poisoned, the children mad... or that I am'. She looks unflinchingly at the children when saying 'the children mad', then turns towards the audience and asserts with finality, 'or that I am'. This moment is more about her unyielding stance and judgement, as if declaring, 'I am not mad; look how normal I am. I'm telling you, it's the children who are not normal; they are mad, they are with the ghosts'.

The musical score for Ex. 4.4.4 (b) Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell', is presented in a multi-staff format. The staves are labeled as follows: Perc. (Percussion), Piano (Piano), Gov. (Governess), Mrs. G. (Mrs. G.), Vi. I (Violin I), Vi. 2 (Violin II), Vc. (Viola), and Db. (Double Bass). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Percussion part features a bell sound. The Piano part is marked 'pp' and 'dim.'. The Governess part is marked 'darkly' and 'f'. The lyrics for the Governess are: 'That his house is poisoned, the children mad - or that I am!'. The lyrics for Mrs. G. are: 'un - cle. schrei - ben.'

Ex. 4.4.4 (b) Act II Scene 2, 'The Bell'.

When Miles stays behind to talk to the Governess, his unhappy demeanor and hands in pockets suggest he senses her suspicions. When the Governess asks, 'Are you not happy here?' and reaches out to touch his face, Miles recoils and remarks, 'I'm growing up, you know, I want my own kind'. As the Governess moves closer again, attempting to touch his face while saying, 'But I trust you, Miles', he responds sternly, 'You trust me,

my dear, but you think and think... of us and of the others [...]'. Miles's avoidance of physical contact and the angry expression on his face, followed by a look of disdain, seem to convey, 'You say you trust me, yet you speak ill of me behind my back'. This interaction signifies a rift in their relationship. The Governess, perceiving Miles's reaction, concludes that he fully understands her thoughts and finds the realisation terrifying:

[The Governess] I must go away, now, while they are at church. Away from those false little lovely eyes. Away from my fears, away from those horrors. Away from this poisoned place. Away, away.

During the Governess's portrayal of these thoughts, the stage is cast in extremely dark tones: apart from the stage backdrop, which resembles a dark night sky in deep blue, everything else, including the Governess, is cloaked in black. This choice of lighting serves a dual purpose: firstly, it visually represents the Governess's feelings of loneliness and isolation, emphasizing her detachment from those around her. Secondly, the dark hues mirror the inner turmoil and psychological darkness that the Governess is experiencing. The use of darkness in this scene is a powerful tool, conveying the depth of the Governess's internal struggle and her descent into a disturbed psychological state. The gloomy and oppressive atmosphere on stage further mirrors the Governess's growing sense of despair and confusion.

In Act II, Scene 4, 'The Bedroom', Miles sits on the bed, deep in thought, and the Governess, both curious and cautious, inquires what he is pondering. Miles responds that he is reflecting on the strange life they lead. He then, with a tone of complaint, points out the Governess's surveillance over him. The Governess is taken aback; perhaps she did not anticipate that while she was observing Miles, he was also scrutinising her. However, she quickly, and with a hint of threat, informs Miles that she has written to the Guardian. Miles's expression turns to one of surprise and disappointment as he says, 'What a lot you'll have to tell him'. The Governess then adopts a more assertive stance, lifting Miles's chin and staring at him fiercely, almost

vengefully stating, 'And so will you, Miles'. Her forceful attitude and the underlying tension in this confrontation underscore the Governess's increasing need for control and answers, while Miles grows increasingly uncomfortable under her scrutiny.

Then, as if undergoing a transformation, the Governess changes her approach. She envelops Miles in an embrace, gently rubbing and caressing his arms, her tone softening as she says, 'Miles, dear little Miles, is there nothing you want to tell me?' Miles, showing signs of resistance, remains unresponsive. The Governess persists, probing further with, 'Miles, what happened at school? What happened here?' Miles attempts to break free from her hold, leading the Governess to look at him in disbelief. She then lifts her head, gripping the struggling Miles with a resolve that resembles an attempt to tame a pet. She sings more forcefully, 'Miles, if you knew how I want to help you. How I want to help me save you'. Ultimately, unable to withstand the intense pressure, Miles screams. While the Governess's words are intended for his benefit, her actions are likely to frighten a ten-year-old boy. She grips Miles tightly with both hands, her gaze sharp and her expression fierce. This scene portrays the growth of the Governess's madness, as her increasingly forceful and intimidating behaviour stands in stark contrast to her supposed role as a caregiver and protector.

In Act II Scene 5, 'Quint', Miles is playing the piano when the Governess approaches him with a smile, tenderly stroking his head and praising. However, the scene takes a turn as Flora sneaks out while Mrs Grose is distracted. The Governess, once again overtaken by tension, sternly wakes Mrs Grose and orders her to find Flora. When Mrs Grose questions, 'But you'll leave the boy?', the Governess, with a fixed and domineering gaze on Miles, declares, 'Oh, I don't mind that now, he's with Quint' (Fig. 4.4.4 (c)), marking the first time she directly mentions Quint's name to Miles. This scene highlights the Governess's fixation on Quint (and Miss Jessel) and reveals a pattern of erratic emotional responses, almost akin to madness. The Governess's behavior towards Miles in this instance, particularly her aggressive approach and fixation on the presence of Quint, suggests a deepening of her mental instability.

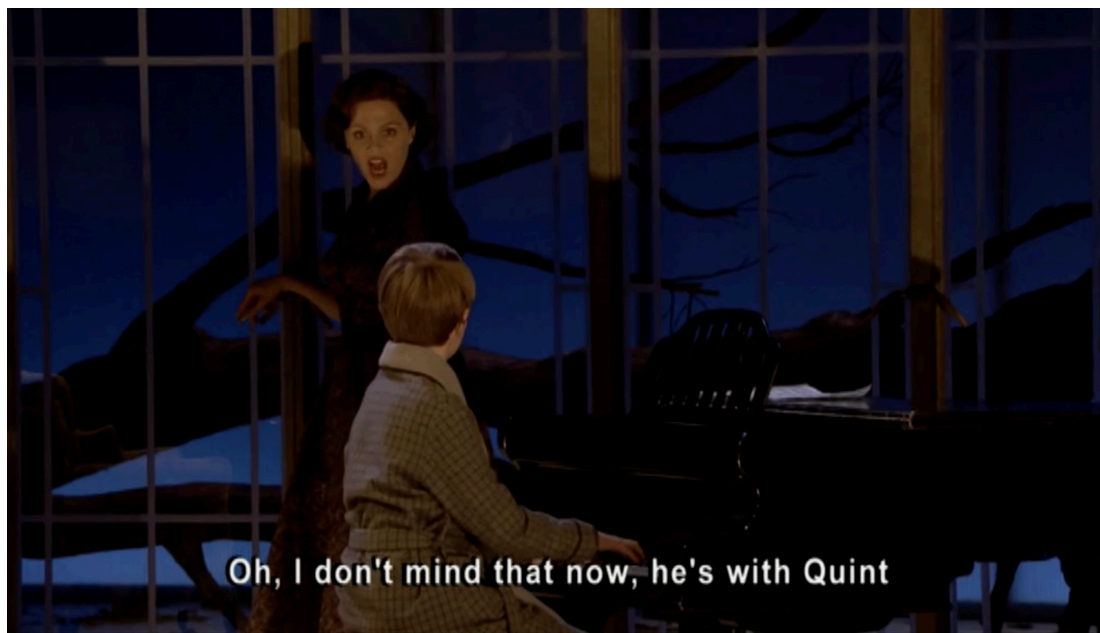


Fig. 4.4.4 (c) Act II Scene 5, 'Quint', the Governess and Miles (Thomas Parfitt). Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

In Act II Scene 7, 'Flora', the Governess and Mrs Grose find Flora by the lake. Mrs Grose embraces Flora with a worried expression, while the Governess, arms crossed and with an air of superiority, appears convinced that she knows Flora's intent. She confronts Flora: 'And where, my pet, is Miss Jessel?' Upon claiming to see Miss Jessel, she runs towards Flora, saying, 'Look, she's there', and grabs her, forcibly dragging her towards where she believes Miss Jessel is. Mrs Grose insists she sees nothing, and Flora takes the opportunity to run into her arms. The Governess approaches again, forcefully grabbing Flora and trying to make her see the supposed Miss Jessel: 'But look!' Flora struggles to break free and finally does, leaving the Governess astonished. Flora angrily sings:

[Flora] I can't see anybody, can't see anything. Nobody, nothing, nobody, nothing. I don't know what you mean. You're cruel, horrible, hateful, nasty... Why did you come here?

The Governess stands confused and helpless, pointing towards where she thinks Miss Jessel is. Mrs Grose asserts, 'There is nobody there. We know all things, they know

nothing. She isn't there. Poor Miss Jessel's dead and buried.' Flora, weak and distressed, lies in Mrs Grose's arms, begging, 'Take me away... I don't like her', and throws her doll at the Governess, becoming hysterical. The Governess remains fixated on Flora, seemingly outraged by her resistance and curses.

After Flora leaves, she cries out in a victimized manner: 'My friend, you have forsaken me at last. Flora, I have lost you'. Then she becomes frenzied, shouting in anger, 'Am I horrible? Am I then horrible? No, No!' (Fig. 4.4.4 (d)) She cries over her failure, then rages, with the music reflecting a sense of doom (rehearsal number 113): 'But I have failed, most miserably failed, and there is no more innocence in me'. This is followed by a sense of utter defeat as she weeps, 'And now she hates me, and now she hates me, hates me'. Her inability to comprehend the reality of the situation and her forceful actions towards Flora highlight her deteriorating mental state. This scene powerfully illustrates the Governess's increasing madness and desperation. Her despair and insanity reveal her hysterical symptoms mentally, sparking her almost pathological need for control.

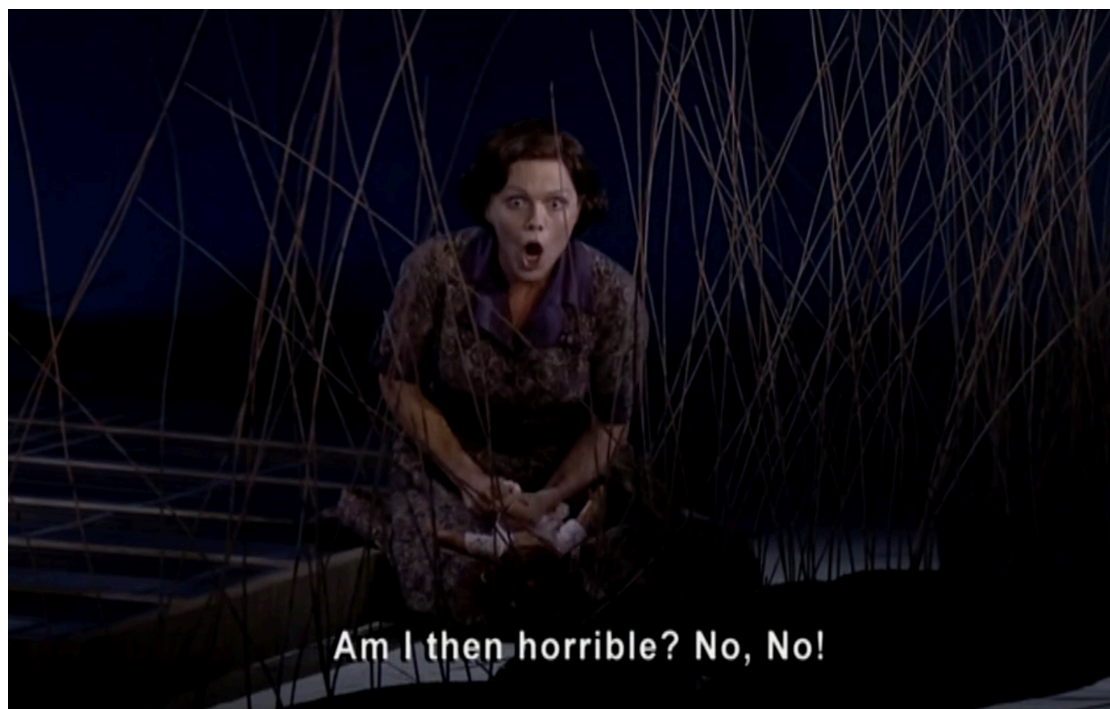


Fig. 4.4.4 (d) Act II Scene 7, 'Flora', the Governess. Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

In Act II, Scene 8, 'Miles', the Governess, in a highly emotional state, confronts Miles alone, willing to go to any length for him. Following a tense confrontation with Flora, she subtly encourages Miles to reveal Quint's identity. Despite her prodding, Miles initially resists, prompting the Governess to become increasingly demanding. As Miles tries to leave, she intervenes, leading him to kneel and promise to confess everything, momentarily softening her approach as she tenderly strokes his face. However, when Miles hesitates, saying 'But, not now', the Governess's patience snaps, and she aggressively demands to know if he stole her letter, to which he admits under duress (Fig. 4.4.4 (e)).

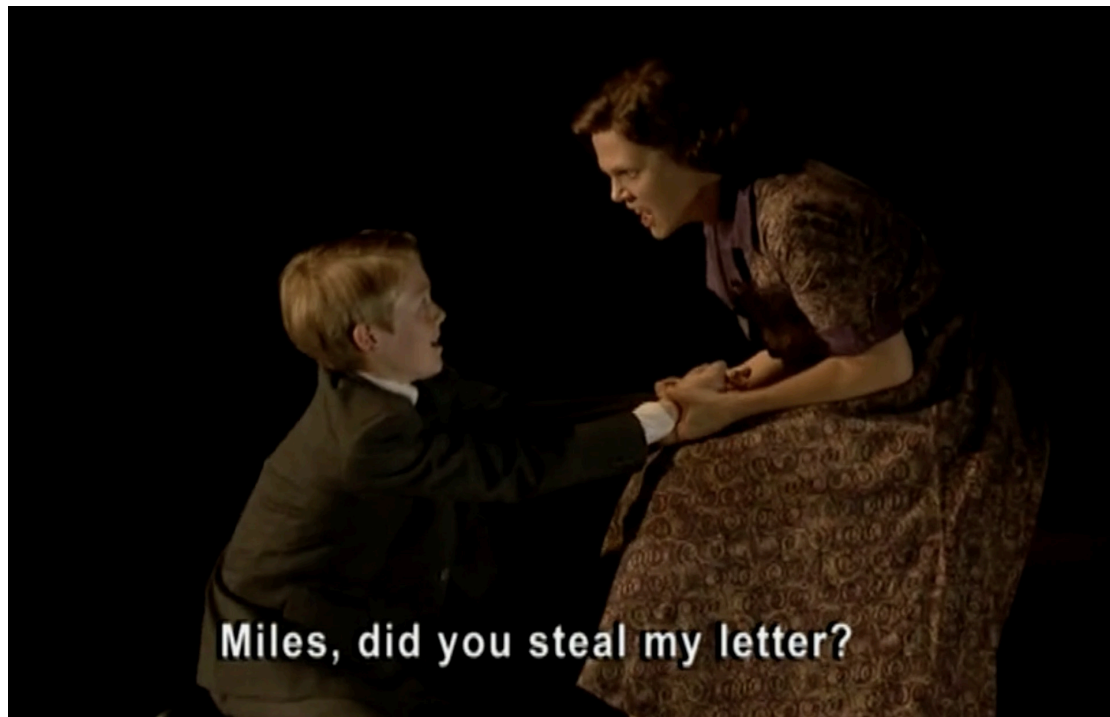


Fig. 4.4.4 (e) Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', Miles and the Governess. Screenshot from the DVD of 2011 Glyndebourne production.

The situation escalates as the Governess pulls Miles closer, urgently asking him to identify who he sees and waits for. Despite Miles's struggle to break free and his confusion, she presses him to say the name. In a dramatic climax, Miles finally shouts 'Peter Quint', collapsing onto the Governess and accusing her of being a 'devil'. Believing she has saved Miles, the Governess initially reacts with triumph. Her moment

of victory, however, is short-lived as she is confronted with the shocking reality of Miles's death. Frantically, she cradles him, shaking him while singing 'Malo', a song Miles enjoyed, in a futile attempt to rouse him. As she comes to terms with his death, she is left despondently questioning the tragic outcome of their intertwined fates.

Throughout the production, the Governess's interactions with Miles and Flora are marked by a growing sense of paranoia and desperation. Her actions, while intended to protect and save the children, increasingly become more erratic and intimidating, particularly in her confrontations with Miles. This culminates in the tragic death of Miles, showcasing the devastating impact of her mental breakdown. In Kent's production, the long-standing trope of exploring themes related to gender and the 'madwoman' concept is further reinforced. Kent's interpretation, visually captivating and dramatically engaging, can be argued to offer minimal challenge to the traditional narrative frameworks that often characterise female roles, such as the Governess.

This production largely focuses on the emotional turbulence of the Governess, perpetuating the notion that a woman's mental breakdown is almost inevitable when confronted with complex moral dilemmas and supernatural challenges. It reinforces outdated gender stereotypes of women being susceptible to emotional distress and mental disarray. The portrayal of the Governess highlights the stereotypical association between femininity and irrationality, a motif frequently encountered in classic literature and opera. The depiction of the Governess's gradual psychological disintegration aligns closely with archaic representations of women as inherently unstable or prone to hysteria under pressure. This production thus remains aligned to interpretations from the early period (the 1890s to the 1920s) based on the sociocultural context of the original material.

4.4.5 2019 Garsington Opera production

In Louisa Muller's production, set in the 1890s, the creative team presents themes that transcend the era, focusing on gender equality, the blurring of social class distinctions,

and female empowerment. Muller crafts the image of women as both gentle and strong, imbued with a sense of responsibility. However, the ghosts exceed their understanding and capabilities and inflict great pain upon them. In particular, the Governess struggles valiantly against the supernatural, but the escalating conflict and her efforts to protect the children place immense psychological stress on her, leading to hysteria and madness.

As a female director, Muller imbues the Governess with a compassionate and emotional character, while also highlighting the limitations imposed on her as a woman in the male-dominated society, rendering her unable to fully protect the children from harm independently. While dealing with themes that go beyond a specific period, this portrayal also offers a view of the challenges faced by women in assuming roles of responsibility and authority in the 19th century.

In this production, the Governess is portrayed as cheerful and kind-hearted. Unlike other productions analysed in the thesis, the Governess arrives at Bly full of hope and anticipation. Her interactions with the people of Bly are filled with love. She develops an egalitarian relationship with Mrs Grose, akin to friendship, and provides ample companionship and attention to the children. The production features several variations where the Governess is seen engaging in playful activities with Miles and Flora, underscoring her affectionate nature.

The peaceful and idyllic life at Bly is shattered by the appearance of a male stranger outside the window. In Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', the Governess learns from Mrs Grose that the figure she has seen is the deceased Quint. The music conveys the Governess's state of panic in this particular segment: the Governess's extreme agitation and unsettled psychological state are effectively communicated through the clarinet's continuous trill and the swift progression of notes (Ex. 4.4.5 (a)).

Agitated

89

44 (♩, ♩) *very smooth*

Ob.

Cl. in B♭ (tr♯)

Hrn. in F *very smooth*

GOVERNESS *p (whispered)*

I know no-thing of these things. Is this shel-tered place the wick-ed
 Ich weiss nichts von sol-chen Dingen. Ist dies stil-le Haus die bö-se

Fl.

Ob. *ppp*

Cl. in B♭

Hrn. in F

Harp *p*

Perc. Timp. *ppp*

Gov. world where things un-spoken of can be?
 Welt, wo Un-aus-sprech-li-ches ge-schieht?
 Mrs. GROSE

Vla. *ppp*

Vc. *ppp*

Db. *ppp*

Ex. 4.4.5 (a) Act I Scene 5, 'The Window'.

However, in a moment of intense emotional shift, the Governess's demeanour drastically changes. She swiftly moves from the back of the stage to the front, furiously denouncing Quint, who appears outside the window, and tells Mrs Grose that Quint has come for Miles. The strings in the orchestra resonate with the Governess's heightened,

agitated emotions, oscillating between *forte* and *sforzando* to match the intensity of her outburst (rehearsal number 45). Shocked at witnessing a ghost, she resolves to protect the children of Bly and uphold the tranquillity of their guardian. Mrs Grose supports her in this resolve, but from this point on, the Governess's mindset begins to be influenced by the ghosts, leading her towards a loss of control.

In Act I Scene 7, 'The Lake', the Governess accompanies Flora to the lakeside. Their conversation is initially harmonious until Flora submerges her doll in the water, seemingly becoming a different person under some influence. The Governess quickly pulls Flora away but then loses control of her emotions, hysterically lamenting her failure to save the children and feeling useless before fainting. In Variation VII, after fainting, the Governess wakes up (or possibly dreams) and sees Miss Jessel (appearing for the first time on stage) and Quint's face at the window, which frightens her into fainting again. In Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', the children, summoned by the ghosts, run out in their nightclothes. The Governess awakens from her faint and immediately rushes to Miles, kneeling to attend to him.

The two instances of fainting suggest that the Governess is experiencing intense psychological stress, a clear manifestation of hysteria. Her immediate concern for Miles upon waking, despite Flora being cared for by Mrs Grose, highlights the children's importance to her and reflects her deep sense of responsibility. This portrayal in Muller's production emphasizes the Governess's dedication to the children, even as she battles her own psychological turmoil and confronts supernatural forces.

In Act II, Variation VIII, the Governess sees the children playing at night and is startled by them wearing masks. Her expression is grave and sorrowful, causing the children to feel puzzled and wonder if they have upset her. The Governess is distressed, leaning on the piano in a state of despondency. Miles comes to comfort her, and they embrace, offering her some solace. This scene illustrates the Governess's affection for the children and their inherent kindness towards her.

In Act II, Variation IX, the Governess is again frightened by the ghosts, becoming increasingly terrified and hypersensitive. Consequently, she constantly observes the children (Fig. 4.4.5 (a)), suspecting that the ghosts have already influenced them, potentially pulling them away from her and Mrs Grose. In Act II Scene 2, ‘The Bell’, the Governess is on edge, informing Mrs Grose that the children are already with the ghosts. Her emotions become agitated and hysterical. However, at this moment, Mrs Grose dismisses the Governess’s claims, taking the children away and giving her a look that seems to convey distrust in her words.



Fig. 4.4.5 (a) Garsington Opera production, Act II Scene 2, ‘The Bell’, the Governess (Sophie Bevan), Flora (Adrianna Forbes-Dorant), Miles (Leo Jemison). Photo by: John Snelling, Image provided by Garsington Opera.

Returning to inquire about his return to school, Miles expresses dissatisfaction with the Governess’s constant observation of him and Flora. His reference to the uncle with, ‘does my uncle think what you think?’, and the gesture of touching the Governess’s face are particularly significant. This action, echoing the Guardian’s earlier touch to the

Governess in the Prologue, suggests that Miles is more aware and astute than he appears. He recognizes the significance of the Guardian in the Governess's life and uses this knowledge to express his discontent and rebellion.

Following Mrs Grose's evident distrust in her words and the psychological impact of the apparitions, the Governess experiences a complete breakdown. She sits on a stool, seemingly engulfed by darkness, with no one to assist her. After a jarring sequence of pizzicato that transitions from loud to soft, the strings experience a brief cessation before entering a prolonged, low register. It is in this soundscape that the Governess begins to sing, 'I'm alone' (rehearsal number 54), as if reflecting her mental process of grappling with the bizarre and incomprehensible events that have transpired. This musical choice symbolizes her descent into a state of profound helplessness and isolation. After a moment of contemplation, she hysterically decides to leave Bly and rushes to pack her belongings. This series of events highlight the Governess's descent into isolation and despair. Her initial purpose and strength are eroded by the supernatural occurrences, the children's changing behaviour, and the lack of support from Mrs Grose.

The appearance of Miss Jessel disrupts the Governess's plans to leave Bly and further exacerbates her hysterical mental state, yet it also showcases her sense of responsibility. In Act II Scene 3, 'Miss Jessel', the sudden appearance of Miss Jessel not only deeply frightens the Governess but also reinforces her belief that Bly is under threat from the ghosts. This compels her to muster the courage to confront Miss Jessel, as evidenced by her exclamation, 'you horrible, terrible woman' (Fig. 4.4.5 (b)).



Fig. 4.4.5 (b) Garsington Opera production, Act II Scene 3, 'Miss Jessel', Miss Jessel (Katherine Broderick) and the Governess. Photo by: John Snelling, Image provided by Garsington Opera.

The Governess's decision to stay at Bly, despite her initial intent to leave, signifies a turning point in her character. This choice, driven by her sense of duty to protect the children and the estate from perceived supernatural dangers, leads her to break her promise to the Guardian by writing him a letter.

Muller's portrayal of the Governess in this scene underscores the struggle between her fears and determination to fulfil her responsibilities. It highlights the psychological toll of her experiences at Bly and unwavering commitment to safeguarding the children, even at the cost of her own mental well-being.

In Act II Scene 7, 'Flora', the Governess and Mrs Grose encounter Flora, who, seemingly possessed, walks into the lake, a symbol of Miss Jessel (Fig. 4.4.5 (c)). Flora then directly confronts the Governess with an intense gaze. The Governess then tries to force Flora to look at Miss Jessel. Flora seems to snap out of a daze, denying seeing Miss Jessel and expressing her dislike for the Governess: 'I don't like her! I hate her!'

Contrary to her usual well-behaved demeanor, she becomes extremely angry, rushes at the Governess, and attempts to hit her. (Fig. 4.4.5 (d)).



Fig. 4.4.5 (c) Garsington Opera production, Act I Scene 7, 'Flora', Mrs Grose, Flora, and the Governess. Photo by: John Snelling, Image provided by Garsington Opera.



Fig. 4.4.5 (d) Act I Scene 7, 'Flora', Mrs Grose, Flora, and the Governess. Screenshot of online video of 2019 Garsington Opera.

After encountering Flora's hostility, the Governess plunges into deep panic and despair, particularly distressed by Mrs Grose's lack of trust. She exhibits immense sorrow and agony, crying out, 'Am I horrible? Am I horrible? No, No!' and admitting her failure: 'But I have failed, failed'. Once again, the Governess is enveloped in darkness, reflecting her profound loneliness and torment. It emphasises the Governess's psychological collapse and her profound feeling of solitude after losing trust and connection with Flora and Mrs Grose. The profound distress and recognition of her lack of success emphasise the psychological consequences of her encounters at Bly.

In Act I Scene 8, 'At Night', Mrs Grose prepares to take Flora to London to see the Guardian. She expresses her belief in the Governess's words after the night she spent with Flora, leading to a reconciliation between them. This understanding gives the Governess new hope. After a brief farewell with Mrs Grose, she readies herself to confront Miles with the aim of saving him. When Miles appears, the previously cold stage is imbued with warm colours, symbolizing the Governess's hopeful and affectionate feelings towards him (Fig. 4.4.5 (e)). This warmth not only reflects her hope of saving Miles but also signifies the warmth and love he represents in her heart.

This scene emphasises the emotional connection between the Governess and Miles and her unwavering determination to protect him, despite the challenges and fears she has faced. The use of warm colours in the stage design contrasts with the earlier darker tones, highlighting a moment of hope and emotional depth in the Governess's journey. This portrayal underscores the Governess's persistent sense of duty and care, intertwined with her deep emotional investment in the well-being of the children, especially Miles.



Fig. 4.4.5 (e) Garsington Opera production, Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', Miles and the Governess. Photo by: John Snelling, Image provided by Garsington Opera.

In the climactic moment of Act II Scene 8, 'Miles', Miles finally utters the words the Governess has been desperately waiting to hear: 'Peter Quint, you devil'. Believing she has succeeded in saving Miles from the supernatural influence, the Governess embraces him with maternal affection, tenderly stroking his face as a mother would her beloved child. However, her relief turns to horror when she realizes that Miles is no longer breathing.

The Governess is consumed by a profound sense of despair, as if all her hopes have been extinguished in an instant. She gently lays Miles down, stands up, and looks around Bly, enveloped in a state of shock and loss. In this poignant moment, she departs, leaving the audience with a sense of lingering contemplation and unresolved emotion.

As the central figure in Muller's production, the Governess personifies the duality of strength and vulnerability in women confronted with responsibilities that surpass conventional expectations within a society dominated by men. As soon as she arrives

in Bly with the objective of safeguarding the children, she is depicted as a well-educated and nurturing individual. Nevertheless, as the narrative progresses, she is confronted with increasing supernatural threats: the reappearances of Quint and Miss Jessel not only provoke fear within her, but also disrupt her perception of reality, precipitating a state of hysteria and emotional turmoil. The Governess's interaction with Flora by the lake and her subsequent faintings lead to moments of emotional collapse and isolation, depicted through the dark staging and melancholic music.

Muller's portrayal touches upon the historical challenges faced by women in authoritative roles. The Governess, characterised by her cheerfulness and kindness, spirals into despair and isolation due to supernatural phenomena, the changing behaviour of the children, and the lack of support from Mrs Grose. This portrayal exemplifies the contradictions faced by women in the late nineteenth century within a male-dominated society, juggling socially assigned roles (as a female governess and caregiver) and the need to independently handle significant responsibilities, along with the ensuing psychological trauma. Similar to Kent's production, Muller's interpretation also deeply reflects on the duality of women's strength and fragility. However, Muller places greater emphasis on showcasing the Governess's core, benevolent qualities filled with love for the children to the audience, portraying her actions towards the children as motivated by love rather than possessiveness.

4.4.6 2020 Opera North Production

Talevi's portrayal of female characters is notably significant, particularly in highlighting their tragic destinies and their sense of powerlessness over their own fates. The actions and experiences of these characters in Talevi's productions subtly or overtly reveal elements of misogyny that the director finds in James's and Britten's work. Talevi's interest is specifically focused on Britten's attitude towards women:

Britten often has very strong female characters who end up either crashing or failing to reform male characters. It's as though he felt threatened by female

figures. Britten himself, and similarly, Henry James, has a certain misogyny in his works, you know, misogyny meaning hatred towards women. So my research was quite specifically interested in Britten's attitude towards women, particularly his mother, and also looking at the similarities between his attitude to women and Henry James's attitude to women. Henry James has many stories with a similar idea of women who are controlling or very possessive or desperate, and she's always punished at the end of the story. So, there was this similarity, I think, between Britten and Henry James in that sense.⁵⁸

In Talevi's production, various elements highlight the tragic fate of women and a misogynistic tendency within the context of the era. The Governess's hysteria, stemming from a lack of security; the confrontation between Miss Jessel and Quint, coupled with Quint's disdain for Miss Jessel; and Flora's transformation from cheerful to sinister – all these aspects reflect the bleakness of women's destinies and the malevolence directed towards them in this production.

In Act I Scene 2, 'The Welcome', Mrs Grose, accompanied by Miles and Flora, welcomes the arrival of the Governess. Unlike the restrained and calm approach of the 2005 BBC production or the clear distinction of status in the 2011 Glyndebourne production, Talevi's production, similar to the 2019 Garsington production, uses warm stage lighting to highlight a congenial atmosphere. As the conductor of Opera North production, who has also conducted the Glyndebourne production, Leo McFall, in an interview with me, spoke about the differences between the Glyndebourne and Opera North productions. He opined that the Opera North production is more extroverted and visceral, suggesting a contrast in the overall presentation and emotional engagement of these productions:

The Glyndebourne production was cooler and more technical. The stage featured two rotating circles, contributing to a very technical production in terms of stage dynamics. There was a lot happening with the stage movement. For example, our set remained the same, but it had an icier feeling. It was actually set in Christmas time, not in summer, giving it a wintry feel.

This [Opera North] production, on the other hand, is much more visceral and extroverted. I would say the Glyndebourne production was quite introverted but

⁵⁸ Talevi, interview.

fun in its own way as well. This one is much more outward and expressive. The word I would use to describe it is ‘visceral’.⁵⁹

The children are lively and cheerful, engaging in playful banter, and Mrs Grose is portrayed as kind and friendly. Notably, Talevi’s depiction of the Governess is one of greater tenderness, with an evident affection for the children. From the beginning, she aligns herself more closely with her role and duties as a Governess, rather than assuming the role of an authoritarian figure in charge of Bly. The depiction of characters in this scene enables the audience to experience the lively and energetic atmosphere of Bly, immersed in the kindness and warmth of its people.

In Act I Scene 5, ‘The Tower’ the Governess first encounters a strange man atop the tower, which reveals her sensitive, insecure, and easily frightened nature within her character. Initially mistaking the figure for the Guardian, the Governess joyfully and romantically sings, ‘Ha! ’Tis he!’ full of elation. However, upon realising that the man on the tower is a stranger, her emotions undergo a dramatic shift. Between rehearsal numbers 27 and 29, the music strikingly captures the emotional shift of the Governess. Composed of short, brisk motifs in the woodwind section, the music illustrates her transition from shock to confusion, ultimately leading to retreat. The fluctuation between loud and soft dynamics mirrors the Governess’s evolving emotional state: initially startled, then bewildered, and finally withdrawing in apprehension. Her movement becomes like a startled bird; her eyes widen, and her body recoils. Retreating, she sings with a sense of alarm and fear, ‘No! No! Who is it? Who? Who?’ reflecting her sudden transition from joy to dread.

In Act I Scene 5, ‘The Window’, the music revisits the short, brisk woodwind motifs, signalling the reappearance of the same strange man previously seen atop the tower. The Governess is startled again, this time getting a clearer view of the man’s appearance and noticing his gaze directed towards the classroom where Miles and Flora are studying (Fig. 4.4.6 (a)). Upon hearing the Governess’s description, Mrs Grose

⁵⁹ Leo McFall, interviewed by Yaou Zhang, Leeds: *Leeds Grand Theatre*, Feb 26, 2020.

guesses that this stranger is Quint, and her expression turns to one of immense pain. The Governess brings a chair for Mrs Grose to sit down, showing concern and support.



Fig. 4.4.6 (a) Opera North production, Act I Scene 5, 'The Window', The Governess (Sarah Tynan) and Quint (Nicholas Watts). Photo by: Tristram Kenton. Image provided by: Opera North.

As Mrs Grose recounts Quint's past associations with Miles and Miss Jessel, and describes his behaviour as 'free', the Governess, deep in thought, slowly walks away from her, moving across the stage. The spotlight remains on Mrs Grose only, who is enveloped in light as she continues to narrate Quint's story. Upon learning that both Quint and Miss Jessel are deceased, the Governess distances herself even further from Mrs Grose, as if perceiving her as a symbol of Bly and everything she wishes to escape from. She becomes enveloped in darkness, a visual representation of her shock and fear. Her line, 'I know nothing of these things. Is this sheltered place the wicked world where

things unspoken of can be? Only this much I know; things have been done here that are not good, and have left a taste behind them', is delivered amidst this growing sense of isolation and dread.

This staging effect effectively isolates the Governess from Mrs Grose, highlighting the Governess's psychological state following her shock and realisation of the truth. It reveals the gravity of the events disclosed by Mrs Grose and underpins the Governess's escalating fear and her heightened sensitivity.

In Act I Scene 7, 'Flora', the Governess's fear and sensitivity are once again triggered, leading her to a state of hysteria. The scene unfolds with the Governess and Flora playing by the lake, symbolised by a bed. The Governess falls asleep, and Flora continues to play with her doll alone. The music theme of Miss Jessel awakens the Governess, who, through the darkness, sees a sinister female face appearing on the other side of the lake. Startled, she drops her book and urgently sends Flora to find Miles, immediately deducing that this malevolent stranger is the deceased Miss Jessel, as described by Mrs Grose.

The Governess's hysteria escalates as she realises that Flora has seen Miss Jessel but remains silent. Overcome with emotion, she collapses beside a chair, singing in a tearful, broken voice, 'They are lost, lost, they are lost'. She then musters the courage to approach the spot where Flora was playing. In a fit of despair, she disrupts the play scene (tearing down the fabric representing the lake), crying uncontrollably, and eventually faints or falls asleep. This illustrates the Governess's deepening sense of despair and helplessness in the face of the supernatural occurrences at Bly. Her emotional breakdown, coupled with the destruction of Flora's play area, symbolises the shattering of normalcy and innocence at Bly.

Whether influenced by Miss Jessel or increasingly affected by the Governess's tense and hysterical behaviour, Flora's character undergoes a significant transformation. Initially portrayed as lively and cheerful, she gradually reveals a darker, more frantic side. In Act II Scene 6, 'The Piano', this change in Flora becomes starkly

evident. After lulling Mrs Grose to sleep, Flora quickly and cunningly uses yarn to tie Mrs Grose to a chair, demonstrating a mischievous and perhaps sinister aspect of her personality. This act of binding Mrs Grose and then running away showcases a drastic shift from her earlier innocence and playfulness to a more troubled and rebellious behaviour.

In the following scene, Act II Scene 7, 'Flora', the complexities of Flora's character are further unveiled. She is seen passionately kissing a doll that bears Miss Jessel's likeness (Fig. 4.4.6 (b)). Upon hearing Mrs Grose's anxious voice searching for her, Flora quickly hides the doll. As Mrs Grose and the Governess approach, Flora pretends to be calmly stroking another doll, smiling provocatively at the Governess.



Fig. 4.4.6 (b) Opera North production, Act II Scene 7, 'Flora', Flora (Jennifer Clark). Photo by: Tristram Kenton. Image provided by: Opera North.

The Governess, unable to contain her frustration, confronts Flora with the question, 'And where, my pet, is Miss Jessel?' Flora, adopting an innocent and hurt demeanour, sings, 'I can't see anybody, can't see anything...' The music at this point intertwines Flora's original theme of childlike innocence with Miss Jessel's musical motif (Act II,

rehearsal number 106), reflecting the intersection of her youthful naivety and the sinister influence she is under. When Flora screams, 'I don't like her, I hate her!' her voice is filled with exhaustion and anger. She throws the doll she is holding at the Governess with all her might and attempts to attack the Governess, only to be restrained by Mrs Grose. Following Flora's malicious outburst, the Governess is left heartbroken and devastated. Overwhelmed by the hostility directed at her, she clutches Flora's doll and breaks down in tears, eventually fainting from the emotional strain.

Flora's behaviour, particularly in her confrontational scene with the Governess and her subtle connection with Miss Jessel, firstly illustrates the influence and shaping of young girls by adult women in their lives, for better or worse. This can signify how young girls' personalities and actions are moulded by the adult females around them; secondly, Flora's rebellion and aggression towards the Governess challenge the traditional notion of women and girls being passive. Her behaviour represents a natural form of rebellion by a young girl under oppression. Furthermore, Flora's outburst, although negative, can also be interpreted as an assertion of her agency and voice. Historically, female characters, especially young girls, are often depicted as docile and compliant. Flora's actions break this stereotype, showing a young girl's strong expression of her emotions and discontent.

The differing attitudes of the male ghost Quint towards Miles and Miss Jessel reveal an underlying misogynistic tendency: when Quint tries to draw Miles's attention, his body language and musical theme create a soft, dreamlike atmosphere; in stark contrast to his attentiveness towards Miles, Quint exhibits disdain, contempt, and indifference towards his former lover, Miss Jessel. While Miss Jessel still harbours affection for Quint and seeks his attention: in Act II, Variation VIII, when Miss Jessel appears, the music, dominated by strings and harp (Act II, rehearsal numbers 1-4), carries a sense of sorrow and a delicate, feminine quality, vastly different from her dark and sombre musical theme when she appears by the lake. Miss Jessel is portrayed as

longing and yearning for love, eagerly anticipating Quint's appearance. She appears excited, looking around for Quint (Fig. 4.4.6 (c)).



Fig. 4.4.6 (c) Opera North production, Act II, Variation VIII, Miss Jessel (Eleanor Dennis), The Governess, and Quint. Photo by: Tristram Kenton. Image provided by: Opera North.

However, when Quint does appear, the music shifts dramatically, with rapid arpeggios on the harp and a robust, assertive French horn playing a rhythm emphasizing the quaver and semiquaver triplets (Act II, rehearsal number 5). This is reminiscent of a male warrior's theme, contrasting starkly with the dreamlike theme used during Quint's seduction of Miles. This musical contrast also establishes the dynamic between Quint and Miss Jessel, highlighting Miss Jessel's vulnerability in Quint's presence and his relative assertiveness.

Miss Jessel approaches Quint excitedly, her face alight with longing and a smile, tenderly touching her pregnant belly, eagerly looking at Quint. However, Quint's reaction is one of indifference, superiority, and disdain. He surveys Miss Jessel from head to toe, sighs, waves his hand, and turns to leave, seemingly conveying his disappointment. Miss Jessel, witnessing this reaction, sees her hopes dashed and is

overcome with grief, covering her face as she weeps. Gathering her composure, Miss Jessel turns back to continue her search for the elusive Quint. Suddenly, Quint appears beside her. She is overjoyed, but soon realises that Quint shows no interest in her, his gaze fixed intently on Miles's desk (Fig. 4.4.6 (d)). Miss Jessel tries to turn Quint's face towards her and even kisses him in a bid for attention. Quint, remaining unresponsive, pushes her to the ground and continues to stare at Miles's desk.

The stark contrast between Miss Jessel's affectionate gestures and Quint's callous indifference highlights the tragic and one-sided nature of their relationship. Quint's disregard for Miss Jessel and his fixation on Miles further illustrate the misogynistic undercurrents in his character.



Fig. 4.4.6 (d) Opera North production, Act II, Variation VIII, Miss Jessel and Quint. Photo by: Tristram Kenton. Image provided by: Opera North.

Following the musical backdrop in Act II Variation VIII that sets the tone for the relationship between Quint and Miss Jessel, Act II Scene 1, 'Colloquy and Soliloquy', further elucidates the imbalance and inequality in Quint and Miss Jessel's relationship

through their dialogue and stage performance. Quint's disdain and heartlessness towards Miss Jessel are evident in both his words and expressions.

Miss Jessel's emotional state culminates in a breakdown during this scene. She frenetically sings, 'Despised, betrayed, unwanted, she must go forever to my joyless spirit bound', portraying her mental anguish and instability following her abandonment by Quint. This powerful moment on stage conveys Miss Jessel's profound sense of rejection and despair, highlighting her torment and the psychological impact of Quint's cruel treatment.

These two scenes not only reveal the tragic aspect of Miss Jessel's character but also further exposes the misogynistic elements within Quint's character. The disparity in their emotional states and the nature of their interaction paints a relationship marred by inequality, disregard, and emotional abuse.

Miss Jessel's character exemplifies the theme of a tragic female figure, one who suffers due to her circumstances and relationships. This portrayal reflects the societal challenges faced by women, particularly in terms of reputation, love, and loss. Her role in the opera highlights the difficulties that women faced in the Victorian era, especially when deviating from social norms. As a ghost, Miss Jessel represents the loss of the female voice, symbolising women's voices that were suppressed or silenced. Her affair with Quint and subsequent downfall depict the harsh realities of a woman's voice and agency being stifled during the Victorian period. This aspect of her story serves as a critique of the social standards and moral expectations imposed on women, particularly regarding sexuality and personal autonomy.

Moreover, Miss Jessel's character gains additional emotional depth through the theme of maternal loss. The fact that she was pregnant at the time of her death indicates a lost opportunity for motherhood. Her connection with Flora in the afterlife triggers her maternal instincts, creating an emotional bond that adds complexity to her ghostly presence. This connection not only humanises Miss Jessel but also brings to light the

enduring impact of maternal bonds and the profound sense of loss associated with unfulfilled motherhood.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter, through an analysis of the historical development of themes related to gender, particularly focusing on women, examines the influence of Victorian social contexts on female behaviour and how environmental changes prompted shifts in perceptions of femininity. The interpretation of female characters' actions and psychology in Henry James's novella reflects the contradictions between social credibility of women's discourse and the definers of that discourse, such as medical diagnoses of hysteria in women. Additionally, the Governess's independence in managing work matters and interpersonal relationships at Bly, without male authority, showcases her awakening self-awareness and the formation of an independent personality. This reflects the challenges and disparities experienced by women in professional and personal realms during the Victorian era.

In this opera, male characters symbolise authority and freedom. The Guardian's influence on Bly is undiminished by his absence. The Governess, as a newly empowered independent woman, emulates management styles typically associated with male governors to manage Bly, representing a challenge to Victorian era gender norms. Although her journey ends in failure, it equips her with the ability to independently handle responsibilities, ignites her protective instincts, and maintains her forbidden emotions for the Guardian, reflecting the struggle of women against their era's conventions.

The 1954 UK première production, with David Hemmings playing Miles, gave special attention to the male character. The stage design and interactions emphasised Miles's masculinity and dominance. The production also utilised spatial arrangements and metaphors, associating Quint's male ghost with the tower (a symbol of masculinity) and Miss Jessel's female ghost with water (a symbol of femininity). Additionally, the

Governess's preference for male companionship caused a gender imbalance in her attention and care, impacting Flora's character development. Flora and Mrs Grose's departure from Bly to London to find the Guardian symbolises a new life, breaking free from Bly's constraints, embodying the Governess's desire for challenging Victorian restrictions on women.

The 1979 English National Opera production, directed by Jonathan Miller, highlighted the Governess's sunny, strong, independent image upon arrival at Bly, symbolising the emerging power of new-era women. Through stage positioning and costume design, she was contrasted with the traditionally Victorian Mrs Grose and the victimised Miss Jessel, burdened by Victorian morals. The Governess's confidence and beliefs eventually collapsed under pressure from ghosts and children, highlighting the difficulty for women to assert independence in the male-dominated Victorian era, the inherent flaws in achieving gender equality, and the hardships in the rise of female power.

Katie Mitchell's 2005 BBC Wales production turned its focus towards female characters, especially Flora and Mrs Grose, exploring their psychological depths and the Governess's inner world. The production delicately affirmed women's inherent sensitivity, love, and motherhood, recognising their capabilities and strengths in social roles, thereby promoting gender equality in opera.

The 2011 Glyndebourne production by Jonathan Kent and the 2019 Garsington Opera production by Louisa Muller further deepened traditional analyses of the Governess. Kent's production focused on the theme of 'madness', reinforcing traditional interpretations of women as prone to emotional distress and mental disorder, while Muller's production depicted the Governess as both gentle and strong, yet ultimately succumbing to hysteria due to immense psychological pressure. Both highlighted social challenges faced by women in assuming roles of responsibility and authority in a male-dominated society. A key difference is that the 2011 Glyndebourne production, both in terms of overall stage effect and character portrayal, is colder. After

the Governess becomes mad, it is hard to sense any affection for the children on stage, but rather an almost irrefutable command. In contrast, the Governess in the 2019 Garsington production displays a rich emotional range, reflecting her love for the Guardian and a maternal love for the children.

Alessandro Talevi's 2020 Opera North production emphasised women's tragic fates and their powerlessness over their destinies, revealing elements of misogyny. The Governess's hysteria, Miss Jessel's longing for Quint, and Flora's transformation from cheerful to sinister were used to underscore the bleakness of women's destinies and malevolence towards them. In addition, the production's focus on Flora's character transformation from cheerful and lively to sinister and rebellious reflected the influence of adult women on children. Flora's confrontation with the Governess broke traditional expectations of female compliance, reflecting an awakening of women's self-consciousness.

Through the analysis and summaries of this chapter, it can be observed that opera productions directed by men (such as the 1954 UK première production, the 1979 English National Opera production, the 2011 Glyndebourne production, and the 2020 Opera North production) differ from those directed by women (like the 2005 BBC production and the 2019 Garsington production) in their portrayal of female characters and relationships. The female directors whose productions are examined in this thesis amplify traits of maternity, delicacy, acuteness, and determination in the Governess, with more equitable attention to the both boy and girl. Notably, in the Garsington production, the Governess, played by Sophie Bevan, was pregnant during the performance, which perhaps deepened her portrayal of the 'mother' role towards the young actors. In the 2005 BBC production, through dialogues led by Miss Jessel with Quint (typically dominated by Quint), her actions and body language vividly present a young woman who meets a tragic fate due to unrequited love, calling out to Flora more from a basis of maternal instinct rather than manipulation, breaking the barrier of Miss Jessel's traditionally secondary role.

In my view, compared to male directors of the opera *The Turn of the Screw*, who are more adept at depicting masculinity and male authority, female directors excel at exploring the inner world of the female characters, guiding and coordinating with female actors in capturing emotions, observing details and nuances, and showcasing maternal qualities. Of course, this viewpoint is mainly based on the conclusions drawn from my study of these six productions (and other productions examined but not included in the scope of this thesis).

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

Returning to the original research question of this study: How has Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw* demonstrated cultural significance through its continuous renewal and revitalisation in the UK over nearly 70 years since its première? Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I have explored the social and cultural shifts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the UK, studying Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*. I have shown that these social and cultural changes are significantly related to Britten's reception and adaptation of James's novella into an opera, and they play a crucial role in guiding new opera productions by later directors and teams, which often engage with social and cultural issues. As an opera born 70 years ago, *The Turn of the Screw* was honoured by *The Guardian* Newspaper in 2011 as one of the 'Top 50 Operas', and its enduring popularity and crucial status in the British opera market make it a primary subject for cultural analysis. The numerous different productions and hundreds of performances staged in the UK over the years provide a wealth of case studies for this research.

The thesis selected six opera productions of *The Turn of the Screw* staged in the UK over nearly 70 years, directed by various opera directors. These productions were analysed considering the creative team's philosophy, stage design, blocking, directorial control, and interpretation. This analysis highlighted how stage performances accentuate the diversity and complexity of character portrayals and narrative content. To achieve my research objectives, my investigation included assessing primary and secondary sources related to the opera's libretto, music, as well as practical investigations of the selected six opera productions, utilising archival materials, published materials, and field observations, including interviews with directors, conductors, and designers of the creative teams, audience reviews, scholarly articles, and my personal observations and interpretations. The conclusion drawn is that opera productions are influenced by the social values of their creation period, and the degree

of this influence correlates positively with the opera director's and production team's philosophy.

Directors and production teams' staging can, to some extent, reflect the social and cultural trends of their time. Post-performance receptions (by audiences, critics, etc.) of opera productions can update or even transcend the original reception of the opera creation, endowing the opera performance with a contemporary significance. Influenced by the changing values of aesthetics, socio-politics, social movements, and cultural trends over time, the operatic content reflected by the staging and performance bears the imprint of its era, becoming an essential component of opera reception.

To explore the social and cultural impacts on opera production, the Introduction revisited the development of opera studies and research on opera staging and production. I proposed that the analysis of opera production should include both material and interpretative aspects, where the material analysis encompasses all stage-related elements that bring the opera to life; the interpretative aspect relates to subjective understanding, especially the subjective interpretation of the audience. The Introduction also traced the application of reception theory in musicology, opera studies, the reception of James's storytelling, the reception of the work since the novella's birth in 1898, composer Britten's reception and creation of *The Turn of the Screw* based on James's novella, and the focal points of opera production since its staging. In conclusion, reception theory aids in analysing the interpretations of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* in the UK across different periods since its inception in 1954 and helps us to understand the intersection of opera interpretation/production with social change.

This thesis establishes an understanding of the fundamental shifts in British society from the nineteenth century to the present, focusing on four main themes: social class, the supernatural, gender, and sexuality. It examines the social changes or literary developments related to each theme, their representation in novellas and operas, their connection to the personal development of writers and composers, and conducts an analysis of six selected opera productions related to the themes.

The line by John Donne, ‘No man is an island, entire of itself’, serves as a subtitle to unfold the discussion on individuals as integral parts of society. Due to individual differences, diverse social divisions emerge, leading to various classes and powers. The foundational logic of the stories set in the Victorian era begins with the internal social class division and hierarchical structure within Bly, which then facilitates the subsequent narrative development. The characters in the novella are delineated based on class divisions, creating figures like Miles, who emerge as authoritative figures within the social context of Bly. As British society entered the twentieth century, the rigid class divisions began to relax, and the concept of class started to evolve, especially after World War II, when significant social transformations led to greater class mobility. Wealth and income became crucial metrics for class distinction, diminishing the importance of hereditary class. Hence, it is observed that opera adaptations, such as the 1954 première by Britten, the 1979 production by the English National Opera, and the 2019 Garsington production, adhered to James’s original novella’s class divisions, portraying Miles as an authoritative figure in opera. In contrast, the 2005 BBC production shifted the power center multiple times through cinematic narration. The 2020 Opera North production and the 2011 Glyndebourne production, due to shifts in the story’s temporal setting, deviated from establishing authoritative figures, showing that twenty-first century opera creations no longer adhere strictly to Victorian-era class notions but express class and authority with more flexibility. Consequently, I have identified two types of interpretive approaches in opera production: 1. Maintaining the original plot and social background while exploring details to construct new perspectives; 2. Altering the historical backdrop of the original story, and changing the social context and material elements under different aesthetic influences to affect story development and character portrayal.

H.P. Lovecraft’s assertion that ‘The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown’ highlights humanity’s profound fear of supernatural horrors. The supernatural inherently questions the

limitations of rational understanding and the authority of empirical knowledge. Similarly, the presence of ghosts can challenge the authority of the ruling class, as they represent an uncontrollable factor that refuses to be suppressed or made invisible. As a narrative device ghost stories serve as a means to explore the loss of human control, venturing beyond the realms of rational explanation and challenging established authoritative norms. Ghost studies often explore themes of fate, destiny, and the uncontrollable aspects of life and death, reflecting social anxieties about the unknown. Such loss of control can be seen as parallel with the experiences of marginalised groups in society, including those defined by their gender or sexual orientation, who often confront the limits of their control over their own identities and bodies in the face of societal norms and expectations. The supernatural is, I would argue, another form of ‘otherness’ in *The Turn of the Screw*. James’s ghosts story have successfully elicited continuous fear and contemplation among readers. The analysis in Chapter 2 illustrates that the interpretation of the ghosts’ existence in James’s novella evolved alongside medical advancements and mainstream social thought, primarily Freudian theory, influencing Britten’s opera creations and the productions by opera directors. Early opera works, such as the 1954 UK première production and the 1979 English National Opera production, revolved around the question of the ghosts’ existence, influenced by interpretations of James’s novella from inception to the first half of the 20th century. Subsequent opera productions employed various techniques to create ambiguity, such as doors opening without cause (in the 2005 BBC production) or the use of dry ice fog (in the 2020 Opera North production), to reflect the ghosts’ ambiguity.

As Freudian analysis gained popularity, the Governess’s psychological state emerged as a new angle for interpreting the story. For instance, the 2019 Garsington Opera production and the 2020 Opera North production introduced elements of the Governess’s dreams, displaying both the ghosts and the Governess on stage to represent the Governess’s unstable mental state, thus diminishing the ghosts’ reality and highlighting the Governess’s significance. The reality of the ghosts no longer seem to

be the focal point of debate; the 2011 Glyndebourne production even portrayed the male ghost, Quint, with a gentlemanly appearance and bold behaviour, a product influenced by discussions on gender and sexuality from the 1970s onwards. Therefore, through the portrayal of ghosts and the interplay of other characters and staging in these opera productions, it is evident that opera productions reveal how directors are influenced by cultural trends and social changes of different creative eras, continuously updating the temporal significance of ghost characters.

Jane Eyre's assertion 'I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will' serves as the subtitle for Chapter 3, which extends the discussion on sexuality, including from the perspective of gender cognition and sexual orientation. Chapter 3 focuses on the development of sexual issues in British society since 1879, discussing topics such as marriage and homosexuality, and explores the self-protective measures taken by James and Britten in respect of their own sexuality and the impact this had on their respective works. With the passage of the UK's The Sexual Offences Act in the 1967 and the continuous efforts of the LGBTQ+ community, the tolerance for non-mainstream sexuality has gradually increased. Previously, the subtle sexual implications and homosexual allusions in James's and Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, along with more sensitive topics like abuse and paedophilia, have gradually garnered attention from society and academia. Simultaneously, opera production teams have also focused on these socially sensitive topics, especially in the twenty-first century, with diverse discussions and perspectives on sexual themes, including the implied sexual repression of the Governess and the sexual intercourse between Quint and Miss Jessel in the 2005 BBC production, the improper affection of Quint towards Miles suggesting paedophilia in the 2011 Glyndebourne opera production, and Quint's manipulation leading Miles to undress, involving child sexual abuse and precocity issues in the 2020 Opera North production.

Undoubtedly, sexual liberation is an inevitable path in social development and a trend of the times. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, while sexual liberation within

the realm of adulthood requires boundaries and caution, it is especially crucial to protect children. Children can suffer potential irreversible harm from inappropriate adult behaviour, manifesting tendencies such as precocity, Oedipal complex, violence, and depression (see Chapter 3). The opera productions that progress with social development and sensitive topics prompt further exploration: the moral standards and bottom lines for involving child actors in explicit behaviours during performances, and the need for opera production companies to pursue artistic freedom while protecting vulnerable groups requires extremely careful reflection and risk assessment. Opera productions reflecting social changes enable the art of opera to constantly burst forth with new vitality. However, I believe that the ethical issues in opera production such as those just mentioned warrant attention and discussion by contemporary artists and scholars.

Simone de Beauvoir's statement in *The Second Sex*, that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman', has led me to continually reflect on society's definition of women. The title of Chapter 4, 'Anonymous was a woman', highlights the awkward social position of women during the Victorian era, uncovering the fig leaf that, under male-dominated discourse, considered women merely as appendages to men. The low credibility of women's speech, their role in managing households, or the issue of unequal pay for equal work, contrasts sharply with the symbols of authority and freedom represented by men. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the first wave of feminism began a series of feminist movements, of which there have been four waves to date. As one of the main battlegrounds for the feminist movement, the UK has seen breakthroughs in social reform movements and academic research on gender equality, scrutinising the social norms that lead to gender differences. The successful development of this movement is inseparably linked to the UK's political policies, social history, and cultural inclusiveness.

Chapter 4 specifically focuses on women, exploring the impact of the era's background on the behaviour of the Governesses in the works of James and Britten, the

changes in their perceptions due to environmental changes, and through the analysis of the portrayal of female characters, their characterisation, and independence in opera productions, it was found that the attention to the female aspects of *The Turn of the Screw* positively correlates with the correlates with how recently the production was first staged. Furthermore, this thesis suggests that female directors (in the 2005 BBC production and the 2019 Garsington Opera production) pay more attention to exploring the personality traits of female characters and actors, with more nuanced focus points and a richer sympathy for the female image.

The analysis in this thesis of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* on the UK opera stage since its 1954 première helps to explain the positive correlation between socio-cultural shifts and opera creation. I also argue that discussion of the stage performances can shape and change contemporary audiences' understanding of the opera. The continuous updates in opera production and performance reflect the changes in sociopolitical values and social trends in social culture. By exploring nearly 70 years of *The Turn of the Screw*'s opera productions and performances in the UK, this thesis places Britten's opera within a broader context of opera culture research and socio-cultural background, enriching the field of opera production case studies and diversifying Britten opera research.

Last but not least, in the process of this thesis, I have become increasingly interested in the differences between male and female directors in opera production, as well as in the considerations surrounding children's involvement in works with sensitive themes. One direction for future research is an investigation into the impact of female directors on stage productions. Given the historical dominance of the male perspective in theatrical direction, studying how female directors influence the narrative, character development, and thematic emphasis of productions could reveal subtle differences in gendered direction. This exploration may uncover whether female directors are more inclined to challenge traditional representations of gender and

sexuality or whether their leadership fosters a more inclusive environment for diverse narratives.

Another area of exploration involves the ethical considerations of involving children in works that address sensitive themes. Since theatre often deals with complex and sometimes controversial issues, the participation of child actors sometimes raises ethical concerns. The focus here could be on potential psychological and emotional effects on children involved in such performances, and the safeguards and practices in place to protect them. It could extend to the responsibilities of directors, creative teams, and theatre companies in ensuring the ethical participation of child performers, and a critical examination of the efficacy of policies in this area.

Furthermore, the manner in which elements such as class, gender, sexuality, and the supernatural interact on stage to shape narratives and character images offers a variety of research perspectives. Expanding the scope of research to examine these intersections in greater depth could explore how they inform and are informed by broader social discourses and movements, such as feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and social justice. This would contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of opera in reflecting and influencing social change.

APPENDIX A

Full list of productions from the 1954 to 2023 in the UK

First performance: Venice (Teatro La Fenice), 14 September 1954.

First UK performance: London (Sadler's Wells Theatre), 6 October 1954.

Year	Production	Venue	Place	Director
1954	English Opera Group (UK Première)	Sadler's Wells Theatre	London	Basil Coleman
1955- 1976	Nationwide tour in UK ¹			Basil Coleman
1959	Associated-Rediffusion	Television	-	Peter Morley
1961	Oxford University Opera Club	Playhouse	Oxford	Christopher Jones
1966	Morley College Opera Group	Morley College	London	Geoffrey Connor
1966	London Opera Group	Dorking Halls	Dorking	Vincent Dowdall
1970	Scottish Opera ²	His Majesty's Theatre	Aberdeen	Anthony Besch
1973	University of Exeter	-	-	-
1974	Southeast Derbyshire College	-	-	-
1978	Barbican Opera Group	Jeannetta Cochrane	London	John Eaton
1978	Royal Academy of Music	-	-	-

¹ Additional performances: 1954/10/8, 11, 16 Sadler's Wells Theatre, London
 1955/7/5, Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod, Llangollen
 1955/9/20, 21, 23, 26, 28, and 10/01, Scala Theatre, London
 1955/10/10, 12, 15, Arts Theatre, Cambridge
 1956/9/26, 28, 29, and 10/01, 03, 05, the Scala Theatre, London
 1962/9/3, 5, 7, King's Theatre, Edinburgh
 1964/11/9, 13, 14, Arts Theatre, Cambridge
 1971/8/26, 28, Snape Maltings, Snape (director: Colin Graham)
 1971/9/18, 20, 22, Sadler's Wells Theatre, London
 1972/8/3, 5, Snape Maltings, Snape
 1973/10/15, 20, Sadler's Wells Theatre, London
 1973/11/2, Theatre Royal, Newcastle upon Tyne
 1973/11/7, 9, Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton
 1973/11/13, 17, Theatre Royal, Nottingham
 1976/4/2, Snape Maltings, Snape (This was a Dress rehearsal for English Music Theatre Company's Inaugural Season UK tour, and English Opera Group renamed/re-formed as English Music Theatre Company)
 1976/4/13-24, the University Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne
 1976/4/27-5/1, the Forum Theatre, Billingham
 1976/5/4-8, the Theatre Royal, Brighton
 1976/5/11-15, the Haymarket Theatre, Leicester
 1976/5/18-22, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Birmingham
 1976/9/9, 13, Sadler's Wells Theatre, London

² Additional performances in 1970, 1971, 1973, and 1979.

1978	Studio Opera Group	Arts Theatre	Belfast	
1978	Welsh National Opera ³	Wales Millennium Centre	Cardiff	Adrian Slack
1979	English National Opera ⁴	London Coliseum	London	Jonathan Miller
1979	Kent Opera	Theatre Royal Bath	Bath	Olivia Fuchs
1981	University of Hull	-	Hull	-
1982	Royal College of Music	-	London	-
1982	Royal Opera House (Czech collaboration)	Film	-	Petr Weigl
1992	Pimlico Opera	Garsington Manor	Oxford	Jonathan Cocker
1993	Bath & Wessex Opera	Theatre Royal	Bath	Oliver Mears
1993	Aldeburgh Festival	Snape Maltings	Snape	John H. West
1994	Scottish Opera	the Tramway	Glasgow	David Leveaux
1997	Royal Opera House ⁵	Barbican Theatre	London	Deborah Warner
1999	Opera Mint	St Donats Arts centre	Cardiff	Else Rooke
1999	Pericles Production	Belgrade Theatre	Coventry	Bob Eaton
2000	Welsh National Opera	New Theatre	Cardiff	John Crowley
2000	Broomhill Opera	Wilton's Music Hall	London	Elijah Moshinsky
2000	Britten-Pears Orchestra/students of the Britten-Pears School	Snape Maltings Concert Hall	Aldeburgh	Martin Andre
2002	Grange Park Opera	West Horsley Place	Surrey	David Fielding
2002	Edinburgh Festival (Co-production with Aix and the Vienna Festwochen)	King's Theatre	Edinburgh	Luc Bondy
2003	Royal College of Music	The Britten Theatre	London	John Copley
2004	Opera on television/BBC ⁶	BBC2	-	Katie Mitchell
2004	Cheltenham Festival	Town Hall	Cheltenham	Adrian Osmond
2006	Aberdeen International Youth Festival Opera Garden	Lemon Tree Studio	Aberdeen	Gidon Saks
2006	Glyndebourne ⁷	Glyndebourne Opera House	Glyndebourne	Jonathan Kent

³ Additional performances in 1979 and 1985.

⁴ Additional performances in 1984 and 1989.

⁵ Additional performances in 2002.

⁶ DVD version is released in 2005, available to buy at Amazon on:
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Britten-Turn-Screw-Lisa-Milne/dp/B0007CGPU0>.

⁷ Additional performances: 2006/10/24, 27, Glyndebourne
2006/11/2, New Victoria Theatre, Woking
2006/11/9, Theatre Royal, Plymouth

2007	Heritage Opera	Castle	Lancaster	Dean Taylor
2007	English National Opera	Coliseum	London	David McVicar
2009	Trinity College Opera	Trinity College	Cambridge	Claudia Parkes
	Dartington International	Dartington Hall		
2010	Summer School	Graveyard	Dartington	Richard Williams
2010	Opera North ⁸	Grand Theatre	Leeds	Alessandro Talevi
		King's Head		
2011	Opera Up Close	Theatre	London	Edward Dick
	NI Opera (Opera Northern		Newtownab	
2012	Ireland) ⁹	Theatre at the Mill	bey	Oliver Mears
	Bath Philharmonia and Frome			
2013	Festival	Cooper Hall	Frome	Morag McLaren
		The Granary	Wells-next-	
2013	Seastar Opera	Theatre	the-Sea	Susie Self
2013	Artwork Opera	Etcetera Theatre	London	-
		St Andrew's		Christopher Moon-
2014	Moon-Little Theatre	Church	London	Little
		Holland Park		Annilese
2014	Opera Holland Park	Theatre	London	Miskimmon
		Nevill Holt Opera	Market	
2014	Nevill Holt Opera	Festival	Harborough	Nicholas Chalmers

2006/11/16, Milton Keynes Theatre, Milton Keynes

2006/11/23, Theatre Royal, Norwich

2006/11/30, Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent

2006/12/7, Sadler's Wells, London

2007/8/11, 13, 15, 17, 20, 23, 25, Glyndebourne

2011/8/13, 16, 18, 21, 23, 26, 28, Glyndebourne Festival, Glyndebourne

2014/10/21, 24, Glyndebourne Opera House, Glyndebourne

2014/10/30, New Victoria Theatre, Woking

2014/11/7, Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury

2014/11/21, Milton Keynes Theatre, Milton Keynes

2014/11/28, Theatre Royal, Plymouth.

⁸ Additional performances: 2010/10/16, Royal Northern College of Music, Carole Nash Recital Room, Manchester

2010/11/3, The Lowry, Salford Quays

2010/11/10, Theatre Royal, Newcastle

2010/11/17, Theatre Royal, Nottingham

2020/2/15-20, 3/19, Grand Theatre, Leeds

⁹ Additional performances: 2012/3/3, The Riverside Theatre, Coleraine

2012/3/10, The Strule Arts Centre, Omagh

2012/3/20, Lyric Theatre, Belfast

2012/7/16, 20, Opera House, Buxton

2014/7/5, 6, Nevill Holt Opera, Market Harborough

2016/3/11, 12, Lyric Theatre, Belfast

2016/3/15, Millennium Forum, Derry-Londonderry

2015	Faded Ink Productions	St John the Evangelist Church	Oxford	Tomos Watkins
2015	Sidney Sussex Arts Festival	Sidney Sussex College	Cambridge	Jonny Vennell
2015	Aurora Orchestra/Aldeburgh Music	St Luke's	London	Nicholas Collon
2016	Byre Opera/ St Andrews University	Byre Opera at the Byre Theatre, St Andrews, Haddo House	Methlick	Tania Holland Williams
2016	Rye Arts Festival	Milligan Theatre	Rye	Legi Rafn Ingvarsson
2017	Leeds Youth Opera	Carriageworks Theatre	Leeds	Tom Newall
2017	Bristol University Opera Society	St. Paul's Church	Bristol	William Brockman
2017	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	AGOS Studio	Glasgow	-
2018	English National Opera	Regent's Park Open Air Theatre	London	Timothy Sheader
2018	Aylesbury Opera Group	Sir Henry Ford Grammar School	Aylesbury	Rosalie Sadler
2019	Bury Court Opera	Bury Court Opera	Farham	Ella Marchment
2019	Riverside Opera	St Mary's Church	Barnes	James Day
2019	Garsington Opera ¹⁰	Garsington Opera	Stokenchurch	Louisa Muller
2019	Dartington International Summer School	Great Hall Dartington	Totnes	Graeme Jenkins
2019	National Opera Studio	National Opera Studio	London	Keith Warner (Stage), Jonathan Haswell (Film)
2019	New Palace Opera	St Johns Waterloo	London	Michael Thorne
2020	OperaGlass Works	Wilton's Music Hall, and Marquee TV	London	Dominic Best, Selina Cadell, Eliza Thompson
2023	Ustinov Studio	Theatre Royal Bath	Bath	Isabelle Kettle

¹⁰ Additional performances: 2019/7/4, 7, 13, 15, 19, Garsington Opera, Stokenchurch
2022/7/2, 5, 7, 10, 15, 18, Garsington Opera, Stokenchurch (First performance of The Turn of the Screw after the pandemic)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and social distancing policies were implemented in the UK beginning March 2020. Public theatres gradually reopened starting February 2022, following the UK government's publication of the 'Living with Covid-19' policy. Garsington Opera announced that Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* would be performed in its 2022 season, marking the first live performance of the opera in the UK since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

APPENDIX B

Interview Transcript with

Alessandro Talevi

Director of the 2010/20 Opera North Production

Time: 18.30pm-19.00pm (GMT + 0)

Date: 11 February 2020

Yaou Zhang (YZ): What is the overall story you want to convey in this production?

Alessandro Talevi (AT): I feel there is quite a big difference between the novel and the opera. The opera is really amazing and very cleverly written. However, it doesn't quite convey the sense of ambiguity that the novel does. For me, this is because the ghosts are so tangible in the opera; they have to sing and speak words. In contrast, in the novel, they just appear, and we are left to imagine what they are like. In the opera, they are very flesh and blood.

Additionally, the basic narrative structure differs between the novel and the opera. In the novel, the story is told by the Governess, which introduces a level of subjectivity. We have to interpret the Governess's accounts ourselves, deciding whether they are real or imagined, whether the ghosts truly exist. However, in the opera, the story is presented through separate characters, so this level of subjectivity is lost.

To address this, I was trying to bring that subjectivity back by keeping the Governess on stage at all times. This way, we get the sense that maybe she is imagining everything, or perhaps the ghosts are real. For me, the success of the

novel lies in the way you never truly know, even after many pages, whether the ghosts are real or just in her mind.

YZ: To what extent is your production a story from the 1950s or a more contemporary story?

AT: I set the production in the 1920s, with the aesthetics and the set all reflecting that era. I believe that the psychological interpretation, particularly the Freudian perspective regarding the ghosts, is quite modern. I'm not simply accepting them at face value as being real entities. So, in that sense, my interpretation leans towards modernity. However, I think it's a blend of traditional elements and innovative ideas.

YZ: What kind of research did you do on Britten and Henry James?

AT: I was obviously trying to find the things that Britten found interesting in Henry James, and some themes that keep coming back, like the idea of 'misogyny'. Actually, Britten often has very strong female characters who end up either crashing or failing to reform male characters. It's as though he felt threatened by female figures. Britten himself, and similarly, Henry James, has a certain misogyny in his works, you know, misogyny meaning hatred towards women. So my research was quite specifically interested in Britten's attitude towards women, particularly his mother, and also looking at the similarities between his attitude to women and Henry James's attitude to women. Henry James has many stories with a similar idea of women who are controlling or very possessive or desperate, and she's always punished at the end of the story. So, there was this similarity, I think, between Britten and Henry James in that sense. I did a lot of research on that, also on Britten's childhood, and his experience with young boys. He had a very complicated relationship with underage boys, which today would be considered

almost maybe illegal, the sort of intimacy he had with them. So that was very interesting.

YZ: So what role does the sexuality play in your production?

AT: I try not to be too direct about it, because there is definitely an element of sexual tension between Miles and Quint, and also between Miles and the Governess, or more precisely, the Governess's feelings towards Miles, as if she's projecting her feelings for his guardian onto him. However, I think one of the key responsibilities of a director in this production is to avoid making concepts too obvious. You can't be too straightforward, because the moment you do that, and you start defining things explicitly, the story loses its power. The power of the story lies in its ambiguity and double meanings.

It's very important to strike a balance between different ideas, not giving undue importance to one over the other, to keep the audience constantly questioning, 'Does he mean this or that?' That's one of the most crucial elements. So, for me, it's vital to suggest that Quint isn't just an evil figure. Although the Governess may see him as evil, Quint also represents freedom, fantasy, and imagination for the boy.

In this production, particularly in the nighttime scene, which is point scene 8, I tried to create something really magical and seductive. The first time we hear Quint singing, the boy responds to all the beautiful things he talks about. The boy isn't just scared of Quint. For me, the seductiveness of Quint was an important aspect to portray.

YZ: How would you like to describe the relationship between the Governess, Miles, and Quint?

AT: I don't know if I can describe it. It depends on... you know, you can say that they could all be part of the same, the Governess and Quint almost parts of this: Quint as a part of the Governess's personality maybe; Miles, his relationship with the Governess is, ah, on the surface straightforward, but underneath, they almost like they understand the same things, but they can't talk about them, you know, it's very English, not being able to express things.

YZ: What does the wooden horse mean in your production?

AT: Oh, ah, it's a children's toy, but I think like anything to do with children, it can be perceived as either an innocent object or something sinister, if you know what I mean, sinister. Particularly when it moves on its own, I think it suggests that it is almost like a symbol of ghosts, akin to what you see in horror films. Quint talks about the horse, the riderless horse, so it's like we understand that it's related to him. When Miles plays with it, we understand later that it's maybe one of the games that Quint plays with Miles. That toy, it finds itself as a symbol of the relationship with Quint.

YZ: How about the masks?

AT: That's about birds. Birds have been mentioned a lot in the opera, mentioned a lot. He talks about 'the long sighing light of the night-winged bird', and it represents to me... it's a symbol of freedom.

YZ: Is social class a significant factor in your production?

AT: Um, yes, it is, actually. The Governess feels insecure in her relationship with the children because they belong to a higher social class. Additionally, her relationship with Miss Jessel contributes to this insecurity, especially when Mrs Grose reminds the Governess that Miss Jessel was a real lady. This makes the Governess feel

insecure and jealous. As a result, I think the Governess tries to enforce her power over the children because of her inner insecurity.

YZ: Did the ideas of cast member's influence your staging?

AT: This production is very similar in terms of blocking, you know what I mean, by blocking. Blocking is the term we use in directing to refer to the positioning of people on the stage. So, the blocking is basically the same as it was ten years ago when this production was new. I guide the characters, the singers, by telling them how I think it should be done, and then they try it out. If it feels right and they're happy with it, we go with that. But if something is not quite right, I ask them to find their own way to do it. So, sometimes they perform the same actions, but they're motivated by something slightly different than the original intent, because they are interpreting it for themselves.

YZ: Are there any differences between the 2020 staging and the 2010 one?

AT: Yes, there are some differences, mainly in the blocking. I've tried to create more interesting stage pictures. For example, in this staging, Quint comes to the top of the bed, whereas nine years ago, he didn't; he was always more hidden on the sides. Ah, and there are some other small changes, but nothing huge, you know.

YZ: Great, so do you have any sense of how the public feels about the former production?

AT: The public was very appreciative of it, ah, but it was a production that greatly divided the critics. Some critics said it was the best production they had ever seen, while a few, maybe one or two, absolutely hated it. They accused me of ruining Britten, saying I didn't understand the concept or what Peter [Quint] was about. They claimed I made them do stupid things on stage. But, ah, it's very... it's not easy because this opera has a very strong following in this country, the United

Kingdom, and some critics feel very protective of Britten, as he is like ‘their composer’. So, some critics are very traditional and don’t want to see changes.

I did something quite different from what you normally see. For example, everything happens in one room, whereas in the original set, there’s a different scene and set change after each act. That was one thing that more traditional audiences in the United Kingdom might have expected. This approach is more modern, in a sense.

But the thing that I really liked was, the first, I can’t remember, someone was reviewed in the opera critic from Opera Magazine, and he had been to every single production since 1954, and he said that this was the best one he had ever seen. [Yaou: Michael Kennedy? Alessandro: Yes!] So, I was like, ‘well, ok!’ you know. So, yeah, there were divided opinions.

YZ: Miss Jessel was pregnant, but where was the baby in the end of the opera?

AT: Yes. You know, about the baby idea, it’s that Quint, you know, it was very shameful to be pregnant in that era if you were not married. So when she says, ‘I was... where were you when in the abyss I fell?’, the idea is like, you know, he shamed her, he made her pregnant, and that’s why she had to leave. But, I guess the idea here is that the baby died with her. So yes, the baby dies, the baby dies with Jessel, a little baby ghost.

APPENDIX C

Interview Transcript with

Madeleine Boyd

Stage Designer of the 2010/20 Opera North Production

Time: 18.00pm-18.40pm (GMT + 0)

Date: 13 February 2020

Yaou Zhang (YZ): What is the overall story you want to convey in this production?

Madeleine Boyd (MB): We decided quite quickly that we wanted to focus on the idea of how powerful children's secrets can be and how the disconnect between adults' and children's minds leads to great confusion. In this sense, the question of whether ghosts exist or not was less important than the adults' interpretation of children's actions and their responses, which can often be corrupted or misinterpreted.

The director of this production was very keen on exploring the power a secret holds for a child. This includes the idea that a child, burdened with guilt, can retain a lot before expressing it, which in a way is more elastic than what an adult can manage. And so, we never really resolve whether there are ghosts or not. If I were asked whether they are ghosts, I would say no, they are not. Instead, there's this huge amount of energy generated by the Governess's misunderstanding of the children. I fundamentally don't think she ever tries to imagine what it might be like from the child's perspective.

YZ: So, what kind of research did you do on Britten and Henry James were they important to you when preparing this production?

MB: I read a few of Henry James's works to get a sense of what his broad mind was like. For him, obviously, that constant ambiguity and debate he creates is really important. When reading Henry James, what strikes you is that the Governess first states a hypothesis, then repeats it several times, and then makes it true. So, I think what Henry James teaches us is the power of self-conviction or the self-feeding of fear.

We read Henry James, and then the design was quite intuitive, in the way that the Governess is intuitive and the whole piece feels. It's very much about intuition and instinct. The way we worked it out, the director and I, was to think, 'Ok, well, if the Governess had tumbled into the book and the way things are kind of sporadic in the opera, if we asked the Governess in a state of fever after her first day at Bly what it looked like, what she experienced, the set should manifest as a description she would give'. So, the whole space, the whole design of it, is basically if she had written a garbled postcard someday. It wouldn't necessarily make sense, but she would have written down what was most important to her. The set is a collision of all the things that she finds, what she considers important.

We were interested in creating an architectural space, not just in reproducing Bly, but in producing the Governess's impression. And so, the set becomes the playground, in which the children, in a sense, become playthings. It's not intentional, but that's what happens; she ends up having a massive social experiment with them.

YZ: To what extent is your production, like, a 1950s story or a more modern story?

MB: Gosh, I don't know, it's not modern. I think it's supposed to be universal. We wanted it to resonate beyond its time. We looked at Fauvism and Surrealism paintings because we set our *The Turn of the Screw* in the circle of the 19th century, very early 20th century, encompassing surrealism, Fauvism, and also Freudian themes, and sexual awareness. All of that was present, so we were most interested in finding an inherited history that allowed us access to artists and modes of thought that the Governess would likely be aware of, keeping in step with what was happening.

No, it's not intended to be modern; it's intended to be truthful, honest, and original. If there's one thing to be said about our *The Turn of the Screw*, it's that it shouldn't be moralizing or Victorian. Many adaptations of *The Turn of the Screw* are often quite heavy, quite gothic. We wanted this to be told through the eyes of a child, which could be Miles or Flora. The portrayal of the Governess is quite clearly virginal, very clearly sexually naive. I think she probably is a virgin. What she does, what she says seems to come from a sort of sexual idealism, particularly her evident love for her employer. That's for sure.

YZ: What role does sexuality play in this production?

MB: I think what our production does is make the audience culpable, and that's what we wanted. What Miles and Flora do is simply play, as children do. They explore things and often perform actions that, to an adult eye, might have connotations of sexuality or remind us of a sexual act, but not to children. By staging something with real ambiguity, where the play could be interpreted completely innocently, it makes the audience culpable because we see things that are not so innocent. The children themselves don't do anything wrong.

So, I think sexuality plays a role only insofar as any sexual awareness in the audience will inform their interpretation of what Flora and Miles are experiencing.

Like I said, we decided the Governess was quite clearly a virgin, and that idea of the unknown is supposed to be compelling, horrifying, and frightening for her. I think she probably has some idea that if she looks after the children really well, the master will come down, be super impressed, and make her the next mistress of the house. She has some sort of idea that duty is somehow linked to maturity, and she links it to a longing for her first sexual awakening.

YZ: Do you think Flora riding on Miles suggests sexuality?

MB: Well, that's exactly what I mean. I don't think it does. I think it only suggests sexuality for those who are sexually aware. Flora rides on Miles because she is playing horse. What the audience projects onto that makes them culpable for interpreting it sexually, and the same goes for the Governess's interpretation. It's about her perspective. We like the idea of making the audience think, 'Oh, that's... I've done that', and in that way, by making the audience see a sexual act, we make them as culpable as the Governess, putting them in her position, in a sense.

YZ: What do the wooden horse and the bird mask mean?

MB: Ah, the bird mask! That's really interesting. The wooden horse symbolises... we looked at toys that would automate. We wanted the idea of toys that move, like swinging or bouncing. First, it's a musical thing; the horse rocks to the timing of the music. Second, there are times when the horse in the set is rocking, and no one is there to rock it. The horse was meant to make the space disconcerting and somehow animated. It's positioned at the back of the set to throw big shadows. It's one of those things where the Governess probably sees too much into it, especially in a fevered, sexually charged mind.

And the bird mask! The director is very interested in masks. I think the mask serves as a way for Miles to hide, to become a superhero. It's how children often feel

brave, like putting on a Superman cape. Miles couldn't cope with what was happening as just Miles, so he quickly decides to put on this piece of armour for the moment where he hesitates to take the letter.

In the original production, Quint didn't have a bird mask. We had thought about giving Quint and Jessel bird hats. This was linked to surrealism, the idea of flight, sexuality, and how surrealists use birds a lot. Due to budget constraints, we didn't pursue that.

So the bird mask is vestigial from that idea, using birds as a symbol of flight, nightfall, and sexual freedom. It evolved from that and has now become more about a tool Miles uses to find the bravery to steal the letter.

YZ: Do you think the masks suggest that Quint manipulates Miles?

MB: It does now, yes. By giving him a mask, it certainly suggests that. What's interesting is that in this particular revival, the third time *The Turn of the Screw* has been performed, the director gave Quint the mask. This definitely furthers the ambiguity of the ghosts' existence. What Britten does, and Henry James doesn't, is give them a voice. By doing so, you're fighting that idea of ambiguity inherent in Henry James. So, the mask, especially the bird mask, strengthens the link to the idea of Miles being controlled by something.

YZ: It's really interesting. You spent a long time going through Tim's gestures, the little Miles, last Friday.

MB: Yes, Alessandro did this, haha, it was a long time.

YZ: Does it also suggest Quint manipulates Miles?

MB: Yes, I think the idea of puppets, like Flora uses, suggests somehow that the children are being manipulated. That idea came from a dark place. Initially, the Governess

uses the children as puppets in her own experiments, rather than removing them from danger. We talked about the experiment and the idea of puppets. We decided the children being literal puppets was too extreme, but then the idea evolved. Puppets are often used in a non-threatening manner to help a child express themselves. So, the puppets in this production represent Flora trying to communicate with the Governess, to show what they've been exposed to, which is clearly traumatic. The idea of puppet play, and the horse dancing, echoes this. It's a manifestation of Miles trying to say to the Governess, 'Help me'. He's been controlled by trauma.

YZ: So how would you describe the relationship between Quint, Miles, and the Governess?

MB: It almost feels like Stockholm syndrome. The way it's staged, there's a sense of codependency. Alessandro suggests that for the children, it's like a game or a coping mechanism. The Governess is jealous of the close relationship the children have with the ghosts. She's possessive of Miles, saying, 'Miles, you are mine'. That's not a normal way to describe children. It's more like she's coveting him, treating him more as a possession than a person.

YZ: So, is social class a significant factor in this production?

MB: No, I wouldn't say it's a major point. We were aware of it, especially with Mrs Grose lacking education and being unable to cope. The Governess is supposed to be better equipped to look after and educate the children, which obviously isn't the case. But we didn't make it a focal point; it's just a part of the piece. We kept it relevant to the time when governesses were commonly used, unmarried women likely to be virgins and spinsters. Social class is no more than what the story requires to be credible.

YZ: Where did your inspiration for this staging come from?

MB: From Rousseau and Fauvism. For instance, the backdrop is inspired by Fauvism, reflecting a childish yet sophisticated use of colour, like Rousseau's exotic, compelling, and familiar paintings. Then, there was this realist photographer, Eva something, who took photos of children against vivid wallpapers, creating out-of-scale and slightly distorted images. Between this photographer and Rousseau were our main artistic influences. The set design was intuitive. I tried to capture the surrealism ethos of writing down dreams upon waking, applying it here. I absorbed *The Turn of the Screw*, Henry James, the opera, and then noted down what stuck in my mind, adjusting the scale on stage to create a peculiar yet sophisticated innocence.

YZ: What was the biggest challenge for you in this production?

MB: Honestly, there wasn't much of a challenge. I really enjoyed it. It was intuitive. We designed it with a lot of love, color, and richness. We aimed to make the set as beautiful as a child's mind, tragic because of the sad story unfolding within this beautiful setting. The challenge was making the set beautiful enough to accentuate the tragedy.

YZ: In this production, are the ghosts really real?

MB: We didn't make them real; we just ensured they were prominent when singing. They are real because they have a voice. We didn't exaggerate their presence but rather softened it. We positioned other characters in the way whenever the Governess or children looked at the ghosts, maintaining ambiguity. The costumes were strong, and we portrayed Miss Jessel as pregnant, adding layers to her character and story. The goal was to keep it ambiguous, as Britten intended.

YZ: Did cast members' ideas influence your staging?

MB: The cast themselves? You know, because everything has been designed beforehand, I had designed the costumes before I met the artists. So, no, the artists, in a sense, took the costumes and set to the next level. There were always strong interpretations that they stepped into. We did have a really wonderful Miles the first time around; he was a gifted child. His ability allowed the character of Miles to be more present, and he brought so much to the role that we relied on it. And the child this time, like Tim, has to keep up the pace with that.

YZ: You mean Tim?

MB: Tim, yes. I mean, Tim has to step into big shoes and succeed. But the Miles character, I think, became central to the opera. The first child, James, back in 2010, was so able to bring such subtle nuance to his acting that it made you forget he is a young boy, which is perfect for this. And Tim has to try to do the same. It's challenging because he has to come across as a child without seeming too much like one, which is really hard. [The child playing Miles] is obviously a child who isn't traumatized and hasn't seen too much. So asking a child to play a damaged child is quite a tall order and must be done really sensitively and carefully. So, you know, the cast take in their regard a fixed concept, but not specifically in this opera. In any production, it would be the same.

YZ: Are there any other differences between this production and the former one in 2010?

MB: Jessel was always pregnant, but the bird mask is a new addition. This time around, the director has brought the ghosts closer, making them climb on the bed and swarm around the Governess. They're braver, encroaching further onto the stage than in the original production. Quint never went up on the bed before, but now he does, and he appears around the curtain and looks at her. The double governess is in the beginning in the carriage; now he pops through and sits next to her. Again, it's all slightly more thrown off base regarding what's reality, what's a flashback,

what's real, and what's happening in the Governess's head. So, yes, I think the director has increased their presence, but it's more about making the Governess's breakdown more vivid rather than making the ghosts more real.

YZ: Lost what?

MB: She is becoming distressed and confused. Her state of mind feels more unstable in this current production. The addition of the ghosts being closer to her puts more pressure on her. I don't think it makes the ghosts more real; rather, it makes her mental breakdown more vivid. Does that make sense?

YZ: Good point. What kind of working relationship do you have with Alessandro?

MB: Gosh, we've known each other for years.

YZ: Was *The Turn of the Screw* the first time you worked together?

MB: No, we've done about three shows together before this one, making this probably our fourth or fifth production together. It's definitely the biggest one we've done. Our process varies each time. For this one, Alessandro had a clear idea of how he wanted it, but initially, I wasn't convinced because it was described as dark and gothic. I challenged him to make it our unique version of *The Turn of the Screw*. Alessandro is really in tune with how children's minds work, so he came back with a better idea, focusing on the naivety of the children as the heart of the production. Our collaboration often involves back-and-forth discussions about what's interesting or not. Sometimes I play a sounding board for Alessandro, encouraging him to push his ideas further. He sometimes comes with a fully conceived idea, and other times I bring ideas to the table. Our collaboration depends on the project, but his understanding of children's minds has been key in leading this production.

YZ: So, how do you balance your ideas and Alessandro's as a director and designer?

MB: Well, I build the model, and Alessandro comes to play with it, which is where our collaboration really takes shape. We discuss possibilities, like ‘Could this happen instead of that?’ I sketch out the set in a model box based on our agreed-upon general idea. He then examines it, suggesting where ghosts might enter and how the lighting could work. It's almost like giving him a doll's house to play with, but with a very practical, adult approach.

He asks questions and suggests modifications, and the design evolves. Alessandro always knows the score better than I do, so he looks for musical motifs and entrances that I might not fully grasp. My focus is on storytelling, creating visually attractive and exciting sets, while Alessandro's perspective is more influenced by the musical elements of the production.

Essentially, he usually finds a way to make the set design I suggest work with the musical components. It's a bit like, ‘I've given you a plan within a box, now you figure out how to use it’. This back-and-forth process is how we balance our ideas, combining visual storytelling with musical interpretation to create a cohesive production.

APPENDIX D

Interview Transcript with

Leo McFall

Conductor of the 2020 Opera North Production and
the 2014 Glyndebourne Production

Time: 15.00pm-15.30pm (GMT + 0)

Date: 26 February 2020

Yaou Zhang (YZ): What is the overall story that you want to convey in this production?

Leo McFall (LM): Someone who wants to tell the story of the piece simply, I mean, apart from the central theme of whether the Governess is causing the problems herself, or whether the ghosts are causing the problems, which is obviously ambiguous. Everything else is quite clear, so I don't approach it with the idea that I want to make Mrs Grose, for example, an aggressive character, or I want to make Miss Jessel seem like a different character or something. You know what, everything is clear in the score, and the music and the words. This is not the piece where you need to do that, and I don't think it's also right to do that. Alessandro wants to preserve the ambiguity, which I think is also correct. Both directors I worked with, Jonathan Kent and Alessandro, felt the same about that. So, 'Peter Quint, you devil' is not addressed to either Quint or the Governess, but just addressed out there simply. And I agree with that. So, my work is more about pacing the piece correctly, sort of turning the screw, so the climax is in the right place, maintaining attention, and the ebb and flow of the structure of the pieces is well-served. And then obviously, it's about honouring the story and getting as

much as what is there audible. I mean, that's this piece of my role rather than me deciding the story. The story is quite clear, so we all have to serve it.

YZ: So, what do you want to express in your conducting?

LM: The score, simply, I don't have anything extra to put on it. I just try to do what's there; I try to bring alive what's there.

YZ: So, how do the cast members influence your interpretation?

LM: Oh! That always happens. It should happen, I mean, you hear one of them can make wonderful long phrases, so then you want to use that or when someone is doing well, you best not disturb it. For example, the big duet with Mrs Grose and the Governess 'Dear god, is there no end...', that one, sort of worked. I think I didn't have to give a lot of inputs to either of those singers because they had such a strong dynamic together, and they are both such good and wonderful artists. So, the thing is just to allow them to do it, you know? I don't need to reinvent the wheel when you have good people.

YZ: How do you work with children? Do you think it's harder than working with adults?

LM: It's a bit different. The only time I work with children is in this piece, and maybe I worked with them once in *Pagliacci* and *Carmen*, but they are obviously less experienced. So, you have to be on your guard to be very encouraging, but that's fine. Of course, you want them to feel confident and good, so you perhaps give more emphasis to that. And of course, you give that emphasis to anyone you work with. But with children, you want to protect them as well, so you give them good encouragement and energy. That's how it's a bit different.

YZ: So, what kind of research on Britten or perhaps Henry James was important to you when you prepared for this conducting?

LM: As for the research, it is important to me with Britten himself, in every score of mine, there is a lot of my writing of musical notes. So, in this score, you have a sort of blank page, then I draw the music staves, and I write in a lot about it just for myself. I also did a graph of the tension level of each act. For me to learn the music, the words, and the opera, you have to get it into yourself in many ways. You're asking me about the research, what was important for me was to read the biographies of composers. I think it doesn't necessarily mean that somebody's sad period in their life led to their decision to write a piece, but I find it interesting to read those things. The books I read on Britten include Peter Evans's *[The Music of] Benjamin Britten*, I think that's a, that's a very good book, and the biography by Burton, whose name I'm afraid I can't remember right now.

YZ: What was the biggest challenge in this production?

LM: It wasn't like that. I mean, Alessandro is a very musical person. He has trained in piano, and he never went away from what I would think is right, actually. I mean, there are productions where the director says, 'she has to sing this upside down', you know. But we were working towards the same thing, I felt. So, it wasn't one of those experiences where you think, 'I have to achieve this challenge in spite of my other responsibilities'. It wasn't like that. After all, everybody was working towards the same thing.

YZ: What's the differences between this production and the production in 2014, the Glyndebourne one?

LM: Have you seen the DVD? There's a DVD available, and it's also on Medici TV, you can check it out. I wasn't conducting, but it's the same production. The Glyndebourne and this production are similar in that they both aim to preserve ambiguity, but they differ in certain ways. In my opinion, both productions are wonderful.

The Glyndebourne production was cooler and more technical. The stage featured two rotating circles, contributing to a very technical production in terms of stage dynamics. There was a lot happening with the stage movement. For example, our set remained the same, but it had an icier feeling. It was actually set in Christmas time, not in summer, giving it a wintry feel.

This production, on the other hand, is much more visceral and extroverted. I would say the Glyndebourne production was quite introverted but fun in its own way as well. This one is much more outward and expressive. The word I would use to describe it is 'visceral'.

YZ: Can you tell me more about the Glyndebourne production?

LM: Yeah, it was set in 1950s, I think. The whole look of the stage was much cooler, as I said it was set in winter. There were some burning leaves like you have in the autumn and winter, October or November time. There was a huge glass structure that folded and represented the lake, the lesson, and went into some shapes. But I think both productions told the story very well and focused on all characters in their right ways, so they were both very honest and set in ambiguity, so in a way they were quite similar, but very different at the same time.

Also, I worked twice with Glyndebourne. Once I was an assistant conductor, and once I conducted on a tour. When I was the assistant conductor, the Governess was Swedish and the Quint was American, so it had quite an international *The Turn of the Screw* feeling. And there was an English language coach to help them with the pure English, and each time was a very different experience. Then when I conducted at Glyndebourne on tour, they were all British, some Welsh, but British, so it was different.

YZ: Did you do the assistant conductor as well?

LM: Yeah, in 2007, long time ago.

YZ: How do they work, the conductor and the assistant conductor?

LM: Well, it depends. It depends on the dynamic, actually. I've worked with some conductors who don't want much collaboration, while others want a lot of information. Practically speaking, when the conductor is away - either for another job or, for example, rehearsing the orchestra - production rehearsals have to continue, and the assistant conductor takes over and leads those rehearsals. However, in my case, I was here for the whole time, which was the way it should be. The assistant conductor is normally in every rehearsal, and they are usually younger colleagues who gain experience with the piece. For example, for the Act One finale, it took us about three days to stage it in January. So, it's nice for me to know where I can sustain a piano during these rehearsals. Johan would conduct, and I let him conduct a bit so that he could gain something useful from it. Then, I could totally see what was going on. It was a very nice collaboration.

YZ: Have you conducted other Benjamin Britten operas?

LM: No, I have to say no, I mean that's the only one I've done.

APPENDIX E

Interview Transcript with

Louisa Muller

Director of the 2019/22 Garsington Opera Production

Time: 10.30am-11.00am (GMT + 0)

Date: 27 February 2023

Yaou Zhang (YZ): What is the overall story that you want to convey in this production?

Louisa Muller (LM): For me, I wanted the story to operate on two main levels, First of all, as a proper spooky ghost story, a real proper Gothic or skin crawl kind of thing. Then I think the main story really is about this woman's real descent into madness, or her loss of the grip on reality, which works whether the ghosts are real or not either way. I was really interested in exploring the psychological journey of the Governess as the main story.

YZ: To what extent is your production a story from the 1890s, 1950s or a more contemporary story?

LM: It's a great question. I think we set it in Henry James's world and time period, which felt important to us, because of the isolation of that world. When we talked about updating it, we couldn't come up with a modern equivalent for the house in the middle of nowhere, where you're not in contact with other people. So, it's very much a story of that period [1890s]. But of course, anytime you're doing something for a modern audience, then everything has coloured it from that lens as well. So, I think it's very much a story of today, too; I think less so a story of

Britten's period. [...] certainly, the 1950s wasn't like in our minds very much when we created it.

YZ: What kinds of research on Britten and Henry James were important to you when preparing this production?

LM: I did a lot of research into their lives, but I'm not sure if there was anything so important about their biographies that came into it. But I spent a lot of time reading the Henry James novella, and it really influenced me. One of the things that is so clear in the book, and less so in the opera, is the Governess's real fascination with the Guardian. I mean, fascination is a small obsession with the Guardian. And that directly influenced how we've staged the prologue, particularly at Garsington. So there were lots of little details from the book that didn't make it into the [Britten's] opera that I found quite interesting and atmospheric, and we put in as well.

YZ: Is social class a significant factor in your interpretation? And if so in what way?

LM: Yeah, I think it's because it makes the hierarchy of the house tipped in some way, so that in a strange way, Miles, although he's a child, is head of the household, and that's about social class and about gender, of course. But I think that is really important because the Governess never gets to be in charge properly. She's always subservient in some way to the kids, particularly Miles. I think it also influences the relationship she has with Mrs Grose, so they can be compatriots, and they can be friends, but not completely. There's always a distance between them because of their class differential as well, I think it is important. And there's another reason, I think it was useful to keep [the story] in that period, because it's much clearer.

YZ: Is the supernatural a significant factor in your interpretation? And if so in what way?

LM: I think it was really important to me to preserve the ambiguity of the whole piece.

I think that is the core of what makes it so interesting, which is like, you could go home, and two people sitting right next to each other could be like, 'oh, I could absolutely tell that this was this supernatural thing that was happening', and the person next to them could go, 'oh, no, no, no, there's a perfectly reasonable explanation for that in the natural world.' So I wouldn't say that we did anything that felt very clearly like it couldn't possibly be real like it had to be supernatural, but certainly we skated on the edge throughout. One thing we did was we changed the space, like changed the world. So that it started in Act I there was a small sliver of water, and then for the second half the water had encroached into the space. I think you could look at that as either supernatural or just a visual representation of what is happening in the Governess's mind.

YZ: How do you think that your production suggests that the ghosts are real or imagined?

Even though you've addressed that question.

LM: Yeah, I did, didn't I? I think we were very clear that the ghosts never touch the children or the Governess; they only touch each other. Also no one other than the Governess looked directly at the ghosts or indicated that they were looking at them. This was done to preserve the possibility that the ghosts were not real.

But, in other ways, it felt like it didn't matter. What mattered was that the Governess saw them, and they were real for her. That was the relationship and the interesting thing to bring about. We were careful not to come down too hard on one side or the other with the kids, or what they saw or what they knew.

YZ: Is sexuality a significant factor in your interpretation? And if so in what way?

LM: No, it wasn't, but love was. We worked a lot with the tenor singing Quint, and the way that he looked at Miles, and the way he felt about Miles that we... to find real

love there, and we as an audience can decide whether that's appropriate or meaningful. But there certainly wasn't anything overtly sexual, and I felt like that the minute you go into that realm you lose the ambiguity that is so interesting about the piece.

YZ: Is there any love element between the Governess and the Guardian? Because I saw in the prologue, the Guardian touches the Governess's face.

LM: Yes, I think it was important. I think she has to fall in love with the Guardian in order to agree to this crazy thing, which is that she can't contact him. So that is why we staged the prologue to have him embody the Guardian. Because otherwise you don't see it in the way that you see it in the novella. He touched her in a way that felt casual to him, but weighty to her. That touch that launched the whole thing.

YZ: Is gender a significant factor in your interpretation? And if so in what way?

LM: Yeah, I think gender is significant in the piece. It's a world of women. There're no low voices, and the way the Governess interacts with the male characters - the Guardian, Quint, and Miles, is very much influenced by gender. She has a real fascination, and I think in certain ways those three male characters become also sort of intertwined for her, in the way that she responds to them. Gender is also tied up with the lack of options or agency available to her during that period, which is significant. Obviously like the history of it, there's so much contemporary criticism of the James's novella. Even where they're talking about how she's hysterical and that sort of thing. It would be a different story if the Governess were a man. I think there is a more interesting exploration of her psyche that does tie into her gender as well.

YZ: How would you describe the relationship between Miles, the Governess, and Quint?

LM: That's really complicated, isn't it? I believed in a relationship between Miles and Quint that was important to both of them, whether or not there were lines crossed, and it was like a foundational relationship between Miles and Quint when Quint was alive. The Governess, in some way, is an interloper. We don't really know if maybe they were fine, maybe everybody was fine before she came and there wasn't really a problem. We don't know that she always saw the worst possible interpretation of anything she saw or thought she saw. But that relationship was strong. I wasn't interested in Quint being the embodiment of evil or something, but that we actually don't know who to root for, I guess.

YZ: How would you describe the relationship between Flora, the Governess, and Miss Jessel?

LM: Hmm, yeah, so Flora is so interesting. This is something that works better in the opera than in the novella, because in the novella Flora is so young. It's interesting to have Flora because of what she has to sing. You're never going to end up with a six-year-old on the stage, but that she is on this cusp of womanhood. In that way, she is looking for a model of what kind of woman to be, and that preteen or teenage age where you're looking around at the adult women in your life and thinking, 'where do I fit in'? And I think her class is interesting too, because she's not going to go into a job. Probably she is going to get married, or she has a bit of arrested development as well. She's always playing with children's smaller things. I just feel like she's looking to be taught.

And Miss Jessel is, it was important to me that she's not just like a pair with Quint, that she is separate, and what she is really looking for is something with Quint, and the child seems like not as important to her in some way. You know she's still so looking for him, and wanting to be validated and loved by him as a sort of holdover from life.

But also, I think the Governess doesn't have such a stronghold with Flora either: she's much more able to let her go and say, 'okay, that's done'. But Miles – which again goes back to gender as well, doesn't it?

YZ: Did the ideas of the creative team members influence your staging, and if so in what way?

LM: Hugely. It's all such a collaborative process. Christopher Oram, who designed the sets and the costumes, I mean he and I really made it together. The set is particularly important to me because it sets the stage [for the entire production]. We influenced each other, you know, we did the whole thing together.

Then, when we got into the space, Malcolm Rippeth, who did the lights, was experimenting with a few things, we ended up... have you seen the whole thing? (Yes), with a moment in Act II, where one of the walls turns on, there's this big shaft of light come across. And that originally was not planned, we didn't plan to open it. Then Malcolm was like, 'what if we did this'? And we had the light, and then that made it into the show and is, I think, one of the best images of the show.

So, I mean, it was all super collaborative, and everything came together. Even the original idea with the water in the second act would just come up onto the stage like would be encroaching in that way, and then at some point I said, 'well, what if actually we took out part of the floor?' And that was the way it expanded. And then Christopher, when he brought me the next drawing, or the next model, it was like a much larger space than I had imagined in my own head. But it was perfect, and exactly what it needed to be, so it couldn't be changed. The whole space for the second half was just right.

YZ: Did the ideas of the cast members influence your staging, and if so in what way?

LM: Yeah, very much. It was interesting to do it with two casts. I think you know the way I like to work is very collaborative. I know what certain moments need to be, what certain things need to feel like, but certainly in rehearsals we find a lot of things together. I don't even know if I could pinpoint exactly what they are. The cast has a huge influence on the staging, and how certain things feel better to different people. So, all of it, I feel like the original cast was very tied up in the making it.

YZ: Have you any sense of how the public feels about your production?

LM: I mean, people have been very positive. It was an exciting moment for me, honestly, because it was my first big new production. People have come up to me and said it was their favourite one they've ever seen. It was exciting, it's been very positive.

YZ: Are there any differences between the 2022 staging and the original production you directed in 2019?

LM: There were small changes, but in any piece like this, which is such a chamber ensemble piece, even one person different in the cast, would have made a difference. And to have a whole new cast, I think just like the feel of different moments is different. The two tenors who played Quint had totally different physical energies from each other, so even if they were standing in the same place on the stage, there was a real change in how it felt.

Yeah, also, like the Governess, I'm sure she wouldn't mind me saying that the original Governess... the first time she was pregnant with her first child as we were rehearsing, and I think that for sure must have changed how she held herself and how she thought about it with the children. So there's so many things that I think, like the personalities involved, changed. But the actual structure of the production didn't change.

YZ: So, it's a very useful information that the Governess, the original Governess was pregnant. And also, I've noticed that the 2022 Quint was in the 2021 OperaGlass Works production.

LM: Oh, yes, he was in that video of it, wasn't he? Yeah, interesting. It was interesting actually because he had done it in that digital production. Putting those two performances next to each other would be so interesting, because I think he really changed a lot about how he did the character. I think it must be a strange thing about being a singer doing roles more than once right because you go from place to place, and whoever is there with you may have a totally different idea of it. But yeah, yeah, I had forgotten that he had done that, but absolutely.

Because once I start preparing an opera, I don't want to see anybody else's production of it. And because I'm American, they don't do *The Turn of the Screw* very often in the States, so I had only seen one production of the piece, which was like 10 years ago in Houston. Then I started preparing mine, I mean you've seen more *Turn of the Screw* productions than I have, because I've basically only seen that one.

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