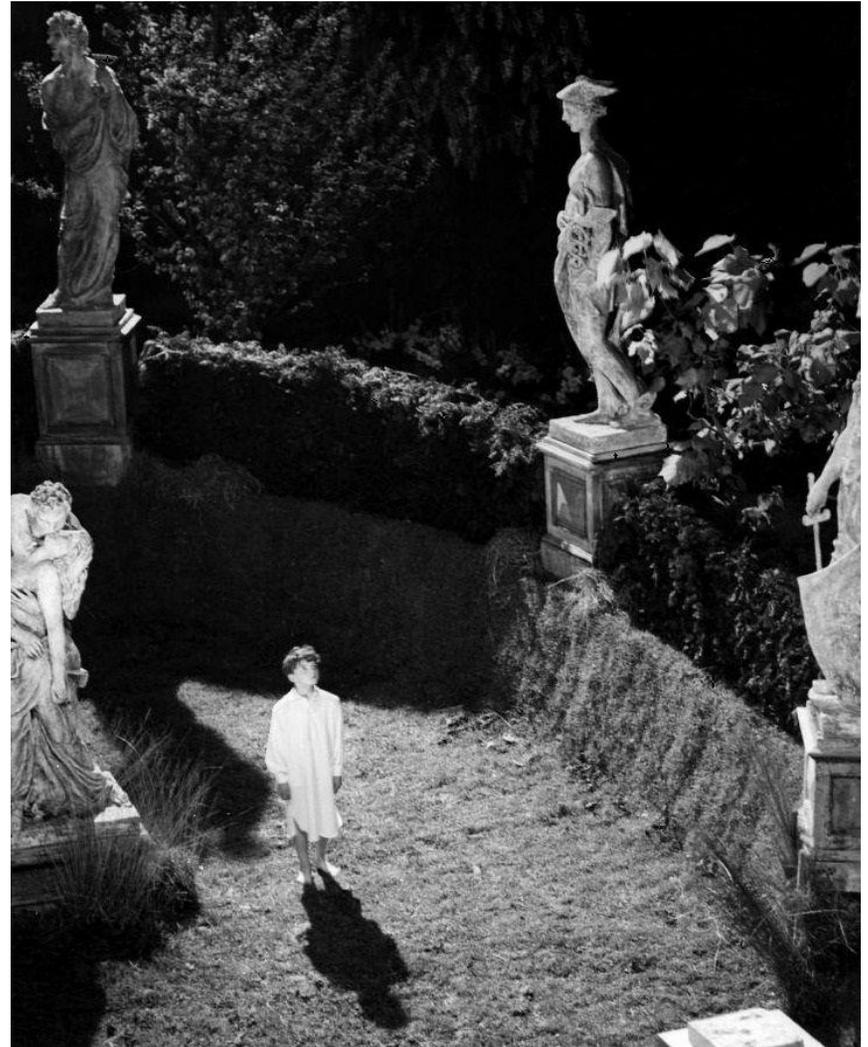


- Now alone with Miles, the Governess says that she only wants to help him. She gets him to confess that he stole the letter—“to see what you said about us,” he says. She asks him more about the school. Peter Quint appears at the window. The Governess forces Miles to look at him and say his name. He does so, with a great cry of “Peter Quint, you devil!” and falls dead in her arms. [23–24]

Issues

- The novella is the *locus classicus* of what is often called “The Unreliable Narrator.” We have only the Governess’ word for what she sees.
- What is the “reality” of the ghosts?
- Who or what killed Miles?
- What is the role of sexuality in the story: the Governess, the servants, the children...?

The Turn of the Screw



Scene from *The Innocents* (1961), Jack Clayton dir.

The Novella

- Published by Henry James in 1898, shortly after he had moved to Rye in Sussex, England.
- Written shortly after *What Maisie Knew*, which has similar themes.
- Comes just before his late novels *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*.
- Ties in with a long interest in Gothic.

Characters

- Various characters in the prologue: Douglas, who reads the Governess' story; the unnamed narrator; and others.
- The Guardian, who employs the Governess and sets her conditions. He is not subsequently seen.
- **The Governess.** A young woman engaged to look after...
- **Miles and Flora.** Nephew and niece of the Guardian, brought up at Bly, a country house in Essex.
- **Mrs. Grose.** The old housekeeper at Bly.
- **Peter Quint.** The Guardian's former valet.
- **Miss Jessel.** The children's former governess.

Summary

- Gathering at a country house. Talk of ghost stories involving children. Douglas asks if another child makes another turn of the screw. He reads a manuscript written by the Governess twenty years earlier. Implies she was in love with the Guardian. [Prologue]
- Governess meets the Guardian, and accepts his conditions that he shall not be bothered. Arrives at Bly, feels comfortable with Mrs. Grose, and is delighted by Flora. Miles arrives two days later. [1]

- Governess receives a letter saying that Miles has been expelled from school as "an injury to his friends." Mrs. Grose says that he is a good boy. She also tells of the former governess, Miss Jessel, who unexpectedly died. [2]
- Governess settles in happily at Bly. One evening on a walk, she sees a strange man on the top of one of the towers of the house. [3]
- After trying to put this apparition out of her mind, the Governess sees the strange man again. When she describes him to Mrs. Grose, the latter realizes she is talking about Peter Quint, the valet, dressed in his master's clothes. With horror, the Governess hears that he has been dead for a year. [4–6]
- The Governess is convinced that Quint is somehow in touch with Miles. One afternoon, by the lake, she sees a strange female figure that she believes has a similar hold on Flora. The housekeeper (who never sees the apparitions) says that the description fits Miss Jessel, whom she implies was sexually involved with Quint. [7]
- Time passes as the Governess mulls over these events. Mrs. Grose tells her that Miles used to spend a lot of time with Quint, and Flora with Miss Jessel. There are a couple of incidents at night, in the first of which Flora is unaccountably out of her bed, and in the second the Governess sees Miles out on the lawn alone. Both children deny seeing the ghosts. [8–11]
- Mostly discussions between the Governess and Mrs. Grose, who wants her to write to the Guardian. This the Governess cannot bring herself to do. [12]
- On the way to church, Miles asks the Governess when he may return to school. Discomfited, she runs back to the house, where she sees Miss Jessel sitting at her own desk. She realizes that she must stay to fight. [13–15]
- Governess decides to write to the Guardian after all. In the midst of doing this, she goes to Miles' room, finding him awake thinking of "this queer business of ours." He seems about to unburden himself, but a great gust of wind blows the candle out. Miles says it was he who blew it out. [16–17]
- The letter has been written, but not yet mailed. Miles plays the piano for the Governess, under cover of which Flora slips out to the lake. The Governess runs out, sees Miss Jessel again, and confronts the girl. Flora becomes hysterical and tells the Governess that she hates her. [18–20]
- Mrs. Grose reports that Flora has been feverish all night, uttering language such as she has never heard. She also tells her that the letter to the Guardian disappeared before it could be sent. The Governess tells her to take Flora to London, leaving her alone with the boy. [21–22]