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Shadows of Shadows

Techniques of Ambiguity in Three Film Adaptations of "The Turn of the Screw": J. Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961), D. Curtis's *The Turn of the Screw* (1974), and A. Aloy's *Presence of Mind* (1999)

by Dennis Tredy

Of all the tales of Henry James, none has been the subject of more adaptations into feature films or teleplays than what the author called his "sinister" little "excursion into chaos", "The Turn of the Screw" (*Literary Criticism II*, 1183-84). In the last half-century there have been nearly a dozen such adaptations in English, not to mention numerous foreign language films, several versions of Benjamin Britten's own operatic adaptation, and scores of theatrical transpositions of the novella. Our focus here will be exclusively on English-speaking adaptations of the text to celluloid and to video tape, an overview which reveals a vast heritage of retellings in which each filmmaker builds both upon James's original tale and on the work of other filmmakers who had hitherto taken on the tale of the governess as the subject of their films. Each has contributed to the collective legacy of interpretations of "The Turn of the Screw", each providing a personal vision of the governess's personal vision, in line with the *mise en abyme* of subjective retellings found both within the narrative structure of the tale itself and during a century-long succession of wide-ranging and often radical readings of the tale on the part of literary critics. Each filmmaker also adds to this heritage a number of key motifs, visual or narrative devices and plot changes that, in many cases, preserve the ambiguity that is the key element of the original tale, while at other times hard-handedly settle the question concerning the governess's sanity and the existence of the ghosts at Bly. Between 1955 and 2001, there were three feature film adaptations and seven teleplay versions of the "The Turn of the Screw" for U.S. and U.K. television viewers, but three of these seem to stand out as landmark works directed respectively by an Englishman, an American and a Spaniard: Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961), Dan Curtis's *The Turn of the Screw* (1974), and Antonio Aloy's *Presence of Mind* (1999).

I. *The Innocents*

In the 1950's, the very first attempts to adapt "The Turn of the Screw" were all intended for the small rather than the 'big screen', for U.S. television viewers saw three successive teleplays produced in the latter half of the decade. In 1955, Gore Vidal wrote a greatly abridged 36-minute adaptation that starred Geraldine Page, was directed by Seymour Robbie and aired on 13 February, 1955. It was followed two years later by the first colour adaptation, a live telecast entitled *The Others*, which aired on 15 February, 1957 and starred Sarah Churchill. Perhaps the most memorable of these early attempts to bring James's "most sinister romance" (*Literary Criticism II*, 1183) to the screen was James Costigan's 70-minute adaptation, which was one of the very first directing attempts by the now renowned filmmaker John Frankenheimer, and which starred none other than Ingrid Bergman as Emmy, the well-meaning but ill-experienced governess. Unfortunately, the general public has no access to these first adaptations of "The Turn of the Screw", for they were produced long before the advent of videotape and only kinescope copies remain in the archives. There are rumours, however, that Frankenheimer's 1959 teleplay may be included as one of the bonus features on the upcoming DVD release of *The Innocents*.

It is indeed Jack Clayton's 1961 *The Innocents*, the first feature film to attempt to tell the enigmatic tale of the governess at Bly, that was the true cornerstone of a series of film adaptations of "The Turn of the Screw", a series that has gone on for over forty years now and will undoubtedly continue. This 99-minute feature is indeed a universally acclaimed masterpiece for many reasons and includes incomparable performances by Deborah Kerr as the governess and Megs Jenkins as Mrs. Grose, as well as Pamela Franklin and Martin Stephens as young Flora and Miles. However, just as important to the success of the film as the performance of the actors and the cinematography of Jack Clayton and his director of photography, Freddie Francis, are the modifications made to the story in its transition from paper to celluloid.

When Jack Clayton decided to take on the project, his main source material was not the short story itself but the dialogues of the 1950's Broadway play, *The Innocents*, written by William Archibald. For his own adaptation of the stage-play to film, Clayton called on Truman Capote, who agreed to put aside his work on *In Cold Blood* for a few months in order to write the new screenplay. His main priority was to preserve and even to enhance the inherent ambiguity of the original short story, to find creative motifs and additional themes to stitch into the fabric of the governess's "pensive embroidery", and what he and Clayton came up with is nothing short of ingenious.

On the whole, the dialogues and the basic three-act movement of the plot are preserved, but there were a few key changes made to the story. For example, the governess, mysteriously unnamed in the original work, is given the name "Miss Giddens", which reminds us of her constant "misgivings" as well as her often "giddy" or dizzy state of mind. Also, in the play and the film, the children are given much more of a voice than in the original work. For example, in the novella, Flora is not given any dialogue until Chapter 10, whereas in *The Innocents*, she is given a great deal of dialogue from her very first appearance, thus allowing the spectator to witness the children cleverly wrap the governess around their little fingers. There are other changes as well. In the film, Flora somehow "knows" that Miles will be coming home earlier than expected, whereas in the short story, Miles is simply coming home for the summer holidays. Most of the changes concerning the children seem to contribute to making them more ostensibly evil, and this could have tainted the work's ambiguity and tipped the scales in favour of the governess, showing the children to be indeed corrupt and evil, had they not been counterbalanced by other changes. The most important of these would have to be the fact that the film more definitely pits Mrs. Grose against the governess during the last few scenes, thus strongly reinforcing the notion that the governess is mad, whereas in the original tale, the governess seems to win over the housekeeper "to her side" just before her final confrontation with Miles. These changes may seem slight at first view, but they show that Capote was trying to 'up the ante' on both sides of the question of whether the children were evil or the governess mad, or, in other words, whether the ghosts she saw were 'real' or simply imagined. Truman Capote felt that preserving this ambiguity, which he referred to as James's "elusive and indirect style," was his main goal in writing the screenplay, and after the film was released he felt that the balance had not been perfect, admitting that having the governess find Jessel's fresh tears on her desk in the schoolroom, just after their mysterious encounter may have "ruined everything" by showing the ghosts to be truly present at Bly (Clarke, 350).

Capote indeed hoped to respect James's interdiction of 'going behind' the events and dialogues to tell what was really happening, as James felt that the key to a good ghost story, as with a "well-made play", was "the imposed absence of going behind" (*Literary Criticism II*, 1131). In the original tale, James put together an airtight narrative structure designed to preserve this ambiguity. The governess was the sole narrator of the main manuscript, and her tale was "imperfectly told", full of errors and especially gaps, signs of faltered memory and difficulty to put her experience into words. To further distance the reader from the 'true' events at Bly, James devised an infamous *mise en abyme* of narrative levels, a succession of retellings of the same imperfect tale with long intervals between each implied narrative. Twenty years after her hair-raising experience, the governess wrote the manuscript and then kept it in a locked drawer. Twenty years later, Douglas re-reads the manuscript in front of guests gathered for a Christmas party, and one of his listeners, years later, re-writes the entire tale for the reader. In the film version, however, these narrative levels are absent and there is no narrator. Capote did however try to make up for this lack and create a similar effect. One rather simple technique was insuring that the governess was present in each and every scene of the film, never showing the spectator what the children, or the ghosts for that matter, were up to or what was 'really' happening. Her omnipresence in the film thus creates an *implied* focalization, despite the more objective third-person camera angle. A second technique was the use of an "echoing effect" to replace the succession of narrative levels and to immediately put forth the notion that we might be delving into the mind of the governess. In the opening credit sequence, we hear the governess utter three key

lines concerning her desire to, respectively, “save,” “love,” and “possess” the children, lines which will be echoed in various scenes later in the film:

All I want to do is save the children, not destroy them.
More than anything I love the children. More than anything.
They need affection, love, someone who will belong to them, and whom they will belong to.

However, one of the most surprising modifications Capote seems to have made to the original tale is his use of a fifteenth-century picture book, the *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili*, as a conscious subtext, for there are a striking number of similarities between Francesco Colonna's 1499 work of Renaissance iconography and Clayton's 1961 film.¹ The *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili*, which roughly translates as “The Strife of Love in the Dream of Polyphilo” (*hypnos* = sleep, *eros* = love, *machia* = strife), is a tale that relies very heavily on a marked ambiguity between reality and dream state and is the story of Polyphilo (“lover of many things”) and his mysterious odyssey as he searches for his true love, Polia (“many things”). Capote clearly saw a parallel between the governess's misadventures and frustrations and those of young Polyphilo.

One key parallel can be found in the way each of the tales opens. One of the very first woodcuts of Colonna's work shows Polyphilo lying beneath tree, pining away for his lost love Polia and falling asleep, thus sparking the ambiguity between reality and dream state that pervades the entire work, as leaving on his quest is described as entering a dream, or more precisely, “a dream within a dream”. There is of course a parallel to make with the ambiguity of the governess's tale and the unanswered question as to her possibly suffering from hallucinations. For the film version, Capote and Clayton decide to open the film with a song sung by Flora (Pamela Franklin), the song that is played by the music box the late Miss Jessel gave to Flora and that Flora sings or hums before or during the manifestations of the ghost of her dead governess. The macabre lullaby speaks of someone lying down under a weeping willow tree and pining away for his lost love, imagining they are together although the speaker is alone. The girl's song, written by Paul Dehn, goes on to draw a parallel between sleep and death:

We wait, my love and I,
Beneath the weeping willow,
But now alone I lie,
And weep beside the tree,
Singing, “Awaiting, awaiting,”
By the tree that weeps with me,
Singing, “Awaiting, awaiting,
Till my lover returns to me.”
We wait, my love and I,
Beneath a weeping willow,
But now alone I lie.
A willow I die.
A willow I die.

There are other parallels to be drawn as well. For instance, Polyphilo enters an unknown world and is struck by the immensity of the landscape and the architecture, much like the governess on her arrival at Bly. Polyphilo also gets lost in a maze of corridors, which happens repeatedly to the governess, providing in both cases a setting clearly symbolic of the labyrinths of the troubled mind. Much like the governess, Polyphilo associates his arrival in his new surroundings with being lost in a fairy kingdom and enchanted garden, which is an analogy the governess herself uses in her manuscript. However, the most striking motif that Capote borrowed from

¹. Note that the *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili* has been attributed, until very recently, to Francesco Colonna. However, Liane Lefavre, in her thesis and recent studies, makes a strong argument pointing to Leon Battista Alberti as the actual author. The mystery surrounding the book's authorship of course adds to the overriding ambiguity and enigmatic nature of the work itself.

Polyphilo's tale is related to one of the figures the young man encounters during his quest. In woodcut 133 we see the representation of a woman holding a turtle in one hand and a bird or a pair of flapping wings in the other, thus representing the opposition between the forces of heaven and earth, between the elevation of the human soul and basest animal instincts. Anyone who has seen *The Innocents* has surely been struck by the omnipresence of turtles and doves or pigeons in the work. Flora is constantly playing with her pet turtle Rupert, both at the lake and around the house. During the governess's nightmare, Flora can be seen decorating Rupert with a string of flowers, and in the final confrontation between the governess and Miles the young boy plays with the turtle while the governess interrogates him and finally throws the animal through the window, shattering it. As for the birds, Miles is often shown tending to them as there is an aviary at Bly. When the governess thinks she sees Quint on the tower and investigates, she finds instead Miles playing with half a dozen birds. In perhaps one of the most memorable scenes of the film, the governess discovers a dead bird under Miles's pillow and, with an evil stare, Miles caresses the poor animal whose neck he has broken.

There are additional parallels between Colonna's work and Capote and Clayton's screenplay. The picture book often plays on the ambiguity not only between landscape and dreamscape or between heaven and earth, but also between model and copy. There are an innumerable number of statues that Polyphilo comes across during his journey, but they are never referred to as statues *per se*, but more often than not as "representations", as the hero is unsure whether they are sculptures or living figures. In the 1961 film, similar games are played, as helmeted statues are placed strategically outside windows and in the garden so as to give the impression that someone may be standing there. One should note that when Quint first appears at the drawing room window, his face seems to appear from within a statue located outside, that the same statue casts an eerie silhouette at the drawing room window as the governess finally begins to write to the Master, and that in the final confrontation with Miles, the spectator sees Quint standing on the pedestal of one of the garden statues, hailing Miles, and then an instant later Quint is gone and a statue stands in his place. In Polyphilo's tale there are many 'representations' of Cupid or cherubs that the young man comes across (see Folio 85, 193 and 401, for example), and Polia tells of watching in horror as Cupid mutilated and dismembered young maidens for being too promiscuous. In Clayton's film, just seconds before the governess first sees Quint on the tower and while she is herself entertaining promiscuous thoughts about being with the Master, she is startled when she comes across a statue hidden in the bushes, a statue of an eerie cherub holding two dismembered hands.

Finally, one of the most striking parallels is made evident in the final scene of the film. Near the end of Polyphilo's tale, he finally kisses Polia and she mysteriously disappears, the kiss taking place in the centre of the Garden of Venus, surrounded by figures carved from the shrubbery. In the final scene of the film, the governess confronts Miles in a similar circular garden ringed with statues, at the centre of which stands the figure of a man and woman kissing, clearly Polyphilo and Polia. The confrontation between governess and charge of course also ends with a kiss and the disappearance of Miles, whose "dispossessed" heart, we are told, has stopped.

More evidence to support the connection we have made can be found in Truman Capote's first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948). The image of Miles holding and caressing the dead dove in bed clearly reminds us of a similar scene in Capote's novel, in which young Joel finds Randolph sitting in bed naked with one of the blue jays his sister Amy has caught for him. He has killed it and is pasting the bird's feathers onto a sheet of cardboard so as to create a representation of the "living bird transfixed" (169). Also, in the film, we have Flora decorating her turtle with a string of white flowers, and in Capote's novel Idabel and Joel put a string of white flowers around the dog's collar.

This brings us to the last two motifs that Capote brought to *The Innocents*, recurring images that can be found in his previous works, particularly in *Other Voices Other Rooms*, but not in Colonna's picture book. The two last images worth mentioning are those of the white rose and

of the mirror image.² Indeed, as if to counterbalance the recurring images of animals discussed above, the flora at Bly is given as much attention as the fauna, and the flower of choice is decidedly the white rose. White roses can be seen everywhere, both in the garden and in the house, often on a table separating the governess and Mrs. Grose as the former interrogates the latter, and even in front of a dressing mirror, separating the governess from her own image. In addition, we are often shown these flowers losing their petals, such as when we have a close-up of a single white rose petal falling on a Bible, just before the governess hears strange sounds one evening and gets up to investigate. There are two possible explanations for Capote's clear predilection for this motif. Firstly, the white rose is a symbol of purity and of the Virgin Mary, thus stressing both the religious side of the governess's mission and the inadvertent harm she may be bringing to the children's purity. Secondly, the white rose is traditionally a symbol of silence and secrecy, and turning Bly into a white rosary is a way of foregrounding the dark secrets at Bly, the evil acts that are henceforth *sub rosa*³ and kept from the inquiring governess.

The last motif that Capote and Clayton clearly brought to the fore in the 1961 film is that of the reflection or mirror image. In the original story, the poor governess, on her arrival at the wealthy estate, is struck by her own reflection, for in the "long glasses" at Bly she can see herself whole for the first time. In the film, when she first arrives, she stares at her own image over a bouquet of white roses. Throughout the film, there are innumerable examples of Clayton's *mise-en-scène* that focus on the protagonists' reflection. For example, when we are first shown Flora, the shot shows her inverted reflection in the lake and then the camera pans up to film her greeting her new governess, just as when Flora, near the end of the film, escapes and the governess goes to the lake to seek her out; we are shown only the inverted reflection of the governess as she notices that the row-boat is no longer there. Similarly, there is the remarkable scene in which the governess frantically roams the hallways at Bly in search of 'things that go bump in the night'. She discovers that the source of the sounds is, apparently, just the tassel of a window shade bumping against the pane, but by staring at the pane the governess is in fact staring at her own reflection in the glass, an indication to the spectator that she may herself be the true source of the strange occurrences at Bly. The recurring use of the mirror image clearly has the same use as in James's short story—to stress both the fact that her hunt for the ghosts at Bly is in fact a voyage of self-discovery and the possibility that everything is but a product of her own psyche.

It is in many ways thanks to the clever motifs and themes added by Truman Capote that *The Innocents* is a universally acclaimed masterpiece. Many of these key themes—such as that of an increased use of animals and flowers, of troubling mirror images, of statues that may be more than simple 'representations', and so on—will be reconstructed or built upon in future film versions of "The Turn of the Screw", for Clayton's 1961 film is above all a true model of film adaptation to which future screenwriters and directors who choose to retell James's sinister little tale will aspire.

II. Dan Curtis's *The Turn of the Screw*

For a decade *The Innocents* would stand as the only feature-length film adaptation of James's tale, but in the early 1970s, two filmmakers would try their hand at giving another turn to James's story, only one of which is indeed relevant to our discussion of techniques of ambiguity. The first was of course Michael Winner's controversial *Nightcomers* in 1972, starring Marlon Brando as Peter Quint and Stephanie Beacham as Miss Margaret Jessel. The film was a bold, somewhat misguided, attempt to provide a "prequel" to "The Turn of the Screw" by concentrating on Quint

². For an more in-depth study of how these motifs were used in both Capote's novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and the film *The Innocents*, please consult my article entitled "Strife in the Dream of the Governess", published in *Fenêtres sur l'obscur: Littérature et cinéma du domaine anglo-saxon*, ed. Max Duperray (Aix-en-Provence, Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2001, 187-220).

³. The Latin expression *sub rosa* ("under the rose") referred to keeping sins a secret. The symbol comes from one of the tales of Cupid, who gave Harpocrates, the god of silence, a white rose to bribe him into not repeating what he had seen transpire between Venus and her lovers. For centuries the rose was sculpted into ceilings of banquet halls to remind guests not to repeat what they had seen take place *sub rosa*.

and Jessel's lascivious relationship and on the former's corruption of the children, the story beginning with the death of Arthur and Helen Tyrell on January 5, 1901, and ending a year or so later when the Master hires a "new governess" to replace the late Miss Jessel. The concept was a bold one, but when one thinks of the lurid, sadomasochistic sex scenes between Brando and Beacham or the gruesome murder scenes, "ambiguity" is certainly not the word that comes to mind. The spectator has more the impression of watching the method actor warm up for his performance in *The Last Tango in Paris* than of witnessing an adaptation in the spirit of James's original tale. One must remember that in this prequel there is no question of ghosts whatsoever, for it is more a tale of how Quint and Jessel's corruption of the children backfires when Miles shoots Quint dead with an arrow and Flora successfully orchestrates the drowning of her governess, their intention being to insure that these two beloved adults would stay at Bly with them forever. There are perhaps only two aspects of the work relevant to our discussion of techniques of ambiguity and of the manner in which each adaptation seems in some way to feed off of previous ones. Firstly, Michael Winner and his screenwriter Michael Hastings clearly picked up the animal motif from *The Innocents* that we discussed above and tried to take it a step further, for the film is chock full of disturbing images of animals and animal torture. In one of the opening scenes, we witness Quint teach his young wards to torture and kill a bullfrog with a cigar, and several times we are shown Miles wilfully torturing Flora's pet turtle. Secondly, we should not be surprised that Winner also took great 'liberties' in regards to Miles and Flora's relationship, having them re-enact Quint and Jessel's sadomasochistic bedroom games and thus casting the shadow of a budding incestuous relationship between the two siblings, a theme that future filmmakers would occasionally re-iterate.

Jamesian purists will certainly find more to say about Dan Curtis's adaptation, which aired on U.S. television in 1974 as a two-part segment of ABC's "Worldwide Mysteries" series. In fact, just as *The Innocents* remains the 'definitive' feature film adapted from James's story, Curtis's "The Turn of the Screw" would have to be considered a landmark teleplay adaptation. Dan Curtis had long been intrigued by James's short story, Archibald's stage play and especially Clayton's film, to such a point that he admits that "The Turn of the Screw" had a major influence on many episodes of his famous suspense series *Dark Shadows*. Thus it should not be surprising that when he was given a chance to retell the tale, he tried to build upon many themes and motifs that had caught his attention in the Clayton film. This is evident from the minute one notices his choice of actresses for the main roles, for he asked Megs Jenkins to don the apron of Mrs. Grose for a second time, playing the same role she had had in the 1961 film, and he cast Lynn Redgrave as the governess. It was in fact Lynn's father, Michael Redgrave, who had played the role of the absent Master of Bly and the governess's love interest in the Clayton film, so one can imagine how 'layered' her performance must have been. Although Curtis hoped to create a teleplay worthy of its highly acclaimed predecessor, he was also aware that he could never hope to match the 1961's film's complexity due to the inherent limitations of the medium within which he was working, limitations both in terms of time and funding. The actors would have only two or three weeks to rehearse and to learn their marks and cues before the shooting began, and the chosen format for filming was non-stop 'multiple camera' format similar to that used on daytime soap operas. This format left the director's hands tied in terms of possible special lighting or editing effects, allowing only camera lens effects such as diffusion filters or extreme close-ups, a technique that is admittedly over-used in Curtis's film to show the shocked look on the governess's face or the frightening presence of one of the ghosts. However, despite the limitations, Curtis hoped to do justice to the original tale, understanding that he was joining the ranks of what was certain to be a long line of filmmakers adapting James to the screen.

There were indeed many small changes that Curtis brought to his telling of the tale. For example, there would be no funding to recreate Bly on a sound stage as spectacularly as it had been done in Clayton's film, so he decided to film on location one of the oldest country houses in England, in a small town called Hennick an hour or so out of London. This choice would bring its own difficulties, for the age-old structure was not designed to hold three TV studio cameras, and thus Curtis's choice of shots and settings was also greatly limited.

There were also changes Curtis brought to the story itself, one of the most important of which was linked to the casting of Miles. In an attempt to be as true to the original tale as possible, Curtis had originally cast an eleven-year-old named Mark Lester in the role of the young master of the house. However, when it was apparent the street-smart youngster could never play the comparatively aristocratic Miles, Curtis cast fourteen-year-old Jasper Jacobs. Curtis agreed to the change hoping that this would help him amplify the impression given of Miles's corruption, for the new Miles was old enough to know better, old enough to outwit and outtalk his governess, and old enough to create more believable sexual tension between the governess and her charge, a theme that Curtis chose to bring to the forefront far more than any other previous filmmaker. In fact, Curtis would give this implied attraction such attention that he will completely forego the attraction that existed, or that the governess believed existed, between herself and the absent Master, one of James's key devices to point out the governess's personal desires and obsessions. In Curtis's film, there is no affection even remotely alluded to between the Master and the young woman during her interview, the Master treating the governess rudely, even going out of his way to make her scorn him, and finally declaring that he does not require "the affection of his employees, only their talent."

In addition, to further emphasise Miles's corruption, Curtis added an entire new subplot to the story—that of Luke the stable hand and his son Timothy. The child is but a few years younger than Miles but is forbidden by his father to play with the young master of the house. Father and son finally flee the house for good when Miles does or says something 'dreadful' to the boy in the barn. We are never told exactly what Miles does to Timothy that would drive an entire family away from their home and their father's livelihood, but this is but one example of ways in which Curtis tried to allow ambiguity to have its role despite the far more straightforward and stage-like filming technique. Curtis came up with a few other tricks to keep the spectator guessing as well. For instance, when the Mrs. Grose finally gives in and tells the governess all the details concerning the despicable and vile activities of Quint and Jessel, the reader hears absolutely none of the conversation. Curtis positions his camera just outside the window during the disclosure, so that the spectator can see only the back of Mrs. Grose's head and the governess's appalled face as she learns the truth. Similarly, and in the spirit of the theme of "the letter that won't tell" that is so predominant in the original tale, it is not only the contents of the letter from Miles's school that provides the spectator with no answers. Miss Cubberly, as the governess is called, also finds and reads a stack of Miss Jessel's "degrading" and lustful letters to Quint, but again the exact contents are never shared with the reader. Later in the film Miles hands in an essay to Miss Cubberly in the schoolroom that is apparently, "disgusting" and "vile", although the essay is crumpled up and thrown into the fire, just like the letters, without disclosing any of its contents.

However, when one watches the teleplay, one cannot help noticing the numerous themes that Curtis had borrowed directly from Capote and Clayton. For instance, one of the most disturbing scenes in Clayton's film is the one in which Miles and Flora put on a show for Mrs. Grose and Miss Giddens in the drawing room one rainy night, a recital during which Miles recites a chilling poem:

What shall I sing to my lord from my window?
What shall I sing, for my lord will not stay?
What shall I say, for my lord will not listen?
Where shall I go when my lord is away?
Whom shall I love when the moon is arisen?
Gone is my lord and the grave is his prison.
What shall I say when my lord comes a-calling?
What shall I say when he knocks at my door?
What shall I say when he speaks, "Enter," softly?
Leaving the marks of the grave on my floor.
Enter my lord. Come from your prison.
Come from your grave, for the moon is arisen.
Welcome, my lord.

The addition of the poem was a very clever device added to the 1961 film, and it worked in conjunction with the previously mentioned song sung by Flora to foreground the hold the dead servants still seem to have on the children. In the poem above, Miles chants his series of chilling questions that the governess indeed would like answers to, implies that he worships a lord who is trapped in his grave and whom he invites to come to him. In Curtis's film, we have a very similar device. Flora is not given an eerie poem to sing, but, in a rather cliché style, the little girl sits at the piano for the children's late night recital and plays Chopin's "Funeral March". When she finishes and it is Miles's turn to perform, he too recites a poem of his own conception, a poem that has both the same theme and the same intended effect as the one recited in the 1961 film. Entitled "The Darkness", it deals with children who are drawn to the darkness and shadows, indeed "enthroned" in darkness, and with the ability of those who love the darkness, once dead and buried, to rise from the grave.

Darkness is a shroud to cover,
 Darkness is a cloak we wear.
 We do not fear the vast of blackness.
 We wear shadows in our hair.
 Darkness calls us to a reckoning,
 Calls us to its close embrace.
 We shall soon be there to meet it,
 Though we cannot see its face.
 In the dark, the raid of the ghost,
 And the coffin cannot hold
 Those of us who love the darkness.
 Darkness is our final throne.

Also taking the cue from the Clayton film, Curtis decides to include several other games and amusements that seem to point to the children being less innocent than they appear. In addition to the games of hide-and-seek and 'dress-up' that appear in nearly every film adaptation of James's story, Curtis adds quite an unusual card game that Flora and Miles invite the governess to play. It is called "Master and Slave" and involves each player drawing a tarot card from the deck, the player drawing a "slave" card being forced to do whatever the game master, in this case Miles, asks him to do. The governess of course draws the slave card and Miles and Flora send her up to the bell tower, where they have already prepared a prank to scare her. The name of the card game itself is of course a reminder of the power plays and the fight for possession of the children that are being waged at Bly. Another game they play is simply called "Pretend", but it involves the children sneaking out of their beds in the middle of the night, hiding in an abandoned room in the west wing of the house, and, apparently, sitting on the bed and making sounds of ecstasy and love-making until the governess finds them. The latter of course is persuaded that the sounds she heard were those of Jessel and Quint, possibly reiterating one of their lurid spectacles in front of the children, but it is also a subtle but definite allusion to possible incestuous feelings between the two children. Both explanations, however, clearly point to devices taken directly not from *The Innocents* but from *The Nightcomers*. Finally, even the children's two favourite individual pastimes, piano playing for Miles and needlepoint for Flora, are given a mysterious connotation, for when the governess is out of the room she hears Miles playing Bach with the talent of a concert pianist, which, incoherently enough, Quint was said to be in this adaptation. On Flora's side the little girl produces embroideries far beyond her years, as good as those Jessel once made. This simple device, used for the first time in this adaptation to point to the children being "possessed" by their dead servants, will also be picked up by future filmmakers retelling James's tale.

In addition to these devices, Curtis also borrowed the theme of animal torture on the part of the children, which, as we have seen, was first used in *The Innocents* and was then taken to extremes in *The Nightcomers*. For example, on Miles's first night home, the governess finds him alone on a bench in the garden, apparently talking to someone. The boy hesitantly explains that he was in fact just talking to the trees of Bly, for he was so happy to be back home. When they go back into the house, however, the camera slowly zooms in on a dead sparrow that Miles was hiding from the governess while they conversed. Later, in the schoolroom, the governess catches

Miles playing with a shoebox in which he keeps a frog he has been torturing for his own amusement and whose eyes have been gouged out. Still later, while the children and their governess have a picnic on the lawn, Miles takes great pleasure in squashing ants and in explaining how he likes to torture them by drowning them and then leaving them under the hot sun until they slowly and painfully seem to come back to life. Flora, on her side, enjoys planting flowers in the garden with her new governess, but with a sinister smile admits to hoping that the rain will kill them.

There are in fact very few motifs or devices that are not somehow adaptations of those used in one of the two earlier films. There is perhaps the rather blatant attempt to create an effect of *mise en abyme* through the fairy tale the governess reads to the children during the aforementioned picnic. It is the children's favourite: the tale of "a boy and a girl lost in a magic forest," and of "an evil witch" who comes to the edge of the lake to try to capture the little children. Many spectators will surely be disappointed that Curtis did not do more with this device or at least try to make the connection less obvious, and they will be even more disappointed when Miles later discusses a "fascinating book" he is reading, which turns out to be about a fifteenth-century prince who punished those he did not like by inviting them to dinner and impaling them on stakes while he feasted before their dead bodies. Again, those who had hoped for something subtle would be disappointed, the reference to the legend of Vlad the Impaler, and by extension *Dracula*, being interesting only inasmuch as it was in fact Bram Stoker's work that Curtis had adapted to the small screen only two weeks before taking on "The Turn of the Screw" project, in the same format and for the same television series.

As the last examples have clearly shown, Curtis often and unfortunately went in for devices and motifs that were far less subtle and less ambiguous than those used in the original tale or in Clayton's film. More importantly, and most unfortunately, Curtis shatters that precious ambiguity that concerns the veracity of the ghosts' existence and the extent of the corruption of the children. He effectively "ruins everything" (to reiterate the phrase used by Capote) by "going behind" the events at Bly (to quote the phrase from James). For example, we mentioned earlier that the governess was present in every scene in Clayton's film, thus never showing what the ghosts or the children were actually up to. Curtis breaks James's golden rule and "goes behind" what the governess witnesses several times, most often by keeping the camera on Miles or Flora long after the governess has left the room, showing their sinister and telltale grin. Worse still, we witness Flora alone in her room talking to Miss Jessel, telling her she will come to see her at the lake, and we also see Miles lock the governess in the bell tower when she finds herself face to face with Jessel. Perhaps the most damning sequence concerns less the children than the ghosts. While the governess and Mrs. Grose watch the children's recital, the camera is suddenly placed outside the house, providing the point of view of one of the ghosts as it exists the clock tower (we see the door open on its own) and approaches the drawing room window in the rain. The subjective camera work here confirms the existence of the ghosts, shifting the point of view briefly but irreparably to Jessel or Quint, and destroying that key element of ambiguity that was at the very heart of the original tale. Curtis clearly chose to conclude that the ghosts were real and that the governess was not mad, and he drives the point home in the final scenes by making a key modification in terms of the role of Mrs. Grose. It may be the same actress, but the housekeeper in this version of the tale believes the governess and backs her in her decision to take on the ghosts at all costs, declaring that she must take Flora to London to get the child away from "them", that is, the ghosts.

In Dan Curtis's version of the tale, there is one last theme that is used repeatedly and which can be construed as an original take on the events at Bly. Curtis plays heavily on the notion that Miles has in fact become the embodiment of Peter Quint and the governess herself the embodiment of Miss Jessel, and three key devices are used to put this forth, all of which are in fact variations of devices first developed in Clayton's film.

In *The Innocents*, the use of a dream sequence to show the governess's troubled thoughts was first used and provided a model that nearly every filmmaker adapting the tale would try to emulate. The original dream sequence truly stands out in the film, and one of the main reasons it

does so is that it allowed Clayton to go beyond the comparatively straightforward camera work required for the dialogue scenes, thus permitting him to use both superimposition and repeated dissolve techniques to provide a very dense and enigmatic presentation of the main motifs of the film, such as the birds, the white roses, or the mirror image. It also allows us to see first hand just what type of corruption the governess believes may have gone on at Bly. Dan Curtis also chose to provide a dream sequence, but one of a quite different order. The live taping format did not permit Curtis to do such sophisticated editing, and he instead chose to use a standard diffusion filter, such as that which is often used to represent dreams or flashbacks, as the governess imagines herself going to Quint, giving herself to him and being ravished by him, clearly casting herself in the role of Miss Jessel. When the governess awakes with a lustful grin on her face, she finds Miles leaning over her bed on the verge of kissing her, thus casting Miles in the role Quint played in her dream.

As we have mentioned above, playing with the mirror image of the governess was an effective and recurring device used in *The Innocents*. In Curtis's teleplay, one of his most memorable scenes involves a similar game with mirrors that again suggests that the governess may in some way be the embodiment of Miss Jessel. As the visibly shaken governess forces herself to applaud the disturbing performance of the children at their recital, she glances back towards the large mirror and sees Miss Jessel applauding on the sofa in her place. When she bolts to the mirror to investigate, Jessel has disappeared and she stares only at her own image.

Finally, Curtis put a lot of effort into trying to come up with original staging for the final confrontation between the governess and Miles. From the very beginning of the film, the main staircase is used repeatedly as the part of the house in which the governess confronts the evil at Bly, just as staircases were indeed used for two ghostly visits in the original tale. In Curtis's film, at one point the governess discovers the children on the stairs pretending, she believes, to be Jessel and Quint, and one night when investigating a strange sound, she finds herself face to face with Quint on the main staircase and lunges at him in attempt to show her defiance. Curtis also decides to stage his most unusual ending on that same staircase. Considering the equipment Curtis had to work with, the staging of the scene is rather complex. As the governess presses the child to confess, she follows Miles up the stairs. At the top she catches him, but he breaks free when they both see Quint appear at the bottom of the staircase. Miles runs away from the governess and towards Quint but stops on the landing a few moments and, tormented, tries to decide to whom to go. He finally chooses to reject Quint and goes to the governess, but while she embraces the boy, she is shocked to see, at the bottom of the stairs, Miles dressed in Quint's clothes. The governess lifts the head she is embracing to find the viscous visage of Quint, whom she instinctively pushes over the banister. Of course, when she then looks over the banister, she sees not Quint but Miles's broken body below. She goes to him, holds him and the teleplay ends. This clever but overdone staging of the final scene clearly aims to stress that Miles cannot be saved because Quint had taken full possession of the boy, and thus the governess could not excise Quint without killing Miles. As bizarre and perhaps clever as the ending is, it is not really enigmatic, which was of course what James had intended.

III. "The Turn of the Screw" in the 1990's

For the remainder of the 1970's and throughout the 1980's, Clayton's film and Curtis's teleplay would remain the definitive adaptations of the short story, and no filmmakers would attempt to retell the tale cinematically, with the exception of new adaptations of Britten's opera, which we have not included in our discussion. However, throughout the 1990's, as the 100th anniversary of James's tale approached, there was a sudden frenzy among filmmakers to honour the event with a clever retelling. Between 1989 and 1995, three adaptations were produced that, although 'minor' works in the "The Turn of the Screw" legacy, should be briefly discussed as they did contribute heavily to the evolution of the devices and motifs we have been outlining. They also show how the notion of 'ambiguity' often suffers when faced with the greater acceptance of lurid sexual scenes or references that characterizes more recent audiences.

A. 1989-1995 : The Revival of the Tale of the Governess

The first of this series was a U.S. teleplay which was written and directed by Graeme Clifford and which aired in 1989 as part of a program called *Nightmare Classics Series*. The film starred Amy Irving as the governess, Nicole Mercurio as Mrs. Grose and David Hemmings as the Master, here renamed 'Mr. Harley', a play on the address of the offices of the originally unnamed Master, on "Harley Street, London". One should also note that the choice of Hemmings surely went beyond his popularity as an actor in England, for when he was a young boy, he was one of the first child sopranos to play the role of Miles in Britten's opera production. His performance was thus surely as layered as Lynn Redgrave's had been fifteen years earlier.

Clifford's main influence was clearly Clayton's film, for a few of his motifs come directly from the 1961 work. For instance, Clifford chooses to play up the 'statue' theme quite heavily. The governess is quite shocked at the statues the Master has decorated Bly with, most of which are nudes and all of which greatly offend the governess's sensibility and strict upbringing, to such a point that she has them removed and locked away. The influence of Clayton's film is most obvious during the scene in which the governess first sees Quint on the tower, for here she is also frightened by a statue of a cherub, just as there is also a close-up of a white rose petal falling on her desk later in the film.

Clifford did, however, bring in several new devices in his adaptation. For example, he chose a new subtext for the teleplay, providing an epigraph in the pre-credit sequence, a quote from Edgar Allan Poe's 1848 poem, "A Dream within a Dream": "All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream." However, despite the promise of the epigraph, the *mise en abyme* device so important to the tale is totally neglected, and the choice seems little more than an attempt to suggest the possibility that the governess is dreaming, whereas the film tends to lean more definitely towards the notion that the ghosts are real. Other changes seem to be linked to a 'sign of the times' and the desire to include more explicit sex scenes, even in a teleplay. For example, in this adaptation, when the governess returns from church to pack, the sight that convinces her to stay and fight for the children is not the traditional schoolroom scene in which she finds Jessel crying at her desk. Instead, she discovers Quint and Jessel having sex in her bed, witnessing one of their torrid encounters of the past.

Clifford's main concern seemed to be drastically changing the roles of the Master and even of Miles. Here, during the initial interview with the Master, Mr. Harley makes no mention of any interdiction. He does not forbid the governess to contact him; on the contrary, he actually comes to visit Bly. When he does come to Bly, the governess tells him about the ghosts she believes she has seen (thus cutting out the entire theme of the letter that was not sent or "won't tell"), after which he mocks both her faith and her prudery and dismisses her of her duties on the spot. The Master's disapproval of her actions, which in other works remains but a fear she represses, is here presented as unambiguously as one could imagine.

Miles, too, has changed. Here he is often seen drinking alcohol at age fourteen, and smells of liquor once or twice when the governess tucks him in. It is presented as one of the vices Quint taught him, and a rather cheap horror device is used to drive this home: at one point a slightly drunk Miles suddenly speaks in Quint's voice, which the director has added as a voice-over, telling the governess to let him be. Even more surprisingly, Miles's corruption is taken a step further as he actually murders his uncle during a visit by successfully orchestrating a riding accident. Finally, the work suffers much from the 'turn' that Clifford has given to the ending. First, Miles admits to the governess that Quint exists, desperately asking how she expects him to stand up to the ghost: "Do you know his power?" he demands. Second, during the final scene, in which the governess, the children and the ghosts are all on the tower, Miles sacrifices himself to save the governess and especially Flora by pushing Quint over the rampart and falling with him. Again, despite the epigraph, there is no ambiguity as to the question of the existence of the ghosts.

A few years after Clifford had given the tale his 'turn', it was then the director and screenwriter Rusty Lemorlande who decided, thirty-two years after Clayton's masterpiece, to take on the challenge of adapting the film as a feature. The 1993 Franco-British production starred

Patsy Kensit as Jenny Gooding, the governess, Stéphane Audran as Mme Grose and Julian Sands as the Master, Mr. Cooper. One immediately notices that Lemorlande hoped to truly set himself apart from those who had adapted the film before him. For example, he is the only filmmaker to date who partook in the now-popular trend of taking classic tales of literature and transposing them to modern times, in this case setting the tale in the mid-1960's, and thus transforming the Master, for example, into a hookah-smoking hippy who lounges around his office, philosophises and plays verbal games with the young governess in a manner reminiscent of that of the Caterpillar in chapter five of *Alice in Wonderland*. However, parts of the film are also set in the 1990's, as Lemorlande is also the first filmmaker to try to reproduce a narrative frame comparable to that involving Douglas and the I-narrator in the original tale, by including scenes of narrative interruption in black and white. However, quite surprisingly, the woman narrator, played by Marianne Faithfull, is not speaking to a gathering of Christmas guests as Douglas was in the novella but is in group therapy at St. Margaret's Hospital and is speaking to her doctor and fellow patients. Furthermore, although we initially imagine that she is the governess herself years later, we eventually learn that the narrator is in fact Flora, who even now at middle age scornfully blames the governess for the "murder" of her brother so long ago. Though Jamesian purists might shudder at these bold changes, one has to appreciate Lemorlande's effort to recreate the narrative *mise en abyme* that so brilliantly structured the original tale.

There are a few other basic changes that strike the spectator immediately. First of all, Mrs. Grose is now 'Madame Grose', a French housekeeper who, in keeping with the unfortunate stereotype, is quite surly with Miss Jenny and gives trite comments such as "Ah, you English, you see ghosts everywhere!" The new profile given to Grose does however allow her to occasionally speak to Miles in French, thereby further disorienting the governess, who does not speak the language and angrily demands a translation. Secondly, the governess's father is given a key role in this adaptation. He comes to Jenny quite often in her dreams, as the young woman remembers the strikingly handsome young reverend coming to her bed when she was but Flora's age. It is indeed only in this adaptation that we have such blatant indications that the governess was in fact molested by her own father, and this trauma is so apparent that it serves repeatedly to put the governess's sanity into question. For example, when leaving the church to go home and pack, she is shocked to see that the vicar greeting the guests is in fact her father as he looked so long ago, and in the final scene, Lemorlande gives the ending a turn by having the governess confront both Quint and the manifestation of her own father, both of whom have disturbing bedroom eyes. It thus should not be surprising that, thirdly, the governess is shown to have attempted suicide in the past, as her scarred wrists testify.

When watching Lemorlande's film, one is also struck by the large number of devices taken from previous adaptations that he has nevertheless included in his work. Borrowing from Curtis's 1974 teleplay, he emphasizes Miles's talent at the piano as being far beyond his years and the influence of Quint's virtuosity. In echo of the Clifford's 1989 film, the governess repeatedly discovers the two ghosts having sexual intercourse and in one scene a raven is seen tapping at her window, a blatant reference to Poe, whom Clifford had used for his epigraph. However, the greatest number of these borrowed devices are taken directly from Clayton's film, such as the extensive use of animals (although here the white dove is most often replaced by a white owl) and the repeated use of statues at Bly that frequently surprise the governess. This is most obvious in the scene in which the governess first sees Quint on the tower, for here too she is first startled by discovering a statue hidden in the garden (although this time it is not a cherub but an anatomically correct adult male); she also cuts white flowers that drop to the ground when she sees Quint, and then goes to the tower, where she finds a number of dead birds but no sign of the intruder. Also of note is the fact that in the schoolroom scene following the disappearance of Jessel, the governess discovers a small slate on which are written the words "Save them!" and which is covered in several fresh tears, the very device that Capote had regretted including in his 1961 screenplay for, he felt, indicating that the ghosts truly existed.

Lemorlande also decides to borrow the device of the confused 'dream sequence' that Clayton's film had set the standard for. However, this director chooses to provide three extended dream passages throughout the film, each filmed with an incoherent and constantly shifting series

of images representing the governess's obsessions and the filmmaker's chosen symbols. However, there is a serious problem with these sequences. First of all, the sheer number of symbols he has chosen to include is so staggering that they lose their potential power on the spectator, who has to deal with nude bodies covered in black paint, beds made of twisting tree limbs, hands reaching out of lakes, spilt Holy water and a father getting into bed with his little daughter, pools of blood, mechanical dolls, children in costumes, a breast mutilated by a knife, frightening dolls, Victorian picture wheels and doll houses (which seem out of place considering the change in time period affected by Lemorlande), and the list goes on and on. The spectator can only be put off by this incessant visual assault and eventually gives up searching for any deeper meaning in the images presented.

Finally, Lemorlande, like so many predecessors, would also decide to give a quite personal interpretation of the ending of the tale. One new device is the governess's altered appearance in the last scenes as she quotes the Bible and cuts her hair extremely short, in the image of Joan of Arc, just as the narrator proclaims that she readied herself to do "battle" with the spirits at Bly. It is a rather trite device, but it does serve to emphasize the governess's religious fervour more than in previous adaptations and stresses her penchant for 'visions'. His final twist is having Miles repeatedly bludgeon the governess with a statuette in the final scene, her blood dripping on his face as he dies in her arms.

Lemorlande's adaptation, as we have seen, was quite ambitious, seeking to apply aspects of the tale no other filmmaker had dealt with, borrowing quite heavily from previous filmmakers and clearly attempting to give his own vision of the story through several radical changes. Unfortunately, the sexual explicitness, the over-use of symbolic images and a limited distribution seem to have kept the film from becoming a major work of adaptation.

In 1995, two years after Lemorlande's effort, still another director, Tom McLoughlin, would attempt to adapt the tale, this time for U.K. television. *The Haunting of Helen Walker* was written by Hugh Whitmore and featured Valerie Bertinelli as the eponymous heroine, Diana Rigg as Mrs. Grose and Paul Rhys as the uncle, Edward Goffe. Although the weakest of the productions of the 1990's, there were a few new 'turns' worth mentioning. This time the governess is a young American widow whose "much older" late husband was a schoolmaster. By making the governess a disoriented American girl in Europe, McLoughlin is clearly trying to add elements of James's "International Theme" to one of the author's stories that did not deal with it. However, the spectator who has seen previous adaptations will find little new in terms of devices and recurring images, for this film is little more than a rehash of techniques invented by previous filmmakers. For example, from Clayton's film, we have the now essential dream sequence and the repeated use of mysterious statues and cherubs. Borrowing from the 1989 teleplay, McLoughlin also has the governess "witness" Quint and Jessel making love in her bed. However, it is clear that it was the 1974 film by Curtis that had the greatest influence on this 'new' version of the tale. Here again the governess is frightened when it is not herself whom she sees in her reflection but Miss Jessel, and McLoughlin extends this simple device by later having the governess see Quint behind her as she brushes her hair in the mirror, turning around to find only little Miles coming to see her. Here too the governess finds the children in an abandoned room "pretending" to be Quint and Jessel, and here again Miles is seen to possess Quint's talent at the piano.

Perhaps most damning to this adaptation is fact that it also reiterates Curtis's tendency to "go behind", too often showing the evil the children were up to when the governess was not present and, worst of all, indicating too clearly at the end of the work that the ghosts truly roamed Bly. As was the case in the 1974 film, the final confrontation takes place on the main staircase of the house, but here the staging is simply switched, with the governess at the bottom and Quint at the top, gliding down the stairs with outreached hands and slowly casting an enormous shadow over the entire room. As Miles dies, he smiles at the governess, as if to thank her for saving his soul and showing absolutely no scorn, and then the camera shows Quint and then Jessel slowly fading away for good. Once again we have a teleplay that leans far too heavily on the side of the governess's claim that Bly was indeed haunted and the children corrupt, thus shattering the matrix of ambiguity that structures the original tale and the more commendable adaptations.

B. Antonio Aloy's *Presence of Mind*

In 1998, marking the centennial of the first publication of the tale by Henry James in *Collier's* magazine, two of the most recent film adaptations of "The Turn of the Screw" went into production and were released the following year, each taking the line of progression we have been following from one filmmaker to another in a very different direction. One is a masterfully achieved teleplay for U.S. and British television simply entitled *The Turn of the Screw* and directed by Ben Bolt as part of the world-renowned *ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre* series. For this production, Bolt and his writer Nick Dear decided not to use or build upon the various devices and themes that previous filmmakers had added to the Jamesian tapestry, but instead to return to the original text and to produce what is quite definitely the most faithful adaptation to date. In the *Masterpiece Theatre* tradition, the acting performances are first-rate, with Jodhi May as the governess, Pam Ferris as a hearty Mrs. Grose, and a brief appearance by popular actor Colin Firth as the Master. The on-location settings and the costume work are up to par with any feature-length period piece, but what is most striking to the spectator is the attention given to respecting James's original vision, for there are very few lines of dialogue, devices or themes in the film that cannot be found in the short story. There are of course three or four minor modifications, such as having Miles and Flora insist on writing to the Master, a proposition that frightens the governess as she feels they might complain to him about her treatment of them. Bolt has also cleverly chosen to hang a portrait of the Master above the drawing room staircase, so as to constantly remind the governess of his absent presence, and to begin the film with a brief scene showing Miss Jessel committing suicide by drowning, a device first used in the 1995 adaptation by McLoughlin. Finally, Bolt and Dear have decided to change the governess's own reading preferences. In the original tale it is mentioned or hinted that she reads or has read Henry Fielding's *Amelia*, Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre* and Anne Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, all of which can be seen as subtexts to the governess's vision of her own plight. In this adaptation, the only work that the governess reads as she hesitates on whether to face the ghosts or flee Bly is in fact *Hamlet*, which shows that Bolt finally opted for a more universally recognisable literary reference and again borrowed from McLoughlin's 1995 version, in which the governess devotes a lesson to Shakespeare's oft-cited play. In the end, this teleplay adaptation would be the ideal video for secondary school teachers accompanying their pupils on a discovery of the sinister short story, even more so as there are no lurid sex scenes or politically incorrect references and as the film is accompanied by a brief history of how James came to write the tale, presented by Russell Baker.

The other 1999 adaptation was a remarkable feature film entitled *Presence of Mind*, directed by Spanish director Antonio Aloy and first presented at the Deauville Film Festival. For the native of Majorca, this was his first feature, having previously directed only a short Spanish film, "Señores de Gardenia", which was presented at the Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival in 1998. Aloy's background is mostly that of a screenwriter and production designer, collaborating with more seasoned Spanish directors such as Augustin Villaronga, whom we find in front of the camera in Aloy's film playing Quint, although in this adaptation the ghost is re-baptised 'Fosc', which means "dark" or "unpleasant". The film stars Sadie Frost as the governess, Lauren Bacall as the stern housekeeper, Mado Remei (a far cry from the good-hearted Mrs. Grose we have long been accustomed to), and Harvey Keitel as the Master, whose poor line delivery during his cameo sequence is more than made up for by the startling performances of Frost and Bacall, not to mention Nilo Mur and Ella Jones, who play Miles and Flora remarkably well. In this most recent of the film adaptations of "The Turn of the Screw," Antonio Aloy decides to continue in the tradition of the nearly four decades of filmmakers who took on the same challenge, by borrowing and modifying techniques of ambiguity used by those who went before him and by adding a few clever devices of his own to the heritage. The end result is a beautifully rendered adaptation of the tale that can (nearly) stand up to comparison with Clayton's 1961 masterpiece.

The spectator is immediately struck by several radical changes made to the overall story. One is clearly his re-writing the character of simple-minded and good-hearted Mrs. Grose into a stone-faced and aggressive Mado Remei, thereby creating the most adversarial representation of Mrs. Grose to date and leaving the governess with no one "on her side." However, one of the most significant changes Aloy made was changing the location of the story, for even though the

governess meets with the Master in London, she is sent on a long voyage over rough seas to the island of Raixa in Majorca, where this new telling of the tale takes place. The change works extremely well, especially as it permits the director to situate the story in an environment steeped in strong Catholic heritage. Aloy indeed chooses to play up the religious fervour of the governess and her crisis of faith far more than in any previous adaptation. The governess's faith is emphasized from the onset, when the Master discusses the fact that she is a devout Catholic, that his grandfather who built the sprawling villa at Raixa was also a Catholic and that he himself, though not a man of faith, had always been intrigued by the Catholic religion, for, as he declares to her, "the notion of redemption through suffering fascinates [him]". During that meeting he also gives her a broche adorned with a Saint Christopher medallion, drawing a parallel between the saint's mission and that of the governess. His loaded words, which would echo in the governess's mind during her sea voyage, were the following: "The protector of the Christ child—to save oneself by saving innocence... how fitting..." The medallion will then be used by Aloy as a symbol of her faith, both her religious faith and her faith in herself to save the children, as she only removes it later in the tale, when she considers leaving the island and giving up on the children, and then she puts it back on as she prepares for the final confrontation scenes. Throughout the film, Aloy plays repeatedly on the religious theme, and we find the governess and Flora reciting "Our Father" together, just as we later find the governess and Mado Remei in the villa's chapel reciting "Hail, Mary" together in front of an imposing statue of the Crucifixion, the seemingly blood-stained wounds of which often make the stone look like actual flesh. Similarly, every Sunday, the governess presses the children to go to Confession at church, and, on other occasions, she can be seen walking around with her Bible and her rosary in hand. The religious question also makes its way into the schoolroom, as Miles and Flora taunt the governess by drawing parallels between the Catholic faith and believing in ghosts. Miles, for example, shows the governess a drawing of Lazarus and asks why he was resurrected, why he was not admitted into heaven, and if he was then a ghost. When the governess dances around his question and predictably declares that there are no such things as ghosts, Miles corners her by asking her if she then believes in the Holy Ghost, a semantic trap from which the governess, despite her recourse to use of a dictionary, cannot escape. This new accent on religion and its conjunction with the new setting for the story work extremely well, and the importance of this theme for Aloy, himself a native of Majorca, is made apparent by the Spanish title of the film, for if the English "Presence of Mind" seems to refer to the more traditional question of the governess's sanity, one meaning of the Spanish title *El Cielo* is "zeal" or "ardour", which could easily point to the governess's religious fervour. However, Aloy's choice of a Spanish title is quite remarkable, because the word *celo* also means "heat" when referring to animals and their desire to mate, thus cleverly blending the themes of religious purity and animal-like sexual desire under one heading.

There are of course many devices taken from earlier adaptations of the tale and most often from Clayton's *The Innocents*. However, in nearly every instance, Aloy has not simply borrowed but expanded upon the motif or technique. For example, just before the governess spots Fosc on the tower, she is startled by her discovery of a broken statue, in this case the head of a Greek god that rests below the surface of the water in a fountain, a face which seems to briefly morph into that of the Master's before the governess sees the ghostly figure. We also again find the now obligatory dream sequences, this time two in number, which again showcase several of the main themes and symbols chosen by the director. However, in one sequence, her dream seems to be premonitory, as one of the quickly shifting images is that of the Master at Raixa frowning and uncovering the body of a dead child, clearly an external prolepsis giving us a glimpse of what will occur after the final scene. Similarly, we have the repeated use of the disturbing mirror image that was put forth in the original tale and, notably, in Clayton's 1961 and Curtis's 1974 adaptations. Here, there is again a clever modification, for the mirrors and panes in which the governess sees herself are never perfectly flat surfaces and never faithfully reflect their subject. Instead they distort lines and features and thus stress the governess's distorted and uncertain self-image.

Aloy also borrows very heavily from *The Innocents* by including the recurring theme of animal torture and the image of the white dove. During the governess's first evening at Raixa,

Flora shows her new tutor her 'box of secrets' in which she keeps her pet dove Ophelia (another reference to *Hamlet*, after its use as a subtext in the 1989 and 1995 versions). The governess then discovers that Miles has broken the bird's wings so that it may never fly away from them. Miles, soon after his arrival, can also be seen in the aviary tending to the pigeons and doves, but instead of giving us Miles simply caressing a dove with a broken neck, as Clayton and Capote did, Aloy presents us with the bloody sight of Flora's bird mutilated in a basin that resembles a stone altar, a gruesome mock religious sacrifice perpetrated by Miles. However, the severity of Miles and Flora's sins are greatly amplified and seem to go far beyond animal torture. In sequences both more powerful and yet subtler than those used in the 1972 *Nightcomers*, the possibly incestuous relationship between Miles and Flora is presented in a manner that is both aesthetically pleasing and morally ambiguous to the extreme. Three key scenes put forth this notion. Firstly, on Miles's arrival from school, he and Flora's embrace lasts just too long and includes just enough affectionate caressing to disturb the spectator. Later, the governess comes across the children sleeping in what the spectator must feel to be a lovers' embrace in the rowboat docked at the lake, although the governess herself does not seem to perceive any impropriety, for the moment. Indeed, she too will be taken aback by the third scene pointing to incest, which occurs when the governess, much like the protagonist in the 1974 film, hears what sounds like Quint and Jessel in the throes of passion and follows the sound to its source, only to find Miles and Flora in an abandoned room. This time the children are wearing make-up and are undressed, Miles sitting behind his sister and caressing her shoulder, his sister admiring herself in a hand-mirror. Once again, Aloy has managed to take themes from previous adaptations and make their representation both more beautiful and more disturbing.

Perhaps even more striking is the importance that Aloy gave to visual representations of *mise en abyme*, a theme that, as we have seen, has been incorporated in diverse ways in previous films. Again, Aloy starts with an image borrowed from *The Innocents*, in this case the music box that links Flora to her dead governess. In Clayton's film, for example, there is a striking image that immediately precedes the final confrontation with Jessel at the lake. Flora is dancing 'alone' inside the gazebo to the sound of the music box with the spinning ballerina that Jessel gave to her. When the governess approaches the lake from atop a hill, the sight of the gazebo below with Flora spinning within it is like a life-size recreation of that same music box. Aloy decides to reiterate the use of this clever device. Here, too, Flora has a music box that Jessel had given her and again the child hums or sings the mysterious words of the song before several appearances of Jessel's ghost. However, the music box here becomes a double symbol, for the object represents a ship on which the ballerina is dancing, a ship that reminds us of the repeated images of the governess making her great voyage over rough seas to Raixa. In addition, Aloy multiplies the motifs underlining a *mise en abyme*. There is thus also the importance given to dolls at Raixa. The governess arrives much like a child herself, with a little doll called Alice that she eventually offers to Flora, both to break the ice and to 'replace' Flora's current "dead doll", one that Jessel had clearly given to her. Then, later in the film, clever staging gives us a striking image of the governess and Flora preparing for bed. In the mirror of the dressing table, we see the governess sitting behind Flora and brushing the child's hair, while Flora herself sits behind her new doll and brushes its hair. The doll motif is then brought back throughout the film and in the end the dolls seem more to symbolize Miles and Flora than the governess and Jessel. Indeed, when the governess packs her bags and plans to leave Raixa, she packs her Bible and her Rosary but decidedly leaves two dolls, one a boy and the other a girl, behind on her bed. Then, at the end of the film, after the damage has been done to both Flora and Miles, the governess can be seen nearly catatonic on her bed surrounded by the shattered remains of those two dolls. In an additional effort to point to the story within the story, the dream within the dream, Aloy designs the absent Master's room at Raixa as being a chamber within a chamber. At Raixa, the Master's room is always locked, but the governess's curiosity and infatuation with the Master get the best of her and push her to order Mado Remei to open it for her. Inside she finds an outer chamber disturbingly decorated with suggestive statues and, even more disturbingly, with a photograph of Fosc and the Master after a successful hunt for wild game. Then she "pulls back the curtain" (a key line in the original text) at the back of the room and discovers an obscure inner bedroom, the dark walls of which are covered by tapestries and murals showing nude children and fang-bearing demons, images that will of

course haunt the governess's sleep throughout the film. Finally, Aloy added one other rather clever *mise en abyme* motif. When the governess sees Quint on the tower, she thinks to herself how she would like the Master to see her and admire how well she is doing. Her thoughts are taken directly from James's tale and are the following: "I only asked that he should *know* and the only way to be sure he knew would be to see it, and the kind light of it, in his handsome face" (175). What is striking is that is that later that afternoon the governess is alone in the library and seems to be reading these same words aloud from a book she is holding, quite clearly James's original tale, which she hurriedly puts back in its place when Mado Remei enters. It is as if the governess herself were caught checking the original text of her own tale.

Not every device used in *Presence of Mind* had its roots in the Clayton film or other early adaptations. In fact, on a few occasions, Aloy visually represents passages from the original tale that no filmmakers had hitherto transposed. One striking example is the mention in the original manuscript of the governess's "private scenes" in the schoolroom, in which she stood alone and practiced confronting the children on the subject of their gruesome playmates. In the film, Aloy stages this, predictably perhaps, by starting with a close-up of the governess apparently directly interrogating the children, and finishing the short scene by panning back to show that the two chairs are in fact empty. Another theme that was given limited attention in previous works was that of role reversal between the governess and her charges, between tutor and pupil, a theme that James included in many of his experimental tales of the 1890's. This begins with the governess having a doll of her own she travels with, and is expanded when, for instance, Flora gets her to keep a secret from the stern mother figure, Mado Remei, and when Miles tries to help the governess overcome her fear of the dark, albeit through a blind-fold game charged with sexual tension. Similarly, it is not the governess who writes to the Master to 'tell' on the children, but Miles who decides to write a letter to the Master to denounce his governess's behaviour.

However, there are two other devices that are quite original and striking, and which stay with the spectator long after watching the film. The first is the introduction, in the pre-credits sequence and throughout the film, of the studio photo taken of the governess with her father just after his death, her father well-dressed and propped on a chair, the governess holding an orchid in one hand and forced, on the photographer's demand, to take her dead father's hand in the other. Picking up on what in modern times seems far more macabre than nostalgic, Aloy not only shows the governess cringingly posing with the dead body of her tyrannical father, but has her later receive the photograph by post at Raixa, discuss the life and death ambiguity of the image with Flora, and finally remove the disturbing photo from a locked drawer in order to burn it in the fireplace before the final confrontations begin. There is a link made with another photo of the deceased, that of Fosc, that hangs in the Master's chambers, somehow equating the governess with the dead, but it also allows Aloy to dwell on her relationship with her father, who is clearly responsible for the welts and scars that cover her body, although the question of the cause of this treatment, its exact nature or its possible sexual context remain a mystery.

Secondly, in connection with the ambiguity between life and death characterizing her own image in the photograph with her father, Aloy goes further than any other filmmaker before him in portraying the governess as becoming another Miss Jessel. This is suggested on several occasions, for example when she enters the Master's chambers where Quint and Jessel often had their encounters and puts on a black shawl she finds there, or when she promises Flora, and later Miles, that she will never leave them, that she will stay at Raixa with them forever. Towards the end of the film, the device becomes far more obvious. The governess, immediately before and after her final confrontation with Miles, is shown with her long hair down, as Jessel used to wear it. More strikingly, she is shown looking out of a window at Miles with a mad look in her eye and twice walking down a long, dark corridor towards the spectator, her arms loosely folded across her chest and her head hanging down to one side, her face partly covered by her long hair. The staggering figure of the governess is thus an exact replica to that of Miss Jessel as she always appears at the lake. The crossed position of her arms and her hanging head bring to mind Jessel's corpse, as she hanged herself in the schoolroom. However, it also seems a macabre reference to the Madonna, the governess and Jessel's arms folded as if holding a child that is not there, cleverly bringing in once again the religious question and the extent of the governess's religious 'zeal'. The film in fact

ends with the governess haunting a long corridor at Raixa in Jessel-like stance and with what appears to be the ghost of Miles taking her hand and walking away with her, suggesting that both Miles and the governess are now ghosts but never disallowing that this might be all in the governess's mind as she sits catatonic on her bed after the death of Miles.

As we have attempted to show, Antonio Aloy's *Presence of Mind* seems to be a work comparable to Clayton's masterpiece, or at least the most comparable to date. It is indeed through a careful balance of new devices and new takes on motifs employed by his predecessors, as well as through his own background as a screenwriter and production designer, that Aloy produces an aesthetically striking work that both manages to bring in bolder themes and all the while preserve the sacred ambiguity of James's novella.

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To conclude, one could say that film adaptation of "The Turn of the Screw" is an on-going and ever-evolving heritage that surprisingly seems to have most recently been an affair for Spanish filmmakers and English-speaking audiences. Indeed, only two years after Aloy's *Presence of Mind* was released, another Spanish filmmaker produced a very high-budget and commercially successful film that is very loosely based on the "sinister little tale" of James's that so intrigues us. Although a far cry from a *film d'auteur*, Alejandro Aménabar's 2001 film *The Others* relies very heavily on characters, devices and dynamics that are part of "The Turn of the Screw" legacy we have been outlining. Although cast and crew members are quick to point out the blatant differences in the two stories, few critics or spectators seem to deny the link. One need only look at one of the movie posters used to promote the film in the U.S., for next to an image of a frightened Nicole Kidman walking a dark hallway barely illuminated by an oil lamp (an image reminiscent to that of the governess walking the halls with her candlestick in Clayton's film), there is a tell-tale tagline quote from *Rolling Stone* magazine that boasts "It turns the screws of psychological terror." In addition, the title itself is a reference to a key exchange in the original tale that occurs between Miles and the governess during their final confrontation. When Miles proclaims that they are now "alone" at Bly, he then adds the ambiguous line "Of course, we have the others", and the governess concurs with "We have the others—we indeed have the others" (297-298). Let us not forget that "The Others" was also the title of one of the very first teleplay adaptations of the tale in 1957, and that the ambiguity of the expression "the others", in both the tale and Aménabar's film, is the uncertainty as to whether we are referring to ghosts or to domestics. Add to this the devices that seem to be taken directly from the film adaptations we have discussed, such as the scene in which the mother hears the piano being played beautifully from within the music room but upon entering discovers the room empty, the exact same scene occurring in McLoughlin's 1995 adaptation, or the use of the photographs of the deceased collected in Mrs. Mills's 'Book of the Dead', a device that Aloy had used so successfully in his 1995 *Presence of Mind*, and one must conclude that Aménabar's *The Others* should be considered a part of this heritage of retellings of "The Turn of the Screw", although an adaptation as free if not more so than Michael Winner's 1972 *Nightcomers*.

Such is the legacy, to date, of "The Turn of the Screw" among filmmakers for both television and the big screen, and James would most certainly be amazed at this series of retellings of his tale in which each adaptation in some ways builds upon those that came before it and yet is quite subjective and includes devices and plots twists that are the product of the story-teller's personal vision of the tale. Let us not forget that this was indeed James's intention when he first had the idea for the novella in January of 1895. The author had been struck by the "charm" and "the strangely gruesome effect" of listening to the Archbishop of Canterbury relate to him, subjectively and "imperfectly", a ghost story told to him by a woman who herself had given an unclear, imperfect and subjective account of the events. James marvelled at the fact that he was getting but "the shadow of a shadow" in the Archbishop's tale (*Notebooks* 178-79; *Literary Criticism II*, 1182-83). James of course tried to recreate this matrix of retellings through the *mise en abyme* of his narrative levels involving the governess, Douglas and the I-narrator of the Prologue, and through the inherent and perfectly balanced ambiguity of the tale. In turn, for nearly a century, the chain of retellings would go on and on among literary critics, many of whom would

propose widely varied and extremely radical interpretations of the tale. Many comprehensive studies on James's story, such as Peter Beidler's 1995 work, give a thorough overview of the extremely varied interpretations of the tale provided by critics since Edmund Wilson first proclaimed that the ghosts might not be real and the governess might be mad. For example, in 1949 Heilman felt that Miles dies because the governess successfully destroys his "god" Quint, in 1962 Kaplan announced that he dies because the governess repressed his homosexual desires, in 1967 Aldrich accused Mrs. Grose of killing Quint and Jessel and of orchestrating Miles's death, as she was jealous of the attention the governess was giving to *her* children, and in 1964 Rubin declared that Miles did not in fact die at Bly that day, because Douglas in the Prologue is in fact Miles.

The point is that the filmmakers we have discussed have all participated in this vast *mise en abyme* of 'subjective' and 'imperfect' retellings, for an often neglected aspect of film adaptation of a literary work is that it is in itself criticism, interpretation and reception as well as a visual retelling of its model story. In the case of "The Turn of the Screw", the forty-year legacy of film adaptation should not be excluded from comprehensive works on over a century of criticism of James's tale. Each filmmaker devises his own techniques and motifs with which to put forth his "personal vision", and each chooses his own subtexts. It is true that when it comes to subtexts, few filmmakers and screenwriters were as inventive as Jack Clayton and Truman Capote, who chose to superimpose images from Colonna's 1499 *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili* onto James's tale, and others since then have chosen more easily recognizable subtexts including *Hamlet*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Dracula*, the poems of Edgar Allan Poe and the legend of Joan of Arc. Each filmmaker brings to the public his own interpretation of the ambiguities of the original work, with various readings of, for example, the ending of the tale that are in line with the most radical interpretations put forth by Jamesian critics over the years. More important still, much like a literary critic, each filmmaker attempts to build upon the work of those in their field who have interpreted the tale before them while still endeavouring to add a few new theories to the collective research on the meaning of "The Turn of the Screw", this vast legacy of successive and ambiguous retellings, of "shadows of shadows".

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