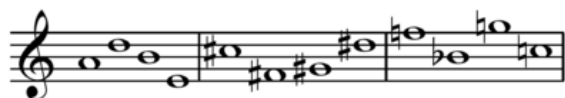


Musical Structure

- Prologue (piano only), followed by two acts of eight scenes each.
- Separated by interludes, each of which is a variation on a twelve-tone theme introduced at the end of the Prologue.



- Like a screw turning, each scene in Act I is pitched higher in the A-minor scale from A to Ab (not quite reaching A, but being subverted).
- The Act II scenes similarly move back down the scale, but displaced from the ascending one, getting into more unusual keys. It returns to A at the end.
- Final scene is a *passacaglia* on the first six notes of the twelve-tone theme, adding the others as Quint appears, moving into two keys simultaneously.
- Much use of other repeated musical motives, such as the Governess' "Oh, why did I come?" from 1/1, which becomes Quint's theme, and Miles' "Malo" song from 1/5, which will be the last thing we hear.
- Use of children's games and songs throughout, many of them traditional.

Production 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.
- So are the ghosts "real," or only in her mind? Is it possible to maintain the ambiguity if the ghosts are portrayed by real singers appearing on the stage?
- What is the role of sexuality in the story? What is/was the relationship of Quint to Jessel, the Ghosts to the Children, the Governess to the Guardian, or the Governess to Miles?
- How does Miles die?

The Turn of the Screw

Opera by Benjamin Britten



The Opera

- Britten's 6th full opera, after *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, and *Gloriana*, and the third of his chamber operas after *The Rape of Lucretia* and *Albert Herring*.
- Commissioned for premiere at La Fenice, Venice, during the 1954 *Biennale*.
- Libretto, after Henry James, by Myfanwy Piper (the wife of his designer John Piper, she also did *Owen Wingrave* and *Death in Venice*).
- Written for small group of soloists, and orchestra of only 13 (string quintet, wind quintet, harp, percussion, keyboard).
- Fullest exploration to date of Britten's theme of childhood innocence.

Characters

- **Prologue.** Tenor. Most usually doubled with Quint.
- **The Governess.** Soprano.
- **Miles.** Boy soprano.
- **Flora.** Soprano. May be taken by a young adult.
- **Mrs. Grose.** Soprano.
- **Peter Quint.** Tenor. Most usually doubled with Prologue.
- **Miss Jessel.** Mezzo-soprano.

Scene Breakdown

Act I

- **Prologue.** Prologue tells of the Governess' commission, and the instruction that she must on no account bother the children's Guardian.
1. **The Journey.** Governess in the carriage, traveling to Bly, worrying. [key: A]
 2. **The Welcome.** Governess greeted by Mrs. Grose, Miles, and Flora, immediately feeling at home. [B]

3. **The Letter.** Governess receives a letter expelling Miles from boarding school. Mrs. Grose stands up for him, and Governess agrees to do nothing. The children play in the background. [C]
4. **The Tower.** Walking in the park on a beautiful evening, Governess is surprised to see a strange man looking down at her from a tower. [D]
5. **The Window.** Children again playing. Governess sees the man looking through the window. Mrs. Grose identifies him as Peter Quint, the former valet, and tells her of the evil he spread, his seduction of the late Miss Jessel, and his influence over Miles. She reveals that he is dead also. [E]
6. **The Lesson.** Happy Latin lesson for Miles turns somber when he sings the curious *Malo* song, not saying where he picked it up. [F]
7. **The Lake.** Flora playing with her doll by the lake. The ghost of Miss Jessel appears at the other side. Governess realizes she has power over the girl. [G]
8. **At Night.** Quint entices Miles out of his bed at night. Miss Jessel similarly draws Flora. Governess and Mrs. Grose find the children in the garden. [Ab]

Act II

1. **Colloquy and Soliloquy.** Jessel and Quint reenact their mutually destructive relationship, but unite in a vow to destroy the innocence of the children. The Governess awakes as from a nightmare. [Ab/G#]
2. **The Bells.** Outside the church, the Governess is convinced that the children are enacting a secret ritual. Miles challenges her with his expulsion. [F#]
3. **Miss Jessel.** Determined to write to the Guardian, the Governess finds Miss Jessel installed in her schoolroom. She drives her off and writes. [f]
4. **The Bedroom.** Governess visits Miles in his bedroom. He seems about to unburden himself when a gust of wind blows the candle out. [e]
5. **Quint.** Quint entices Miles to steal the Governess' letter. [c#]
6. **The Piano.** While Miles is playing the piano, Flora slips out unseen. [C]
7. **Flora.** Governess and Mrs. Grose find Flora once more by the lake with Miss Jessel. When accused, Flora abuses the Governess. [Bb]
8. **Miles.** Mrs. Grose tells the Governess that Flora has been feverish all night, uttering dreadful language. She agrees to take her to London. Alone now with Miles, the Governess tries to get him to name Quint, who also appears to fight for his soul. With a great cry of "Peter Quint, you devil!" Miles finally banishes the ghost, but falls dead in the Governess' arms. [A]