

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: AN OPERATIC CONTRIBUTION TO A
LITERARY CONVERSATION: LOCATING
HENRY JAMES' AMBIGUITY IN BENJAMIN
BRITTEN AND MYFANWY PIPER'S *THE
TURN OF THE SCREW*

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Musicology and Ethnomusicology

In 1954, Benjamin Britten and Myfanwy Piper's chamber opera, *The Turn of the Screw*, premiered at the Venice Biennale. They adapted their story from the late eighteenth-century Henry James novella of the same title. Soon after its publication in 1898, James' *The Turn of the Screw* sparked a literary debate focusing on the credibility of the main narrator, a young governess who claims to see ghosts while in charge of two children isolated in a country house. During the 1950s, when Britten's musical career was steadily advancing, the literary debate moved in the direction of reconciling the argument over the governess' credibility. This study primarily expands upon musicological scholarship from Philip Rupprecht as well as literary scholarship by Shlomith Rimmon, along with various other studies concerning music, literature, and adaptation. Through a textual and musical analysis of James' ambiguity as realized in Britten and Piper's *The Turn of the Screw*, this study demonstrates that the opera should be considered among the contributions to the mid-century critical trend toward synthesis of the two dominating interpretations of the novel from the twentieth century.

AN OPERATIC CONTRIBUTION TO A LITERARY CONVERSATION:
LOCATING HENRY JAMES' AMBIGUITY IN BENJAMIN BRITTEN AND
MYFANWY PIPER'S *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*

by

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Introduction

During an interview in 2000, actor David Hemmings reflected on his experience as part of the 1954 premiere of Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* at Teatro La Fenice:

It was one of those occasions when the audience can do nothing. There must have been fifteen seconds before they realized it was over, even though the curtain was down in front of them, so great was the emotional response. Then it started slowly, and soon there was this rush of enormous enthusiasm from the audience—which absolutely took you by the bowels and broke your heart [...] There was something like forty-three curtain calls. It was one of those special nights.¹

Britten indeed met success with his chamber opera, and its international acclaim was all the more refreshing because it followed the poor reception of his previous opera, *Gloriana* (1953), commissioned by the British government for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.² While *Gloriana*'s music was praised by many contemporary musicians and artists in his circle and beyond, Britten was unable—due to the circumstances of the commission—to explore his usual subjects of interest: the corruption of innocence and social isolation.³

¹ David Hemmings in an interview with Tom Sutcliffe, in *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten, Volume Four: 1952-57*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008), 226. Hemmings played Miles in the original cast of *The Turn of the Screw*.

² Britten wrote to Barry Till: "You didn't miss much on Monday night because the Gala was a shocking occasion—an audience of stuck pigs—but I hope you'll see her later under more auspicious circumstances." See also the footnotes for extensive reports on the premiere, pgs. 147-161. Britten to Barry Till, 11th June, 1953, in *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten, Volume Four: 1952-57*, 147-161.

³ Peter Grimes, *Albert Herring*, *Billy Budd*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, etc. Myfanwy Piper claims this is one of the driving incentives to suggest James' novella for the La Fenice commission later the same year. Patricia Howard (ed.), *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 23.

Although honored to be chosen for the coronation opera commission, he also felt constrained by the occasion that would have made any provocative subject matter highly improper. Thus, his next commission from the Venice Biennale arts festival, postponed from 1953 to 1954 due to the scheduling conflict with *Gloriana*, was a chance for Britten to return to his interests.⁴ Aware of his inclinations, writer and librettist Myfanwy Piper suggested that Britten set Henry James' 1898 ghost-story novella *The Turn of the Screw*.

Myfanwy Piper's education was in English language and literature, which she studied at St. Hugh's College, Oxford. Piper's career had, until 1954, mainly focused on nonfiction writing in various forms, including *Axis*, the review journal of abstract art she founded in the 1930s.⁵ *The Turn of the Screw* was Myfanwy Piper's first attempt at writing a libretto and her first collaboration with Britten. Piper's connection to Britten was originally through her husband, John Piper, who, in 1947, joined Britten and his colleagues at the newly founded English Opera Group as the set designer and conceptual artist. After Britten received news of a new commission for the 1953 Venice Biennale, Myfanwy Piper recommended James' novella as a story that would appeal to his dramatic taste.⁶ The result of this, their first collaboration is

⁴ "BTC 1049 The Turn of the Screw," from Britten-Pears Foundation, *Britten Thematic Catalogue*, 2012, accessed online 9 March, 2018, <http://www.brittenproject.org/works/BTC1049>

⁵ Frances Spalding, *John Piper, Myfanwy Piper: Lives in art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶ Arnold Whittall, "Turn of the Screw, The," *Grove Music Online*, accessed 2 Mar. 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000002517>; It is worth noting that, according to Piper, Britten was encouraged by Peter Pears to pursue James' novella after "he'd just reread *The Turn of the Screw*, and he remembered that [she'd] suggested it." Myfanwy Piper, interview in *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (London: Faber Limited, 1992), 331; Shlomith Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity -- the Example of Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 121.

an emotionally arresting story that has all the dramatic intrigue of the original novella, and more.

In this study, I explore the “more” that Piper and Britten added to James’ tale by setting my textual and musical analysis of the opera within the framework of adaptation studies and literary criticism. Specifically, I aim to analyze *The Turn of the Screw* through the lens of the literary concept of ambiguity, in order to free the opera from the constraints of fidelity to James’ storyline and instead to focus on Britten and Piper’s techniques for creating and sustaining ambiguity inherent in their source. My goal is to highlight the ability of an operatic adaptation to expand a story’s readership and therefore its intertextual network, and I emphasize that, as a dramatic work, it encourages continuous reinterpretation with each subsequent director’s production.

Critical Responses to The Turn of the Screw

The publication of James’ novella sparked a literary debate over the intentionally ambiguous elements of James’ writing. Scholars were generally split into two main groups, which scholars have now come to refer to as apparitionists and anti-apparitionists. Apparitionists take the novel at face value and argue that the ghosts are indeed present and attempt to corrupt the children, despite the governess’ efforts. Anti-apparitionists argue that the ghosts are not real, but rather exist in the governess’ mind (see Chapter 1 for details on the Apparitionist Debate). Therefore, in the anti-apparitionist view, the entire “ghost” story must be read as the governess’ manipulated account of her psychological trial while at Bly, and she must ultimately be blamed for the death of Miles, a young boy in her charge.

The initial critical reception of Britten and Piper's *The Turn of the Screw* centered around the issue of its fidelity to James' story, and specifically, on a controversial decision to present the two Ghosts—Peter Quint and Miss Jessel—as stage characters. A critic of *The Times* found that 'Quint and Miss Jessel behave like two too solid stage villains.' A critic from the Daily Telegraph observed that the Ghosts "appear too often...and say too much," and a critic from the *Observer* found Piper's ghosts "all too concrete," and therefore unbalancing James' original ambiguity.⁷

This criticism of *The Turn of the Screw* has not necessarily changed since the early days of its reception. Director Neil Bartlett observed in 2017: "Because the ghosts are right there, in front of our eyes, there is no ambiguity of event in this perfectly plotted piece at all."⁸ Musicologist and Britten scholar Philip Rupprecht says plainly:

"As an opera, though, the *Screw* appears to lose some of its obscurities, simply by virtue of the chosen medium. Articulate, singing ghosts seem to settle the whole 'two-stories' debate that for so long dominated the book's critical reception—as vocal beings, the ghosts seem as real as the Governess, Mrs. Grose, and the children."⁹

Gary Tomlinson takes a similar approach, suggesting that the "singing ghosts...destroy the 'systematized ambiguity' of James's first-person narrative. When Britten decided that 'the haunting was real,' the very solidity of vocally articulate

⁷ *The Times*, 16 September 1954, p. 9 *Daily Telegraph*, 15 September 1954, p. 8, and *Observer*, 19 September 1954, p.15 quoted in Howard, 56.

⁸ Neil Bartlett, *Queer Talk*, ed. Lucy Walker (Ipswich, UK: Fuller Davies, 2017), 27.

⁹ Philip Rupprecht, "The Turn of the Screw: "Innocent Performance," in *Britten's Musical Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 179.

visitants undermined ‘the listener’s ability to sustain the illusion of ghostliness.’”¹⁰

Joseph Kerman, on the other hand, suggests that the Ghosts and humans communicate in a way that would suggest “the characters are all ghosts.”¹¹

Even close friends of Britten did not consider his opera an unbiased adaptation of James’ original novella. The late Lord Harewood, a life-long music enthusiast and a member of Britten’s inner circle, said in an interview with critic Alan Blyth, “Britten felt he had to take sides, and he had decided there was something malign at Bly.”¹² Harewood was confident that the composer had intended to choose one side of the Apparitionist Debate, rather than maintain James’ ambiguity for the stage. Blyth suggests that Harewood himself “was adamant on the ambivalence of [James’] governess’ position. To him it was crucial never to know if she was mad or if everyone else was under the control of a malign influence.”¹³ In light of Harewood’s own views, that ambiguity was “crucial,” it would appear that he might have disapproved of what he believed to be Britten’s choice.

In general, critical and scholarly opinions from the opera’s premiere to the present day support the argument that the composer and librettist intended to choose one side or the other of the Apparitionist Debate for the operatic stage, in contrast to the prized ambiguity of James’ ghosts. However, in an interview years after the premiere, Piper contradicts these claims: “Neither Britten nor I ever intended to

¹⁰ Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: an essay on opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 155-156.

¹¹ Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* [1956], rev. ed. University of California Press (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1988: 225.

¹² Alan Blyth, *Remembering Britten* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 82.

¹³ Ibid.

interpret the work, only to recreate it for a different medium.”¹⁴ Piper’s account of Britten’s position, specifically, emphasizes the composer’s interest in the larger message of the story:

I don’t think Ben really took sides: but James’s story certainly underlines his own emotional attitude to the corruptibility of innocence. That evil exists whether in life or in the mind...and is capable of corrupting—or perhaps not necessarily corrupting but causing the loss of innocence—he was, I think, quite certain.¹⁵

Piper’s reference to Britten’s open-mindedness in setting such a highly disputed text likely also illustrates her own approach to the project as the other member of their creative duo. Her statement, therefore, is used as a starting point for the present study.

Britten Scholarship

Scholarship on Britten’s music has seen a surge over the past few decades, with the number of publications peaking around the composer’s centennial in 2013. Two seminal works provided the foundation for these twenty-first century studies. The first is Humphrey Carpenter’s *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (1992). Carpenter enjoyed unlimited access to all the materials housed in the archives of the Britten-Pears Library in Aldeburgh, UK, including letters, journals, images, programs, and much more. Carpenter’s biography was immediately (and is still today) criticized by conductor and writer David Blum in *The New York Times* for “defining the plant by the soil”—that is, for essentializing Britten’s relationships and drawing

¹⁴ Myfanwy Piper quoted in David Herbert, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 11.

¹⁵ Myfanwy Piper, letter to Patricia Howard, 22 February 1982, in Howard, *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, 23.

too many conclusions as to the meaning of his works in relation to his personal life.¹⁶ Despite these flaws, Carpenter masterfully weaves correspondence, written and oral accounts of Britten's life into what the author intended as a "candid and fully truthful" reflection of Britten's work as well as his personal life.¹⁷ In parallel with Carpenter's biography, Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed had been conducting a complementary study of the Aldeburgh collection, resulting in a monumental publication *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten* (1998-2012).¹⁸ In its six heavily annotated volumes the many facets of Britten's personal life—stormy friendships, same-sex relationships, and pacifist beliefs—are illuminated.

Since these two biographical contributions appeared, many scholars have returned to the Britten-Pears Library to examine other, still unpublished primary sources. Britten's personal life, specifically his lifelong relationship with tenor Peter Pears is now more freely discussed than it was in the twentieth century, and especially prior to Pears' death in 1986. The growth of conversation surrounding their relationship since the new millennium is largely a result of the changing societal view of homosexual relationships and the greater comfort of Britten and Pears' inner circle with sharing their recollections of the couple. The documentary film *The Hidden Heart* premiered in 2001 and includes interviews with Britten's colleagues and friends, as well as featuring Britten scholars discussing the composer's personal life in relation to his career. The insight with which these interviewees approach this

¹⁶ David Blum, "Sex, Triads, and Chromaticism," in *The New York Times Archives*, 1993, accessed online April 7, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/11/books/sex-triads-and-chromaticism.html>.

¹⁷ Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, ix.

¹⁸ Philip Reed, Mervyn Cooke, Donald Mitchell, *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten, 1913-1976* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998-2012).

delicate subject has informed this study's understanding of the connection between Britten's work and his lifelong relationship with Pears. Indeed, historical as well as analytical studies of Britten have benefitted immensely from the greater accessibility of documents once considered harmful to the composer's reputation.

The most recent biographical contributions came just in time for Britten's centennial, and have equally informative yet diverse approaches to tracing the composer's life and work. Lucy Walker's bold *Britten in Pictures* (2012) takes full advantage of the holdings at the Britten-Pears archive and contains private photos of Britten and Pears in their everyday lives, with friends, and, on occasion, in the nude. These candid images reveal Britten's personality behind his reserved public demeanor and his vulnerability behind his notoriously strong grudges.¹⁹ Neil Powell, although not a musicologist by profession, brings multiple aspects of Britten's life into a discussion of his compositions in *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music* (2013). Powell's work is of particular interest to me because his strong knowledge of literature allows him to make interesting points about the composer's work in relation to that of his contemporary writers.

Paul Kildea's *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century* (2013) is a fusion of Carpenter and Powell's approaches: it is a detailed biography that also contains keen analytical insight into Britten's compositions in relation to his personal life. Kildea is perhaps best known for his assertion that Britten did not die of congestive heart failure as reported, but syphilis. While this particular suggestion

¹⁹ Britten was known to leave behind a trail of "corpses," which were friends, collaborators, critics, etc. who had somehow come to be at odds with the composer.

continues to be disputed, Kildea's work provides an excellent foundation for any scholar who hopes to familiarize themselves with Britten's work in relation to his colleagues and community. He also approaches the 1950s as a mournfully reflective time for Britten, who, according to Kildea, refused to heal from the trauma of war but rather wished to experience its psychologically detrimental aftermath. This observation is particularly relevant to the present study, as *The Turn of the Screw* dramatizes the concept of irreparable damage and irreversible corruption, most vividly with Miles' death.²⁰

The most recent contribution to Britten scholarship in general is a collection of essays by both new and well-established Britten scholars, entitled *Benjamin Britten Studies: Essays on an Inexplicit Art* (2017).²¹ The collection explores yet another portion of neglected and/or unpublished primary sources in Aldeburgh, and draws upon a variety of methodologies beyond those of musicology and history. The collection provides a new approach to the ever-growing conversation on Britten's identity and his identity's connection with his work. Among the scholars represented in *Britten Studies* are Kildea, Reed, and Walker, as well as Britten-Pears librarian Nicholas Clark and musicologist Philip Rupprecht (discussed further below).

Arguably the first major piece of scholarship that focused specifically on the impact of homosexuality on Britten's music was Philip Brett's *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, written as early as 1977 but published posthumously in 2006 by his partner

²⁰ For more on this, see Chapters 2 and 3..

²¹ Vicki P. Stroeher and Justin Vickers (eds.), *Benjamin Britten Studies: Essays on an Inexplicit Art* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017).

George Haggerty. At the time when Brett was writing, his claims would have not been received well by the people who were protecting Britten's reputation. However, when finally published, Brett's insights were welcomed into the open discussion of Britten's private life, which had begun with Carpenter and flourished into the ever-expanding wealth of publications available today.

That there are sexual undertones present in Piper and Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* would, in my opinion, be an understatement. While scholars such as Philip Rupprecht are cautious to assign sexual or homosexual meaning to the story's purposefully ambiguous secrets (see Chapter 1), the composer's consistently evident fixation on the subject of the corruption of innocence requires consideration in the context of his personal life. As scholar Jonathan Manton suggests in support of making such connections, "in Britten's case especially, it is impossible to separate the composer from the music," particularly in light of his relationship with Peter Pears.²²

Britten's professional and personal relationship with Peter Pears began early in his career, when Pears was singing with a group for which Britten had composed a new work.²³ The two quickly became close, and the rest of their careers was defined by their relationship; it is impossible to discuss the success of one without the other, as their mutual artistry was complementary, existing in a "symbiotic relationship."²⁴

²² Jonathan Manton, *Studying Britten: The Current Landscape of Published Scholarship on Britten*, 229.

²³ Sue Phipps in an interview in *The Hidden Heart*, documentary, directed by Teresa Griffiths (London: EMI Classics, 2009) accessed online December 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9S31OGrGkL4&t=906s>.

²⁴ James Bowman in an interview, in *The Hidden Heart: A Life of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears*, prod. and dir. Teresa Griffiths, (EMI Classics, 2001), online video, accessed March 4, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9S31OGrGkL4&t=204s>

Britten displayed Pears' unique tenor voice in a number of compositions, from operas to canticles and song cycles. In his operas, the lead character is usually a tenor role written for Pears, as in *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *Albert Herring*, *Owen Wingrave*, and *Death in Venice*.

That Pears should premiere the role of Peter Quint, the valet who, before his death, likely took advantage of the young Miles and possibly still pursues him as a ghost, is notable for many reasons. While homosexuality itself was not illegal at the time of the opera's premiere, being convicted of homosexual acts was grounds for imprisonment. The same laws that in 1895 condemned Oscar Wilde, released from prison a year before James' novella was published, were still active during most of Britten and Pears' lifetimes. Indeed, the years preceding the composition of *The Turn of the Screw* saw a particularly fervent pursuit of homosexual offences by British law enforcement. In a well-publicized 1952 case, respected wartime code breaker Alan Turing was convicted of "gross indecency," opted out of prison in exchange for a chemical castration, and would commit suicide three months before the premiere of Britten and Piper's opera. The high-profile nature of this event was a catalyst for the Wolfenden Committee, established less than a month before *The Turn of the Screw*'s premiere, which sought to lift the criminalization of homosexual acts done in private. It would take thirteen years for their efforts to succeed with the adoption of the Sexual Offenses Act of 1967, and even that law established a higher age of consent for homosexual acts than for heterosexual ones.

The Turn of the Screw's subject matter also proved particularly relevant to Britten's personal life, particularly in relation to his well-known affection for young boys. Britten's relationship with young boys who were often involved in his productions in some way adds an eerie quality to what might otherwise be an entirely innocent use of children on the operatic stage. In the case of *The Turn of the Screw*, David Hemmings was the original Miles, with whom Britten had a close and, in Peter Pears' words, "nearly catastrophic" relationship.²⁵ While these relationships were never confirmed as sexual, there remain numerous accounts of Britten's borderline (and as some have argued, actual) paedophilia. These can be found in letters to and from Britten, his diaries, as well as personal accounts of the boys themselves as adults and Britten's close friends.²⁶ Indeed, Britten's one-time close friend W. H. Auden mocks the composer in one of his letters for his attraction to "thin-as-a-board juveniles."²⁷ This very delicate area of Britten's personal life has been documented in detail and treated with extreme care in John Bridcut's daring 2006 publication, *Britten's Children*.

Scholarship on *The Turn of the Screw* (1954)

While there is a substantial amount of writing on Britten's operas, *The Turn of the Screw* is not nearly as discussed as, say, *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, and even

²⁵ Raymond Leppard remembering Pears' words from a conversation, in a letter to Carpenter, 26 September, 1991, in *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, 357.

²⁶ Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, 1992; John Bridcut, *Britten's Children* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006); Benjamin Britten, *Journeying Boy: the Diaries of the Young Benjamin Britten 1928-1938*, ed. John Evans (London: Faber & Faber, 2009).

²⁷ Martin Kettle, "Why Must We Talk About Britten's Boys?," in *The Guardian*, November 21, 2012, accessed March 10th, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/nov/21/britten-boys-obsession-cannot-ignore>.

Death in Venice. Among the more recent of the studies dividing their attention between most, if not all, of Britten's operas, is Claire Seymour's *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion* (2004), a textual and musical analysis of Britten's operas that focuses on the structure and manipulation of the screw theme.²⁸ Britten is known to have always worked in close collaboration with his librettists, and a substantial volume of archival material remains as a testimony to this work. Seymour's book contains several illuminating accounts of the transformation of Britten's opera libretti from initial drafts to printed text set to music. Seymour's study has been criticized for seeking to prescribe Britten's dramas as an attempted cure for his psychological isolation, claiming that he "was driven by his desire for an appropriate public 'voice' which might embody, communicate, and perhaps resolve, his private concerns and anxieties."²⁹ Her discussion of *The Turn of the Screw* draws a parallel between Britten's life and work discussed above, pointing out that Pears and Britten's relationship was socially unacceptable and is thus related to the opera's strong suggestions of sexual misconduct. While I acknowledge a potentially personal layer of meaning of these textual and musical moments of sexual suggestiveness in the opera, in my own study I do not aim to suggest any specific parallels with Britten's personal life.

²⁸ This book is expanded from a dissertation that goes uncited in Seymour's book, but was probably written in the late 1990s according to Whittall, "Review: *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion* by Claire Seymour," in *Music & Letters* 86, no. 3 (2005): 513, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/3526633>.

²⁹ Claire Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 1.

The main musicological work I reference in this study that focuses on Britten's compositional technique is that of Philip Rupprecht, one of the most active scholars of Britten's music today, and the author of *Rethinking Britten* (2001) and *Britten's Musical Language* (2013). While the latter's chapter on *The Turn of the Screw* focuses on the children as the focal point of ambiguity, I center my own musical analysis around the Ghosts' musical language (see Chapter 3). I also add to Rupprecht's examination of the children's music as performative with examples of the Ghosts' music as equally contrived, both musically and textually, and what this means in the context of the opera's frame-story structure.

The two studies that focus specifically on *The Turn of the Screw* as an adaptation are Patricia Howard's *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw* (1985) and Michael Halliwell's *Opera and the Novel: The Case of Henry James* (2005). The latter has a small chapter on *The Turn of the Screw* that provides a brief overview of the debate surrounding the novella, addresses the practical considerations of transforming a literary work into an opera, and goes on to suggest that *The Turn of the Screw* has the potential to remain faithful to James' original ambiguity, but does not go as far as to make an argument. Halliwell also appears to be the first scholar to address the possibility of a biased narrator manifested within the score, but quickly withdraws from further exploration with a shallow reminder of music's tendency to "access essential truth."³⁰ In general, Halliwell discusses the many potential pitfalls of analysis in this piece but leaves most of his questions unanswered. He reiterates, in

³⁰ Michael Halliwell, *Opera and the Novel: The Case of Henry James*, ed. Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 127.

his conclusion, the danger of Piper's singing Ghosts as an imbalanced adaptation of James' story, ultimately leaving the final decision in the hands of a director: "The final interpretation ultimately depends on the production team - what they choose to emphasize or ignore."³¹ While my own study acknowledges this same freedom of directorial interpretation, I suggest that an interpretive choice is not enough to avoid ambiguities embedded in both the libretto and the score.

Howard's collection of essays, both her own as well as contributions by other musicologists and literary scholars, is mostly concerned with the comparison of the original novella to the text and music of its operatic adaptation, as well as of the compositional process to its final product. The essays are tied together by the idea of the "first" and "second story," which literary scholar Vivian Jones defines as the two main interpretations of the James that a reader generally experiences in a specific order.³² While an opera does not have the same feasibility of a second viewing as the book does of a second reading, this concept of two truths within the same novel is certainly connected with Piper and Britten's operatic adaptation. There is much discussion of these two interpretations in Chapter 1.

While there are countless analyses of James' *The Turn of the Screw* (see Chapter 1), the first to formulate a theory behind James' "first" and "second story" is literary scholar Shlomith Rimmon's poststructuralist study, *The Concept of Ambiguity—the Example of James* (1977). Rimmon's work offers a literary-critical

³¹ Halliwell, *Opera and the Novel: The Case of Henry James*, 159.

³² Vivien Jones, "Henry James' 'The Turn of the Screw,'" in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, 1-22.

framework upon which I build my argument for Britten and Piper's opera as part of a larger discussion of ambiguity. More information on this source as well as the other foundational critical studies of *The Turn of the Screw* can be found in Chapter 1.

Methodology

While there is a wealth of Henry James scholarship, of particular relevance to the present study are those works that trace the groundbreaking shift in the critical interpretation of James's ambiguity in *The Turn of the Screw* that occurred in the mid-twentieth century, from an essentially stagnant approach to a new, more flexible mode of thought. Ambiguity as it translates from the novella into its operatic adaptation is the central focus of my thesis. While there is an abundance of literary scholarship on *The Turn of the Screw* from the late twentieth-century to present-day, the interest of this study goes beyond James' novella and focuses on its adaptation into opera. That the opera was composed during a shift (1950s) in the theoretical approaches to James' novella draws my attention primarily to this shift and its predecessors (see Chapter 1).

The present thesis also relies on a theoretical framework of adaptation studies, specifically as applied to music by Linda Hutcheon in her seminal work, *A Theory of Adaptation*. With its clearly structured theoretical approach to the process of adaptation, her book provided a useful model for my own research. Specifically, it inspired my view of *The Turn of the Screw*'s adaptors (Hutcheon's "who") as a creative team as well as led me to consider the changing nature of an audience

(Hutcheon's "when" and "where"). This study also follows Hutcheon's call to move beyond the outdated conventions of "fidelity criticism" and into the complex network of meaning that an adaptation inevitably creates. In addition to Hutcheon, Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation*, which explores the limitless nature of intertextuality, provided another useful guide, particularly with respect to my use of certain concepts and terminology.³³

I also aim to avoid the claims of fidelity or infidelity, as these labels denigrate adaptations as negatively derivative, and woefully dependent upon an original source. An adaptation, which is inevitably derivative, is not automatically a lesser creation but instead just another addition to a larger network of intertexts (see below for more on "intertextuality"). As Hutcheon writes in her *Theory of Adaptation*:

The idea of "fidelity" to that prior text is often what drives any directly comparative method of study. Instead...there are many and varied motives behind adaptation and few involve faithfulness.³⁴

Instead, I test these operative additions against Shlomith Rimmon's analysis of James' technique of ambiguity in order to understand the ways in which Piper and Britten transformed an ambiguity from words on a page to singing actors on a stage.

Language and Terminology

Following Piper's clarification of her and Britten's intentions in *The Turn of the Screw*, I address the opera as an *adaptation*, rather than an "interpretation." Of course,

³³ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), XIII.

a complication arises from Piper's word choice in a modern discussion of adaptation and its widely accepted notion that "all adaptation is interpretation."³⁵ To clarify, when Piper used the term "interpretation" in the late 1970s, it is likely she was responding to questions concerning the existence of the Ghosts in the opera, according to the criticism following the opera's premiere as discussed above. Therefore, I posit that she was referring specifically to taking sides in the Apparitionist Debate rather than interpreting the story in a general sense. Furthermore, I see this adaptation as distinct from an *appropriation*, based on a distinction made by Julie Sanders: "Appropriation carries out the same sustained engagement as adaptation but frequently adopts a posture of critique, even assault."³⁶ This study also uses Julia Kristeva's concept of *intertextuality*, a term commonly employed beyond literature and defined as "the permutation of texts by utterances and semiotic signifiers deriving from other texts."³⁷ Specifically, I identify both literary and musical instances of intertextuality throughout the course of Piper and Britten's opera, just as James' novella includes intertextual elements.

The terms *double directedness* and *single directedness* (more often appearing in this study as "singly directed clues") are borrowed directly from Shlomith Rimmon's 1977 poststructuralist study of *The Turn of the Screw*. Rimmon based this term on Roger Gard's criticism of another James novel, *The Golden Bowl*: "He is presenting two separate and complete, strongly contrasted but equally credible

³⁵ As supported by scholars such as Linda Hutcheon, Julie Sanders, and Robert Gordon.

³⁶ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 4.

³⁷ Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 162; Musicologist Philip Rupprecht often refers to the term on a musical level in his work on Britten, particularly in *Britten's Musical Language*.

‘realities’ simultaneously.”³⁸ These concepts are discussed in more detail in Chapter 1, and applied to Piper’s libretto and Britten’s music in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. Rimmon also uses the terms *narrative ambiguity*, *verbal ambiguity*, and *retrospective ambiguity* extensively in his study (see Chapters 1 and 2). Although these terms are not exclusive to his work, I use his particular definitions along with his larger concepts for a comprehensive application of his poststructuralist reading of *The Turn of the Screw* to Piper and Britten’s adaptation.

In Chapter 1, I give a brief synopsis of James’ *The Turn of the Screw* and trace the development of literary critical thinking surrounding the novella, from the time of its publication in 1898 to the poststructuralist movement in the mid-1970s. I conclude the chapter by suggesting the critical trend toward synthesis in the 1950s is the contemporary trend to which the opera contributes. In Chapter 2, I identify and examine the most significant textual additions Myfanwy Piper made to the original story. Chapter 3 then focuses on Britten’s musical setting, aiming to recontextualize current musicological and analytical thinking about the score within the larger critical conversation on ambiguity in James’ original novella.

By demonstrating that Piper and Britten’s opera displays the evidence of Rimmon’s concept of James’ ambiguity, I am further able to contextualize the work as a participant in the critical movement of synthesis, a contemporary push by literary scholars to set aside the polarized debate and work toward a reading that incorporates both arguments of the Apparitionist Debate. Rimmon’s ability to prescribe a structural

³⁸ Quoted in Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity -- the Example of Henry James*, 15.

concept of ambiguity to James' work is crucial to understanding any adaptations' successful preservation of that same ambiguity, despite any superficial alterations.

Through textual and musical analyses of Britten and Piper's *The Turn of the Screw* based on the particular technique of ambiguity in James' novella, I will demonstrate that their work belongs to a contemporary trend of synthesizing both arguments of the Apparitionist Debate. In the next chapter, I will provide a synopsis of James' novella, lay the groundwork of foundational scholarship of the Apparitionist Debate, and trace the transformation of critical analysis from James' to Britten and Piper's lifetimes.

Chapter 1:
Arguing for Apparitions and Ambiguity:
Critical Approaches to Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*

Henry James (1843-1916) was raised in an affluent American family in New England, where his parents enjoyed a vibrant social and intellectual life among artists and writers. For Henry, it was European culture, high society, and art that beckoned him from a young age. Because of his privileged upbringing, James routinely traveled to Europe with his family and continued to do so throughout his lifetime. He was highly influenced by and connected with European philosophers, writers, and artists, more so than those in America. James finally settled in Europe in 1875 and traveled frequently between France and England, continuing to make connections with artists and intellectuals in both countries.³⁹

In the latter half of 1897, having just settled into the small town of Rye, Sussex, the expatriate living out his European dream was contacted by the American magazine *Collier's Weekly* with a request for a ghost story to be completed in the new year.⁴⁰ James welcomed the request from *Collier's Weekly* as an opportunity for steady income after his recent move from London, and began writing weekly installments of what was to become his first critical success following major disappointments on the London stage.⁴¹

³⁹"James, Henry," in *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of American Literature*, 813-816, Vol. 2, (Detroit: Gale, 2009), *Gale Virtual Reference Library* (accessed February 8, 2018), http://link.galegroup.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/apps/doc/CX3008100253/GVRL?u=umd_um&sid=GVRL&xid=4499cf42.

⁴⁰ Vivien Jones, "Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw,'" 1.

⁴¹ Sami Ludwig, "Metaphors, Cognition and Behavior: The Reality of Sexual Puns in 'The Turn of the Screw,'" in *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (March 1994), 33-534.



Figure 1.1. Henry James in 1910. (Image: Bettmann Corbis Stock Photos and Images, Getty Images)

The Writing

James had finished the *The Turn of the Screw* in its entirety before the new year, dictating to a typist as he had never learned to type and his writing hand was irreparably damaged from ceaseless writing since childhood.⁴² The story was then distributed by *Collier's* in twelve installments from January 27 to April 16, 1898.

Because of its theatrical elements, *The Turn of the Screw* would go on to become one of the most widely adapted English novels of the nineteenth century. As Peter Beidler explains: “The story is also one of James’ most theatrical: it has a single setting in a mysterious mansion, pale faces at windows, strange figures appearing and disappearing, dramatic scenes and dialogue, a melodramatic interplay of innocence with the haunting forces of darkness.”⁴³ While the exact origins of the story are unknown, the main germ is generally acknowledged as a story the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward White Benson, told James several years beforehand.⁴⁴

The original novella is divided into twenty-four chapters with a prologue establishing a frame within a frame. The chapters were originally organized into five “parts” and published in twelve installments. *The Turn of the Screw* would be published in its entirety in October 1898 in a collection called *The Two Magics*, along with another of James’ short stories.⁴⁵

⁴² Peter G. Beidler, “Biographical and Historical Contexts,” in *The Turn of the Screw* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press,), 17.

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Henry James, *Complete Stories, 1892–1898*, (New York: Library of America, 1996), 941.

The Plot

The story begins from the perspective of an unnamed narrator, who is attending a house party that has evolved into a nighttime story-telling session around the fire. After a few guests have spoken, the group begins to discuss the theme of children in horror stories, their innocence making those stories so much more terrifying. A man, whom the narrator identifies as Douglas, speaks up and claims he has an even worse tale: “If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to *two* children—?”⁴⁶ Douglas explains he has a manuscript account of a haunting written by a woman he used to love, who was his own sister’s governess when he was a young man.

The next night, Douglas gives the curious group of friends a short introduction, explaining that the young woman, fresh from her training, had received notice of a man in London who was in search of a governess. When she met him, she was bashfully attracted to him, and rather intimidated by the conditions of the job: the children, his orphaned niece and nephew, were living in a country house, and he wanted her to have full responsibility for their well-being and disciplinary matters, and not to bother him for any reason, no matter the urgency. She hesitated at first, but eventually gave in to her desire to please this gallant young gentleman and accepted the position. He never gives the woman a name, and she is never addressed by her first name once in the entire story.

⁴⁶ Henry James and Peter G Beidler (ed.), *The Turn of the Screw*, Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism, (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995), 22.

From this point on, James' story is told from the governess' perspective (who, notably, remains nameless throughout the tale). She begins with her travels to the country house, Bly, and explains that her expectations for a bleak house and living situation were quickly dissolved by her first impressions of the pleasant estate and its inhabitants. She meets the younger child, Flora, the old housekeeper Mrs. Grose, and eventually the elder child Miles, who returns from school a few days after her own arrival. Miles' return is shortly followed by a curt letter from his school's headmaster, expelling the boy with little explanation; the and the governess is distressed and confides in Mrs. Grose that she is disturbed by the news. The children seem perfectly pleasant and happy to have her, and the governess is put at ease for a short while. One evening, while she is walking the grounds, she spots a man on the tower who is unknown to her and who, she immediately detects, is neither a "gentleman," nor anyone who works in the house or in the village. He has a curious way about him, and he stares intently and directly at the governess. He finally turns away and abruptly disappears.

The next sighting occurs when the governess is in a room where the children had just been playing. She spots the same man looking into the room through the window, but she senses that he is not looking at her; he appears to be searching with a lowered gaze for something that he cannot find. The governess runs out to confront him, but sees nothing once she arrives at the spot where the man was standing a few moments earlier. Instead, she startles Mrs. Grose through the window and the housekeeper comes out to question her. Their conversation reveals that the man,

whom the governess describes to her, appears to be Peter Quint, a now deceased Bly valet. The governess immediately suggests that Quint must have been searching for Miles earlier. Mrs. Grose goes on to admit that Quint was “too free with everyone,” including Miles.

Convinced that Quint wants to corrupt the children from the grave, the governess resolves to do everything she can to ensure the children do not see the apparition. The next event occurs some time later when the governess is out with Flora by the lake. While Flora plays by herself under the governess’ watch, there appears an unidentified person (she does not specify gender until later) on the other side of the lake. The governess notes that Flora intentionally turns her back on the person and continues playing, but more quietly, almost as if not to draw attention to herself. The governess now believes the children can also see the ghosts, despite her efforts to shield them. When the governess later tells Mrs. Grose of her ordeal, Mrs. Grose reveals that the person being described to her is the children’s former governess, Miss Jessel, who is also deceased. Mrs. Grose implies that Miss Jessel became pregnant while at Bly, was forced to leave, and later committed suicide, and the governess is now convinced that she wants Flora for her nefarious plans.

After two more sightings inside the house, the governess notices Flora repeatedly sneaking out of her bed to go to the window in the middle of the night. After Flora denies that she does this, the governess makes a plan to observe Flora at her window from another vantage point in the house to figure out what she is looking at. Unexpectedly, it is Miles on the lawn that Flora looks at, and not Miss Jessel’s

apparition, as she had expected. Miles seems to be staring up at something above the governess' window—that very same tower where she saw Quint for the first time. Miles does not mention the odd event until later in the evening when he says that he did it because he wanted the governess to “think [him]—for a change—*bad!*”⁴⁷

Mrs. Grose and the governess now consider writing to the uncle in London, but the governess cannot imagine how she would word such a letter: “By writing to him that his house is poisoned and his little nephew and niece mad?”⁴⁸ Instead, she threatens Mrs. Grose that, if she were to go behind her back and contact the uncle, she would abandon them and the house at once. Again, the governess takes it upon herself to combat the ghosts and what she believes to be the children's desire to see them. Here, the governess senses insidious motivations behind the children's behavior and thinks them to be silently taunting her with their charm and “unnatural goodness.”⁴⁹ At one point, she claims to have an “obsession” with the idea that the children were seeing the ghosts while in the same room with her, but keeping their sightings a secret from her as their own game.

The catalyst for the final action in the story takes place on the way to church one morning, when Miles confronts the governess about the reason for him not returning to school. They have a hazy conversation about his behavior and their tense situation at Bly, until he finally asks: “Does my uncle think what you think?” To that ambiguous question, the governess responds: “I don't think your uncle much cares,”

⁴⁷ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 72.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 74.

and Miles claims that he will convince his uncle to come down to Bly, despite his apathy.⁵⁰ The governess never enters the church and instead runs back to the house with the intention of packing her things and escaping the distressing situation at Bly, when she comes across Miss Jessel at her desk. The sight of the apparition agitates the governess to the point of changing her mind about leaving.

Later that night the governess visits Miles in his room to let him know that she is writing a letter to his uncle. He continues to speak vaguely in response to her questions about events prior to her arrival in Bly. The candle is mysteriously blown out when she reveals she wants to “save” him. Despite her confusion due to “an extraordinary blast and chill, a gust of frozen air and a shake of the room as great as if, in the wild wind, the casement had crashed in,” Miles nonchalantly claims responsibility for blowing out the candle.⁵¹

A chaotic scene erupts the next day. Flora sneaks out of the house and down to the lake, pursued by the governess and Mrs. Grose. She is found safe; however, the governess suspects Miss Jessel to be nearby. Sure enough, Jessel appears to the governess, but Mrs. Grose cannot see her despite the governess’ frantic attempts to guide her gaze toward the ghost. Flora also denies being able to see anything, and begins to furiously accuse the governess of making it all up: “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!”⁵² Mrs. Grose and Flora retreat to the house, and the governess is left in despair.

⁵⁰ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 83.

⁵¹ Ibid., 91.

⁵² Ibid., 99.

The following day, Mrs. Grose claims that Flora has spoken things in the night that she could never repeat, and that she must leave for town with the little girl at once. When the governess reminds her that the uncle should be on his way because of the letter, Mrs. Grose informs her that the letter was never sent.

The governess is now alone at Bly with Miles (and the servants who are almost never mentioned throughout the story). They begin to talk about the events that have transpired, and the governess attempts to get what she *thinks* is the truth about Quint out of Miles. Once again, their conversation is vague, until she bluntly asks Miles if he took her letter. Suddenly, Quint momentarily appears in the window and the governess holds onto Miles to make sure he does not see him. Miles admits to taking her letter, but claims that it was not for stealing that he was dismissed from school. This brings up more questions, which the governess directs at Miles, and eventually Quint reappears, which again prompts the governess to grasp Miles to shield him. However, this time he is frantically asking who is there, and when the governess will not say his name so as to get a confession out of Miles, he screams, “Peter Quint—you devil!” The governess rejoices that Miles has confessed and holds him in her arms in relief, until she realizes that Miles’ heart is no longer beating.

The Initial Reception

With the exception of the prologue, the chapters of the novella may be generally categorized as either the governess’ transcriptions of dialogue between the characters, or her descriptive accounts, still from the future governess’ perspective, of

long stretches of time and unexpected, silent run-ins with the ghosts.⁵³ These vague descriptions and nuanced dialogues are typical of James, who valued his readers' imaginative participation in his stories. The writer notes:

Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself...and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy...will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him *think* the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications.⁵⁴

Because of the first-person perspective from which many of James' stories are told, his plots are challenging to follow. At the same time, they are also extremely personal, as the reader experiences "the same delusions, limited perceptions, and dawning awarenesses as the character through whose consciousness the story is filtered."⁵⁵ Since the story is almost entirely the governess' written account of the tragedy, the reader is the judge of her credibility. The question of credibility and therefore the governess as an unreliable narrator would go on to become the crux of what is now termed the "Apparitionist Debate" in the literary world.

Indeed, since its first full publication in 1898, there was a strong sense of awe amongst critics of *The Turn of the Screw* that clearly reflects the book's unsettling effect upon its readers. During that first year, *The New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art* called the work "a deliberate, powerful, and horribly successful study of the magic of evil, of the subtle influence over human hearts and minds of the

⁵³ For clarity, James' characters (except proper names) will remain in lowercase, while Britten's will be capitalized.

⁵⁴ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 123. See below for more on his Preface to the 1908 edition.

⁵⁵ "James, Henry," in *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of American Literature*, 813-816.

sin with which this world is accursed.”⁵⁶ The anonymous reviewer saw the story as “one of the most moving and ...most remarkable works of fiction published in many years.” A reviewer in *Literature* stated that the novella is “so astonishing a piece of art that it cannot be described.”⁵⁷ A reviewer for *The New York Tribune* suggested the book “crystallizes an original and fascinating idea in absolutely appropriate form.”⁵⁸ While these comments remain rather vague, they hint at the heart of James’ dazzling literary feat: an uncanny ambiguity.

It is important to note that James’ own thoughts on and supposed intentions with his piece survive in his Preface to the 1908 New York edition. Not surprisingly, James’ Preface discusses the work in a rather fanciful and off-hand manner, as in the following puzzling musing:

The thing was to aim at absolute singleness, clearness, and roundness, and yet to depend on an imagination working freely, working (call it) with extravagance; by which law it would n’t [sic] be thinkable except as free and would n’t [sic] be amusing except as controlled.⁵⁹

While serving as a typical example of James’ complex writing style, this quote also offers a hint of the writer’s own opinion of *The Turn of the Screw*’s function. He goes on to explain his strategy of leaving the text just devoid enough of “weak specifications” so as to deny the reader an exact proof of the nature of the evil at Bly. In response to a critic concerned with the governess’ lack of personality, James states: “We have surely as much of her own nature as we can swallow in watching it reflect

⁵⁶ "James, Henry," in *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of American Literature*, 813-816.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid..

⁵⁹ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 120.

her anxieties and induction.”⁶⁰ Thus, he argues that her personality should be decided mainly based on her concerns and actions, rather than an explicit characterization by Douglas, the narrator in the prologue. However, these concerns and actions, as James surely knew, are not at all clear, and add to the many reasons why this “fairytale, pure and simple” became the focus of literary debate for decades to come.⁶¹

The Apparitionist Debate

What makes *The Turn of the Screw* unique among James’ sophisticated later works is a lack of closure for the reader at the end of the story. His other novels, while equally marked by his signature ambiguity, end with a final reveal or clarification (to the reader, not always the narrator) of the events that have transpired. The mystery at Bly is not so satisfying. While the governess is convinced of the reality of the ghosts, the reader is left questioning the string of encounters she describes, leading up to the final tragedy. Are the ghosts real, or not? It is precisely this stunning lack of clarity that inspired stage, film, and musical adaptations of the work, and sparked a debate over its interpretation that has lasted for over a century. The debate has been dominated by two equally formidable and mutually exclusive theories that divided scholars into “apparitionists,” who argued for the ghosts’ existence and the governess’ credibility, and “anti-apparitionists,” who argued for the ghosts’ nonexistence and the governess’ lack of credibility due to either madness or guilt.

⁶⁰ "James, Henry," in *Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of American Literature*, 121.

⁶¹ James’ words in his Preface, *The Turn of the Screw*, 119.

I will begin with outlining the apparitionist point of view, as it is the face-value, “first-reading” interpretation of James’ novella.⁶² The foundational element for the apparitionist argument is the cultural context of the story’s original publication—specifically, the fact that James’ novella was a product of a long tradition of ghost storytelling around Christmas time. Thus, although nineteenth-century writers such as James, Charles Dickens, E.F. Benson, Algernon Blackwood, and J. H. Riddell were contributing to a larger business scheme bolstering holiday sentiment and financial profit in Europe and North America, they were also accessing a much older Christian appropriation of the ancient worship of the winter solstice.⁶³

With this nostalgic purpose in mind, *Collier’s Weekly*’s request that James provide “something seasonable” in the winter of 1898 resulted in what seems, at first glance, a conventional tale of supernatural events.⁶⁴ Indeed, in his 1908 preface, James describes the work as “a fairy-tale pure and simple.”⁶⁵ However, literary scholars acknowledge that he was speaking in hindsight. Possibly aware of the growing conversations about his novella, James may have taken the opportunity to reassure, or perhaps mock, his readers’ distress at such an inconclusive tale. The simplicity that he attributes to the story would ultimately support the apparitionist

⁶² Jones, “Henry James’ ‘The Turn of the Screw,’” 20.

⁶³ Kat Eschner, “Why Do People Tell Ghost Stories on Christmas?,” *Smithsonian.com*, Dec 23, 2016, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-do-ghost-stories-go-christmas-180961547/>

⁶⁴ Henry James and Anthony Curtis, *The Aspern Papers and the Turn of the Screw* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1986), 8.

⁶⁵ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 119.

argument, where the ghosts are real entities corrupting the children and appearing to the governess.

The strongest voice of the apparitionist argument arrived in 1948 with Robert N. Heilman's "The Turn of the Screw as Poem." Heilman claimed that "at the level of action, the story means exactly what it says."⁶⁶ More specifically, although the story can be taken as a symbolic commentary on evil and innocence, the plot does contain real ghosts and portrays corruption through supernatural means. Heilman's interpretation would remain the pillar of the apparitionist argument until the debate's decline in the latter half of the twentieth century.

The apparitionist argument was challenged by the growing wave of psychoanalytic writing of the anti-apparitionist scholars. As scholarship in psychoanalysis flourished in the early twentieth century, it fueled speculation that the governess is an unreliable narrator.⁶⁷ The doubts surfaced as early as 1907,⁶⁸ when English literature scholar Oliver Elton, who first raised the issue, wrote the following: "There is...doubt, raised and kept hanging, whether, after all, the two ghosts who can choose to which persons they will appear, are facts, or delusions of the young governess who tells the story."⁶⁹ The psychoanalytical approach of the

⁶⁶ Robert Heilman, "The Turn of the Screw as Poem," in *A Casebook on Henry James's the Turn of the Screw*, edited by Gerald Willen, Crowell Literary Casebooks, (New York: Crowell, 1960), 230.

⁶⁷ An unreliable is a narrator, in this case in literature, whose credibility has been compromised either immediately or after further examination of the text. Although, this particular term was coined many years later; see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

⁶⁸ William James, Henry's brother was at the forefront of this emerging field. Beidler, "Biographical and Historical Contexts," 15; It is also important to note that James, being extremely well-read, was likely aware of this speculation and perhaps wrote his 1908 preface to the New York edition with this interpretive conversation in mind.

⁶⁹ Oliver Elton, *Modern Studies*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1907), 256.

anti-apparitionists continued to gain traction with Edna Kenton's 1924 publication "Henry James to the Ruminant Reader: *The Turn of the Screw*," in which she specifically argued that the ghosts did not exist outside of the governess' own mind. The absence of the ghosts was eventually brought to the forefront of literary discourse through Edmund Wilson's controversial 1934 publication, "The Ambiguity of Henry James." This particular study gained greater attention than its predecessors because its analysis of the governess' psyche was for the first time openly grounded in Freudian methodology.⁷⁰

Wilson argued that the governess was hallucinating due to unmet, repressed sexual desire, brought on by the uncle's indifference and Miles' pubescence. That Wilson's hypothesis revolved around the issue of sexuality was not an entirely new concept, as James' various hints of sexual symbolism were one of the focal points in the novella's initial critical reception.⁷¹ Indeed, many anti-apparitionists trace the source of the governess' character to a case study published in the early 1890s by Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer. Their patient Lucy R. experienced suspiciously similar circumstances, including taking care of two children, being emotionally attached to their guardian, and hallucinating certain smells connected with painful emotional experiences.⁷² Because of these scholars' knowledge of the Freudian

⁷⁰ Parkinson, "Early Criticism: 1898-1933," *The Turn of the Screw: A History of Its Critical Interpretations 1898-1979*, (PhD diss., 1991), accessed November 20, 2017, <http://www.turnofthescrew.com/>

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⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Sigmund Freud, Josef Breuer, and Nicola Luckhurst, *Studies in Hysteria*, Modern Classics, (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 61.

studies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the governess' story struck them as suspiciously familiar. Thus, the anti-apparitionist argument focused particularly on the sexual elements of James' novella to support their larger argument.

The Sexuality in The Turn of the Screw

Wilson's exploration of the sexual elements of the story paved the way for scholarship focusing on sexual symbolism and the Freudian connection between the governess and the two children. There are numerous sexual aspects of the novella that are crucial to the plot: Quint's supposed sexual harassment of the children and Miss Jessel; the account's existence possibly due to the governess' sexual desire for the uncle in London; and the uncle's need for a governess due to the late Miss Jessel becoming pregnant with Quint's child. In the novella, the governess learns the following from Mrs. Grose of Quint's past relationship with Miles: "'It was Quint's own fancy. To play with him, I mean—to spoil him.' She paused a moment; then she added: 'Quint was much too free.'"⁷³ The reader must interpret exactly what Mrs. Grose means here by the word "free," although it is commonly understood by scholars as an indication of sexual misconduct. The relationship between the governess and Miles is also questionable, as the governess mentions several moments of them "kissing" and uses particularly suggestive similes. For example, toward the end of the novella Mrs. Grose and Flora have left for London and the governess and Miles are left alone in the house. She says of this situation: "We continued silent while the maid was with us—as silent, it whimsically occurred to me, as some young

⁷³ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 49-50.

couple who, on their wedding-journey, at the inn, feel shy in the presence of the waiter. He turned round only when the waiter had left us. ‘Well—so we’re alone!’”⁷⁴

Other sexual references are symbolic, such as the phallic tower where the governess sees Peter Quint, as opposed to the yonic lake where the governess sees Miss Jessel. When Flora is playing at the cusp of the lake, the governess observes that “she had picked up a small flat piece of wood which happened to have in it a little hole that had evidently suggested to her the idea of sticking in another fragment...”⁷⁵ The governess also uses the word “kiss” in an extremely vague way throughout the story. These images and many others have generally been accepted by scholars as sexually suggestive.⁷⁶

In addition, in the second half of the twentieth century, as homosexuality became less of a taboo subject, and was eventually considered a legitimate topic of research, scholarship began to focus specifically on James’ sexuality in connection with his story. Residing in England while writing his American-commissioned ghost story, James would have been especially aware of this societal hostility. Although after 1861 the penalty for homosexual acts in England was no longer death by hanging, they were still grounds for imprisonment, as was amply demonstrated by the trial of Oscar Wilde only three years prior to *The Turn of the Screw*’s initial publication. Scholars interpreted the intentionally vague references to homosexual desire between Quint and Miles, Miss Jessel and Flora, and perhaps even the

⁷⁴ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 109.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁶ This aspect of James’ novella is preserved through Piper’s libretto, to be discussed further in Chapter 2.

governess and Flora as a hidden commentary on late nineteenth-century society's view of homosexuality as evil.⁷⁷

The Trend Toward Synthesis

Thus, when Benjamin Britten and Myfanwy Piper began their collaboration on *The Turn of the Screw* in 1954, the literary discourse was mostly dominated by Heilman's apparitionists and Wilson's anti-apparitionists. In the late 1940s, there was a consensus among scholars that neither interpretation could be disproved, and therefore James' inspiration for the piece became a topic of particular interest. Using James' 1908 Preface, as well as his correspondence with colleagues and family members, scholars set out to learn whether his source and/or inspiration for the story would support either Heilman or Wilson's interpretation. The uncovered data included the following: accounts of James' involvement with his brother William's Society for Psychical Research; the Archbishop Benson's oral narrative that James referred to in the 1908 Preface; the real mental illness and subsequent death of James' sister Alice; and Breuer and Freud's *Studien über Hysterie*, as well as countless other studies.⁷⁸ Again, scholars ran into the same issues where the evidence for each side of the argument was so abundant that neither could be dismissed or recognized as the sole truth.

⁷⁷ Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

⁷⁸ Parkinson, "Movement Toward Synthesis: 1949-1957"; Francis X. Roellinger, "Psychical Research and 'The Turn of the Screw,'" in *American Literature* (Jan. 1949): 405 and Oscar Cargill, "Henry James as Freudian Pioneer," in *Chicago Review* 10 (1956): 13-29.

Once this second impasse was reached, there was an impetus amongst scholars to dispel the thick fog of the Apparitionist Debate, believing there was more to discuss in James' story than the presence or absence of its ghosts. The most successful in integrating both interpretations was John Lydenberg, who, in 1957, found that both Wilson and Heilman's interpretations could be reconciled with each other through the frame of the governess' narrative. For example, Lydenberg addresses Heilman's claim that James creates parallels between the governess and a savior, ultimately setting the scene for a conventional contrast between good and evil, living and dead, holy and unholy. However, he points out that these projections of good and evil might not necessarily be James' but rather those of the deluded governess. He writes of Heilman's argument:

It is at this point that his otherwise admirable analysis slips a crucial notch. These words are not simply words that James attaches to her; they are words that James has her attach to herself. And the words suggesting that the children are angelic creatures corrupted by infernal agents are her words, words that give us her vision—or version—of the fall of the house of Bly.⁷⁹

Lydenberg reminds the literary world that Heilman's conventional concept of good and evil works perfectly well within Wilson's framework of an unstable governess. If both arguments are true, then Lydenberg suggests that the ghosts simply symbolize an "aspect of human nature which, like original sin perhaps, exists in all people, including the governess."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ John Lydenberg, "The Governess Turns the Screws," in *Nineteenth Century Fiction* (June 1957): 39-40.

⁸⁰ Parkinson, "Movement Toward Synthesis: 1949-1957."

Perhaps the most groundbreaking aspect of Lydenberg's approach, crucial to the argument of this thesis, is his concern with the technique of ambiguity, rather than the ambiguous details of the plot. The narrative structure and the narrator him/herself are his main focus, rather than a desire to fit the piece into a single genre, such as "psychiatric case history or religious propaganda," based on available clues.⁸¹ Lydenberg's examination of all the various, sometimes contradictory, plot details as part of a larger meticulously crafted structure set the precedent for future literary criticism. This general approach, I suggest, also parallels the one adopted in the contemporaneous adaptation of James's novella, Britten and Piper's *The Turn of the Screw*.

While the opera coincides chronologically with an early 1950s scholarly effort towards synthesizing the critical arguments outlined above, it has never been considered as a part of that debate. Scholars often use comparative analysis of the original novella with the opera to serve their exploration of the opera itself, but never to understand the opera's function within the larger literary discourse about its source story. Yet, Piper and Britten's approach to the adaptation of James' novella—preserving his method of ambiguity rather than the exact content—exemplifies the primary trajectory of that discourse in the years following the opera's composition.⁸² Therefore, this study argues that Britten and Piper's work should be viewed as a substantive contribution to the literary debate over the original story, and specifically to their contemporary critical synthesis trend. However, in

⁸¹ Parkinson, "Movement Toward Synthesis: 1949-1957."

⁸² Parkinson, "The Influence of Structuralism: 1958-1969."

order to understand Piper and Britten's process of adaptation in 1953-4, I look to the 1970s' culminating critical approach of poststructuralism in the apparitionist discourse as an analytical tool.

The Deconstructionist and Poststructuralist Approaches

It was not until the mid-1970s, twenty years after the premiere of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, that a strong third interpretive approach entered the literary critical arena, founded upon the earlier attempts to synthesize these two apparently irreconcilable arguments. Following Lydenberg's focus on James' novella as a piece of complex literature, scholars in the mid-1970s examined *The Turn of the Screw* through the concept of ambiguity. Specifically, they posited the presence of two simultaneous realities, rather than an unclear telling of a single reality. Dorothea Krook in her 1974 "Intention and Intentions: The Problem of Intention and Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw,'" was the first to suggest that the polarized argument seeks a far too simple solution for a purposefully complex text. Her idea of "two meanings, both equally self-consistent and self-complete" became the widely accepted approach in the 1970s and paved the way for groundbreaking conceptual interpretations, particularly in the works of Shoshana Felman and Christine Brooke-Rose.⁸³ These two scholars, much inspired by Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist views, formulated what is now considered the poststructuralist reading of James' novella. Shoshana Felman states that the task is not "simply to

⁸³ Dorothea Krook, "Intention and Intentions: The Problem of Intention and Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw,'" in *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays*, ed. John Halperin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 355.

decide whether in effect the ‘Freudian’ reading is true or false, correct or incorrect. It can be both at the same time.”⁸⁴ Similarly, Brooke-Rose reflects on the old Apparitionist Debate and addresses the governess’ confusing prose as the root of the reader’s frustration while trying to make sense of the text: “This structure [of the governess’ narrative] is successful, as we have seen, which is why I call the governess’s state (her language) ‘contagious’.”⁸⁵

In the same year that Felman adopted Derrida’s deconstructionist approach and declared there can be multiple, simultaneous readings of the story without any being labeled as true or false, Shlomith Rimmon published his monograph, *The Concept of Ambiguity — the Example of James*. Expanding on the idea of multiple realities, Rimmon seeks to define the differences between “ambiguity” and other forms of the “multiplicity of meaning.”⁸⁶ He argues that, while there can be various readings of a literary text, these readings do not all have the same relationship to one another. For example, an allegory has two readings—literal and figurative—which are equivalent. Ambiguity, on the other hand, has two or more meanings that “are at the level of narrative literality...and the relation between them is not one of equivalence but of incompatibility.” Rimmon goes on to argue that:

⁸⁴ Shoshana Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977): 94-207.

⁸⁵ Christina Brooke-Rose, “‘The Turn of the Screw’ and Its Critics” (1976), in *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 156.

⁸⁶ Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity -- The Example of Henry James*, 13.

Equivalence is not the only relation that can obtain between various readings of a literary text. Sometimes the ‘finalized’ hypotheses complement each other or are integrated in a larger unit of meaning. Ambiguity differs in that its component alternatives cannot both be true, nor can they be subsumed in a larger unit which they conjoin to create or in which they are reconciled and integrated. Therefore [...] ambiguity simultaneously calls for choice and makes it impossible.⁸⁷

To further explain Rimmon’s argument, I’ll take a common allegory—Aesop’s “The Tortoise and the Hare.” The two creatures begin a race at the same time, and although the hare is naturally faster and at first advances much quicker than the tortoise, his ego and perhaps lack of consistency convince him he can take a nap and still win the race. While the hare sleeps, the tortoise, with stamina and commitment to the race despite extremely poor odds, overtakes the hare and wins. If one were to attach a figurative meaning to this allegory, the literal and figurative meanings would be an exact match. For example, a child struggling with math in school who commits himself to completing his homework and eventually attains competency, while a naturally gifted student neglects his homework and falls behind. The character with commitment and stamina perseveres and eventually succeeds, while the other’s self-assuredness leads him to laziness and falling behind.

If a story were ambiguous, on the other hand, the literal action that takes place is unclear, and the two or more possible meanings of the text reshape their narrative and outcome. The reader must choose one or the other meaning to form a single story, however, the choice must be made subjectively, as the text is objectively neutral. For an extremely simplified example (to avoid regurgitating the more famous ambiguous

⁸⁷ Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity -- the Example of Henry James*, 14.

tales such as James’): “The crane landed on the street below, and a surprised crowd immediately gathered in awe of the sight before them.” One meaning of this sentence shows a scene of chaos, broken machinery, and possibly injury, while the other reads as a delightfully pleasant visit from a beautiful bird.

There is nothing to reveal exactly which meaning I intended, and therefore, the story lacks a single reality. This ambiguity is due to the story’s main homonym, “crane,” as well as vague vocabulary and lack of what Rimmon refers to as “finalization.” In this short story’s case, “finalization” could have been as simple as “...while the sound of sirens approached from behind them,” which reveals the single reality behind my intentionally vague writing. If “finalized,” the story is no longer ambiguous. In this sense, “ambiguity” would certainly fit the circumstances of *The Turn of the Screw*, because of the weak “finalization” James provides his reader. Rimmon labels this phenomenon—a vague narrative paired with a lack of “finalization”—as “narrative ambiguity.”⁸⁸ However, unlike my previous example, James’ method for creating a vague narrative is, according to Rimmon, far more complex than a simple homonym in an imprecise vocabulary.

The literary technique that this study uses as a foundation for analyzing ambiguity in Britten and Piper’s *The Turn of the Screw* is what Rimmon terms “double directedness,” made possible by James’ “‘distributional’ technique,” which is the particular, segmented way in which the action is balanced throughout the novel. In Rimmon’s words, James’ distributional technique is “the narrative continuum

⁸⁸ Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity -- the Example of Henry James*, 10.

[that] divides this general question [which reality is true?] into a series of ‘local’ questions, each forming the focus of a relatively self-contained section of the story.”⁸⁹ He explains the function of these “local” questions in terms of what he calls “singly directed clues”:

The sequence of singly directed clues renders the scene in which they appear doubly directed. The clues themselves are not doubly directed, but because they are sequential and because they are focused on a well-defined situation every time, they render the situation doubly directed.⁹⁰

In short, these singly directed clues do not all point to a single, hidden *reality*, but rather each singly directed clue points to one of *two possible realities* and therefore to a single *question* within a scene: which is the true reality? Although, that “local question” presents as more specific to each scene depending on the action that unfolds. In Rimmon’s view, they are crucially important elements in James’s technique of creating ambiguity.

I posit that Rimmon’s singly directed clues can also be found in Piper’s libretto and Britten’s score, both as recreations of those found in James as well as *additions* to them. These additions expand the James original with new material for the ghosts and the children while maintaining double directedness within each scene. As Piper once stated in an interview, “neither Britten nor I ever intended to interpret the work, only to recreate it for a different medium.”⁹¹ By examining the intricacies of Piper’s libretto and Britten’s music, this study shows that in every one of their

⁸⁹ Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity -- the Example of Henry James*, 121.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁹¹ Herbert (ed.), *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: The Complete Librettos*, 11.

addition to the source text, their adaptation works toward the preservation of James's "double directedness."

Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* has a rich history of interpretive criticism, which progressed from the two-sided Apparitionist Debate into a larger conceptual movement that focused more on the piece's function in its past and present contexts. This study argues that by "recreating" James' story and thus preserving the "double directedness" of the original writing, Piper and Britten's opera, through the concept of translation as criticism, not only foreshadowed deconstructionist criticism by twenty years, but continues to actively participate in this discourse over sixty years later.⁹² Choosing not to interpret the story, the opera moves further than creating the possibility of a single reality shrouded by ambiguity, and allows their work to transcend from a tool in a debate to the "we can have it both ways" playground for the director's concept, be it societal allegory, political criticism, or religious symbolism.

The next chapter contains a textual analysis of Piper and Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, based on Rimmon's literary approach. In this analysis, I aim to provide evidence of double directedness in the 1954 opera, confirming the composition's function within the larger literary trend toward a synthesis of the debates' oppositional interpretive viewpoints. I test each substantial novel elements of the opera's libretto against its source text before discerning its function within the

⁹² Caryl Emerson and Alexander Burry, among others, posit that the transposition of a story "might in fact be the most vigorous commentary possible on another author's work of art." From Emerson (ed.), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 8. See also: Alexander Barry, *Multi-Mediated Dostoevsky: Transposing Novels into Opera, Film, and Drama* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2011).

broader “double directedness” of the story. This contextualization supports the larger argument of this study by establishing Britten and Piper’s opera as an unconventional and unacknowledged contribution to a contemporary critical trend of synthesis.

Chapter 2: Double Directedness in Piper's Libretto for *The Turn of the Screw*

In her chapter, "Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw,'" gender and literary scholar Vivien Jones comments on the weight of undertaking an adaptation of James' text:

The playwright, or librettist, or composer brave enough to try has the choice between commitment to one interpretation and the formidable task of reproducing in another medium ambiguities which in James are so inextricably part of our experience of reading the governess's account of events at Bly.⁹³

In 1954, Myfanwy Piper's libretto accomplished this formidable task and more by preserving the original ambiguities in a staged drama as well as *expanding* upon those crucial moments in the James that have been the focus of a century-long literary debate. This chapter examines how Piper adapted James' novella into a libretto, the larger structural changes during adaptation, and how these affect the ambiguity of the plot as compared with the James. Then, following Rimmon's poststructuralist approach, this chapter examines those ambiguities more specifically as singly directed clues creating an effect of double directedness.

Piper's university studies in the 1930s makes her knowledge of the complexities of James' work extremely likely.⁹⁴ While her knowledge of Henry James's novella is confirmed by her recommendation to Britten, her possible familiarity with the scholarship surrounding the novella can only be a matter of

⁹³ Jones, "Henry James' 'The Turn of the Screw,'" 2.

⁹⁴ David Fraser Jenkins, "Obituary: Myfanwy Piper," *The Independent*, 22 January 1997.

speculation.⁹⁵ Furthermore, in 1934 she would have likely been aware of Edmund Wilson's "The Ambiguity of Henry James," the breakthrough piece of criticism that would spark the Apparitionist Debate, as explored in Chapter 1. Although published in *Hound and Horn*, an American periodical, Wilson's article would likely have been quickly distributed to and discussed by English literary scholars in England; Henry James was considered an Englishman by the time of his death in 1916, and therefore criticism of his novella (written less than thirty years before Piper attended Oxford) was the concern of both American and English literary scholars.⁹⁶

An Overview of Adaptation

Piper's libretto is evidence of what Julie Sanders describes in her *Adaptation and Appropriation* as the adaptation-editorial practice of "indulging in the exercise of trimming and pruning...[and] an amplificatory procedure engaged in addition, expansion, accretion, and interpolation."⁹⁷ While Piper takes settings, characters, and lines of prose from James, she develops these literary elements to take advantage of the expanded sensory experience of an opera. Her propensity to add action to James' original story is evidence of the composer and librettist understanding the importance of preserving James' method of ambiguity (i.e., Rimmon's double directedness), rather than reproducing the exact content—detailed description and dialogue—of the novella. However, it is important to note that Piper was not entirely responsible for

⁹⁵ Piper offered up James' story as an option for Britten's commissioned piece only a year after a musical theatre adaptation of James' story, *The Innocents*, had visited London's West End. As has been the case in opera history, the recent success of the mainstream adaptation was a perfect trend for Britten and Piper to follow.

⁹⁶ Beidler, "Biographical and Historical Contexts," 6.

⁹⁷ Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 18.

the text of *The Turn of the Screw*, as Britten frequently added and suggested texts in their correspondence.⁹⁸

First, I will identify the main omissions in the adaptation of James' text. I will then provide an overview of the major changes to the original story as they appear in Piper and Britten's opera. By highlighting these differences, this portion clarifies how Piper's additions function as supplementary (in the case of omission of original material) or additional clues that preserve the opera's double directedness. The three main alterations (not including the music itself) made in James' original story concern the story's structure, text, and characters. I'll focus on the three larger categories in the initial brief overview and then delve further into the textual changes in an analysis of the libretto's singly directed additions.

Omissions

While there are countless small, potentially plot-sensitive details of James' story lost in the transformation from novella to libretto, I focus on a handful of the larger omissions. The first large omission is the outer frame of the original prologue, with an account of an unnamed narrator surrounded by party guests, all gathered around a fire sharing ghost stories with each other. This scene was neither practically nor financially viable for the restrictions of the chamber opera's manpower and budget, and Britten and Piper eventually decided to begin directly with Douglas (here named Prologue) introducing the Governess' account; more on the "Prologue" below.

⁹⁸ Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, 334.

The other large omissions are the two occasions where the governess sees the ghosts on the stairs: Peter Quint ascending the stairs as the governess holds her ground and Miss Jessel crying into her hands at the foot of the stairs. The impact of this change is a greater shock when the Governess finds Miss Jessel at her own desk after returning from church (more information on Act II, Scene no. 3, “Miss Jessel,” below). Without these two smaller sightings of the Ghosts indoors, this is the first time the Governess sees a Ghost inside the house, and entirely unanticipated.

Another omission made for the purpose of adaptation to stage is the extremely long, drawn-out process in which James’ governess finds out the entire truth of the former valet, Peter Quint, and governess, Miss Jessel. Mrs. Grose is an extremely apprehensive gossip, and, in the novella, is constantly evading the governess’ questions and withholding information (at least, the governess tells us she does). There are several conversations in the James where the governess finds out morsels of information revealing Bly’s secrets, and this creates a more gradual sense of understanding and fitting all the pieces together as the governess receives more details. In the opera, however, there is a single reveal in Act I, Scene no. 5, “The Window,” where the Governess learns practically all the details of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, but in much fewer words than James’.

The last omission I will mention is perhaps not as obvious, but is a detail of James’ novella that became a point of contention for the apparitionist debate, and therefore worth mentioning for its absence in the opera. Toward the end of the story, Flora runs to the lake alone and then denies seeing Miss Jessel while the governess

sees her right across the lake. When Flora wakes up with a bad fever and, according to Mrs. Grose, had been saying awful things about the governess all night, they plan for Mrs. Grose and Flora to go to London the next morning. Later that evening, the governess instructs that Flora and Miles have absolutely no contact with each other before Flora leaves, as she knows that Flora will tell Miles what had happened between them at the lake the evening before. The next morning, Flora and Mrs. Grose leave, but the governess finds out that Flora and Miles had breakfast together, against the governess' instructions. During the governess and Miles' final conversation that leads to Miles' death, the boy asks, "is she *here*?"⁹⁹ James' governess is shocked by the pronoun Miles uses, and he goes on to say, "Miss Jessel, Miss Jessel!"¹⁰⁰

Until this point in James' story, Miles had never mentioned the name of Peter Quint or Miss Jessel, nor had the governess in conversation with him. In the novella, the signs point toward Flora having told Miles at breakfast about her interaction with the governess at the lake the night beforehand, and therefore challenge the notion that Miles actually saw Miss Jessel or Peter Quint to begin with. In the opera, however, none of these minutiae are included and instead, Miles refers only to the valet, Peter Quint, in his final conversation with the Governess.

Adaptation of Structure

Piper and Britten's composition is structured in two-acts, with a climactic scene ending Act I and a rather abrupt finale in Act II, which is common for chamber opera

⁹⁹ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 116.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

of this era.¹⁰¹ What is extraordinary is the process of collapsing the twenty-four chapters (separate scenes with few exceptions) of James' novella into sixteen scenes that must also accommodate stage action and the extended length of sung text. I would argue that the two-act structure necessitates a focus on the first finale (Act I, Scene viii "At Night") that does not reflect the novella's slow and steady build-up of tension toward the final scene. As the first scene with all six main characters on stage preceding the intermission, "At Night" is akin to the act finales of eighteenth-century opera; these act finales often presented conflict of interest and chaos, much like "At Night" presents the Ghosts and Children in close contact and the adult interference eventually breaking up the rendezvous. However, Rimmon states that "the various installments of or variations on the enigma in *The Turn of the Screw* have so much dramatic substance that they tend to become narrative foci in themselves."¹⁰² His suggestion that any of the individual scenes within James' story are potentially climactic supports the opera's emphasis on this single scene, "At Night."

A chart of the opera scenes and their major happenings is available in Appendix III. These sixteen scenes that tell the story alternate with instrumental interludes labeled "variations" that are void of stage direction.¹⁰³ Piper's strategy of encapsulating the string of phenomena within this sequence of scenes, each named after their main event or prominent character, preserves James' technique described in Rimmon's monograph. As discussed in Chapter 1, Rimmon argues that the scenes are

¹⁰¹ Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* and Menotti's *The Medium* are two well-known examples.

¹⁰² Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity -- the Example of Henry James*, 122.

¹⁰³ As a single exception, see below, Act II Variation XII, "Quint" in Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, (London: Hawkes & Son, 1955), 153.

essentially independent, self-contained moments, each with their own singly directed clues, pointing to local questions.¹⁰⁴ These local questions result in double directedness: there is an initially accepted truth, which the singly directed clues go on to challenge, creating two realities. In the case of Piper's libretto, the Ghosts are presented in an unmistakable manner, communicating verbally and participating physically in the drama on stage. This initial reading is therefore an accurate transfer of what Vivien Jones considers the "first reading" of James' text.¹⁰⁵

One major repercussion of Piper condensing twenty-four of James' chapters into sixteen scenes concerns the passage of time, a key element in the building of suspense in the novella. James' governess writes vague descriptions of monthly and weekly stretches of time between plot events, which undoubtedly adds a certain suspense to the development of the drama. Piper's Governess does no such thing, and therefore the time in between scenes is left to instrumental rather than textual means in the form of Britten's variations. In her analysis of Piper's libretto, Patricia Howard asserts that the variations "cannot convey with any precision the passage of time which plays so important a part in the story."¹⁰⁶ However, her argument omits the possibility for the visual aspect of an operatic production to communicate this passage of time.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, James' original textual description of time may be

¹⁰⁴ Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity -- the Example of Henry James*, 122.

¹⁰⁵ Critics at the time took these blatant displays of storybook paranormality as a weakness of the piece's ambiguity and therefore of its fidelity to the James. Howard (ed.), "Myfanwy Piper's 'The Turn of the Screw,'" 56.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁷ Carles Berga's 2013 production with Opéra de Lyon (available on YouTube) cleverly provides subtle hints of changing seasons throughout the progression of the scenes and variations.

transferred to the operatic stage, not by way of Piper's libretto or Britten's score, but rather by directorial choices to that effect.

Another particularly obvious difference between James and Piper's work concerns the structure of the Prologue. Although the addition of the Prologue was made at a very late stage in the compositional process for the simple reason that the opera threatened to be too short, the impact of its addition on the overall structure and dramatic development of the piece proves crucial to preserving the double directedness of the story.¹⁰⁸ In James' novella, the prologue establishes a double frame for the governess's tale: an unnamed narrator is attending a small, cozy winter gathering where the guests share ghost stories; the narrator's acquaintance, Douglas, reads aloud a handwritten account by his former love, which would become the novella's centerpiece.

In Piper's Prologue, the outer frame is omitted, as the audience witnesses the Douglas-esque Prologue (a character as well as the title of the scene) communicate with their own eyes, rather than through the eyes of James' unnamed narrator. The inner frame is preserved as the Prologue makes clear that he is presenting the story from the Governess' point of view. For this announcement, Piper uses text directly from James, although in a way that intimates unspoken details concerning the situation at Bly before the Governess' arrival:

¹⁰⁸ Howard, "Myfanwy Piper's 'The Turn of the Screw,'" 25.

It is a curious story. I have it written in faded ink—a woman’s hand...
The children were in the country with an old house-keeper.
There had been a governess, but she had gone...
He was so much engaged—affairs, travel, friends, visits, always
something,
No time at all for the poor little things...¹⁰⁹

The removal of the first frame does not seem to have a major impact on the rest of the story (more on this in Chapter 3). However, the omission of certain details in Douglas’s original introduction of his tale, mainly the passages that hint at his having once loved the Governess, changes the relationship with which the Prologue establishes the Governess’ credibility. While James’ Douglas knows his governess intimately from a past relationship, Piper’s Prologue does not. In addition, Douglas mentions a meeting with her after her time at Bly, and confirms that the governess was employed even after a charge died in her care, while Piper’s omission of this “epilogue” leaves her fate after Bly uncertain.

Adaptation of Language

The concise structural features of Piper’s libretto are complemented by the extremely condensed textual choices necessary for an opera based on James’ writing style. James, known for his verbosity and a particularly dense writing style, was certainly not a choice based on ease of adaptation.¹¹⁰ Critic Christopher Beha describes James’ writing, saying, “every sentence has a purpose, every scene a place in the whole. To put it in Jamesian terms, there is always a governing intelligence at

¹⁰⁹ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 1-3.

¹¹⁰ Curiously, when comparing Henry James’s writing style to his older brother William’s, Peter Beidler claims the latter “wrote psychology so clearly that it reads almost like fiction, whereas Henry wrote fiction so complexly that it reads almost like psychology.” Beidler, “Biographical and Historical Contexts,” 7.

work behind the page.”¹¹¹ Indeed, James’ complex phrase structure alone proves a useful tool for verbal ambiguity, while his play on pronouns and other vague descriptions of conversations further add to the foundation of ambiguity in his delicately balanced novella.

Piper aims to preserve this verbal ambiguity without the luxury of James’ verbosity. For example, in Act II, Scene no. 8, “Miles,” after the Governess comes to realize that Miles is dead in her arms and sings his own tune in a fit of anguish, she then simply says, “what have we done between us?”¹¹² This is an example of a cleverly vague addition Piper made to the original dialogue. Here, “we” can refer to her and Miles, or her and Peter Quint. If she is referring to Quint, why does she believe herself responsible? If she is referring to Miles, why does she put blame on the boy and what exactly had they done “between” them? Another example is at her first entrance in Scene no. 1, “The Journey,” where she describes her anxiety for her new employment. When pitying the children for being orphans, she says the following: “Poor babies, no father no mother. But I will love them as I love my own, all my dear ones left at home.”¹¹³ What exactly does she mean by “love them as I love my own”? Does the Governess have children that she is leaving behind or is she just referring to her family members? If so, why would she say “as my own” and what kind of possessive qualities does this suggest? There are countless examples

¹¹¹ Christopher Beha, “Henry James and the Great Y.A. Debate,” *The New Yorker*, September 18, 2014, accessed March 30, 2018,

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/henry-james-great-ya-debate>

¹¹² Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 197.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

such as this of Piper's carefully balanced text throughout the libretto that would be an interesting topic for further study.

Adaptation of Characters

Some characters in Piper's libretto are also portrayed differently from James'. Of these, the most noticeable and controversial are Piper's Ghosts, the characters distinctly different from James' ghosts who never speak and reveal no easily discernible personalities. Peter Evans says of Piper and Britten's singing Ghosts:

It is to deny the whole point of the operatic medium if two of the chief agents of the dramatic action are deprived of the music which will set them on the same idealized plane as the other characters.¹¹⁴

While his argument could be countered with the appeal that simply instrumental music while they appear would have been less concrete and perhaps more conducive to portraying James' ghosts, this opera clearly presented Britten with an opportunity to showcase tenor Peter Pears' voice.¹¹⁵ In addition to the opportunity for Pears, the musical strain on the two main women and two children in the absence of the Ghosts may have been too daunting.¹¹⁶ These practical reasons aside, the choice was made for the Ghosts to sing, and therefore the opera's Ghosts take on a dimension that James' did not.

¹¹⁴ Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 204.

¹¹⁵ Indeed, the large majority of Britten's vocal music, both chamber and operatic, is written for the English tenor's uniquely clear and flexible tone. In addition to *The Turn of the Screw*, in 1954, Britten had written *Winter Words*, Canticle III: "Still Falls the Rain," which both feature tenor voice and were specifically written for Pears.

¹¹⁶ While Flora ended up as a role for a woman acting as a child, Britten and Piper had originally intended both to be children. An important factor for the change from child-actress to adult was the concern for the already highly involved children's material throughout the show.

Likewise, there is a difference between the children of James' novella and the Children of Piper's libretto. James' children are next to silent in the first half of the novella, and communicate in dialogue only sparingly by its end, while Piper's children communicate as soon as they are on stage and continue to sing (diegetically) and speak throughout the show. While James' governess describes the children at first as "gentle" and "impersonal," Piper's Mrs. Grose describes the Children as "lively, too lively...they wear me out" and chastises their rambunctiousness in Act I, Scene no. 2, "The Welcome," saying, "Quiet, children! Lord, how you do tease!"¹¹⁷

At first glance, their liveliness through speech and song creates a more playful communicative dynamic. However, this chapter and the next explore the ways in which Piper and Britten use the Children's superficial playfulness to point toward questions of paranormal and psychological significance. Discussed in greater detail below, the children's nursery rhymes, "Lavender's Blue" in Act I, Scene no. 3, "The Letter" and "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son" in Act I Scene no. 5, "The Window," as well as their musically simplistic yet textually intriguing solo songs, give the children a more substantive presence as compared to James.'

Adaptation of Perspective

Finally, perspective is perhaps the subtlest of Piper's changes, and yet it holds potential to be the most fundamental difference between the novella and the opera. To a certain degree, the opera lacks one aspect of James' narrative ambiguity, as Rimmon describes. On the surface, the Governess in this adaptation does not need to

¹¹⁷ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 18-20.

relate the other characters' words, just as her own account is not actively being read aloud by another character. Instead, the audience members are made to believe they are witnessing the events in her story first-hand. Thus, the subjective details of James' story that were presented through the governess' account now play out before the audience's eyes, creating the sense of objective reality. The main inconsistency with James' original novella that creates this objective reality is the Governess' conspicuous absence from several of the scenes. An example is Act I, Scene no. 2, "The Welcome," in which Miles, Flora, and Mrs. Grose are preparing for her arrival. These events would not have been related by the governess in James' novella, as she writes about what she allegedly saw with her own eyes. And, although Piper's Prologue establishes these same circumstances—her story is being read aloud to an audience—she is no longer an eyewitness to at least a part of her account.

It would seem that this "Welcome" scene takes place from the perspective of someone other than the Governess. This initial impression leads to a larger question: Is this scene an example of Piper preserving the narrative of James' governess but expanding upon the governess' assumptions in the original novella? Whether or not the novella's reader believes the governess' narrative, and whether or not the opera's audience believes their own eyes is another matter entirely. The idea of perspective is explored further in Chapter 3, particularly in relation to Britten's thematic network.

Double Directedness and the Libretto

In the effort to push the conversation a step further than a comparison of Piper's libretto with James' novella, I now move on to a more focused exploration of those elements of Piper's libretto that expand on James' textual ambiguities. What the libretto naturally lacks in verbosity and descriptiveness (as opposed to James' abundance thereof), Piper's additions to the story provide; all the while these additions reveal not a single reality but rather the "double directedness" from the original story. The following examples provide evidence of Piper's expansions as potential singly directed clues that lead to Rimmon's "'local' questions," thus supporting the opera's "double directedness" and justifying the libretto's place among the contributions to the critical trend toward synthesis. Here, it is important to remember that these singly directed clues do not all point to a single, hidden *reality*, but rather to a single *question*: "What is real?"

As presented in my introduction, there are numerous examples of musicians, scholars, and reviewers who opposed the notion that Piper preserved the ambiguity of the original story. Whether it be the seemingly indisputable existence of the talking Ghosts or the menacing innocence of the Children and their nursery rhymes, there are elements of the libretto that continue to polarize *The Turn of the Screw*'s performers, critics, and audiences. It is these larger, independent additional elements of the libretto text, accused of too plain a truth, that I will now analyze for their potential in creating double directedness. In relation to James' novella, the textual additions fall into two categories, what I refer to as "expansions" and "interpolations." Expansions

are those additions that are alluded to in the original governess' account, and "interpolations" are the entirely novel events that take place in the Governess' absence, and therefore might have possibly been surmised by a reader of the original James, the opera's audience, and even the Governess herself.

In the following pages, I move chronologically through the opera highlighting substantial examples of singly directed clues and examining their function within the larger double directedness of the piece. The expansions include the following: the Children's nursery rhymes, and particularly "Lavender's Blue"; Miles' song "Malo" in Act I, Scene no. 6, "The Lesson"; Miss Jessel's lament in Act II, Scene no. 3, "Miss Jessel"; and Quint's final words in the grand finale, "Miles." The interpolations include: the finale of Act I, "At Night"; the Act II opening scene, "Colloquy and Soliloquy"; and Act II, Scene no. 5, "Quint."

Piper's Expansions

The first scene that Piper expands with children's rhymes is Act I, Scene no. 3, "The Letter." At this point in the opera, the audience has not been presented with the possibility of paranormal entities. Therefore, these early scenes contain singly directed clues that do not point toward the same questions of reality as those that come after Act I, Scene no. 5, "The Window," in which the Governess finds out Peter Quint is dead. Instead, the initial reality is quite ordinary: the Governess is employed at Bly and teaching two charming Children. Therefore, any singly directed clues in

these earlier scenes would challenge this simple reality, not necessarily with paranormality, but rather with the hint of something possibly being amiss at Bly.

In “The Letter,” the Governess receives a letter informing her that Miles has been expelled from his school, with little explanation offered. After briefly discussing this with Mrs. Grose and asking more about Miles’ disposition, the Governess’ and Mrs. Grose’s fears are interrupted by the Children singing “Lavender’s Blue,” as they are “seen at the window.”¹¹⁸ Such a delightful display of innocence, on the one hand, permits these childish verses to go unquestioned and instead praised by the onlooking Mrs. Grose and Governess.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, the rhyme’s widely recognized allusions to sexual behavior are not only maintained in Piper’s version, but are arguably emphasized due to its particular placement within the scene as well as its altered delivery. For example, Miles and Flora sing “Lavender’s Blue” without repetition until perhaps the most explicit verse:

Call up your men, diddle diddle, set them to work,
Some to the plough, dilly dilly, some to the cart;
Some to make hay, diddle diddle, some to cut corn,
*While you and I, diddle diddle... [keep ourselves warm.]*¹²⁰

When the children approach the final phrase, instead of finishing the anticipated rhyming couplet, they repeat the first half of the final phrase: “while you and I, diddle

¹¹⁸ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 27.

¹¹⁹ Rupprecht’s “The Turn of the Screw: Innocent Performance,” focuses on this topic in depth, although with a more musically analytical approach. See Chapter 3 for more detail. Philip Rupprecht, “The Turn of the Screw: “Innocent Performance,” in *Britten’s Musical Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 138-186.

¹²⁰ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 30.

diddle, while you and I, diddle diddle, while you and I, diddle diddle, while you and I...”¹²¹

This singly directed clue of a superficially innocent children’s rhyme works well within the larger scene, which expands on the framework of James’ original story. The context of the children’s rhyme is crucial to the possibility of their display of innocence being contrived.¹²² In Rupprecht’s words, “the ‘Lavender’s Blue’ rhyme dispels, or at least displaces, the Governess’s worries...”¹²³ Therefore, it would also seem plausible that the children are purposefully performing this nursery rhyme in order to preserve Miles’ status as “an angel.”¹²⁴ In Piper’s libretto, the Governess does not exhibit any suspicion: she and Mrs. Grose are enraptured and decide to say nothing of the letter.

This moment of adoration of the Children’s good behavior is Piper’s way of condensing James’ original text, in which Miles is still at school when the governess receives the letter from the uncle, containing an unopened letter from the headmaster. In James’ version, it is her first glimpse of Miles, the day after she has read the letter, which puts her worries at rest. The governess observes him in lessons and at play with his sister over a period of weeks and then decides that she is “dazzled by their loveliness,” and that the headmaster’s letter must have been “vindictive.”¹²⁵ James’

¹²¹ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 30.

¹²² Philip Rupprecht approaches this possibility from a primarily musical perspective in his book, *Britten’s Musical Language*. Rupprecht, “The Turn of the Screw: ‘Innocent Performance,’” 138-186.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹²⁴ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 29.

¹²⁵ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 42.

description of the children's behavior quelling the governess' fears is slow and spans multiple weeks.

For the purposes of time in the opera, Piper created conflict and resolution within minutes of each other in "The Letter." Therefore, the local questions from James' text remain: are the children intentionally distracting the adults from their concern over Miles' expulsion? Is their hesitation before the final suggestive phrase intentional? Are these children participating in Rupprecht's concept of "innocent performance"?¹²⁶ Or are they simply playing in complete ignorance of the adults watching from inside the house, free of manipulative intentions? Thus the singly directed clue, the sexual connotations of "Lavender's Blue," points to the double directedness of this seemingly charming duet.

This local question surrounding the Children's behavior (more so Miles, in light of his expulsion) in the early scenes eventually connects with the crux of the ambiguity of *The Turn of the Screw*: are the children influenced by the Ghosts, or does the Governess create the Ghosts in her mind in order to account for their natural misbehavior? Piper creates this sense of something amiss at Bly with the inclusion of well-known nursery rhymes. And, although this nursery rhyme, "Lavender's Blue" maintains its traditional text in the opera, the context suggests the possibility of it being a singly directed clue.

¹²⁶ Philip Rupprecht, "The Turn of the Screw: "Innocent Performance," 158-163; This question is answered differently from production to production, and is also a point of great musical depth discussed further in Chapter 3.

The second large dramatic addition which expands upon the original James story is Act I, Scene no. 7, “The Lesson” - the schoolroom scene as a whole, and more specifically Miles’ solo song, “Malo.” This particular addition cannot be attributed exclusively to Piper, as evidence of Britten’s influence is preserved in one of his letters to her: “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 the music...”¹²⁷ While “Malo” certainly holds musical significance within the larger “Screw” framework (see Chapter 3 for more details), the text is important in its own right, as another singly directed clue contributing to the opera’s double directedness. Although simple, the few phrases seem to simultaneously reveal and muddle the secrets of Bly even further, augmenting the effect of the children’s rhymes of the earlier scenes:

Malo, Malo, Malo I would rather be,
 Malo, Malo in an apple tree,
 Malo, Malo, Malo than a naughty boy,
 Malo, Malo in adversity...¹²⁸

While the rhyme cleverly plays with several possible translations of the Latin term *malo* (“I prefer to be / a bad man / in an apple tree”), the song’s underlying connection with the unfolding drama slowly dawns on both the Governess and the audience with each of Miles’ contemplative verses.¹²⁹

The Governess’ reaction to his strange verses reveals her curiosity and perhaps concern for Miles in light of past events. Until this point in the opera, Miles has not *shown* any signs of bad behavior, but the Governess has received the letter

¹²⁷ Benjamin Britten in a letter to Myfanwy Piper, January 3, 1954, in Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, 334.

¹²⁸ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 68.

¹²⁹ Rupprecht, “‘The Turn of the Screw’: Innocent Performance,” 168.

dismissing him from school and has also learned from Mrs. Grose that Miles' relationship with Quint was questionable. In Act I, Scene no. 5, "The Window," the Governess sees Quint at the window, is convinced that he has been looking for Miles, and persuades Mrs. Grose to not mention and wholly ignore the sighting: "See what I see, know what I know, that they may see and know nothing." This statement makes clear the Governess' belief that Miles and Flora are ignorant victims, unaware of the paranormal threat. When Mrs. Grose reveals Quint's past behavior with Miles, the Governess seems in disbelief of Miles as a guilty participant in this morally depraved behavior. She instead believes that Quint had seduced him and is now attempting to communicate with him from the other side. However, Miles' focus on misbehavior in "Malo" is the first occasion of the child himself revealing a possible connection with the information from the letter and the previous conversation with Mrs. Grose.

The song "Malo" reveals a hidden aspect of Miles' personality, which seems to take the Governess by surprise and challenges her hope that the children are not currently involved with the Ghosts. After Miles sings the four simple lines of "Malo," the Governess interrupts and asks: "Did I teach you that?" Miles' reply is nothing short of proud, yet vague: "No! I found it. I like it. Do you?" It would seem that Miles' question is not one she fully understands, or perhaps she is not accustomed to Miles asking her a question of preference, especially in reference to a naughty schoolboy rhyme (see Figure 2.1). Upon hearing Miles' confidently coy reaction to her search for the song's origin, the Governess does not respond, and Miles continues to sing after two measures' silence. Whatever the reason for her lack of response to

his question, the Governess is ultimately silenced by the nature of the song, and, due to Miles' vague reply, its origin remains a mystery. Although the strange song has the same educational function as Miles' previous exercise in the scene, its message is a singly directed clue pointing toward Miles' involvement with bad influences and perhaps his own bad behavior. And, in Claire Seymour's words, "the promise of fulfilment is denied, the symbol does not disclose its meaning and the narrative resumes."¹³⁰

The image shows a musical score for a scene from Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*. It features two vocal parts: the Governess (Gov.) and Miles, along with a piano accompaniment. The Governess asks, "Did I teach you that?" in English and German. Miles responds, "No! I found it, I like it. Do you?" in English and German. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as "always p" and "pp". A measure number "53" is indicated in a box above the piano part.

Figure 2.1. The Governess interrupts Miles' song and questions its origins. He continues, unfazed. (Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 60)

¹³⁰ Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion*, 325.

The local question of this scene is, at this particular moment, perceived by the Governess as well as the audience. The message of the clever rhyme is straightforward enough, but what about the source? The rhyme is an excerpt from a real, late nineteenth-century lesson book (see Figure 2.2), and it is possible that audience members during Britten's lifetime would have recognized it as such. If understood as yet another outside literary reference—such as “Lavender's Blue” and W.B. Yeats' “The Second Coming” (see below)—“Malo” will more likely be interpreted as something Miles heard at school before he was expelled, rather than something he heard from Peter Quint while at Bly. Therefore, for Britten's audience, the origin of the rhyme may have only been ambiguous to the Governess, while for a modern audience, that origin may be just as ambiguous as it is for the Governess.¹³¹ The recognition of a real-world reference, similar to James' allusion to Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in his original novella, informs and may imbalance their interpretation of a local question; in this case, Miles' source for “Malo.”¹³²

¹³¹ According to Piper, the eerie Latin play on words originated “from an old-fashioned lesson book that an aunt of mine produced.” Piper quoted in Herbert, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, 10. The lesson book is now thought to be: Henry T. Riley, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek quotations, proverbs, maxims, and mottos, classical and mediaeval, including law terms and phrases, 1816-1878* (London: George P. Ell & Sons, 1891), 217.

¹³² James refers directly to several famous Gothic novels throughout the novella. More on this below.

Maledictus à maliflor non distat nisi occasione. QUINTILL.—
 "An evil-speaker differs from an evil-doer in nothing but want of opportunity." A person who stabs our good name will not hesitate to stab the body if it suits his purpose, and he can insure impunity.

Malifactor qui vult, easquam non accusam inopiet. SYN.—
 "He who wishes to do evil will never be at a loss for a reason." See *Æsop's Fable of the Wolf and the Lamb.*

Malenida. fames. VARR.—"Hunger that persuades to evil."

Malis principii malus finis. TER.—"Bad beginnings have bad endings."

Malis inquietam libertatem quàm quietum servitium.—"I would prefer liberty with uneasiness to slavery with quiet." The sentiments of a lover of freedom at any price.

Malis aribus.—"With bad birds," i. e., "with a bad omen."

Malicia est veritas et fallax ratio nocendi. CIC.—"Malice is a subtle and deceitful engine of mischief."

Malo accepto stultus sapit. PROP.—"After suffering an evil the fool becomes wise." "Experience is the mistress of fools."

Malo beneficere tantumdem est periculum
Quantum bene malifacere.—PLAUT.
 "To do good to the bad is a danger just as great as to do bad to the good."

Malum Platine errare, quàm cum his rectè sentire. CIC.—
 "I had rather be wrong with Plato, than think right with the others."

Malo indisertam prudentiam, quàm loquacem stultitiam. CIC.—
 "I prefer ineloquent prudence to fluent folly."

Malo malo malo malo.
 "Malo, I would rather be
 Malo, in an apple tree,
 Malo, than a wicked man
 Malo, in adversity."
 A play upon the different meanings of apparently the same word.

Malo mihi malè quàm mollior esse. SEN.—"I prefer being unfortunate to being effeminate."

Malo nodo malus querendus cuneus. PROP.—"For a hard knot a hard tool must be sought."

Figure 2.2. The page containing the Latin grammar rhyme, "Malo," in Henry T. Riley's *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Quotations* (1891). (Image: New York Public Library)

While the issue of origin can become rather complex when considering different *audiences'* perspectives, the *Governess'* perspective remains constant from production to production: she doesn't recognize the song, and therefore has no idea as to its origin. She is thus left to wonder if Miles has been detrimentally influenced, and if so, by whom? This local question surrounding Miles' behavior at school remains

unanswered for the rest of the show, although the Governess tries multiple times to learn his secret.

From the Governess' point of view, the origin of the song holds the solution to the local question in this particular scene. If she only knew who exactly Miles learned it from, she would know enough to break the spell of her own perceived double directedness. As Miles has recently spent time at school, the Governess may believe that Miles had learned "Malo" from an outside source. If a friend taught it to him at school, it would seem as though Miles' expulsion was due to his participation in the expected misbehavior of a schoolboy. As Mrs. Grose stated earlier, "A boy's no boy for me that's never bad."¹³³ On the other hand, if Miles did not learn this while at school, he must have learned it from a source at Bly, and the Governess' assumption may be that it stems from his involvement with Quint. Suddenly, the nature of Miles' delight in "adversity" is that of an evil, unnatural, and inappropriate corruption. Unfortunately for the Governess, the opera's fidelity to James' ambiguous writing style demands that Miles responds with ambiguity, although neither the song nor the Governess' question exist in the original. Piper's choice that Miles deny any single reality with his vague response, "I found it," prolongs the Governess' curiosity about "Malo," a singly directed clue that fuels the larger double directedness of the opera.

The next example of Piper's expansion is Act II, Scene no. 5, "Miss Jessel." After the Governess is disturbed by her conversation with Miles' outside of the church in Scene no. 4, "The Bells," she flees back to her study to write a letter to the

¹³³ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 26.

Children's uncle. When approaching the study, she notices someone already at her desk—Miss Jessel. Thus ensues a duet of sorts, although the two characters have different musical material (more on this in Chapter 3). What is curious about this “dialogue” is that it is not a dialogue at all, but rather two monologues flying past each other. While Miss Jessel moans on about her fate in vague terms, “here my tragedy began, here my revenge begins...”, the Governess musters up the courage to challenge her, “Why are you here? It is mine the desk. They are mine, mine the children. I will never abandon them.” Neither pauses for or acknowledges the other's text, and they continue like this until Miss Jessel disappears on a resounding “Alas!”

There is a connection with the disconnect of their dialogue and the governess' description of the event in the original novella. While she makes absolutely no mention of Miss Jessel speaking, the governess only claims to have shouted “You terrible miserable woman!” at the very end of their encounter. However, when the governess later discusses the confrontation, she refers to it as “a talk with Miss Jessel.”¹³⁴ This misleading line from James' governess, which exaggerates her interaction with Miss Jessel, is reflected in Piper's creation of their disconnected conversation in this scene.

This is the first evidence of the Governess and the Ghosts' failure to communicate, as the Ghosts had only spoken directly to the Children in the Governess' absence or appeared silently to the Governess beforehand. Indeed, this lack of communication continues throughout the opera, without a single piece of

¹³⁴ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 86.

evidence that the Ghosts hear the Governess when they are all physically present, and vice versa. This failure to communicate suggests several possibilities, from the Governess' hallucination to Miss Jessel's ability to be heard only when she desires it. Although, the latter solution raises the same question of perspective, if the Governess cannot currently hear Miss Jessel, why can the audience? Is this not her own account of her experience? While these interactions do not prove whether or not the Governess can hear the Ghosts, they do provide evidence of possible disconnect between the three characters. Indeed, in this scene, the Governess' bravery in challenging Miss Jessel could be read as an exaggerated account forged by the future Governess, in the hopes that she would seem more proactive in protecting the Children.

This study's final example of Piper's expansions, Act II, Scene no. 8, "Miles," is similar to "Miss Jessel" in that the Governess once again does not seem to hear Peter Quint's words. The scene begins with Mrs. Grose and Flora leaving Bly for London, which leaves the Governess and Miles alone. The Governess now attempts to coax out of Miles the truth of his misbehavior at school, and things begin to escalate. In the novella, the governess' reaction after Miles blurts out "Peter Quint - You Devil!" is that of relief, before she realizes he is dead. The governess explains in her account: "With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall."¹³⁵ In Piper's libretto, Miles makes the same

¹³⁵ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 116.

exclamation, “Peter Quint, you devil!,” but the action that takes place thereafter is entirely new to the original storyline.¹³⁶

After Miles’ outburst, Peter Quint and the Governess begin to speak simultaneously, but with contradictory texts. The Governess’ “You are saved. Now all will be well,” and Peter Quint’s “We have failed. Now I must go,” resound together as the Governess holds Miles, and Peter Quint fades into oblivion. These two contrasting statements are singly directed clues that point to the local question of success or failure on Miles’ part: from the Governess’ perspective, he successfully banished Quint by speaking his name, and from Quint’s perspective, he failed to keep their secrets hidden from the Governess. While the Governess clearly believes Miles to be threatened by Peter Quint, his interactions with Peter Quint in the Governess’ absence show no signs of distress, and certainly less tension than his interactions with the Governess. Perhaps he is, as Philip Brett argues, a “lovable boy caught between a dominating lover and a possessive mother.”¹³⁷ In addition to drawing attention to Miles’ relationships with both, the Governess and Quint’s simultaneous speech exemplifies the double directedness on which the opera stands: do the Ghosts only exist in the Governess’ mind?

The Governess and Quint’s simultaneity (and, indeed, musical unison) plays on the idea that Quint was only ever in the Governess’ mind to begin with (see Figure 2.3). The other singly directed clue in this scene is Miles’ death after his outburst,

¹³⁶ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 194.

¹³⁷ Philip Brett, “Eros and Orientalism in Britten’s Operas,” in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 249.

which the Governess only realizes after she enthusiastically commends him for speaking Peter Quint's name. While the verbal ambiguity of the Governess' final line, "What have we done between us," is discussed earlier in this chapter, the combination of Quint and the Governess' simultaneous text holds a singly directed clue for the audience to consider.

Quint slowly disappears.
Quint verschwindet langsam.

saved, - ret-tet, you are saved! bist ge - ret-tet, Now all will be Jetzt geht al - les

failed, - sag-ten, we have failed! wir ver - sag-ten! Now I must Jetzt muss ich

well, gut, ... he geht gut. To - ge - ther... we have destroy'd him, Ge-mein - sam ... ward er ver-nich - tet,

go, ... must go, Fare - well! Leb - wohl!

mf *dim.* *p*

Figure 2.3. Quint and the Governess join together to sing their contrasting texts. Their simultaneity points to a possible connection between the two characters. (Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 195)

Piper's Interpolations

The second category of Piper's additions to the story, which I am calling "interpolations," has been the main target of the opera's critics for disturbing the careful balance of realities in James' original novella.¹³⁸ As Patricia Howard explains, "the governess is not always on stage and it is the moments when she is absent—notably the scene between the children and the ghosts which concludes Act I and the 'colloquy' between the ghosts which opens Act II—which can seem to stamp as indisputably objective the 'something malign at Bly'."¹³⁹ However, if we are to analyze Piper's text using Rimmon's approach, the search for singly directed clues in these Ghost scenes, while the Governess' is absent, reveals a complexity that goes further than a simple display of paranormality. If Piper's work displays James' distributional technique, as described by Rimmon, there are to be singly directed clues creating double directedness within each scene. In the Governess' absence, these singly directed clues must challenge the superficial truth of the Ghosts on stage, as they have challenged the initial truth in previous scenes with children's rhymes and instead connect their action with the Governess and the anti-apparitionist reading.

The first interpolation I will examine is the Act I finale, Scene no. 7, "At Night." In James' novella, this scene takes place after the governess has become

¹³⁸ See Introduction for critics' responses to the Ghosts in particular. Howard, "Myfanwy Piper's 'The Turn of the Screw': libretto and synopsis," 56.

¹³⁹ Howard, "Myfanwy Piper's 'The Turn of the Screw': libretto and synopsis," 24.

suspicious of Flora intentionally sneaking out of bed in the middle of the night and staying at her bedroom window for extended periods of time. The governess, who would often sit and read next to the young girl's bed after she has fallen asleep, has witnessed Flora make excuses as to why she was out of bed and even awake at that time of night. Now, smart to Flora's secretive routine, the governess recognizes her chance to slip away and find another vantage point from within the house, in order to find out what she is looking at on the grounds. James' governess says: "She was face to face with the apparition...and could now communicate with it... What I, on my side, had to care for was, without disturbing her, to reach, from the corridor, some other window turned to the same quarter."¹⁴⁰ There is absolutely no hint of doubt, question, or supposition in the original governess' words—she is convinced that the children are interacting with the ghosts.

At this point in Piper's libretto, the crucial issue of her adaptation of perspective returns as she shows the interaction between the Children and the Ghosts that James' governess only assumes to be true. Is their interaction in "At Night" a third-party observation of the true events at Bly, or, just as in the novella, simply what the Governess assumes happened out of her sight? The two interpretations of reality in this particular scene—one apparitionist, the other anti-apparitionist—are predicated upon the materiality of the Ghosts' presence. Both interpretations are well supported during multiple events that involve the Ghosts in the opera. However, if Piper's words, "neither Britten nor I ever intended to interpret the work, only to recreate it for

¹⁴⁰ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 69.

a different medium,” are to be taken as valid, it seems a comparative analysis of the double directedness of novella and opera would be a legitimate approach.¹⁴¹ I posit that, while the action may be played out on stage, the interaction between the Ghosts and the Children cannot necessarily be confirmed as fact.

Although the opera reveals the Ghosts as speaking entities, the essence of James’ original nighttime scene is preserved in this particular instance as the Governess and Mrs. Grose do not see the apparitions with their own eyes, but simply retrieve the children from their posts. Therefore, it is only the audience who witnesses the interaction, so, like the reader of the original James, the audience is once again left to determine if the children truly are face to face with the apparitions, or if this is simply a biased recollection of the Governess in her handwritten account that is supposedly being read aloud to an audience. Therefore, an analysis of the nuanced vocabulary with which the Ghosts entice the children is would help determine to determine the singly directed clues in “At Night.”

At first, Quint is “unseen,” as described in the stage directions, and seductively calls Miles’ name in long, melismatic passages. The repetition of the word, including the growing dynamics from *pp* to “rather *f*” over the course of seventeen measures indicates a gradually approaching, perhaps searching quality in the exclamation. After Quint repeats his name seven times, Miles finally responds with a trance-like “I’m here, O I’m here!...,” and both characters suddenly become

¹⁴¹ See footnote 15.

visible to the audience.¹⁴² Once Miles gives Quint his attention, Quint moves on to a series of metaphors in verse that range from powerfully aggressive to sexually suggestive. Thus ensues what seems to be a full display of enticing, grand ideas of glory, independence, and power:

I'm all things strange and bold,
The riderless horse, snorting, stamping on the hard sea sand,
The hero highwayman, plundering the land.
I am King Midas with gold in his hand.
I am the smooth world's double face,
Mercury's heels feather'd with mischief and a god's
deceit.
The brittle banishment of counterfeit.
In me secrets half-formed desires meet.¹⁴³

As Peter Evans suggests, Piper's "ghosts throw the Children into an ecstasy of compliant terror because their words, of a heady 'poetic' quality on which a child's mind can feed, are intangible yet luring."¹⁴⁴

Patricia Howard's analysis of the children's responses led her to determine that their "words do not quite confirm the objective presence of the ghosts. They, too, can be taken to be projecting imaginative fantasies."¹⁴⁵ The Children's responses seem to evade the deeply evil nature of their respective Ghost's plan for corruption, and instead they reflect on the simpler elements of each phrase. An example that Howard highlights is Miles' repetition of only the last few words of each of Quint's verses:

¹⁴² At the end of this response, and all of his short responses to follow, Britten has emphasized the trance-like nature of Miles' interaction with Quint by indicating a vocal glissando on the final note of each phrase.

¹⁴³ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 86.

¹⁴⁴ Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 204.

¹⁴⁵ Howard, "Myfanwy Piper's 'The Turn of the Screw': libretto and synopsis," 47.

I'm all things strange and bold...[see above for full text]
 I am King Midas with gold in his hand.
 Miles: Gold, oh yes, gold!
 I am the smooth world's double face...[see above for full text]
 In me secrets half-formed desires meet.¹⁴⁶
 Miles: Secrets, oh secrets!
 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 flight of the night-wing'd bird
 Miles: Bird!¹⁴⁷

This lack of acknowledgement of the more sinister undertones of the Ghosts' texts at least denies solid evidence of the Children's involvement in corrupt activities, and at most undermines the Governess' concern for their corrupt behavior later in the opera.

¹⁴⁸ The Children's interruptions of the Ghosts' verse with fragments of their stanzas also draws attention to the performance-like atmosphere of the scene.

The superficial truth of "At Night" is that the Ghosts, finally present and singing on stage, are real paranormal entities who come to visit the children and persuade them to join their insidious schemes. The singly directed clues within the Ghosts' text in this scene, however, suggests that the Ghosts are not present as supernatural beings, but rather as the children's creations, and from there any number of explanations for the children's rapture are possible: they are playing an imaginary

¹⁴⁶ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 86.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 84-87.

¹⁴⁸ E.g., Miles challenging the Governess outside of the church in Act II, Scene no. 2, "The Bells"; Miles' stealing the letter in Act II, Scene no. 5, "Quint"; Miles purposefully distracting the Governess with his piano playing in Act II, Scene no. 6 "Piano," so that Flora can sneak away and collude with Miss Jessel in Act II, Scene no. 7, "Flora."

game; they are dreaming; they are having memory flashbacks.¹⁴⁹ In this case it would also be reasonable to return to the issue of narrative ambiguity, and propose that this scene is simply the Governess' assumption of events transpiring out of her line of sight.

Perhaps the most controversial of the scenes that occur in the Governess' absence is the opening of Act II, "Colloquy and Soliloquy," where Peter Quint and Miss Jessel have what appears to be an independent scene; that is, independent of the Governess and any other living character. For the first portion where the Ghosts are alone on stage, they converse in a particularly stylized, yet vague manner. I argue that their stylized speech creates a singly directed clue, pointing toward a local question surrounding the Ghosts' connection with the Governess. In this scene, Piper allows the audience their first opportunity to observe the ghosts' private behavior. Instead of silently appearing to the Governess or enticing children with rhyming phrases, sensory details, and mythological characters (as displayed in Quint's text above), the Ghosts now apparently have only each other for conversation. I argue that this isolation from other characters makes this scene, "Colloquy and Soliloquy," the most accurate portrayal of the Ghosts' true nature, be it independent from or connected to the Governess' psyche.

¹⁴⁹ The nature of Quint as a dream has been considered one of the more blatant references to a sexual awakening for Miles, whether real or not. Director Neil Bartlett explains: "If any parent, teacher, preacher, or law-maker ever wants to know what it actually feels like to be a queer adolescent, and specifically one who is longing for an adult stranger to initiate him into the mysteries of his own burgeoning and restless self, then they have only to listen to how Miles hears Peter Quint calling to him in the night." Bartlett in *Queer Talk*, 27.

When grappling with this particular scene during composition, Britten wrote a letter to Piper that reveals the collaborators' understanding of the complexity of their task to put words in the Ghosts' mouths. Britten writes: "I wonder if you have had a shot at the Ghosts dialogue, or have left it? I know it's a corker, but I'm certain we are on the right track so far."¹⁵⁰ Why would Britten call the Ghosts' dialogue "a corker," if we are dealing with a straightforward story of a haunting, or even if the Ghosts are simply a projection of the Governess' mind? Clearly, Britten and Piper were aware of the risk they were taking with giving the Ghosts text, and were therefore working hard to develop an appropriately balanced characterization of their Ghosts.

Although there are no vulnerable characters present to motivate the Ghosts to speak manipulatively, their speech, much like in "At Night," is almost entirely in verse. Notably, with the exception of the opera's diegetic passages—children's rhymes and solo songs—all other text is prose, either James' or Piper's own. Therefore, it is significant that an interaction between two entities, each aware of the other's true being, is still shrouded in performativity: an exchange of question and answer and florid verse. The opening passage is in a call-and-response structure with rhyming couplets, where Miss Jessel questions Peter Quint's infidelity, and he responds (with my emphasis):

¹⁵⁰ Benjamin Britten in a letter to Myfanwy Piper, January 3, 1954, in *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, 334.

Miss Jessel: Why did you call me from my schoolroom dreams?
 Peter Quint: I call? Not I! You heard the terrible sound of the wild swan's wings.
 Miss Jessel: Cruel! Why did you beckon me to your *side*?
 Peter Quint: I beckon? No, not I! Your beating heart to your own passions *lied*.
 Miss Jessel: Betrayer! Where were you when in the abyss I *fell*?
 Peter Quint: Betrayer? Not I! I waited for the sound of my own last *bell*!¹⁵¹

The use of verse and directly quoted poetry for a supposedly non-diegetic conversation suggests two possible realities: either the Ghosts do not communicate like the humans would because they are indeed not alive, or the Ghosts behave in a performative manner because they are figures of the Governess' imagination—they are dramatic, playful, and poetic, much like a classroom exercise from the Governess' subconscious.¹⁵²

Furthermore, the Yeats quote in the Ghosts' final moments in "Colloquy and Soliloquy"—"The ceremony of innocence is drowned"—introduces an anachronism to the libretto that adds to the larger double directedness of the opera. Piper's insertion of a well-known poem closely associated with WWI into a libretto that takes place in "the middle of the last [19th] century" inevitably creates a sense of disorientation for the audience: now or then, fiction or nonfiction, ghost story or social commentary?¹⁵³ Additionally, the poem's appearance in an opera by Britten, a

¹⁵¹ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 106-107.

¹⁵² While Miss Jessel was also a governess and must therefore have been well-educated, Quint was only a valet, and his knowledge of history, mythology, and command of the English language is certainly more advanced than expected.

¹⁵³ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, Introductory Material; see particularly "Characters of the Opera." It is interesting here to look to earlier musings on the function of an operatic setting from Francesco Algarotti's *Essay on Opera* (1754): "In order to carry out his intention, namely to move the heart, delight the eye, and charm the ear, without offending reason [...] should take his plot from events remote in time, or at least in place, that furnish occasion for marvellous happenings while at the same

well-known pacifist who fled England during WWII, might have also had ideological implications: harmless fairy tale or political statement? If the anachronism is intentional, does it possibly point toward the timelessness of the paranormal realm or rather the timelessness of the inevitable corruption of innocence? The anachronism is a singly directed clue that points toward the local question of the origins of the Ghosts' text, as independent thought or dependent upon the Governess' thoughts.

Piper's reference to another writer's work, in this case Yeats' poem, relates directly to James' own references to popular Gothic literature—Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1749)—alongside his story's unmistakable similarities with scientific accounts of paranormal activity. James refers directly to Radcliffe and Brontë's texts within a single sentence from the governess' account: "Was there a '*secret*' at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, and unmentionable relative?"¹⁵⁴ With these two points of reference, James was placing his own work within two possible genres, resulting in a heated literary debate. While James' novella was written around Christmas time, a conventional season for entertaining ghost stories, his characterizations of the ghosts, or rather lack thereof, imply a connection to his brother William's research in the Society for Psychical Research.

The conventionally fictional Gothic setting of the story at Bly—isolated castle, beautiful governess, mysterious circumstances—is offset by the oddly

time being extremely simple and well-known." Quoted in Halliwell, *Opera and the Novel: The Case of Henry James*, 22.

¹⁵⁴James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 39.

non-fiction-like behavior of the ghosts. Early critical synthesis scholar Francis X. Roellinger explains the essence of James' ghosts as not simply "the familiar phantoms of Gothic fiction" but rather "conceived to a surprising extent in terms of the cases reported to the Society."¹⁵⁵ That James' ghosts display characteristics of both fictional and non-fictional, romanticized and realistic contemporary accounts of the paranormal is a form of double directedness in itself. Piper's Ghosts, appearing as both silent and vocal, physically near and far, and speaking in both florid verse and simple prose display this same duality of characteristics. That they should communicate and appear in such contrasting ways maintains the double directedness of James' novella.

However, the Ghosts' independence from the Governess becomes unclear as the latter part of the scene replaces the Ghosts with the Governess. The "colloquy" portion of the scene ends and the "soliloquy" portion begins, revealing the Governess as the third character present. The only directions at the beginning of "Colloquy and Soliloquy" are, "the lights fade in on Quint and Miss Jessel — nowhere."¹⁵⁶ When the scene transitions, the "lights slowly fade on the Ghosts" as they finish their final iteration of "the ceremony of innocence is drowned." After their music softens to a distant *ppp*, the next direction is given: "The lights fade in on the Governess." The connection between the Ghosts and the Governess is not made through the presence of a particular stage direction or setting, but rather the absence of these throughout the

¹⁵⁵ Roellinger, "Psychical Research and 'The Turn of the Screw,'" 405.

¹⁵⁶ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 106.

scene. The laconic directions subtly hint at the multiple possibilities for this curiously structured scene.

While the Ghosts are “nowhere,” the Governess’ location is not specified at all. The assumption that she is also “nowhere” is valid, and supported by the fact that she fades in with the lights, instead of entering from another location. However, to say that two people are nowhere does not necessarily imply that they are in the same “nowhere.” In this case, the Governess seems to be in the same ambiguous space, witnessing the Ghosts’ colloquy. After all, “Colloquy and Soliloquy” as one scene (the Ghosts’ colloquy and the Governess’ soliloquy) suggests the same setting, and Soliloquy technically does not require the other party to be absent. On the other hand, the specification of “nowhere” for the Ghosts and the lack of such specificity for the Governess could also permit an audience to ground the Governess in reality, perhaps in her bed chamber or in a passage at Bly. This interpretation removes the Governess from the Ghost’s realm and suggests that she has not witnessed their Colloquy at all.

The content of the Governess’ soliloquy is an even greater point of interest, as it does not relate directly to the Ghosts’ previous conversation, yet can be interpreted as a reaction to her possibly witnessing their exchange. The Governess’ text reads as a frantic monologue that describes in vague details her distressing situation at Bly:

Lost in my labyrinth I see no truth, no truth,
Only the foggy walls of evil press upon me.
Lost in my labyrinth I see 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.
Lost in my labyrinth, which way shall I turn, shall I turn?¹⁵⁷

Perhaps the most obvious singly directed clue in this text is her line, “Yet I fear it, I feel it, worse, imagine it.” Is this sentence a confession to the previous action as her own imaginings rather than the ghostly pow-wow it appeared to be? In this case the local questions revolve around her text in relation to the previous action, the relationship of the “Soliloquy” to the “Colloquy,” and her relationship with the Ghosts.

The Governess’ reference to a labyrinth is particularly notable because it can also be found in James’ preface to the 1908 edition of his novella, where he specifically describes his governess as being “in *her* labyrinth.”¹⁵⁸ While many scholar participants in the Apparitionist Debate refer to James’ preface, there is little evidence in Britten-Piper correspondence to suggest that either of them had read it along with the original novella. Britten’s copy of the book, housed in the Britten-Pears Library, includes only a short introduction on James’ life and work, and lacks the preface. The whereabouts of Myfanwy’s copy of James’ novella are unknown, and thus unfortunately cannot be examined for this study. However, the use of this particular term, “labyrinth,” and the ownership with which the Governess describes it, “*my* labyrinth,” makes a strong case for Piper’s familiarity with the preface..

¹⁵⁷ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 114-118.

¹⁵⁸ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 120.

The final example of a significant interpolation made in Piper's libretto is the shortest scene in the entire opera. It is also the most peculiar, named as it is for a character—Quint—who is not the focus of the drama on stage. Act II, Scene no. 5, “Quint,” poses several singly directed clues to form double directedness. Here, Piper's contribution to James' original storyline is an elaboration of the assumption made toward the end of the story by the governess and Mrs. Grose after the latter reveals to the former that her letter, which she wrote to the uncle requesting he come to Bly, was never sent. When Mrs. Grose is about to leave for town with Flora, the governess mentions that her letter to the uncle should have arrived by now and that he should soon be on his way. Then, the following conversation unfolds between the two women as the governess prods Mrs. Grose for information:

I now felt still more how she had been beating about the bush and how weary at last it had made her. “Your letter won't have got there. Your letter never went”

“What then became of it?”

“Goodness knows! Master Miles—”

“Do you mean *he* took it?” I gasped.

She hung fire, but she overcame her reluctance. “I mean that I saw yesterday, when I came back with Miss Flora, that it wasn't where you had put it. Later in the evening I had the chance to question Luke, and he declared that he had neither noticed nor touched it.” We could only exchange, on this, one of our deeper mutual soundings, and it was Mrs. Grose who first brought up the plumb with an almost elate “You see!”

“Yes, I see that if Miles took it instead he probably will have read it and destroyed it.”¹⁵⁹

This interaction holds singly directed clues for anyone who suspects the governess of foul play, as she coaxes an accusation of Miles out of Mrs. Grose and goes even

¹⁵⁹ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 105.

further to confidently close the case, discouraging further investigation into the missing letter. As James' scene of the governess arguably coercing Mrs. Grose into an accusation is the basis for Piper's interpolation, it is appropriate to approach "Quint" with a similar eye for singly directed clues pointing toward the scene's local question.

The only reference to the letter between the Governess and Miles in Act II, Scene no. 4, "The Bedroom," plays out as follows: "'Miles, I've just written to your guardian.' 'What a lot you'll have to tell him.' 'So will you, Miles.'"¹⁶⁰ The Governess and Miles both assume that they are referring to the same thing; the Governess at this point most certainly thinks that Miles is in with Quint, whereas Miles could be referring to any number of things: from his expulsion, to his misbehavior on the lawn, to his relationship with Quint before his death, and finally to his relationship with Quint now. After the candle is mysteriously blown out in "The Bedroom," the scene fades and moves into Variation XII.

Scene no. 5 actually starts when Quint's voice enters during Variation XII, which is the only exception among the otherwise exclusively instrumental interludes. Quint is heard maniacally scrutinizing the very little information the Governess gave Miles in the previous scene. Quint's speech pattern in this recitative-like variation is strange: repetitive and almost childlike, challenging Mrs. Grose's notion that Quint "was too clever," or perhaps challenging anyone's assumption that this *is* Quint.¹⁶¹

So! She has written, she has written.
What has she written? [x4]

¹⁶⁰ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 149.

¹⁶¹ Mrs. Grose's words in Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 55.

She has told all she knows, all she knows!
What does she know? [x3] What?
It is there on the desk, there on the desk, there, there —
Easy to take [x8]
Take it! [x7]¹⁶²

What is also important to note is Miles' lack of communication and lack of acknowledgement of Quint's command, besides the fact that he is eventually seen (according to stage directions) taking the note left by the Governess for the uncle. In the finale of Act I, "At Night," Miles and Quint were communicating verbally and also acknowledging each other on stage. In Variation XII and "Quint," however, it would seem that, especially for the first pages of Quint's monologue, he is talking entirely to himself, analyzing the Governess' previous statements and obsessing over the information he does not have.

The interaction that plays out both on and off stage during "Quint" is highly problematic for any single interpretation, as there are multiple singly directed clues pointing to a local question: is Miles motivated by Quint's encouragement or does he decide to take the letter himself? As seen in Figure 2.4, Quint's aggressively repetitive phrases, with a shifting word emphasis for every new placement in a measure, seem rather obsessive, paranoid, and even juvenile for the usually boasting Quint. It seems that Quint's particular choice of words and their strange, obsessive repetition are singly directed clues.

¹⁶² Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 153-156.

QUINT
(soprano) *freely* *rall.* 155

It is there— on the desk, there on the desk, there, there—
Es liegt dort auf dem Tisch, dort auf dem Tisch, dort, dort—

[82] In time *pp* *cresc.*

Ea - sy to take, ea - sy to take,
das nimmt sich leicht, das nimmt sich leicht,

pppp *cresc.*

ea - sy to take, ea - sy to take, ea - sy to take, ea -
das nimmt sich leicht, das nimmt sich leicht, das nimmt sich leicht, das

always cresc.

- sy to take, ea - sy to take, ea - sy to take!
nimmt sich leicht, das nimmt sich leicht, das nimmt sich leicht!

f *G.P.*

Figure 2.4. Quint's varying rhythm changes the emphasis in each word, as though it were an English lesson exercise. (Image: Britten, 76)

What is more curious about Variation XII and “Quint” is the fact that Quint does not appear on stage for the entire time that he sings. Notably, in the original production, Peter Pears’ (Quint) silhouette was shown for Variation XII and “Quint,” rather than him being entirely unseen. Perhaps this staging choice suggested the idea, fantasy, or intrigue of a paranormal entity, but still made the choice to not present him fully.¹⁶³ This gives his text more of a devil-on-a-shoulder connotation, perhaps a manifestation of Miles’ inner monologue, now that the Governess has revealed her plan to contact the uncle and thus punish Miles for his collusion with the Ghosts (or so he might assume to be his uncle’s reaction). The way Quint’s words pick apart the little information the Governess gave Miles in the previous scene reads as the desperate and uninformed panic of a young boy about to be in trouble, rather than the mature, proud, and clever spirit of the deceased Quint. This strange monologue as a singly directed clue seems to point to the local question of Quint’s existence: why is he not on stage, and why is he speaking in such a simplistic, repetitive fashion?

Because Piper’s scenes have these local questions created by singly directed clues, they reflect the distributional technique Rimmon identifies in James’ novella (see Chapter 1). Piper successfully adapted the double directedness of James’ novella through singly directed clues pointing to local questions within each scene, which preserves the original double directedness. Rimmon explains his idea of this unification thus:

¹⁶³ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 153.

The reader is concerned with local questions like, Does Flora see Miss Jessel across the Lake? Why does Miles go out in the middle of the night? Why does Miles insist on going back to school? Who blows the candle? It is clear, of course, that all these questions are part and parcel of the central enigma, but...the local questions in *The Turn of the Screw* are distinct from one another.¹⁶⁴

All of these distinct, local questions point to inconsistencies in the governess' narrative, such as the identity of the person who appears on the tower, the reason for Miles' expulsion, and who exactly Flora was looking at through her window at night. Although Piper did not keep the same exact content, she structured her additions to the opera within the same technique of double directedness that maintained James' ambiguity. Therefore, just as in James' novella, the audience of Britten and Piper's opera is presented with *two* possibilities: the apparitionist reality that the governess' account superficially supports, and the anti-apparitionist reality with which the local questions challenge her account.

Although these questions remain open to directorial interpretation, the fact is that, due to the nature of opera, they do not stay resolved from one production to the next. Piper's libretto is transformed into a unique story in each production, if not each performance of any given production. Even further to the point of transitory reality, if a director chooses to make one reality more apparent than another, the reality remains unstable because of the larger narrative framework within which the drama unfolds; after all, we are witnessing a personal account, not a factual history. Thus, any

¹⁶⁴ Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity -- the Example of Henry James*, 121.

attempt at a single interpretation, apparitionist or anti-apparitionist, will inevitably fall victim to the preserved double directedness of *The Turn of the Screw*.

As I have shown in this chapter, Piper's particular attention to scene development and preservation of double directedness when downsizing James' twenty-four chapters are key to what makes this adaptation so thoroughly remarkable and why it should be considered part of the contemporaneous critical trend of synthesis of both arguments of the apparitionist debate. More importantly, her additions to James' original story, what I categorize as expansions and interpolations, create new material for the staged adaptation while maintaining their function within James' original distributional technique, as described by Rimmon. The next chapter explores the work of Piper's artistic counterpart, Benjamin Britten, and particularly his musical additions to the original story that function within Rimmon's originally literary concept of double directedness.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Examples used in Chapter 3 sometimes relate back to excerpts from the libretto covered in-depth in Chapter 2, and are noted as such.

Chapter 3: Double Directedness in Britten's Music for *The Turn of the Screw*

In the same way that Piper's textual additions conform to James' structure of singly directed clues creating large-scale double directedness, Britten's musical setting also supports the poststructuralist reading of James' *The Turn of the Screw*. As Peter Evans writes,

James' careful depiction of the complacently disenchanted world of the English country house which is revealed none the less, to be undermined by indefinable (and therefore virtually unassailable) powers of evil, demanded for its musical treatment all the ambiguities, of innocence touched with worldly wisdom, of terror mounting below high spirits.¹⁶⁶

This chapter identifies those musical "ambiguities of innocence touched with worldly wisdom" in Britten's score as further evidence of Britten and Piper's participation in the contemporary trend toward critical synthesis.

The three main musical manifestations of double directedness under analysis include Britten's unconventional tonal structure, the recurring "Screw" and "Thread" themes, and the particular vocal writing for Ghosts in connection to their existence. Drawing primarily from the work of musicologists Philip Rupprecht and Patricia Howard, I incorporate their theoretical findings into my larger argument for double directedness within *The Turn of the Screw*. I posit that these three significant musical contributions to the adaptation of James' story both suggest the composer's understanding of the complex ambiguity of the original and, more importantly, maintain James' distributional technique and double directedness.

¹⁶⁶ Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 203.

Before I begin my analysis, I want to emphasize that my examination of the score and comparison of musical trends with literary concepts cannot confirm Britten's intentions. Indeed, even his close colleague Erwin Stein noted connections entirely unknown to the composer himself. Stein writes, "among the thematic and other connections here discussed are some of which the composer was not even aware as he wrote—he was rather surprised, when told, about the secrets hidden in his music."¹⁶⁷ However, Stein later claimed that "most of the combinations...have been worked out quite consciously," which certainly encourages further analysis of the score for the possible function of these musical elements in relation to the story itself.

The Thematic Network

I begin my examination with the foundational element of the score, which forms the melodic, harmonic, and dramatic structure of the opera. The "Screw" theme, Britten's musical symbol for James' title, appears in a variety of contexts throughout the work, from the complex instrumental variations to the Ghosts' ominous anthem in "Colloquy to Soliloquy," even underlying the Governess' questioning of Miles in the final scene. The twelve-tone "Screw" theme is treated in a tonal manner, although it is presented without an emphasized tonal center on a number of occasions (see Figure 3.1). Britten's manipulation of this theme is also identified by some scholars as one of the few examples of serialism in his entire output. As Howard states, "Britten had often expressed a dissatisfaction with strict serialism and the atonality it implies...the only evidence of a serialist approach in *The*

¹⁶⁷ Erwin Stein quoted in Howard, "Structures: an overall view," 90.

Turn of the Screw is confined to the method of creating transformations of the theme.”¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Britten’s variations that alternate with the scenes throughout the opera are not developed, but rather manipulated into new shapes. Each new variation is twelve-tone, like the original “Screw” theme, and therefore sounds comfortingly familiar while also eerily divergent. The variations (with the same tonal center as the complementary scenes which they precede) thus create musically discrete sections within the larger work, quite like the distributional technique of James’ novella.



Figure 3.1. A simplified presentation of the “Screw” theme to emphasize its twelve-tone composition as well as its spiral trajectory. (Image: Howard, 75)

The recurring “Screw” theme is also closely tied with the original novella by way of a particular passage from James’ Preface to the 1908 New York edition. While musing over the early reception of his novella, James identifies his piece as “an anecdote amplified and highly emphasized and returning upon itself.”¹⁶⁹ While there is no way to know whether Britten was familiar with the 1908 Preface or with James’ writing process, Piper most likely had studied the Preface, as she used a distinct Jamesian description, “labyrinth,” to represent the Governess’s world in Act II, Scene no. 1, “Colloquy and Soliloquy” (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, it is not necessary to prove Britten’s familiarity with the 1908 Preface in order to claim, as I do, the

¹⁶⁸ Howard, “Structures: an overall view,” 74.

¹⁶⁹ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 120.

existence of a parallel between the structure of James's novella and that of Britten's opera.

Although he may not have read the Preface, the "Screw" theme is one of the few pieces of evidence that demonstrate Britten's intentional translation of literary elements that he may have detected while reading James' novella into a musical medium. As the compositional process was nearing its end, Piper wrote to the composer suggesting possible titles for their opera. Britten eventually responded saying, "I must confess that I have a sneaking, horrid feeling that the original H. J. title describes the musical plan of the work exactly!!"¹⁷⁰ Here, the composer refers to the turning structure of the "Screw" as a pervasive structural element of his opera, evidently with musical as well as narrative implications; the former being the aural connection between the "Screw" variations that introduce each scene, and the latter being the use of the "Screw" theme as a recurring, versatile tool to aid storytelling. I posit that the recurrence of the "Screw" theme throughout the opera suggests that, like in the original novella, the story is being told, musically, through the Governess' narrative bias.

When touching upon the Apparitionist Debate during his analysis of *The Turn of the Screw*, Rupprecht points out that the "Screw" theme causes the unraveling of one side of the Apparitionist Debate in Britten's music:

¹⁷⁰ Britten quoted in Howard, "Structures: an overall view," 73.

Wilson's [anti-apparitionist] interpretation works less well for the opera, where the Governess is *a singing character*, rather than a *narrating center of consciousness*, and where the "screw" of James's title has an autonomous identity as a recurring theme, voiced primarily in wordless orchestral utterance. (my emphasis)¹⁷¹

While Rupprecht's suggestion that the physical presence of the Governess poses a challenge for our perception of her relationship to her narrative has merit, his claim ignores the possibilities for music *as* narrator. Rupprecht's argument implies that, because an audience has the Governess on stage in front of them acting out what was once confined to text on James' pages, they are to consider her physical presence the authoritative voice of the story and forsake the idea that the action is being told through the future Governess' self. This then omits the possibility of her manipulating an audience through her account and implies that what plays out on stage is an objective history. However, I argue he is wrong to assume her physical presence is *proof* of a disconnect between Britten's thematic material and the Governess' character.¹⁷² Rather, by employing the thematic material as part of the "narrating center of consciousness," Britten's music transposes James' original double directedness.

Within both the original novella and the opera, the reader is aware of the governess in two roles: as a character and as a narrator. Rupprecht seems to ignore the former in James' novella, and the latter in Piper and Britten's opera, despite ample evidence of both forms in each. More specifically, just as Rupprecht overlooks the possible connection between music and character in the opera, he also overlooks the

¹⁷¹ Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 143.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 144

process of reading James' text and visualizing the action communicated through prose. When reading James' novella, a reader imagines dialogue as a scene between two physical characters, the governess and perhaps Mrs. Grose or Miles. The governess' account gives visual, descriptive details about each person's behavior and this creates an image in the reader's mind. If it is possible to connect that image of James' governess and the future voice of the governess that narrates her story, it is possible to connect the Governess on stage with the musical narrative of Britten's score, which I argue is an aural manifestation of the future Governess' account. It is therefore important to avoid Rupprecht's assumption that the physical manifestation of the Governess indicates a truthful representation of her experience. It is, after all, the flaws and bias of the governess' account that allow for the double directedness of James' novella, and I suggest the same for Britten's opera.

The "Screw" theme is introduced after the "Prologue" has technically ended and the "Theme" section begins, although the Prologue is still singing his last line when the theme begins. Rupprecht approaches the "Screw" theme as autonomous:

For now, the Screw theme might be understood as essentially a narrative principle: its function is not tied to specific elements of plot or character, but to the way in which these are presented to the audience; the Screw is less a part of the story than of its telling.¹⁷³

In order to find the biases of the Governess' account in Britten's opera, I challenge this statement with the fact that the theme is properly introduced simultaneously with the Governess' acceptance of the uncle's terms of employment: "'I will' she said"

¹⁷³ Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 144.

(see Figure 3.2).¹⁷⁴ The connection between the Governess' acceptance and the introduction of the "Screw" theme creates an unforgettable bond between character and theme. And, to build from Rupprecht's argument, if there is a musical element functioning as a narrative principle, and the audience already knows who is telling the story—the Governess, as revealed in the "Prologue"—we would be remiss in separating the narrative's function and possible biases from the narrator. I suggest that the sudden change of musical style—the "Screw" theme and the characters' musical language) following the "Prologue" is associated with the Governess' biased account.

¹⁷⁴ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 5.

THEME
Very slow (♩ = 60) broadening

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. in A

Bsn.

Hrn. in F

Harp

Timp.

Trpt.

Piano

Prolog

The lights fade and the drop curtain rises in darkness.
Das Licht erloscht und der Zuschauerraum füllt sich in der Dunkelheit.

"I will," she said,
"be true," says she.

Very slow (♩ = 60) broadening

I.

VI.

II.

Vla.

Vo.

D.B.

Figure 3.2. The transition from the "Prologue" into "Theme," where the orchestrated "Screw" theme enters for the first time with the Governess' "I will." (Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 4)

It is then entirely possible to consider the “Screw” theme as not just any “narrative principle,” but more specifically the Governess’ narrative principle, or rather that of her future self recounting the story. It is important to remember that the Prologue specifically states that he is reading her account in “faded ink...a woman’s hand.”¹⁷⁵ Retracing the complex network of the “Screw”’s manipulation back to its first entrance following the “Prologue” reveals its musical separation—timbral, textural, and melodic—from the rest of the opera. These elements clearly indicate the transfer of one narrative approach to the next.

The “Prologue” is set as simple recitative with sparse piano accompaniment and a relatively independent tenor voice, whose speechlike quality may indicate a closer association to delivering factual information than the material in the Governess’ account (see Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3. The Prologue’s recitative marked by solo piano accompaniment, exclusive to this single example of many recitatives in the opera. (Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 4)

¹⁷⁵ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 1.

The rest of the opera is orchestrated. Both its timbral and thematic complexities signify being a step removed from truth and fact. The recitative within the Governess' account, which also involves children's songs, arias, ensembles, and speech, is more elaborate in both melody and accompaniment than that of the Prologue, and often incorporates the "Screw" or "Thread" theme (see Figure 3.4).

The musical score for Figure 3.4 is a page from a score for *The Turn of the Screw*. It shows a recitative section from Act I, Scene no. 4, "The Window." The score is for a full orchestra and vocal soloists. The instruments shown are Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Viola (Vla.), and Double Bass (D.B.). The vocal parts are for the Governess (Gov.) and Mrs. G. The Governess part has lyrics in English and German. The Viola part has a "pizz." (pizzicato) marking. The score is marked with a box containing the number 16.

Figure 3.4. A typical example of recitative in *The Turn of the Screw*, from Act I, Scene no. 4, "The Window." (Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 38)

I suggest that this unique change in the instrumentation from solo piano to full orchestra between the "Prologue" and "Theme" is a transitional element not only in the musical structure of the opera, but also in the narrative structure of the drama. Therefore, the introduction of the "Screw" theme immediately following the "Prologue" is itself an indicator of Britten's musical recreation of the original inner frame of James' narrative structure that facilitates the novel's, and now the opera's, double directedness.

While the placement of the “Screw” theme immediately after the Prologue maintains the separation of one of James’ original frames, Piper and Britten’s adaptation appears to lose the first frame, that of the unnamed party guest observing Douglas’ reading of the governess’ account. Until the opera’s premiere at the Venice Biennale, the score for *The Turn of the Screw* held evidence of this first frame by way of three “Introductory Knocks” before the Prologue begins. John Evans explains:

The second stage in the setting of the Prologue is that found in the composition sketch itself, though even here there are revisions to note. Persisting from the discarded sketch are three ‘Introductory Knocks’ that were to have preceded the opening music of the Prologue. This gesture is borrowed from the conventions of the theatre on the Continent, notably France, and was originally designed to arrest the attention of the audience. Though this was considered to be necessary at the Fenice, particularly as the opera starts with solo piano, it was a notion that was later abandoned when the production returned to England.¹⁷⁶

Although intended for practical purposes, these three “Introductory Knocks” performed at the Venice premiere may well have performed the function of that first frame of James’ original Prologue. While still an option for an adventurous director interested in such a fruitful example of what John Bryant calls a “fluid text,” the published score does not include this original, simple gesture.¹⁷⁷

The other prominent theme that reappears throughout the opera is what Patricia Howard calls the “Catalyst” theme and Rupprecht calls the “Thread” theme. As Rupprecht points out, this theme is directly related to the “Screw” theme as an

¹⁷⁶ John Evans, “Benjamin Britten’s ‘The Turn of the Screw’: the music, in *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, 66.

¹⁷⁷ John Bryant’s “fluid text” refers to any text that existed in even a slightly varied format, whether in another publication, in a draft, or as a palimpsest. John Bryant, *The Fluid Text* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

elaborated inversion of the same interval sequence (see Figure 3.5). The two have superficially contrasting elements, such as the more elaborate, flowing movement of the “Thread” theme as opposed to the plodding, perhaps mechanical nature of the “Screw” theme.

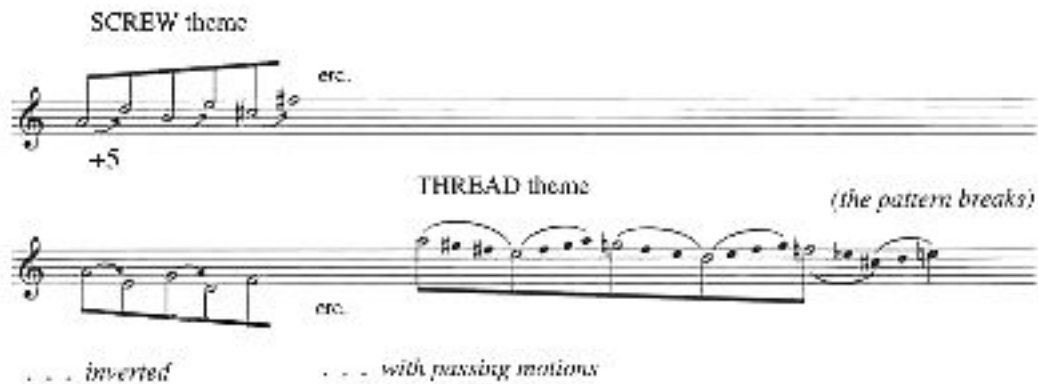


Figure 3.5. The “Thread” theme shown here as an inverted derivation of the “Screw” theme. (Image: Rupprecht, 143)

Britten’s careful allocation of the “Screw” and “Thread” themes function as musical manifestations of another literary aspect of the original story. In Rimmon’s observations of the novella’s structure, the scholar points to a unique form of ambiguity, “retrospective ambiguity,” that James employs to endow a seemingly innocuous past event with significance. Rimmon explains:

Some of the sections listed, such as the prologue, the headmaster’s letter, and the governess’s first and second “encounters” with the stranger, precede the moment at which the central ambiguity is first perceptible, but they are not irrelevant to its analysis, as they point to another interesting compositional feature in *The Turn of the Screw*, the nouvelle’s combination of prospective and retrospective ambiguity. The former begins in chapter 6, developing with the linear progression of the narrative, but once evident it is projected back to the preceding sections, having a local effect.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity--The Case of Henry James*, 123.

Musically, the recurrences of the “Screw” and “Thread” themes exemplify Rimmon’s claim of retrospective ambiguity, as they give rise to a local question concerning their reference point, either with the Ghosts or with the Governess. While both themes are introduced relatively early in the piece—within the “Theme” section before Scene no. 1, “The Journey”—their later utterances with varied timbres, harmonizations, and voices create a complex musical network with multiple possible reference points pointing to local questions enabling a musical double directedness.

Analyzing the various utterances of the “Screw” and “Thread” themes is a daunting task, as Britten not only weaves them into the fabric of the opera, but they are more the primary fabric with which the opera is woven. After the initial instrumental introduction of the “Screw” theme, it returns only four times in its original form, two of them with text. The “Thread” theme, on the other hand, occurs more frequently and mostly with text. Although one is derived from the other, they are equally discernible and therefore may have an equal significance in referential meaning throughout the opera.

Howard’s interpretation of how these themes function theatrically follows what Rupprecht would consider a “logical” thematic relationship. Howard says: “The first derivation [of the “Thread” theme]...is continuously associated with the governess’s coming to Bly and the impact this has on the events of the story.” Howard refers here to the first vocal utterance of the “Thread” theme in Act I, Scene no. 1, “The Journey ” as directly informing the subsequent events that also incorporate the “Thread” theme.

On the other hand, Colin Mason, in a performance review, felt that the “Thread” theme’s origin was with Peter Quint in his illustrious aria in Act I, Scene no. 8, “Miles.” Although this is not the first time the “Thread” theme is heard, it is certainly the first time it is uttered with such emphasis and elaboration (see below for further examination of “Miles” and Figure 3.10). In this case, any event that happens before or after “Miles” is inevitably traced back to and connected with the idea of Peter Quint.

Rupprecht, however, claims the “[‘Screw’ and ‘Thread’] themes are self-reflexive and circular, rather than ‘logical’.”¹⁷⁹ Therefore, Rupprecht acknowledges these equally viable possibilities of the themes’ origins instead of them simply referring to single events in the past. Instead, they connect with both past and *future* events, with no particular point of origin beyond one of speculation.

Throughout the opera, Britten uses these two themes as the foundation for many of his characters’ melodic passages, building a complex and, as Rupprecht states, “self-reflexive” network of musical associations between those characters and certain events.

The first texted appearance of the “Screw” theme is in “Colloquy and Soliloquy,” where it is sung by Miss Jessel and Peter Quint as they make plain their evil intentions toward the children.¹⁸⁰ After voicing their dastardly individual

¹⁷⁹ Rupprecht, *Britten’s Musical Language*, 144.

¹⁸⁰ To be clear, it is still vague as to what their exact strategy of corruption is, as discussed in Chapter 2.

ambitions of vengeance (Miss Jessel) and glory (Peter Quint), the Ghosts sing in unison for the first time in the opera:

Day by day the bars we break,
break the love that laps them round,
cheat the careful watching eyes...¹⁸¹

Once the Ghosts' battle cry for corruption resounds to the tune of the "Screw," the theme's original appearance in the orchestra following the Prologue immediately becomes linked, with the benefit of hindsight, to the Ghosts' newly introduced text. Within the overall tonal structure of the opera, "Colloquy and Soliloquy" is in the key of Ab, extremely distant harmonically from the introductory instrumental utterance of the "Screw" in A—and yet uncomfortably close, as though the latter were a slightly skewed memory, or perhaps an intentionally inaccurate recount of the former. The Ghosts' ode to corruption is marked by Britten to be sung "firmly," a direction found in the opera only once more: as the Governess uses the first four notes of the "Screw" theme in the opera's final scene, "Miles." Yet another layer of ambiguity is added to these clues, as the Governess is not necessarily present for this part of the scene, and therefore may not have actually witnessed these events, but rather assumes them to have taken place, or makes them up deliberately in her account. It is then possible that, within the context of the Governess' narration, the themes take on a flawed, unreliable dramatic significance.

When the Governess sings the final utterance of the "Screw," she asks what Rimmon would consider a "'local' question" that appeals to the larger double

¹⁸¹ Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 112.

directedness in the story. Her music marks the beginning of the “Screw” theme in her vocal line as she sings the first four notes of the twelve-tone theme (see Figure 3.6):

Who made you take the letter?
Who? Who? Who do you wait for, watch for?
Only say the name and he will go forever.¹⁸²

f firmly

Gev. Who? Who made you take the let - ter?
 Wer? Wer Hess den Brief Dich steh - en?

Quint woods, re - mem - - - ber Quint! At the
 Wald, ver - giss Quint! Und am

express. *pp*

R. & B. 19048

Figure 3.6. The beginning of the Governess' questions for Miles, set to the "Screw" theme. (Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 192)

It is her string of pleading questions sung to the “Screw” theme that prompts Miles’ exclamation, “Peter Quint, you devil,” and his subsequent death in the Governess’ arms.¹⁸³ This scene is the height of double directedness in both James’ original story and Britten and Piper’s opera; for the first time in the story, there is physical evidence of abuse. But who committed the crime? The apparitionist reading of Miles’ death

¹⁸² Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 194

points toward Peter Quint's psychic power over Miles. The anti-apparitionist reading of the same event points toward the Governess' physical power over Miles. The cause of Miles' death is not clear, as it is preceded in the novella and opera by a scrupulously worded or composed interaction, respectively. James' governess describes her control of Miles in the following way: "My sternness was all for his judge, his executioner; yet it made him avert himself again, and that movement made *me*, with a single bound and an irrepressible cry, spring straight upon him."¹⁸⁴ The governess' physical interaction with Miles could be interpreted as protective to the point of being violent and overbearing. And, just as there are textual ambiguities in James' final scene, there must then be singly directed musical clues in this interaction that point to the larger double directedness of the operatic scene.

Britten's setting of the Governess' fateful questioning to the "Screw" theme is unlikely to be a coincidence. The confusion surrounding Miles' death ignited by her question, and the trauma of the events leading up to this tragedy would naturally impact the Governess' retelling of the story. Perhaps it is this climactic moment—Miles' death—marked by her own actions, that literally shapes her musical narrative. While her questions are technically harmless, does the Governess' music reveal her darker connection with the hallucinated episodes of Colloquy and Soliloquy? Or, perhaps in this moment the "Screw" theme represents her own ideas of Peter Quint, which fuel her leading questions. Innocent or guilty, the Governess'

¹⁸⁴ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 115.

account is an explanation and an alibi motivated by self-preservation, meticulously structured to detail the cause of the final climactic tragedy.

Therefore, as Rupprecht's argument for a "self-reflexive" thematic network would suggest, the use of the "Screw" theme throughout the opera may be closely linked with action that has yet to occur—the Governess' questioning. Alternatively, by the time the final scene arrives, the "Screw" theme is inevitably linked to action that has already happened—the Ghosts' ode to corruption is one example of many. Each new appearance of the theme then constitutes a singly directed musical clue, fueling the opera's larger double directedness. Did the Ghosts or the Governess murder Miles? In a sense, this decision remains at the mercy of the network of musical associations as detected and interpreted by the audience.

The "Thread" theme appears, with few exceptions, everywhere that the "Screw" theme does, and there is a strong possibility that Britten chose to juxtapose these two themes throughout the opera for dramatic effect, as in, for example, the opening "Theme" section, as well as Peter Quint's beckoning in Act I, Scene no. 8, "At Night." In both cases, the two themes combine their networks of references and thus creates a heightened sense of awareness of the connections between the local questions of each scene in the opera. Further, the theme's utterances as either instrumental or vocal create additional connections, whether with a character, event, or text with which the theme coincides.

The first example of this juxtaposition comes with the introduction of both themes immediately following the Prologue. As discussed above, the "Screw"

theme's first appearance accompanies the Governess' "I will," followed by the instrumental "Theme" (see Figure 3.2). Although Howard may not be correct in assuming that the "Screw" theme irrevocably belongs to the Governess as it spawned from her words, the connection is still made between the two. Thus, her agreement to take on the position at Bly is now connected with the "Screw" theme. After the "Screw" theme is introduced by the orchestra, the "Thread" theme appears in Scene no. 1, "The Journey," as described in Howard's original argument for the theme's origin (mentioned above). The Governess' words "Why did I come here?" seem to suddenly suspend the Governess' journey, both dramatically and musically, as the timpani drops out and Britten instructs that she sing "freely" over sustained strings (see Figure 3.7).

slower

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. in A

Bsn.

Hrn in F

Harp

T.D.

Perc.

Piano

broadly

Gov.

freely

(long pause)

strange world, for a stran-ger's sake. O why, why did I come?

From de, we'll en-ter de boat. O we - - - run - - - like a har!

slower

I.

VI.

II.

Vlc.

Vc.

D.B.

arco

p dim.

Figure 3.7. The Governess sings the “Thread” theme as the orchestra drops out, except for sustained strings. (Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 12)

The contrast of the “Screw” theme’s association with her acceptance of the job and the “Thread” theme’s association with her questioning her own decision only a few measures later possibly draws attention to the Governess’ impulsiveness as well as regrets or doubts. That these two ideas are musically related yet assigned to contrasting sentiments is just the first connection of many in the complex thematic network.

Just as my first example connected an orchestral utterance in an instrumental variation to a vocal utterance in a scene, my second example of thematic juxtaposition pinpoints the “Screw” theme’s utterance in Variation VII preceding the vocal utterance of the “Thread” theme in Scene no. 8, “At Night.” During Variation VII, a solo French horn plays the “Screw” theme against an enchanting ensemble of celesta, harp, and gong, grounded with a double bass. Variation VII’s striking timbre of the horn playing the “Screw” theme implies the masculine aesthetic of a hunting call, which crescendos and decrescendos with the rest of the ensemble, eventually making way for the celesta in Scene no. 8 (see Figure 3.8).¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ That the horn is a featured instrument in this variation is also significant as it connects to Britten’s *Canticle III*, written in 1954 and premiered in 1955. Britten set Edith Sitwell’s poem “Still Falls the Rain,” which was the poet’s disillusioned reaction to the London raids in 1940. *Canticle III*’s strong connection with WWII and its use of horn as a musical reference to war, in retrospect, forms this same association in relation to Variation VII.

VARIATION VII

131

Slow ($\text{♩} = 48$)

Hm.in F *open marked but sustained*
pp

Harp *pp*

Perc. *Gong*
pp

Cel.

Db. **Slow** ($\text{♩} = 48$)
p

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

Harp *cresc.* *always louder*

Perc. *Gong* *louder each time*

Cel.

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

Figure 3.8. The French horn plays the “Screw” theme in Variation VII, preceding Quint’s florid calls to Miles in “At Night.” (Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 131.)

When Peter Quint enters with a vocal utterance of the “Screw” theme, the celesta alone playfully intertwines with his own florid vocal writing, in a seductively effeminate way (see below for further discussion of Quint’s aria and Figure 3.10). Here, the “Screw” theme and the “Thread” theme are connected by contrasting musical engendering, and all the while musically related as one is derived from the other.

With these examples of the juxtaposition of the “Screw” and “Thread” themes, I seek to demonstrate that the interplay of this pair of themes creates a complex network of references to characters, events, and dialogue. The multiple references that may be attached to any of these examples of thematic utterances are singly directed clues pointing toward local questions of origin. That they are fundamentally related yet used for contrasting aesthetic and dramatic purposes within the same sections of the opera may also be grounds to identify these themes as double directed in themselves.

The Unconventional Treatment of Tonality

The second prominent musical manifestation of double directedness is also recognized among Britten scholars as the piece’s musical signature: unconventionally realized tonalities and harmonic structures. Here is how Howard describes the composer’s clever compositional technique: “A tonic is almost always discernible, though the chords which support it are by no means always traditional triads...although the *sense* of traditional tonality arises most strongly from the melodic

lines...” (my emphasis).¹⁸⁶ *The Turn of the Screw*’s curious harmonic patterns with shifting tonal centers continues to inspire analysis. My interest in the composer’s unconventional approach, however, is specific to its dramatic significance within the opera.

The two bookend scenes of the opera use A as the tonic substitute, while the two inner scenes (Act I finale and Act II opening) use Ab as a tonic substitute. The tonal centers of the remaining scenes ascend and descend, forming a rising/falling tonal arch (see Figure 3.9).



Figure 3.9. The shifting tonality from scene to scene creates an ascending and descending model, suggesting a distancing from and return to reality. (Image: Howard, 93)

As mentioned above with respect to the “Screw” theme in “Colloquy and Soliloquy,” I suggest that tonal centers A and Ab demarcate the extremes of the Governess’ realities within the opera, which is ultimately her account of the story. The opening scene in A, “The Journey,” is the least marred by the Ghosts; this is where the Governess has just accepted an exciting job at Bly, and a new chapter of her life has begun. The two inner scenes in Ab, “At Night” and “Colloquy and Soliloquy,” are arguably the most distanced from a conventional reality. These are the

¹⁸⁶ Howard, “Structures: an overall view,” 74.

two scenes where the Ghosts appear in the absence of the Governess, as autonomous, insidious entities bent on corrupting the children for their selfish gain. In the final scene, the opera has returned to A: Miles is dead; the Governess is left alone, as in “The Journey,” and forced to face the reality of her dead pupil in her arms. The unsettling aspect of the two tonalities lies in their acoustic proximity, yet an entirely different harmonic language in the two inner Ghost scenes in Ab scenes - an aural indicator that “something is not quite right.”

In the previous chapter, I discussed Piper’s use of an excerpt from W. B. Yeats’ “The Second Coming” as an added literary form of double directedness. This example of intertextuality relates directly to James’ own use of references to contemporary Gothic literature alongside unmistakable similarities with scientifically examined accounts of paranormal activity. James would have counted on his readers’ knowledge of these famous novels (*Jane Eyre* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*), but perhaps not their knowledge of the Society for Psychical Research studies on real-world paranormal encounters. I would argue that Britten uses tonality and atonality similarly, creating for the audience a musical sense of familiarity sharply contrasted with disorientation.

The dramatic associations tied to unconventional use of tonality in opera around the time of *The Turn of the Screw*’s composition would possibly suggest a challenging psychological element in the story’s plot, as is the case with works with which Britten was familiar, such as *Wozzeck* (1922) and *Lulu* (1935).¹⁸⁷ In these

¹⁸⁷ In a letter to Erwin Stein in January of 1954, Britten expressed his interest in Berg’s *Lulu* in relation to his own projects. “Time will show if they are right about this, but from a point of view of attitude or

examples, the discomfort caused by the drama on stage (violent jealousy, prostitution, and murder) is heightened by the uneasiness of the music that accompanies it. In *The Turn of the Screw*, while the drama is not nearly as disturbing, there is certainly an element of alleged sexual misconduct in the relationship between Peter Quint and Miles, and in some interpretations the Governess and Miles. The characters' texts are vague when discussing Peter Quint's past, as in Mrs. Grose's words in Act I, Scene no. 5, "The Window": "He was free with everyone, with little Master Miles!" The text for Peter Quint's own seduction of Miles is also vague in Act I, Scene no. 8, "At Night"—so vague, in fact, that Rupprecht argues it is not necessarily a sexually charged encounter at all.¹⁸⁸

All the while the conventionally tonal excerpts, such as the children's rhymes—"Lavender's Blue" and "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son"—in the first few scenes and the pseudo-hymn in Act II, Scene no. 2, "The Bells," draw an audience into a deceptively safe and comfortable musical environment. And indeed, these same moments of musical comfort coincide with moments of dramatic respite: children's games and the sanctuary of the church. I posit that Britten's use of the singly directed clues of traditionally tonal melodies combined with unconventional tonality is in itself a musical manifestation of double directedness.

technique I'm sure I'm right for this work, at any rate. There is also room in the world for *Lulu*." Benjamin Britten in a letter to Stein, January 1, 1954, in *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten, Volume Four 1952-57*, 200.

¹⁸⁸ Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 183.

The Ghosts' Performative Melodic Language

Apart from the use of the “Screw” and “Thread” themes and the opera’s unconventional tonality, the third significant musical manifestation of double directedness under examination is Britten’s use of melodic language as an indicator of either reality or fantasy. It is, however, an unreliable indicator, reflective of the narrative ambiguity in the Governess’ account. In *The Turn of the Screw*, Britten introduces three broad narrative types of vocal material: one clearly performative, as in the children’s rhymes, hymns, and solo songs; one clearly non-performative, as in the opening recitative of the Prologue, dialogues between the adults, and the Governess’ letter scene; and the ambiguously performative material for the Ghosts.

The Ghosts’ fanciful songs and rhymes are generally ignored as unproblematic yet unhelpful, as with Rupprecht, or explained away with conventional supernatural associations. For example, Peter Evans states:

Indeed, music’s ancient association with magic and the supernatural, its power to enchant, required that these two figures above all should acquire pronounced musical qualities.¹⁸⁹

However, recontextualizing these melodically rich moments in connection with the idea of a biased musical narrator opens up the possibility of hearing them as the Governess’ contrived imagining of a spectacle rather than a face-value operatic fantasy. That the Governess does not necessarily hear these Ghostly performances is a singly directed clue pointing toward the question of the accuracy of her account. Are these performances as the Governess remembers or as the Governess would have the

¹⁸⁹ Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 204.

audience believe? Does she exaggerate her encounters with the Ghosts through her musical narrative? These local questions surrounding the connection of the Ghosts with the Governess are the crux of the opera's double directedness, as they were the point of contention between the two sides of the apparitionist debate, and remain so for any director who aims to develop an interpretation of Britten and Piper's *The Turn of the Screw*.

The less tuneful setting of the non-performative speech is usually reserved for the music of Mrs. Grose and the Governess, as compared to the playful performative music of the children, which is easily identified by repetitive figures and texts, as well as the quotations of the common nursery rhymes. Both types of vocal settings have been discussed at length by Howard and Rupprecht. Surprisingly, the Ghosts' material—text, music, action, even personality—that suffered the heaviest criticism for unbalancing the ambiguity of the story, has received the least analytical scrutiny with respect to its own potential ambiguities.¹⁹⁰

Furthermore, Rupprecht's approach to the subject of the Ghosts suffers from a potential contradiction. Whereas earlier in his chapter he explained that Wilson's interpretation "works less well" for Britten's opera due to the Governess as a singing character, Rupprecht goes on to say that he argues for the successful transfer of ambiguity from novella to opera via the children's perspective.¹⁹¹ He says: "My argument here will contain counter claims that the opera, with its singing ghosts, is

¹⁹⁰ Howard, "Myfanwy Piper's 'The Turn of the Screw,'" 56; Rupprecht uses Carolyn Abbate's term, "phenomenal performances" in *Britten's Musical Language*, 140.

¹⁹¹ Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 143.

somehow less ambiguous than James's story."¹⁹² How can it be that the transfer of ambiguity was successful yet one of the sides of the Apparitionist Debate works less well?

While Rupprecht argues that the Ghosts' text and music do not threaten the ambiguity of the opera, he neglects the possibility of the Ghosts' material itself representing an important aspect of that ambiguity, which he identifies in the Children's material alone. Rupprecht introduces his analysis as the following:

James's tale... "is vague only in one thing: in what, if anything, actually happened between the children and the haunting pair"...and it is in the children that the opera's central ambiguities reside.¹⁹³

After quoting Piper, Rupprecht disregards half of the librettist's own opinion on the transfer of ambiguity from novella to opera. Rupprecht interprets Piper's words by focusing on the Children's interaction with the Ghosts, but Piper is talking about the interaction between the two. I posit that all the interactions of the Ghosts - not only with the Children but with any living characters and with each other - potentially hold singly directed clues furthering the ambiguity of the opera.

Peter Quint and Miss Jessel interact with a variety of character groups on stage: with each other, with the children as a pair, and each on their own with a combination of the Governess and a child who, as she would claim in her narrative, can also see the Ghosts. In each of these situations, the Ghosts have a unique performative musical language that functions as a singly directed clue pointing toward local questions surrounding the Governess' narrative. As noted in Chapter 2,

¹⁹² Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 181

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Piper and Britten let the Children respond to the Ghosts' as if they can hear them (e.g. in "At Night"), but the Governess' music and text never indicate that she experiences the Ghosts with any sense other than sight (e.g., in "Miss Jessel"). The question remains: if the Governess cannot hear Miss Jessel's lament, how are we as an audience able to do so through her account?

The Governess' ignorance of the Ghosts' musical (and verbal) expression in the opera complicates the issue of narrative ambiguity. The possibility that the children hear the Ghosts and the Governess does not is another singly directed clue pointing to the larger double directedness of the piece. Is the Ghosts' music telling the audience a different story than the visible drama unfolding on stage? In Chapter 2, I discussed the subtle significance of using verse rather than prose as a singly directed clue pointing toward the local question of the Ghosts' existence in the two scenes where they appear together. Here I further posit that the possibility of the Ghosts' connection to the Governess applies to their musical language as well. In general, the Ghosts' music is perhaps the most consistently song-like and melodic of all the characters, and occurs under the most varied circumstances. From the melismatic calls of Peter Quint in "At Night" to the pitiful yearning of Miss Jessel's lament in "Miss Jessel," the Ghosts have a theatrical musical language of their own.

In Chapter 2, I explored the power of Peter Quint's verses in "At Night." The dazzling effect of his references to ancient and mythological wonders is preceded by an even more dazzling display of vocal agility and control. For Peter Quint's beckoning to Miles, Britten uses a florid elaboration of the "Thread" theme, as

touched upon earlier. Introduced by the haunting celesta, Peter Quint's tenor voice arrives on a suspended Eb, as the unseen character calls for "Miles" (see Figure 3.10). His reiterations of Miles' name become increasingly intricate and playful, at first inverting the "Thread" theme (in the third entrance), then exploring descending and ascending runs, followed by various groupings of triplets, and quick, complex rhythms. This scene has a close musical association with the nineteenth-century operatic repertoire set in exotic locales, such as "The Bell Song" from Delibes' *Lakmé*, in which the protagonist is forced to sing seductively in order to attract a particular gentleman.

82 SCENE VIII. At Night. *Nachts.*

The musical score for Peter Quint's aria "Miles" is presented across five systems. The first system features a piano introduction with a treble clef staff containing a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a more active accompaniment. The tempo is marked *Andante* and the dynamics are *ppp*. The second system begins with the vocal entry, marked *pp* and *freely*. The lyrics "Miles! Miles!" are written below the vocal line. The piano accompaniment is marked *always pp*. The third system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "Miles! Miles!" and includes a *cresc.* marking. The fourth system shows the vocal line continuing with the lyrics "Miles! Miles!". The fifth system is marked with a box containing the number 72 and continues the vocal line with the lyrics "Miles! Miles!". The piano accompaniment throughout the score is highly detailed and rhythmic, often featuring sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

Figure 3.10. Peter Quint's florid vocal writing displays both agility and control in his aria, "Miles."
(Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 82)

Likewise, Peter Quint's music is part of his attempt to get Miles' attention. In Seymour's words, "there is no denying the beauty and seductiveness of Quint's melodies."¹⁹⁴ Indeed, the association with musical exoticism is particularly apt as well as the seductiveness of his melodies, as Peter Quint is an otherworldly entity for the Children and Governess, who also may consider him a sexual threat to the Children.

The incredibly ornate melodic lines of Peter Quint's music suggest his strong desire for Miles, supported by his subsequent textual references, as discussed in Chapter 2. A desire for what, exactly, is up for discussion. The Governess learned from Mrs. Grose in Act I, Scene no. 5, "The Window," that "Quint was free with ev'ryone, with little Master Miles!" Perhaps it is the Governess' imagination that imposes this traditionally effeminate, overtly decorative musical language onto him based on her understanding that he is a homosexual. Once again, she is not present for this scene, therefore, this account may be an assumption of the events that, in the original James, happened beyond her line of sight. By contextualizing Peter Quint's music within the biased musical narrative of *The Turn of the Screw*, his flashy vocal lines may prove to be nothing more than the stereotypical imaginings of the Governess.

Miss Jessel's lament is textually vague yet musically deliberate, with a rocking triple meter, sparse harp chords, arpeggiated bassoon, and marching bass drum to ground the sound in seriousness. While the instrumentation seems at first random, the isolation of these instruments reveals certain possible musical references

¹⁹⁴ Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion*, 189.

to established idioms. The harp, for example, can be tied to “The Willow Song” from Rossini’s *Otello*, where the sparse and delicate arpeggiation accompanies Desdemona’s florid phrases. The bassoon can be connected with Verdi’s version of “The Willow Song” that features throughout another double-reed instrument, the English horn. While Desdemona arguably senses the tragedy and betrayal about to befall her in *Otello*, Miss Jessel has already experienced both, but seeks to have others suffer with her in revenge.

These two timbral features add to the minor harmony and plaintive texture of the piece, while the bass drum suggests that Miss Jessel is past self-pity and moving on to vengeance. The effect of these particular elements is theatrical brooding, perfectly defined in Britten’s performance indication: “slow, with pathos.” Just as Quint’s florid, effeminate music possibly stems from the Governess’ assumptions based on her conversation with Mrs. Grose, Miss Jessel’s ominously tragic lament may be precisely what the Governess imagines as the fate of a woman who forsook her duty for a man who would eventually betray her. As Michael Halliwell states in his book, *Opera and the Novel: The Case of Henry James*, “Early theorists insisted that only deities of one form or another (or perhaps shepherds) could realistically be expected to sing rather than speak.”¹⁹⁵ Is the idealized musical language of the Ghosts then a projection of the Governess’ imaginings of the paranormal, or simply the melodic moans of a real spirit?

¹⁹⁵ Halliwell, *Opera and the Novel: The Case of Henry James*, 21.

SCENE III. Miss Jessel. The light fades in on the school-room, with desk. The Governess enters immediately. Miss Jessel is sitting at the desk.
Das Licht blendet auf und zeigt die Gouvernante, wie sie das Schulzimmer betritt, und Miss Jessel am Schreibtisch sitzend.

freely
GOVERNESS (*whispered*) (*distressed*) *Slow, with pathos* (♩. 84)
pp
She is here! Here, in my own room!
Sie ist hier! Hier, in mei-nem Raum!

MISS JESSEL *pp*
Slow, with pathos (♩. 84)
Here... my tra - ge - dy be - gan,
Hier... mein Un - glück einst be - gann,

Ban. pp
Harp
B. D.

Gov. *always freely* *pp*
Near - er and
Nä - her and

Miss J.
here... re - venge... be - gins...
hier... die Ru - che heckt...

ppp Fl.

Figure 3.11. Miss Jessel's lamenting voice and somber accompaniment alongside the Governess' interjections. (Image: Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, 134)

That Miss Jessel's lament is performative is perhaps more directly confirmed by the interruptions that the Governess makes while observing her ghostly intruder. The breaks in her vocal line as well as accompaniment are misleading, as they would suggest that the two women are politely allowing each other to interject and proceed to remain silent while the other speaks (see Figure 3.11). However, as noted in Chapter 2, their text gives no such evidence of their communication. If they do not

hear each other, what is the reason for singing one at a time? Indeed, in Act I, Scene no. 2, “The Welcome,” Mrs. Grose and the Governess talk right past each other, Mrs. Grose’s patter describing the Children and their energy overlapping the Governess’ daydreaming about the beauty of Bly. Britten has these two women sing simultaneously on completely contrasting vocal lines, not acknowledging one another once. Why together there, but separately in “Miss Jessel?” Perhaps the Governess’ speech is incompatible with Miss Jessel’s because they can not speak at the same time: they originate from a single person—the Governess.

The Original Voices

I must emphasize that this analysis does not negate a very real “biographical” motivation for Peter Quint’s fanciful music, particularly in his oft-excerpted solo, “Miles.” Britten wrote this part specifically for his partner and collaborator, the English tenor, Peter Pears. Operatic history contains myriad accounts of composers collaborating with or at least thinking about certain singers while writing their music. Monteverdi, Handel, Mozart, Rossini, Verdi, Debussy, and Poulenc are only a sampling of the names associated with specific vocalists, and Britten is certainly among them. This particular attention to singers’ voices was especially true for Britten’s contemporaries, such as Luciano Berio and John Cage writing for Cathy Berberian and Francis Poulenc writing for Pierre Bernac.

This very same sensitivity to a singer’s abilities also motivated Britten’s writing for Miles’ music. While he had no particular singer chosen for Miles when he

was working on the opera, Britten was already familiar with the challenges and delights of the boy soprano voice. Having grown up as part of England's proud choral tradition, the composer knew well the purity and hauntingly delicate timbre Miles would bring to the score. Indeed, Miles' Latin chanting in "The Lesson" and his hymn with Flora in "The Bells" harken back to the sacred origins of the boy soprano while lacing these ritualistic sonorities with messages both secular and quite probably corrupt.

While Britten's vocal writing was certainly created with the artists' voices in mind, the effect of that music within the context of the Governess' narration points to local questions fueling double directedness within *The Turn of the Screw*. This chapter has presented examples of unique aspects of Britten's score—unconventional tonal juxtapositions, the "Screw" and "Thread" themes' complex network of musical references, and Ghostly performative vocal writing—which, I argue, all point toward Rimmon's concept of double directedness, as part of the opera's commitment to James' ambiguity. Ultimately, these examples support my suggestion that *The Turn of the Screw* should be considered a contribution to the contemporary critical trend toward synthesis surrounding James' novella.

Conclusion

In this study, I set out to explore the complex relationship between Henry James' novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and Benjamin Britten and Myfanwy Piper's opera of the same title (1954). While each piece has its own rich history of analyses, interpretations, and criticism, I sought to understand the dialogue of ambiguity between two versions of the same story. The textual and musical analyses presented in Chapters 2 and 3 suggest that Myfanwy Piper and Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* preserves Henry James' original technique for creating ambiguity. The opera's ability to maintain both realities simultaneously supports my claim that the two artists participated in the contemporary literary movement toward synthesis with their multifaceted contribution.

As a result of its textual and musical additions to James' original novella, Piper and Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* challenges an audience's assumptions of the superficial truths on stage. Their contribution to the operatic repertoire should also be considered a contribution to the critical trend toward synthesis in the 1950s as it implemented James' technique of ambiguity—double directedness—while transforming and expanding upon his original content to suit the operatic stage. By doing so, Britten and Piper provided the means by which future operatic productions might continue the interpretive discussion of James' novella in an unapologetically experimental environment, and grow the story's intertextual network to engage their ever-changing audience.

The Turn of the Screw has numerous paths for further exploration, including, but not limited to those that draw insight from Britten and Piper's personal life, political views, poetic influences, etc. While there is an abundance of scholarship connecting Britten's life with his compositions and dramatic interests, there are far fewer studies that seek to contextualize Britten's musical voice of critical interpretation within the larger literary conversation of those works he uses as textual foundations. Indeed, Britten's literary connection goes beyond the novels on which his opera libretti are based; he composed countless songs that set a range of poetry that spans almost 2500 years of writing.¹⁹⁶ Britten was also connected with the world of literature through personal relationships with contemporary poets, such as W.H. Auden and Edith Sitwell, who in turn influenced his life and work. I therefore conclude with an encouragement for further exploration of Britten's music in relation to the authors, historical contexts, and critical conversations that surround the texts he set.

¹⁹⁶ A recently completed digital map of Britten's song settings of poetry can be found on the Britten-Pears Foundation website as a project called "Visualizing Britten's Poets." The interactive map was the product of Florian Kräutli's PhD research and was edited by Lucy Walker and used in the BPF 2015 exhibition, "Britten's Words," <https://brittenpears.org/explore/benjamin-britten/music/visualising-brittens-poets/#iframemodal>

Appendices

Appendix I: James' *The Turn of the Screw* Synopsis with Changes in the Opera

Chapter #	Chapter Description	Opera Changes
Prologue	An unnamed narrator is a guest at a house party where they are sharing ghost stories. Another guest, Douglas, reads a handwritten account of a woman he used to know, who was employed by a man in London and put in complete charge of his nephew and niece out in the country. He insisted she not bother him about anything, and she accepts.	Omissions: The house party and first frame.
I	The governess' narrative begins here with her journey to Bly. She arrives and meets Mrs. Grose and Flora, the younger of the two children and very beautiful and charming. Flora eagerly shows her around the house and the governess is delighted by the estate. The governess learns that Miles, the older brother, will return from school the next day.	Additions: "The Welcome," which includes Miles with Flora rather than Miles arriving days later.
II	The governess receives a letter from the uncle in London containing another, unopened letter from the school headmaster expelling Miles, with little detail as to why. The governess questions Mrs. Grose about Miles' behavior who says the boy is good and no more wild than any other. She also reveals that the last governess, Miss. Jessel, died.	Omissions: The reveal of Miss Jessel's death comes later in the opera, during "The Window" scene. Additions: "Lavender's Blue."
III	The governess picks up Miles and is convinced the letter from the headmaster was some kind of mistake, as she believes Miles to be, like his sister, the essence of purity and beauty. Some time passes as the governess delights in her pupils. One evening, while walking the grounds at Bly, the governess spots a strange man on the tower.	Omissions: Miles' arrival.
IV	The governess reflects on her encounter with the man on her walk and thinks there are secrets at Bly. Some time passes in which the governess still dismisses Miles' expulsion due to his (and his sister's) excellent behavior. One morning, the governess sees the same man from the tower now looking in through the window and goes out to meet him.	Addition: "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son."
V	Mrs. Grose, having been startled by the governess' frightened expression through the window, asks what happened, and the governess describes her two encounters. When the governess describes the man, Mrs. Grose identifies him as Peter Quint, the old	Addition: Mrs. Grose also explaining Miss Jessel's fate.

	master's valet, who is also dead.	
VI	The governess is suddenly convinced that Quint was looking for Miles through the window. Mrs. Grose explains that Quint had been perhaps too friendly with everyone at Bly when he was alive. The governess decides to be the children's protector, but later that day, a person appears on the other side of the lake while she is playing with Flora.	Additions: "The Lesson" and "Malo," and "Dolly Must Sleep Wherever I Choose."
VII	The governess explains to Mrs. Grose that she believes the children know about the ghosts but don't say anything. After describing the figure at the lake, the governess claims that it was Miss Jessel, and that she was fixed on Flora. The governess' remarks on Jessel's beauty, and Mrs. Grose reveals that Miss Jessel had an affair with Quint.	Omission: The conversation between Mrs. Grose and the Governess is not included at this point in the plot.
VIII	The governess and Mrs. Grose discuss the situation even further, and the governess pushes for Mrs. Grose to believe what she sees and understands of the ghosts' evil. Mrs. Grose reveals that Quint and Miles spent a lot of time with each other, while Flora and Miss Jessel were together. Mrs. Grose still tries to keep the blame off Miles.	Omission: Mrs. Grose shared this information earlier in the opera plot, in "The Window."
IX	Time passes as the governess still seeks to protect the children. She is very affectionate toward them and in return they seem to want to please her greatly as well, but is suspicious that they are putting on an act. One night, the governess comes across Quint on the stairs as her candle is blown out. They stare at each other until Quint retreats.	Omission: Quint sighting on the stairs.
X	When the governess returns, Flora is not in her bed but emerges from behind the drawn curtain. She claims she was looking for the governess. Now that the governess is suspicious, she stays up during the nights and eventually sees Miss Jessel at the foot of the stairs, crying into her hands. When Flora once again sneaks behind the curtain, the governess slips out of the room and finds a window facing the same direction as Flora's, when she sees not Miss Jessel, as she expected, but instead Miles on the grounds looking up at something in another window, neither the governess' nor Flora's.	Omission: All of the action that takes place in Flora's bedroom. Addition: "At Night," and specifically the action that takes place in the Governess' absence.
XI	The next day the governess describes to Mrs. Grose what had happened when she went to retrieve Miles from the grounds. He had said that he wanted the governess to think of him as "bad" and that he had planned the whole thing with Flora. Miles found the	Omission: The Governess' conversation with Mrs. Grose and the detailed conversation between the Governess and Miles.

	<p>ordeal amusing and was pleased that the governess fell for their trick.</p>	<p>Additions: “Colloquy and Soliloquy.”</p>
XII	<p>The governess now explains to Mrs. Grose that she believes the children to be completely engrossed in the ghosts’ affairs and that the ghosts want to somehow “get” the children and permanently corrupt them. When Mrs. Grose suggests that the governess should contact the uncle in London, the governess proudly rejects the idea.</p>	<p>Omission: The Governess’ conversation with Mrs. Grose, Mrs. Grose’s suggestion that she contact the uncle, and the Governess’ threat to abandon her and the children at Bly if Mrs. Grose were to go behind her back and contact him herself</p>
XIII	<p>Time passes as the Governess avoids anything close to the subject of the ghosts. Instead, she is constantly telling them stories of her past to pass the time, and their behavior is as pleasant as ever. However, she senses that the children may be aware of the ghosts while they are all in the same room together. The children ask about the uncle’s absence and the governess has them write letters to him as a purely educational tool.</p>	<p>Omission: The details of these interactions with the children and the vague occasions the Governess describes when the children sense the Ghosts are with them in the same room.</p>
XIV	<p>One morning, they are all walking to church when Miles begins asking about going back to school. He claims he is bored with the people at Bly and wants his “own sort” back at school. The governess attempts to get information from him concerning his expulsion, but he reveals nothing. Instead, he proclaims he will get his uncle’s attention.</p>	<p>Addition: The children’s hymn, “All rivers and seas and lakes.”</p>
XV	<p>The governess is disturbed by her conversation with Miles and, instead of entering the church, returns to the house with the intention of packing her things and leaving Bly. However, when she gets back to her room, Miss Jessel is at her desk. Miss Jessel seems to be aware of the governess’ presence, and the governess screams, “you terrible, miserable woman!” After this, Miss Jessel disappears, and the governess decides to stay.</p>	<p>Additions: Miss Jessel’s lament, “Here my tragedy began...”, the Governess writes a letter to the uncle immediately after she encounters Miss Jessel.</p>
XVI	<p>When the others return from church, they at first behave as though the governess’ absence was not strange. However, the governess finally gets Mrs. Grose to admit that the children had convinced her to be quiet so as to please the governess. The governess tells Mrs. Grose of her “talk” with Miss Jessel, and then says she’ll write to their uncle.</p>	<p>Omission: The interaction between the Governess and Mrs. Grose after she saw Miss Jessel.</p>

XVII	While taking a break from writing the letter, the governess comes across Miles in his room. They begin to talk vaguely about the strange business at Bly, and Miles claims that he wants to go back to school. When the governess tries to question him further, the candle is blown out, and Miles shrieks, but then explains that he blew it out himself.	Addition: Miles singing “Malo” when the Governess first approaches his room; “Quint,” where Peter Quint’s voice is heard beckoning Miles to take the letter from the Governess’ desk. Miles eventually takes the letter.
XVIII	The next day, the governess lets Mrs. Grose know that she has written the letter (which she has not yet sent). Later that day, Miles offers to play the piano for the governess, and as he plays, the governess and Mrs. Grose are not aware of the fact that Flora has left the room. The governess then realizes and asks Miles, who says he doesn’t know. She searches the house but can not find her, and eventually convinces Mrs. Grose to go out searching with her while she leaves Miles in house, as she believes he’s with Quint. Before they leave, the governess sets down the letter to go to the uncle in London.	Omission: The Governess does not search the house, but immediately draws the conclusion that she is down by the lake.
XIX	The governess and Mrs. Grose go to the lake, and when they can not immediately see Flora, the governess assumes she has taken the boat to the other side. When they approach the other side, they find the boat and Flora close by, smiling at them. Flora is very nonchalant and asks where Miles is as well as why they are missing their coats and hats. The governess responds by asking her where Miss Jessel is.	Omission: The acknowledgement and details of the boat’s placement on the lake.
XX	Mrs. Grose has a shocked reaction and Flora stares at the governess with an upset look on her face. Suddenly, the governess sees Miss Jessel across the lake, and tells Mrs. Grose to look, but she can not see what the governess sees, and is instead increasingly confused and concerned. Flora also claims she has never been able to see anything, and she and Mrs. Grose retreat to the house, leaving the governess alone by the lake.	
XXI	The next morning, Mrs. Grose tells the governess that Flora has been saying awful things about her, and the governess is not surprised by the terrible language she has been using. The governess convinces Mrs. Grose to take Flora to her uncle in London, while she stays back with Miles. The governess mentions that the uncle should be on his way since she had sent the letter, but Mrs. Grose reveals that the letter never went, and mention Miles, which brings the governess to immediately	Omissions: Mrs Grose is not as detailed about what exactly Flora says in her sleep, which leads the Governess to believe that what she has said confirms the Ghosts’ existence; the Governess’ request that Flora and Miles not see each other before they leave the next

	conclude that he took it. She also insists that the children not have contact before Flora leaves so that they don't have a chance to exchange information.	morning as, in the opera, Flora and Mrs. Grose leave immediately after Mrs. Grose explains that Flora had nightmares.
XXII	The next day, after Flora and Mrs. Grose had already left, the governess learns that Miles and Flora had breakfast together, against her wishes. She mentally prepares for her conversation with Miles and, after dining together that evening, they are finally left alone.	Omission: The information of the children breakfasting together.
XXIII	The governess suggests that they are not entirely alone, and Miles agrees, acknowledging the "others." They have a conversation about their relationship and the governess tries to get Miles to tell her whatever it is she thinks he is keeping from her. Miles says that he will tell her everything, but not at that moment. Before he plans to leave to room to play, the governess asks him if he took her letter that never left.	
XXIV	Before Miles can answer, Peter Quint appears in the window behind Miles, who is facing the governess. She pulls Miles into her arms and he admits that he did in fact take the letter. The governess is overjoyed at his confession and asks if he stole letters from school. Miles is surprised by this question, and says that he got in trouble for saying things to certain boys at school. Miles asks if "she" is there, and the governess is thrown off by his choice of pronoun. The governess is still holding him so as to not see Quint in the window and is all the while asking Miles to say his name. Finally, Miles screams, "Peter Quint—you devil!" and collapses in her arms. The governess at first is elated by his outburst, but is suddenly aware of Miles' heart, which had stopped beating.	<p>Omission: Miles' question "Is <i>she</i> here?" Which is changed to, "Is he here," in the opera. This small detail relates to the omission of the two children breakfasting together, and the possibility of Flora telling Miles about the Governess naming Miss Jessel at the lake the night before.</p> <p>Addition: The Governess' reprise of "Malo" after she realizes Miles is dead, and specifically her last line, "What have we done between us?"</p>

Appendix II: Piper and Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* Scene-by-Scene Synopsis

Act I, "Prologue"	An character named simply "Prologue" introduces the Governess' handwritten account, explains the conditions of the contract at Bly, and describes the Uncle's inability to take care of the children. The Prologue explains that, after being at first apprehensive due to the strange terms of the job, the Governess finally said that she will do it.
Act I, Scene 1: "The Journey"	While she is traveling to Bly, the governess talks through her anxieties about the new position. She thinks about how strange the uncle's request was and asks, "Why did I come here?"
Act I, Scene 2: "The Welcome"	Mrs. Grose and the Children are seen preparing for the Governess' arrival. The children ask many questions about the Governess, but Mrs. Grose is overwhelmed by their energy and insists that they practice their greetings: Miles' bow and Flora's curtsy. The Governess arrives and meets her pupils as well as Mrs. Grose, and then the children demand to show her the house.
Act I, Scene 3: "The Letter"	Mrs. Grose informs the Governess that she has received a letter, which turns out to be from the school, letting her know that Miles has been dismissed. She is immediately concerned and asks Mrs. Grose if Miles is bad, and Mrs. Grose replies that "a boy is no boy for me that's never wild. But bad, no." The children are seen playing outside and their delightful behavior soothes the Governess and Mrs. Grose back to tranquility. They are convinced that Miles is "an angel."
Act I, Scene 4: "The Tower"	The Governess is wandering the grounds in the evening and taking in the beauty of the estate, when she sees a strange man appear on the tower. She wonders who he could possibly be, but comes up short. He eventually disappears.
Act I, Scene 5: "The Window"	The Children are playing a game together when the Governess calls for them to get ready to go to church. They leave as the Governess arrives, and it is then she sees the same man in the window, looking in to where the children just were. She runs out to meet him but he is going by the time she gets there, and Mrs. Grose sees her in the window and is startled. Mrs. Grose comes out to meet her and the Governess describes her run-ins with this man. Mrs. Grose reveals that it is "Peter Quint," the master's valet who died when he struck his head on the icy road coming home one night. The Governess decides to protect the children.
Act I, Scene 6: "The Lesson"	While Miles rehearses his Latin, Flora tries to participate and gets carried away. The Governess scolds her and then returns to Miles and asks him to remember more of what he has learned. Miles begins to sing a strange song that uses the word "Malo" in different ways. The Governess thinks it is strange and asks if she taught him that, to which Miles replies "No, I found it. I like it. Do you?" The Governess never answers, and Miles keeps singing.
Act I, Scene 7: "The Lake"	Flora and the Governess are at the lake, and while Flora sings her dolly to sleep, the Governess sees Miss Jessel appear on the other side of the

	lake. The Governess notices that Flora seems to intentionally turn away from Miss Jessel's direction. The Governess tells her to go back to the house with Miles, and then proclaims that "it was Miss Jessel!"
Act I, Scene 8: "At Night"	In the evening, Peter Quint calls Miles' name and Miles let's him know that he is listening. Quint equates himself with a list of mythical and wondrous things. Miss Jessel calls to Flora, who answers and listens to Miss Jessel's beckoning her to join her. These interactions go on until the Governess and Mrs. Grose are heard calling for the Children. When they finally come across the Children, Miles says "You see, I am bad!"
Act II, Scene 1: "Colloquy and Soliloquy"	Peter Quint and Miss Jessel discuss their individual plans for the children. Miss Jessel feels betrayed by Quint and wants Flora to join her in despising men. Quint seeks greatness and he wants Miles to be his agile partner. The Ghosts proclaim that "The ceremony of innocence is drowned." After the Ghosts disappear, the Governess appears and says she is lost in her labyrinth, and that innocence has corrupted her.
Act II, Scene 2: "The Bells"	The Children are singing a hymn-like song on the way to church, while the Governess and Mrs. Grose talk about their behavior. The Governess claims that they are saying evil things, and Mrs. Grose reassures her that she will feel better soon. When Mrs. Grose and Flora enter the church, Miles stays back and tells the Governess he wants to go back to school. When he mentions the "others," Miles asks, "Does my uncle think what you think?" He then enters the church. The Governess thinks this is a challenge and retreats back to the house.
Act II, Scene 3: "Miss Jessel"	When the Governess enters her room, Miss Jessel is singing to herself, "here my tragedy began..." and the Governess watches from afar. Finally, the Governess screams, "you terrible, miserable woman!" Miss Jessel then disappears and the Governess writes a letter to the uncle immediately telling him he must come to Bly so she can tell him what has happened.
Act II, Scene 4: "The Bedroom"	The Governess enters Miles' room and he is sitting up on his bed singing his Latin song from earlier. The Governess lets Miles know that she has written to his uncle. They begin to talk about school and the Governess begins to ask questions about his past, when the candle is suddenly blown out, and Miles screams. He then says that he blew the candle out.
Act II, Scene 5: "Quint"	Peter Quint (offstage) is heard obsessing of the information that the Governess told Miles about she wrote in the letter. Eventually, he spurs Miles on to "take it," which Miles eventually does.
Act II, Scene 6: "The Piano"	Miles is playing the piano and entertaining Mrs. Grose and the Governess while Flora plays with her cat's cradle. After Mrs. Grose falls asleep, Flora sneaks out while the Governess is still fixated on Miles' playing. The Governess finally realizes she is gone and wakes up Mrs. Grose to go and find her, and they leave Miles at the piano.
Act II, Scene 7: "Flora"	The Governess and Mrs. Grose come across Flora and the Governess asks where Miss Jessel is. Miss Jessel then appears and calls to Flora

	<p>from across the lake, but Mrs. Grose can not see her and Flora insists she can not either. Flora becomes enraged at the Governess and demands Mrs. Grose to take her away from the Governess. The Governess is left alone to dwell on her failure and how Flora now hates her.</p>
<p>Act II, Scene 8: “Miles”</p>	<p>Mrs. Grose informs the Governess that Flora has been saying awful things in her dreams, and that she must take her to her uncle in London. When the Governess mentions that the letter would have reached him by now anything, Mrs. Grose informs her that the letter never went, and no one would be on their way. Flora and Mrs. Grose leave, and the Governess and Miles are left alone. The Governess begins to question Miles until joined by Quint’s voice, which warns Miles to not reveal too much to her. Eventually, Miles gives in to her questioning and screams “Peter Quint, you devil!” and collapses. Quint and the Governess each respond to his exclamation, Quint in disappointment, the Governess in relief. Quint bids Miles goodbye, and the Governess realizes that Miles is dead in her arms. She sings Miles’ Latin song in agony over him.</p>

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