

## The Turn of the Screw, King Lear, and Tragedy

EDWARD LOBB

Discussion of Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* remains stubbornly inconclusive, and recent criticism has turned away from traditional disagreements about the story (the question of whether the ghosts are real, for example) towards the view that James's novella is a deliberate trap for exegetes, a work which "uses its blanks to undermine all attempts to establish relations and to join references into a coherent pattern."<sup>1</sup> James did write stories in his late period which seem to defy stable interpretation—*The Spoils of Poynton* and *The Sacred Fount* come to mind—but he wrote many more throughout his career in which careful reading allows us to judge the reliability and the integrity of the narrator or point-of-view character, and *The Turn of the Screw* is in this latter category. A previously unnoticed allusion in the novella provides valuable clues about the theme and the function of the frame narrative in James's famous ghost story.

Late in the novella, when the governess has determined that Miles took and opened her letter to his uncle, there occurs this curious exchange:

I felt that the cause was mine and that I should surely get all. "And you found nothing!"—I let my elation out.

He gave the most mournful, thoughtful little headshake. "Nothing."

"Nothing, nothing!" I almost shouted in my joy.

"Nothing, nothing," he sadly repeated.<sup>2</sup>

Even if we grant the governess's excited state and James's fondness for antiphonal repetition, this is a remarkable passage: six "nothings" in four lines of dialogue. It seems clear to me that this exchange is

meant to remind the reader of another, more famous dialogue full of pregnant “nothings.”

*Lear*: . . . What can you say to draw  
 A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.  
*Cordelia*: Nothing, my lord.  
*Lear*: Nothing?  
*Cordelia*: Nothing.  
*Lear*: Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.<sup>3</sup>

On the face of it, there is little in common between the situation of Miles and the governess and that of Cordelia and Lear. The play depicts a family and political conflict, while the novella does not; the sexes of adult and child are reversed; the immediate issue is quite different; and the governess is delighted by Miles’s response, while Lear is enraged by Cordelia’s. But on closer examination there are a number of ways in which *The Turn of the Screw* parallels *King Lear* quite closely, and I believe that James makes the allusion to suggest those parallels. The narrative impetus of *Lear*—what James would call the “spring”—is Lear’s desire to be the sole object of his daughters’ love, and his inability to accept the fact that Cordelia loves him according to her bond, “no more nor less” (I.i.93). The central drama of *The Turn of the Screw* is essentially the same: the governess’s desire to be assured of Miles’s and Flora’s love and the destructive effects of her obsession, effects which leave her, in the last scene, clutching Miles’s dead body much as Lear, in the last scene of Shakespeare’s play, holds the body of the daughter whose death is ultimately his fault.

This view of the story, in which the reality of the ghosts is essentially beside the point, has as its focus the governess’s attempt to “possess” Miles and Flora, to own them emotionally, and sees her fears of ghostly “possession,” of haunting, as those of someone who fears a rival. The governess has, of course, always had her critics. In 1966, for example, Gorley Putt argued that Miles and Flora “could live with bad memories, or even with bad ghosts, but not with her. She is

no protectress, but a vampire. She is the most dangerously self-deluded, and Miles the most pitiful victim, of all James's long list of emotional cannibals."<sup>4</sup> It is not fashionable to put the case so bluntly, but Putt's brief reading, less than two pages in its entirety, focuses persuasively on the theme of emotional tyranny or engulfment, one of James's perennial concerns. The statement that the governess is "the most dangerously self-deluded" of James's characters, however, requires some qualification. That she is self-deluded at the time of the story's events cannot be questioned; even if the ghosts are real, the governess is deluded about her motives in "protecting" the children. But it seems clear that she *subsequently* attains a very full realization of what she has done, and that this realization is implicit both in her narration of past events and in the frame which James's narrator provides for her story. Here, again, *King Lear* becomes a valuable model in our reading.

The elaborate narrative frame of *The Turn of the Screw* is one of the most complex in English fiction since *Wuthering Heights*. What we hear is an unnamed narrator's report of a week spent at a country house, in the course of which a man named Douglas, after describing his boyhood relationship with the governess, reads the narrative which she wrote years after the events at Bly and confided to him before her death. What we hear, then, is coming to us third-hand, and it is necessary to ask why James—who, so far as I know, never employed the device again—constructed so complex a setting for his story.

The most significant feature of the frame narrative is Douglas's description of the governess as "a most charming person," "the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position . . . worthy of any whatever" (636-37; Prologue). It is apparent, unless we suppose Douglas to be unreliable because of his confessed love for her, that the governess was a different woman after leaving Bly. Oscar Cargill, one of the few critics who has attempted to explain the frame narrative, suggested in 1963 that the governess, fearing a return of her madness,

wrote her account to explain to Douglas why she could not return his love.<sup>5</sup> This is indeed a plausible explanation, but it is important to be clear about what the madness of the governess is: it is not seeing ghosts which do not exist, as Cargill suggests, but an inability to control her emotions once they are aroused, and a consequent tendency to destructive possessiveness in her relationships. Her highly emotional nature is apparent in her interview with the children's uncle, "such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel, before a fluttered, anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage" (639; Prologue). With the uncle, her feelings are kept in check by the social difference between them, her awe of him, and his stipulation that she not trouble him about anything; but at Bly, where she is accountable to no-one, her desire for love and her possessiveness quickly assume pathological proportions.

As Douglas approaches the story itself, he reveals that the governess had been in love, and another guest, Mrs. Griffin, asks, "'Who was it she was in love with?'"

"The story will tell," I took upon myself to reply.

"Oh, I can't wait for the story!" [said Mrs. Griffin.]

"The story *won't* tell," said Douglas; "not in any literal, vulgar way." (637; Prologue)

The clear implication is that the story *will* tell about the governess's love, but in an indirect and unvulgar way, as we would expect from a Jamesian heroine. The uncle, her employer, does not figure in the governess's own narrative, and it is logical to conclude, there being no other candidates, that she was in love with the children. She implies as much in her first descriptions of Flora, "the most beautiful child I had ever seen" (642; I) and the "incredibly beautiful" Miles, whom she sees "in the great glow of freshness, the same positive fragrance of purity . . . in which I had . . . seen his little sister" (650; III).

The frame narrative suggests that she writes the story to convey to Douglas, who is ten years younger than she and the age Miles would have been had he lived, her knowledge that she is incapable of ma-

ture, non-possessive love. A genuine tragic heroine, she has achieved enlightenment and self-awareness at a terrible cost, and is reintegrated with the moral world whose order she has violated. *King Lear* not only provides a clue about the theme of James's story, then, but a framework for interpretation of it as a classic tragedy of belated insight. Lear, restored to sanity after a period of madness, recognizes his former demand for all of Cordelia's love as unreasonable and renounces the world, imagining his and Cordelia's prison as a monk's cell (V.iii.8-19). The governess, after Miles's death, experiences a similar recovery and recognition. She renounces any hope of marriage and ultimately explains to Douglas, though not in any "literal, vulgar way," that there are greater obstacles between them than the differences in age and social class.

Unlike Lear, she has the opportunity to tell her own story, and in the telling of it she provides many indications that she is well aware of what actually happened at Bly. Because the governess's narrative is retrospective, it is crucially important to recognize the double perspective at work in it. Even at the time of the story she is aware of her excessive hunger for the children's love, but conceals from herself its full extent and its effects on her behaviour. In retrospect, knowing the consequences of that hunger, she judges herself far more harshly for her actions. With very few exceptions, critics have been unwilling to acknowledge the possibility that the governess might be deluded at the time of the story and clear-sighted at the time of writing; they have consequently been unable to see the frequent shifts of perspective in her narration. Here, for example, is an instance of her awareness at the time of the story:

There were moments when, by an irresistible impulse, I found myself catching them up and pressing them to my heart. As soon as I had done so I used to say to myself—"What will they think of that? Doesn't it betray too much?" (679-80; IX)

At other points in her narrative, the governess gives us her more severe and anguished self-appraisal at the time of writing, without

any indication that it occurred to her at the time of the story, as when she says, "I was like a gaoler with an eye to possible surprises and escapes" (699; XIV).

Particularly as she writes the last sections of the story, her feeling is quite candidly that she and Miles were opponents, fighting in effect for the boy's soul. The name Miles derives, of course, from the Latin *miles* (soldier), and part of the horror of the story is that a child of ten should be forced to fight for his life. Referring to the stolen letter, the governess says, "I can't begin to express the effect upon me of an implication of surrender even so faint" (734; XXIII), and she characterizes herself and Miles as "fighters not daring to close" (735; XXIII). In the next section, she exults in "the desolation of his surrender" when he confesses why he was expelled from school, and describes herself as "blind with victory" (738; XXIV). The word "surrender" occurs a third time in the climactic paragraph of the story when Quint has appeared and Miles is unable to see him. After first guessing that the governess is seeing Miss Jessel, Miles says, "'It's *he*?'"

I was so determined to have all my proof that I flashed into ice to challenge him. "Whom do you mean by 'he'?"

"Peter Quint—you devil!" His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. "Where?"

They are in my ears still, his supreme surrender of the name and his tribute to my devotion. "What does he matter now, my own?—what will he *ever* matter? *I have you,*" I launched at the beast, "but he has lost you forever!" (740; XXIV)

Miles's "supreme surrender of the name"—that is, his submission to the governess's demand to hear it—is the final victory of her personality over his, and quite naturally also the moment of the boy's death. The chilling vocabulary of ownership ("My own," "I have you") reinforces the horror of the scene, as do Miles's last words. It is obvious that he still cannot see Quint, and his words "'you devil!'" are addressed to the governess, a last protest and indictment before he dies. The governess faithfully records, years later, his implied accusation that she attempted to "possess" him as a devil would, and the fact

that the effort of resisting her is what killed him: "We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped" (740; XXIV).<sup>6</sup>

Knowing what she has done, the governess sees herself retrospectively as monstrous in her attempts to control the children and coerce their love. When Miles confesses that he wants to be "'let [...] alone,'" the governess drops to her knees beside his bed and seizes "once more the chance of possessing him" (712; XVII). The choice of word after the fact, here and elsewhere in her narrative, is not accidental, and it is fitting, then, that the governess should see herself as the real ghost in the story, the being who truly haunts the children's lives. She has no real awareness of this at the time, and is appalled when Flora says to Mrs. Grose, "'Take me away, take me away—oh, take me away from her!'" (721; XX). But in retrospect she herself draws attention to the fact that at four points in the narrative (in IV, XV [twice], and XX) she takes the place of one of the ghosts or vice versa.<sup>7</sup> In the first of these scenes, the governess's vision of Peter Quint outside the dining-room window is immediately re-enacted when she pursues him, stands where he stood, and frightens Mrs. Grose.

She saw me as I had seen my own visitant; she pulled up short as I had done; I gave her something of the shock that I had received. She turned white, and this made me ask myself if I had blanched as much. She stared, in short, and retreated on just *my* lines, and I knew she had then passed out and come round to me and that I should presently meet her. I remained where I was, and while I waited I thought of more things than one. But there's only one I take space to mention. I wondered why *she* should be scared. (659; IV)

The last sentence concludes the section, and is rather like a teacher's leading question in class. The governess, a true Jamesian as well as a teacher, will not state the obvious conclusion outright, but seeks to lead Douglas to it, as James seeks to lead us to it. The ghosts in the story represent the unacknowledged evil of the self, a fragment of the perceiver's personality, like the shadow-self that Spencer Brydon encounters in James's story "The Jolly Corner."

Another clue of the same type occurs in section XVIII when Miles plays the piano for the governess. "David playing to Saul could never have shown a finer sense of the occasion," she comments (713). It has been noted by some commentators that in the biblical passage alluded to (1 Samuel 16:14-23), Saul is possessed by an evil spirit, usually glossed as madness.<sup>8</sup> What is far more telling is the fact that the governess, a clergyman's daughter, could not make such an allusion casually; she is fully aware in her retrospective narrative of what she is saying about her mental state at the time. She is also aware that Saul makes repeated attempts to kill David, and does in fact slaughter the priests of Nob (1 Samuel 18-22).

These indirect self-indictments are replaced, later in the story, by more overt suggestions of the governess's depravity. In the last scene, having determined that what Miles did at school—the reason for his expulsion—was perhaps not so terrible after all, she asks herself a question which is again directed to Douglas by the governess, and to the reader by James:

I seemed to float not into clearness, but into a darker obscure, and within a minute there had come to me out of my very pity the appalling alarm of his being perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding and bottomless, for if he *were* innocent, what then on earth was I? (738-39; XXIV)

The answer, by this point, should be obvious, and if we need something more than the governess's own apprehension that Miles is innocent, it is surely to be found in the fact that Douglas, four days after first mentioning the story on Christmas Eve, finally reads it on December 28th, the Feast of the Holy Innocents.<sup>9</sup> This highly indirect allusion (the feast is not mentioned by name) is James's reinforcement of the governess's sense of her own role. The feast day not only suggests the children's innocence, but also associates the governess with the tyrannical Herod, who fears displacement by another king as the governess fears displacement by the ghosts, and who is responsible for the Innocents' deaths. Like the governess's reference to herself as a Saul-like figure, this parallel implies that she is a murderess.



The stages of the governess's degeneration are as subtly conveyed as we would expect in a work by James. The story's twenty-four sections trace the changes in her perception of the children. Phrases like "angelic beauty" (643; I), "the deep, sweet serenity . . . of one of Raphael's holy infants" (644; I) and "they were like . . . cherubs" (657; IV) appear with regularity in the first half-dozen sections, contributing to our sense of the governess's enthusiastic character in the religious terms which come naturally to her. Her capacity for religious analogies, however, is part of her undoing, for she comes to conceive of herself as the children's saviour. Her messianic delusions begin in section VI:

I had an absolute certainty that I should see again what I had already seen, but something within me said that by offering myself bravely as the sole subject of such experience, by accepting, by inviting, by surmounting it all, I should serve as an expiatory victim and guard the tranquillity of the rest of my companions. (665; VI)

When it becomes clear that the children do not particularly want her protection, she decides that they have been won over by the enemy; as she says to Mrs. Grose in section XII, "'Their more than earthly beauty, their absolutely unnatural goodness. It's a game . . . It's a policy and a fraud'" (692; XII). It is surely a sign of the governess's disordered mind that beauty and goodness can now be seen as evidences of depravity. This is the central section of the novella (the thirteenth of twenty-five sections, counting the prologue), and here the die is cast; from this point onwards the governess will not really see the children at all, but a kind of Manichaean symbolic drama in which she, as "expiatory" Christ, will redeem the souls of the wholly corrupted children, whether they want to be saved or not. In section XVIII—this element in the story seems to proceed by sixes—she has no qualms about leaving Miles alone and exposed to the possible apparition of Quint. "'I don't mind that now,'" she says to Mrs. Grose (715), and she doesn't mind because her conscious plan to save the

children is, by this point, simply a pretext. The would-be protector and saviour has become the master and jailer in a Sade-like struggle of wills which is enacted, appropriately enough, in a country house.

The climax of the story in section XXIV brings together the various threads of imagery and theme which have been discussed. When Peter Quint appears, the governess compares him to "a sentinel before a prison" (736); she, of course, is the guard within, and has earlier referred to herself as a "gaoler with an eye to possible surprises and escapes" (699; XIV). It is now that she obtains Miles's "supreme surrender of the name," now that she cries "'I have you,'" and now that Miles dies, the victim of his self-proclaimed protector.

Let us suppose that we have by this point a coherent reading of James's novella which sees it as a tragedy of possessiveness, emotional manipulation, and the protagonist's eventual recovery. This reading makes sense of the frame narrative and of the allusions to 1 Samuel and the Feast of the Holy Innocents in the tragic context suggested by the allusion to *King Lear*; it is, moreover, consistent with James's view of human relations and his horror of those who use people, consciously or unconsciously, for their own ends. This is a theme which unites stories and novels as different as "The Pupil," "The Beast in the Jungle," "The Aspern Papers," *The Bostonians* and *The Wings of the Dove*. What this reading does not do, of course, is to settle the question of the ghosts' existence. I have already indicated that this is not the focus of James's interest, but it remains an issue in the story even if we see the ghosts as the governess's doubles and rivals. Within the narrative, one piece of evidence argues most strongly for the objective reality of the ghosts—the fact that the governess, who has never heard of Peter Quint, is able to give Mrs. Grose a description of the male apparition which the housekeeper recognizes immediately as that of the dead valet (662; V). Critics who argue that the governess is seeing things can dispute even this evidence, but to the common reader it is fairly convincing.

There are three ways of getting at the ghosts' reality which go beyond the novella itself. The first is to look at James's use of ghosts in other stories. James in fact wrote quite a number of ghost stories—Leon Edel's edition of them is a good-sized volume—and the ghosts in these stories are generally real. They obviously serve symbolic and thematic functions, like the ghost of Spencer Brydon as he might have been in "The Jolly Corner," but they are also real ghosts, a fact which suggests that the spirits of Quint and Miss Jessel are genuine, too. The second approach is through James's notebook entries on *The Turn of the Screw* and his preface to the story in the New York Edition.<sup>10</sup> Both make clear that James thought of the ghosts as quite real, though "anti-ghost" critics argue, predictably, that James's phrasing is ambiguous.

The third, and certainly most ingenious, argument was put forward by Donal O'Gorman in an exhaustive article on James's possible sources.<sup>11</sup> Looking at the name "Peter Quint," O'Gorman sees it as meaning just what it says: Peter 5. There are two epistles of Peter in the New Testament, but 2 Peter can be eliminated because it only has three chapters. The eighth verse of 1 Peter 5 is the famous injunction, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (KJV). O'Gorman connects this with the "devilish" description of Quint that the governess provides (peaked eyebrows, red hair, etc.) and to James's admission in his preface that Quint is more than a ghost, *i.e.* that he is a goblin or demon.<sup>12</sup> The somewhat *recherché* thesis of O'Gorman's article is that the governess is possessed by the Devil.<sup>13</sup> O'Gorman helps to establish the reality of Quint, but unfortunately misses the real point of the allusion to 1 Peter 5; it is not that she is possessed by the Devil, but that she is Devil-like in her attempt to possess the children, and projects that attempt onto the ghosts. It seems clear, too, that the *whole* of the chapter is relevant to our reading of *The Turn of the Screw*. The second verse, for example, reads thus: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by

constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." The governess has certainly been willing—all too willing—to supervise the spiritual welfare of her charges, and the verse suggests her devotion to the absent uncle, God the Father to her self-appointed Christ. The fifth verse also seems chillingly apposite in its reminder of the governess's demand for Miles's "surrender": "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." It is part of the governess's tragedy that she did not heed the warning in the rest of the verse against authoritarianism, the admonition to "all of you" to "be clothed with humility." If she can take comfort from anything in 1 Peter 5, it is the suggestion in the tenth verse that her recovery is permanent: "But the God of all grace . . . after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you"—a passage which brings us back to Douglas's assertion that the governess when he knew her was "'worthy of any [position] whatever'" (636-37; Prologue).

The governess's survival is in fact the principal feature of *The Turn of the Screw* which sets it apart from Shakespearean tragedy, in which the protagonist dies in the catastrophe he has precipitated. The most obvious reason for this difference is that the religious and political assumptions of the Renaissance were no longer applicable at the end of the nineteenth century, but I believe that James spared the governess for another reason. In Shakespeare's major tragedies, the protagonist's self-recognition comes quickly towards the end of the play and is soon followed by his death. James was aware that self-recognition is not always this immediate, and that the consequences of dire acts and self-awareness are not invariably fatal. In *The Turn of the Screw*, James allows the governess to do what Shakespeare's protagonists never can—to tell her own story—and to give her readers, both Douglas and ourselves, a remarkable double picture of herself at two periods in her life. In doing this, James makes her not only the protagonist of the story proper but the real heroine of the frame narrative, who performs a renunciation characteristic of his late fiction. While retaining many of the features of traditional tragedy, James re-defines

it for his purposes here as a drama of developing consciousness with ultimately positive results for the governess.

To summarize: James's allusion to *King Lear* is important as a clue to the thematic, situational, and structural parallels between *The Turn of the Screw* and Shakespeare's play: the genesis of the plot in the desire for exclusive love, its tragic issue in the death of a child, the protagonist's eventual recovery from the madness of "possession," and her achievement of mature self-knowledge. A recognition of the parallels between play and novella helps to correct the errors of previous criticism and reinforces other evidence within the story—evidence which makes clear that the governess, as retrospective narrator, is writing a carefully crafted indictment of her earlier self and actions.<sup>14</sup> James's interest here, as always, is in human relationships rather than ghostly machinery. Quint and Miss Jessel are real (or, as James might say, real enough), and they may, as Freudian critics have argued, "menace" Miles and Flora with information about sexuality—information which threatens the pre-adolescent world of the nursery and the governess's hold over the children. But Quint and Miss Jessel are no more the subject of James's novella than river navigation is the subject of *Heart of Darkness*.

The word "nothing," with which we began, recurs with obsessive frequency throughout *The Turn of the Screw*. Some critics of James's novella have argued that the word signals the non-existence of the ghosts: there is "nothing" in her narrative but her own delusory imaginings. Recent criticism views the word as evidence of the story's radical inconclusiveness: nothing is certain, all is self-deconstructing interpretation, and James is a postmodern writer. As I mentioned at the beginning, there are works by James which prefigure the post-modern, but *The Turn of the Screw* is not one of them. It is perhaps the supreme ghost story in literature, and gains an added dimension of horror when we see the children menaced not by the ghosts but by their self-appointed guardian. It is also a brilliant example of the mystery story—the more brilliant, we might say, for leaving the

mystery entirely to the reader to solve or not to solve. In his 1908 preface to the story, James says that his story is “a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an *amusette* to catch those not easily caught (the ‘fun’ of the capture of the merely witless being ever but small), the jaded, the disillusioned, the fastidious.”<sup>15</sup> Those not easily caught, but caught nevertheless, include most of the novella’s critics for a hundred years.

It seems likely that James, in repeating the word “nothing” throughout *The Turn of the Screw*, was echoing *King Lear* as he did in referring to the play’s opening scene. In Shakespeare’s tragedy, the word “nothing,” which occurs throughout the play in various contexts, anticipates and finally symbolizes Lear’s experience of chaos during his madness on the heath. Having violated the laws of nature by dividing his kingdom and disowning Cordelia, Lear as “unaccommodated man” must face and finally understand the void he has opened up (III.iv.101). In *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess must endure a similar experience of vacancy, a dark night of the soul, in order to come to self-knowledge. It seems wholly appropriate that Henry James, writing his own tragedy of egoism, possessiveness, and recovery, should have referred in so many ways to *King Lear*, the greatest treatment of the theme in our language.

Queen’s University  
Kingston, Ontario

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>T. J. Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) 116. Extracts from Lustig and other critics are reprinted in Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren, eds., *The Turn of the Screw: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1999). Other recent critics who take the same line as Lustig include Tzvetan Todorov (Esch and Warren, 193-96) and Shoshana Felman (Esch and Warren, 197-228).

<sup>2</sup>Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, in *Complete Stories: 1892-1898* (New York: Library of America, 1996) 737; section XXIV of the story. Since so many editions of the novella are in use, subsequent references will include the section number as well as the page reference to this standard edition. The first, unnumbered section will be referred to as the Prologue.

<sup>3</sup>William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (I.i.85-90) in Alfred Harbage, ed., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969). Subsequent parenthetical references are to this edition.

<sup>4</sup>Gorley Putt, *Henry James: A Reader's Guide* (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1966) 398-99. Cf. Marius Bewley: "There is nothing more pathetic in James's works than the way the children make a valiant but foredoomed attempt to escape her tyranny." *The Complex Fate: Hawthorne, Henry James and Some Other American Writers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952) 107.

<sup>5</sup>Oscar Cargill, "The Turn of the Screw and Alice James," *PMLA* 78 (1963): 238-49. Leon Edel also attempts to explain the frame narrative in *The Psychological Novel, 1900-1950* (New York: Lippincott, 1955).

<sup>6</sup>As Putt points out, James's story "The Pupil" ends with a similar death; Morgan Moreen, faced with impossible tensions in his relationships with his parents and his tutor, "can only make the ultimate withdrawal of himself in death" (348).

<sup>7</sup>Juliet McMaster has drawn attention to this repeated reversal of locations and its relation to images of reflection—physical and mental—in the story. "We may think of the glass either as a transparent medium through which real ghosts can be seen, or as a mirror in which the governess sees, essentially, only her own reflection." McMaster concludes that the ambiguity of the story is "total and deliberate." See Juliet McMaster, "'The Full Image of a Repetition' in *The Turn of the Screw*," *Studies in Short Fiction* 6 (1969): 377-82.

<sup>8</sup>Cargill was the first critic to note this detail.

<sup>9</sup>Robert M. Slabey points out the use of the feast day in "The Holy Innocents and *The Turn of the Screw*," *Die Neueren Sprachen* 12 (1963): 170-73, but does not draw out its implications regarding the governess. There is a possible ambiguity in the chronology; the narrator says that "the manuscript . . . reached him [Douglas] on the third of these days and . . . he began to read to our hushed little circle on the night of the fourth" (638). If we count days from the beginning of the story on Christmas Eve, Douglas begins to read on the 27th, but it seems clear that we are to count from the day mentioned in the first sentence of the paragraph—the 25th. In either case, Douglas's reading takes more than one evening (641) and includes the 28th.

<sup>10</sup>Henry James, *Literary Criticism: French Writers; Other European Writers; The Prefaces to the New York Edition* (New York: Library of America, 1984) 1173-91; see especially 1181-89.

<sup>11</sup>Donal O'Gorman, "Henry James's Reading of *The Turn of the Screw*," *Henry James Review* 1 (1980): 125-38 and 228-56.

<sup>12</sup>James, *Literary Criticism* 1187.

<sup>13</sup>See O'Gorman 241.

<sup>14</sup>In a letter to Caroline Tate (9 November 1952), Flannery O'Connor seems to anticipate this line of interpretation: "I've also just read *The Turn of the Screw* again and to me it fairly shouts that it's about expiation." *Collected Works*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Library of America, 1988) 899-900.

<sup>15</sup>James, *Literary Criticism* 1184-85.