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Los Angeles

Intricate Spirals: Reverse Engineering Britten's Construction of Vulnerability
in *The Turn of the Screw* Through an Analysis of His Compositional Method

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Music

by

Gabrielle Noelle Rosse

2023

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2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Intricate Spirals: Reverse Engineering Britten's Construction of Vulnerability
in *The Turn of the Screw* Through an Analysis of His Compositional Method

by

Gabrielle Noelle Rosse

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Ian Krouse, Co-Chair

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In the current musicological discussion on Benjamin Britten's operatic work with constructing vulnerability and altered states through his musical language to undergird his characters in crisis, the focus tends towards musical symbolism rather than a close reading of the composer's craft. The result is an analysis of harmonic, melodic, or timbral elements that neatly classifies the "what" of Britten's technique without going in depth on the "how" of its technical detail. Whereas this approach might appeal to a more literary minded audience, I find myself left out as a composer of opera wanting more musical analysis of the music itself, in addition to the rich contextual implications of its libretti. A question many other composers might ask would be, "How and why does it work, both dramaturgically and musically?" Therefore, the goal of my research in my

monograph to accompany my dissertation opera is to write a concise manual for the opera composer through reverse engineering Britten's musical scaffolding of his opera, *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), to its DNA and tracing these strands throughout the work as a whole.

It is my hope to expand upon the current discussion of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, which deftly outlines the composer's formal structure and general harmonic techniques, and change the direction from musical symbolism to a reverse engineering of craft, with the guiding questions of how and why to its construction. Whittall and Rupprecht take us through a tour of the opera's variations and corresponding scenes; the former placing the work opposite Berg's *Wozzeck*, not for its employ of the 12-tone technique, but for its formal design and use of interludes. Deavel and Seymour's research refutes this connection as a superficial observation and offers a comprehensive and concise approach to work's harmonic structure upon which I wish to build in my analysis.

The dissertation of Gabrielle Noelle Rosse is approved.

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2023

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The Turn of the Screw

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VITA

Composer and soprano Gabrielle Rosse invites listeners on a healing journey towards love, respect, and mutual understanding through her works. Alluringly entwining innocent and complex harmonies, “now consoling, now unstable” (SFCV), Rosse engages the intersection of identity and diaspora through an intercultural dialogue that celebrates diverse traditions in her music, lyrics, and literary scholarship. Her music has been performed by the West Edge Opera, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble, Boston New Music Initiative, Brightwork, Earplay, Salastina Music Society, Lyris Quartet, Carpe Diem Quartet, soprano Hilá Plitmann, pianist José Menor, guitarist Elliot Fisk, violinist Kevin Kumar, and cellist Armen Ksajikian, and has been featured on KUSC, Hear Now LA, the Chigiana Festival, and the Sparks and Wiry Cries Festival.

Rosse is a four-year Teaching Artist Fellow with the Los Angeles Chamber orchestra. Her music is published by New Music Shelf, and her scholarly writing is under contract for publication with Oxford University Press. An active performer, Rosse has sung at the Kimmel Center, performed her work in concert with soprano Hilá Plitmann, and premiered the work of Meredith Monk and Pauline Oliveros as a soloist with the Mendelssohn Club Chorus among many other contemporary composers.

Previous study includes the Bachelor of Arts degree in English with distinction in major from Temple University, and the Master of Arts in Music from UCLA. Honors include the American Prize in Composition, 2022, the Elaine Klein Award, Mimi Alpert Award, and Deglin Memorial Award, Phi Beta Kappa, and full scholarships to UCLA, Temple University, and the Sorbonne.

Section 1. Monograph of the Dissertation

Chapter 1. Introduction

Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), based on Henry James's eponymously titled novella, falls within his operatic oeuvre as his eighth opera, ten years after *Peter Grimes* (1945) and three years following *Billy Budd* (1951), which take on a similar theme of the elusive innocence of a young boy sacrificed to the gain of a questionable protagonist.¹ It is a theme Britten excavates again in a more complex way in *Owen Wingrave* (1971) (also based on the eponymously titled novella by James), in which the archetypal child sacrifice is now a young man struggling with the ghosts of his family's expectations. This theme is flipped in his final opera, *Death in Venice* (1973), in which the protagonist, a writer on retreat in Venice before an outbreak, sacrifices his chance at deliverance for his infatuation with a boy.

The Turn of the Screw, written on the heels of *Gloriana* (1953), may be seen as a psychological retreat from the former opera's extroverted aims and ensuing scrutiny from critics and the public.² James' tale is framed as a ghost story within a story: an account of a Governess, "untried, innocent"³ of the death of a child (and emotional breakdown of another) in her charge at the faraway country estate of Bly house. As the

¹ J.P.E. Harper-Scott, "Miles must die: ideological uses of 'innocence' in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*," in *Literary Britten: words and music in Benjamin Britten's vocal works*, ed. Kate Kennedy (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2018), 318-339.

² Claire Seymour, "The Turn of the Screw," in *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 183.

³ This description, taken from Myfawny Piper's adaptation of James' Prologue, could refer to both the Governess' naïveté and any probable cause for indictment in the death of Miles and breakdown of Flora.

Governess becomes convinced that Bly is haunted by the ghosts of the former valet and governess, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, she descends into a psychological and supernatural battle as self-proclaimed hero for the purity of Miles and Flora, who she believes may be corrupted by the ghosts.

The audience must fill in the gaps in the narrative, the unspeakable “evil” that James leaves blank. This blank slate echoes the state of the children and how the adults in their world write their judgements and desires upon them.⁴ Is Miles good or bad? Is Flora loyal or lost? The Governess and her ghosts (and the reader) are to decide. James, and Britten, with libretto by Myfanwy Piper, invite the audience into the trap in which the Governess falls, wondering, “What happened here, in this house?” A major dramaturgical difference between the book and the opera noted by many analysts is that the ghosts have a voice and appear on stage.⁵ Piper’s libretto also fills in more gaps that James’ novella leaves purposefully unsaid.⁶

There are two schools of thought in hot debate over the tangibility versus the psychology of the story.⁷ Edmund Wilson’s essay on the ghosts as a manifestation of the Governess’ “neurotic case of sex repression,” famously stoked the fires two years before Britten began work on the opera.⁸ As Seymour notes, it’s possible Britten may

⁴ James Kincaid, *Child-Loving, the Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, (New York, 1992). Well-known Victorian Kid Lit critic, Kincaid offers the idea of children as *tabulae rase* upon which adults pin their desires, and self-punitive fear of the same.

⁵ Myfanwy Piper. “Some Thoughts on the Libretto of ‘Turn of the Screw,’” in *Tribute to Benjamin Britten*. (London, 1963).

⁶ Seymour, 183.

⁷ Shoshana Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading Otherwise* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 142-149.

⁸ Edmund Wilson, “The Ambiguity in Henry James,” in *The Triple Thinkers* (Harmondsworth, 1962), 115.

have been aware of this Freudian interpretation as betrayed by his original title for the opera, *The Tower and the Lake*.⁹ Musically, Britten seems to side with the interpretation of the Governess' neurosis as the evil that haunts Bly house as we will see by my analysis of his motivic and harmonic treatment of her character. Let us begin with the axis of Britten's operatic universe for *The Turn of the Screw*, the theme.

Chapter 2. Main Theme: Construction (and Deconstruction)

First Appearance of the Theme

The musical score for the first appearance of the theme is presented in two systems. The first system features a piano (Pno.) part in the bass clef, marked *pp* and *always Ped.*, and a horn and cello (Hn., Cb.) part in the treble clef, marked *cresc.*. The second system shows the horn and cello part continuing with a *mf* dynamic, while the piano part continues with a *mf* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation marks, and a crescendo hairpin.

Fig. 1

Many theorists have noted the 12-tone row that establishes the harmonic bedrock of Britten's main theme and mosaic of variations that connect the 16 scenes in the opera. Whittall goes as far as to mention the "menacing 12-note chord" that follows the initial theme statement¹⁰, but what analysts have overlooked is the coalescing

⁹ Seymour, 183.

¹⁰ Arnold Whittall. "The Chamber Operas," in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, (1999), 107.

dynamic and temporal relationship both within the first statement of the theme and its connective tissue to the next section. While the crux of our discussion will center on harmonic relationships stemming from the theme and its generative rhythmic and melodic cells that drive the work, it is worth beginning our journey with an observation of Britten's craft of these elements within our perception of time and space to create an atmosphere of claustrophobia that sets the mood of the opera. These details illustrate how Britten employs his thematic material, not just harmonically, but as a composer considering the multi-dimensional medium of opera. Even though the set on stage cannot (yet) physically close in on the audience, we are invited to perceive both the external setting at Bly house and the internal setting of the Governess' mental state as simultaneously converging to a vortex.

We shall trace this perceptual convergence through our discussion of Britten's employ of the row, especially his deft interweaving of kaleidoscopic modal harmonies within a single passage leading into a freely atonal carousel reflective of the Governess' mental state as she describes the visage of Quint in chapter 6, but for now we turn to an elegantly simple expression of claustrophobia through dynamics and tempo in the first presentation of the theme. The idea that Britten would take readily accessible elements such as layering of dynamics, density, and tempo and employ them in a way that could be seen as a microcosm of the work reflects his compositional efficiency. Perhaps the first fundamental thread to note is that Britten engages the listener with the thematic world of the opera at the outset. This point may be followed by a close second: Britten must construct a sense of normalcy before he can deconstruct it.

What I am most interested in as a composer approaching this passage is 1. how we construct a world in the fewest opening bars possible, and 2. how we deconstruct that world. Britten uses three main tools at the composer's disposal: time, dynamics, and harmony in an intricate balance with the first statement of the theme. Within these three main components are the more detailed points of texture and density: background and foreground, layering of voices, and instrumental color, which we will touch on briefly and unpack in more detail following our discussion of harmony. First, Britten establishes a sense of time in $\frac{4}{4}$. Second, he references an historical style hearkening to the French Overture, in the double dotted processional rhythm. Third, he juxtaposes this traditional Baroque style in a new (and remarkably strange) way with a hushed pianissimo dynamic in the first bar of the theme. Finally, he deconstructs this world within the last 3 of 9 total bars.

Rupprecht rightly identifies the French Overture double dotted rhythm in the Turn of the Screw theme and even recognizes its reference in the Prologue. However, he makes no mention of the rhythm as a generative cell and its significance dramaturgically or musically to the body of the opera.¹¹ In chapter 2 of our interlocution, we will draw this double dotted rhythm's lineage more directly to Purcell than the French Overture. Later in chapter 3, I will unravel the theme's double dotted rhythm as a generative cell driving the duplicitous nature of the work. For now, let us resume our discussion on the deceptively simple connective tissue that Britten uses to finesse our perception of claustrophobic internal and external environs in the Governess' relationships and Bly house.

¹¹ Philip Ernst Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*. (Cambridge University Press 2001), 142-3.

What ensues in bar 9 after the first statement of the 8-bar theme is a tremolo sustained under sweeping upwards glissandi grace notes to the downbeat of the next section in the full orchestra which employs all 12 notes of the row at once on a crescendo to fortissimo. Britten quickens the pace dramatically throughout the final bars of the theme, almost doubling the tempo gradually from ♩ = 48 at bar 7 to ♩ = 96 in bar 10. The tremolo bar does the work of dislocating us further temporally as the breath before the plunge. Albeit a commonplace compositional technique, the significance is found in the surface level analysis of the tremolo as a micro motivic structural element in this texture. This dramatic shift in dynamics and tempo suggests the turning of the screw, both in the Governess's mental state and the conditions at Bly house. Both harmonically and emotionally via the 12-tone row and the increasing compression in tempo, dynamic, and density from our delicate pianissimo and dirge-like origins, Britten has effectively created a DNA strand (note the imagery of the screw in the double helix), for the opera in the first 8 bars of the theme. The theme therefore, even at the surface level, becomes the axis (or the screw) upon which the opera turns.

Transitions as connective tissue may be seen as paramount to thematic material. This vice grip created by layering forces feels sudden and yet has been gradually seeping in since bar 1 of the theme. The final three bars of the theme allow the listener to enter a sort of negative space that takes us into a frantic state at bar 10 reminiscent of Stravinsky's fortissimo rhythmic repetition and variance in *The Rite of Spring*. Contributing to an aural perception of negative space and further dislocating our sense of time, Britten switches from the established common time meter to $\frac{3}{2}$ on a sustained tremolo that removes the beat entirely (Fig. 1.2). After the piano introduces the missing

12th tone C (completing the row 2 beats before in b. 8), the tremolo in b. 9 continues to harmonically saturate the canvas with all 12-tones (already a jarring moment) and acts as a deep breath before the plunge.

Chapter 3. Musical Rendering of the Element of the Uncanny:

Purcellian Double Dotted Rhythm Juxtaposed Against

Unexpected Texture and Density

We should for a moment note that the idea of taking a familiar thing, like the characteristic Purcellian double dotted rhythm, and reframing it in a new, and specifically strange and unfamiliar way is an example of the element of the uncanny¹². Britten employs the element of the uncanny musically in a similar way that James weaves it into his text in the original novel. For example, James' imagery of mirrors and doubles reflects the duplicity and unknown regions of the inner world of the Governess.¹³ We will delve into this doubleness in greater detail in our discussion of Miles and the Governess exchanging melodies and tonal centers and merging as one voice (even blending voice types) at the end of the opera. For now, it suffices to mention the idea of the double may have been taken as tongue in cheek by Britten in employing the double dotted rhythm, and yet the musical joke works perfectly. This rhythm both hearkens the old and heralds the new at once. First let us trace the double dotted

¹² Sigmund Freud. *The Uncanny*. (Penguin Classics, 2003), 335-376.

¹³ In "The Uncanny," Freud explains "the uncanny" occurs when something familiar feels simultaneously strange. This phenomenon engages a "doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self," for example, through "mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death." Literary criticism on James' use of the element of the uncanny in *The Turn of the Screw* is too vast to mention. The important point is that the element of the uncanny, and the Governess' struggle with resolving it, is what influences her perception and drives her actions towards the ghosts and the children.

rhythm's reference to Purcell within the context of Britten's oeuvre before moving on to our analysis of this inherited English stylistic trait as a generative rhythmic cell.

Imogen Holst, co-artistic director with Britten and Pears at Aldeburgh, composer and daughter of Gustav Holst, and copyist for Britten's *Gloriana* and *The Turn of the Screw*, notes Britten's passion in his own words for Purcell's organization of "independent, short sections mysteriously linked by subtle contrasts of key, mood, and rhythm," with a "firm and secure musical structure which can safely hold together and make sense of one's wildest fantasies."¹⁴ Britten's assessment could substitute as a description for much of his own music¹⁵, including his theme and variations in *The Turn of the Screw*. Woodward posits that in his choral work *Rejoice in the Lamb* (also a theme and variations), Britten may reference Purcell in his prevalent double dotted rhythm.¹⁶ This rhythm is also found in Britten's third movement of his String Quartet No. 2 (1945), titled *Chacony*, which references the eponymously titled *Chacony in G minor* (1680) by Purcell (another theme and variations hence the name.) Britten would later arrange Purcell's *Chacony in G minor* for string quartet in 1948.

Now that we have traced its English lineage in Purcell, we resume our analysis of the uncanny at work in Britten's setting of the double dotted rhythm in context of the theme. He forgoes Purcell's typical rendering of the rhythm as anthemic or processional with prominent homophonic octave doubled strings. Instead, he buries the theme at the

¹⁴ Imogen Holst (ed.), *Henry Purcell: Essays on his Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 10-11.

¹⁵ See, for example, Ralph Woodward, "Music for Voices" in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, (1999), 264. Woodward applies this description to Britten's 1943 cantata, *Rejoice in the Lamb*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

tempo of a dirge in the piano (muddled by the pedal “always down”), at a pianissimo dynamic. Furthermore, Britten sets the opening of the theme in heterophony with the vocal line at the elided cadence of the Prologue. Heterophony can be defined as a simultaneously sounding variation on a single melody in two or more voices, and it is a prevalent texture of Britten’s musical language, prominently featured in Curlew River.

Heterophonic setting of the Double Dotted Purcellian Rhythm

Double dotted rhythm in Piano

Variation of piano melody in Voice. Retrograde rhythm, short-long instead of long-short. M6 leap instead of P4 skip. Offset entrances with piano.

Pno. *pp* P4 skip

always Ped.

Prol. M6 leap

"I will," she said.

Fig. 2

Increasing Density on 12-tone chord in Orch. over Pno. solo

THEME
Very slow (♩ = 48) W.w., layered entrances [E, C#, F#, Bb, G] (Fl. on G, bar 8) broadening --

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. in A

Bsn.

Hrn. in F

Harp

Perc.

Piano

Prof.

I.

VI.

II.

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Hp. begins on B, expands to 7-note cluster on [E, A, B, D, G#, F#] by bar 9

Timp. Timp., Pedal A, tonal center.

Pno. begins on A. Plays C, the missing 12th tone, as final pitch, b. 8

The lights fade and the drop curtain rises in darkness.
Das Licht erlischt und der Zwischenvorhang hebt sich in der Dunkelheit.

"I will," she said.
„Ich tu's," sagt sie.

Very slow (♩ = 48) Strings, layered entrances [E, D#, G#, F] broadening --

Fig. 3

Further distorting our memory of the rhythm's Purcellian context, Britten uses the strings, percussion, winds, and horn (blending into the woodwind choir) simply to sustain the pedal tones of an increasingly 12-tone chord as the density increases with each layered instrumental entrance into the next bar (see Fig. 4). The result is an eerie memory of a familiar form, the element of the uncanny immediately at work. By the time the piano emerges from background single line pianissimo to foreground doubled octaves at mezzo forte, the theme is now fighting against the converging forces of the layered 12-tone chord, increasing tempo at twice the original speed, and matching crescendo in the orchestra. Note I have not used PC sets to identify the notes of Britten's 12-tone row because although the row is all-combinatorial, as Deavel aptly states, "Britten does not use it as such."¹⁷ Britten writes the row within the context of his own tonally based language, repeating pitches for emphasis and establishing a tonal center immediately on A, framed within a tonic-dominant relationship to E in the first bars of the piano.

Chapter 4. Musical Cells:

The Symbolism in the Double Dotted Rhythm and the Single Pitch Melody

Taking this point a step further into a close reading of the rhythm, the idea of mirror images, duplicity, and doubles aligned with the element of the uncanny lurks within the double dotted rhythm itself. Shorter than a musical motif, this rhythm is a musical cell, defined as "the smallest indivisible unit."¹⁸ The double dot creates a

¹⁷ R.G. Deavel, "A Study of Two Operas by Benjamin Britten: 'Peter Grimes' And 'The Turn of The Screw'" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, Ann Arbor, 1970), 67.

¹⁸ Nattiez, Jean-Jacques. *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music (Musicologie générale et sémiologie, 1987)*. Translated by Carolyn Abbate (University of Chicago Press, 1990).

ricochet effect that reflects the melody rhythmically, like bouncing off a mirror. In the Prologue (composed after the first three scenes when Britten thought the opera was “too short”¹⁹), Britten references the double dotted rhythm in the piano in a more subdued and disjointed way — in the style of traditional *recitativo secco*. He couples this initial reference to the central rhythmic cell of the theme with the pivotal dramaturgical mandate from the children’s absent guardian to the Governess: silence on the goings on at Bly house. Such an important plot key is signaled by two equally important rhythmic and melodic cells in the double dotted rhythm²⁰ and one-note melody, respectively. The melodic flatlining on one note, C#, enharmonically respelled as D \flat in the next system, is characteristic of Britten’s language to signify death, as in Peter Grimes’ soliloquy on the death of his child apprentices. It is therefore fitting here, at the crux of the plot: a mysterious command to silence concerning the children’s welfare, to musically symbolize silence and foreshadow Miles’ death (and Flora’s emotional breakdown which causes her exit from Bly), with a single-pitch melody juxtaposed against the double dotted rhythm symbolizing duplicity (of the mind of the Governess and what she may — or may not see — in the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel.)

¹⁹ Whittall, 107.

²⁰ Rupprecht, citing Carlos Rowe, acknowledges the first appearance of double dot in the Prologue as sign posting the passing of agency from the children’s benefactor to the Governess, but both overlook the single note melody and its significance, 142.

Double Dotted Rhythm and the One Note Melody Symbolizing Silence/Death

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The top system is for the vocal part, labeled 'Prol.' and 'Pno.'. The tempo is 'Slow' and the dynamic is 'mf'. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The vocal line features a double-dotted rhythm and a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are: 'She was to do eve - ry - thing, be res-pon-si-ble_ for eve - ry-thing'. The piano accompaniment is marked 'pp' and features a double-dotted rhythm. The bottom system continues the vocal line with lyrics: 'not to wor-ry him at all, No, not to write, but to be si - lent, and do her best.' A red bracket highlights the phrase 'but to be si - lent, and do her best.' in the vocal line, with a purple annotation above it: 'Notice the interrupted turn around "silent" on D \flat '.

Fig. 4

Chapter 5. Prosody is “Everything:” Prosodic Origin of Britten’s Generative Rhythmic Cell as the Work References Itself

Even the interrupted turn, leaving conspicuous space for the one-note D \flat pitch obsession on “silent,” can be seen as a motive on the turn of the screw. At the heart of James’ story is a purposeful ambiguity, what is never said of the ghosts or the children or what really transpired at Bly house. This silence on James’ part is what draws the reader in further with each chapter. James writes in his preface to the original story, “Only make the reader’s general vision of evil intense enough.... Make him think the

evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications.”²¹

Seymour puts her finger on the clue at the heart of James’ — and Britten’s — ambiguity when she states, “James’ silence may be the silence which is ‘everything,’ an infinite panorama of possibilities.”²² Ironically, it seems to be the prosody of this very word, “everything,” in the Guardian’s charge to the Governess in the Prologue from which Britten, aside from his Purcellian heritage, may derive the double dotted rhythmic cell that drives the theme within the context of the work.

We have traced Britten’s English lineage of the double dotted rhythm through Purcell, and now we shall dive deeper into the idea of the work referencing itself. Britten’s vocal music displays a keen attunement to prosody generating the rhythm of a melodic line. Note the reflexivity of the prosody informing the rhythm and the rhythm informing the theme and fabric of the work. In this section, I will map the generative rhythmic cell to the prosody of the lines of the Governess, both in the Prologue and at the inciting incident in Act I, on key words that draw us into the mysterious silence at the heart of the story.

Our first clues are signals and repetitions; first, the rhythmic cell on the double dot referencing the theme signals that we are about to hear an announcement, as it were, on a crucial piece of text. Second, the single-note obsession on C#/D \flat calls us to pay attention in the way that a whisper would incline our ear. Third, Britten has marked the tempo at this moment as “Slow” which causes us to reflect. Fourth, he positions the two similar rhythms as bookends (or reflections) in each of the ensuing bars which they

²¹ Henry James, ‘Preface to *The Aspern Papers*; *The Turn of the Screw*; *The Liar*; *The Two Faces*’ in *The Art of the Novel* (London: Scribner’s, 1934), pp. 169-77.

²² Seymour, 181

are found, highlighting their uniqueness. As if this were not enough, Britten slows down time by creating an irregular number of beats between the beginning and end of these first two bars, 4 versus 5 beats respectively. Now our ears are ripened to the twice repeated word “everything” on the last beat of bars 1-2 of the newly marked “Slow” tempo. The repetition invites a close reading into the refrain and links the single dotted rhythm of the word with the piano’s double dotted generative rhythmic cell. (It would follow that a literal mapping of the word “everything” onto the piano’s double dotted cell would be unnatural to the word’s prosody.) The score image bears repeating with the analysis illustrated below.

Close Reading on the Prosody of “Everything” Mapping to Theme

The image displays a musical score for voice and piano. It is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal line (Prol.) and piano accompaniment (Pno.) for the first two bars. The vocal line is marked "Slow" and "mf". The piano accompaniment is marked "pp". The lyrics are "She was to do eve - ry - thing, be res-pon-si-ble_ for eve - ry-thing". The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the next two bars. The vocal line is marked "rall.". The lyrics are "not to wor-ry him at all, No, not to write, but to be si - lent, and do her best." Blue boxes highlight specific rhythmic cells in both the vocal and piano parts, showing the mapping of the word "everything" to the piano's double dotted cell.

Fig. 5

I have highlighted the words, “at all,” because they follow the short-long of the double dotted rhythmic cell and give us further insight into the crucial silence central to the story’s psychological intrigue. Additionally, and important to note compositionally, the third bar’s rhythmic imitation is a variation of the first two. The first two of the group of three bars that begin with the piano’s double dotted rhythmic cell and end with a similar long-short-long rhythm on “everything,” but the third bar is distinguished by a truncated short-long matching the prosody of the text, “at all.” These words fall at the end of “not to worry him at all,” essentially to say *nothing at all* concerning the world at Bly to their Guardian. What then, is at the heart of the mysterious silence behind the *Turn of the Screw*? We echo the Governess, who asks at the inciting incident (Act. I, Sc. 5) on the P4 interval driving the theme, “Who is that?”, following Mrs. Grose’s P4 skip on “What was it?” Why of course, it is “everything” and nothing “at all.” Britten affords a microcosm of the plot and the driving force behind the story — and the mind of the Governess — in these three bars of the Prologue (Fig. 5). He further elucidates the Governess’ mental state behind her actions as he re-enters the previous piano accompaniment in the *recitativo secco* on fast, arpeggiated M7^(add9) chords, characteristic of the composer’s language to foreshadow brewing unrest, as in the “Dawn” Interlude from *Peter Grimes*.

The dotted rhythm comes back to describe the Governess’ inner world, incongruent with the prosody this time which alerts us to draw a connection on the text, “full of doubts.” The prosodically incongruent rhythmic signal returns in the next system on, “need her help,” as part of the phrase, “She was carried away that he... would need her help,” and its position before the fermata on “help” again causes us to reflect.

Rupprecht posits with Carlos Rowe that these lines signify a transference of agency from the Guardian to the Governess.²³ I argue that the opposite; while on the surface this may seem true, the proverbial “turn of the screw” is in what lies beneath. The Governess’ emotional state, “full of doubts,” coupled with her need to be needed point to a lack of agency that drives her quest to win authority over the children from her perceived ghosts. At the center of the story is a lack — of agency, and answers. To further illustrate this point musically, the dotted rhythm returns in the voice, obscured in heterophony with the generative rhythmic cell in the piano, as the Prologue’s narrator (named Douglas in James’ text) speaks for the last time, and pivotally on the Governess’ contractual words, “I will,” she said.” It is also worth remembering the M6 downward leap — turning the Wagnerian rising M6 hero motif on its head — that characterizes her words. The Governess is already the fallen hero, even before she begins her quest.

The Governess’ Contractual Words on the Dotted Rhythm and M6 Fallen Hero Motif

The image shows a musical score with two staves. The top staff is for the Piano (Pno.) and the bottom staff is for the Prologue (Prol.). Both are in 4/4 time. The piano part is marked *pp* and has a bass line with a dotted rhythm and a downward leap. The vocal part has a dotted rhythm. Red arrows point from the piano's dotted rhythm to the vocal line's dotted rhythm. The piano part is labeled "always Ped." and the vocal part is labeled "I will," she said."

Fig. 6

²³ Rupprecht, 142.

Chapter 6. Generative cells of the Theme Found in the Inciting Incident

We mentioned the P4 interval class taken from the theme at work in the inciting incident. It now becomes appropriate to use the term interval class in context of Britten's tonal language as we are about to take a brief look at the composer's play on mirror images before a more in-depth discussion following the next section. Within the theme, Britten takes the P4 interval introduced by the piano in the Prologue and mirrors it to the P5 inversion. Seymour suggests this motion indicates a circle of fifths²⁴, but more specifically it is an A2 (+4 / -3) chromatic sequence. This sequence is a crucial element dramaturgically and foreshadows the inciting incident. In Act. I, Sc. 5, aptly titled "The Window," the Governess tells Mrs. Grose she has seen an image of a man (who we later find is the ghost of Peter Quint) through the window (itself a mirror image.) Mrs. Grose implores the frightened Governess, "What is it?" on a rising and falling P4 that *strangely* echoes the Governess' own contractual words, "I will," on the rising and falling M6 — fallen hero motif — in the Prologue. The Governess' words, "frightened," "window," "strange man," and "before" (as part of the phrase, "I saw him before") are all elements of the uncanny, and all are set to the P4 interval that Seymour rightly associates with "unanswered questions."²⁵

²⁴ Seymour, 186.

²⁵ Ibid.

A2 (+4 / -3) Chromatic Sequence Outlined by Theme

Driving the Modulations at the Inciting Incident



Fig. 7

The inciting incident sparks the Governess' decision to stay and save the children from the "evil" that she perceives—which becomes her single-minded obsession, symbolized by Britten's single-pitch obsession motif on the Governess' words as she demands information, "Mrs. Grose, what has happened here, in this house?" I am now using the term motif instead of melodic cell to describe the single-pitch motif, as we are considering the movement of the single pitch over time. Mirroring his signal to pay attention in the Prologue, Britten strategically positions the Governess' single-pitch motif right before Mrs. Grose speaks again the name of Peter Quint. Additionally, he interjects a fermata right before the adverbial phrase in Governess' question, emphasizing, "in this house?" The fermata, and the question, both imply that Bly is not a haven after all, but now it is "this house," this great wide and scary world of windows, mirrors, ghosts, and the unspeakable never answered. (Fig. 8, next page). Note that the interstices at the pauses create a double dotted feeling. The instrumentation of this passage is dark; low strings continuing Mrs. Grose's melody where she leaves off, supported by open 5ths in low winds and harp.

The Governess' Single-Pitch Obsession Motif

Connecting Prologue to Act I, Sc. 5

Gov. *p* freely (long pause)
Mrs. Grose, what has hap-pened here, in this house?

Mrs. G.
Dear God!

Str.
Str.
Hp., Hrn., Cl., Bsn.

Fig. 8

Looking back for a moment to the beginning of this scene, it is fitting that Britten would reference the rising/falling M6 fallen hero motif on the Governess' first words describing what she saw at the window, "A man," who becomes her self-proclaimed antagonist, is set to a crescendo on her held F# over the starting pitch, A. It is important to note that in the Governess' melody on, "A man look'd through the window, a strange man. But I saw him before," Britten gives us 10 out of 12 pitches of the row, arranged in a similar fashion (although not exact) to the theme. Perhaps 10 is a symbol of Quint, having been sighted twice. Compositionally, this is an unsettling moment that destroys, as it were, both the Governess' tonality of A major, and her emotional stability in one fell swoop.

The Governess Perceives her Antagonist:

Rising M6 Juxtaposed Against Orch. Syncopation

M6 leap
(Governess will become self-perceived
hero as she names her antagonist)

pp

Gov. *A man*

Mrs. G. P4 "questioning" motif mirroring theme
What was it? What was it?

Syncopated rhythm in orchestra displacing beat

W.w.
pp cresc.
W.w.

Gov. *marked*
look'd through the win-dow, a strange man. But I saw him be-fore,

Pno. Red. *Str., pizz. (heavily)*
p

Fig. 9

Mrs. Grose *almost* echoes the Governess' rising M6 refrain, except flattened on the m6, when she asks, also on a crescendo referring to the Governess' newly perceived antagonist, "What was he like?" Meanwhile, the orchestra has been (and continues) distorting our sense of time with syncopation, close imitation on the P4 motif, and *molto crescendi* over 3 quick beats at a time, perhaps evocative of the Governess' heart skipping a beat.

Mrs. Grose's Answer on the m6, Constituting an Augmented Triad

Fl. *p* *cresc.* *f* *tr.*

Ob. *p* *mf*

Cl. in Bb.

Bsn.

Hm. in F *mf cresc.*

Perc. S.D.

Gov. No! in - deed no!
Nein! ge - wiss nein!

Mrs. G. gentle-man, then?
Herr, der Sie kennt?

What was he like?
Wie sah er aus?

Fig. 10

Mrs. Grose's answer, "What was he like," on the m6 from [B – G] is necessary to dislodge (once again) our sense of tonality with the G^{aug} chord that would otherwise be a BM triad. Britten evades landing on a V-I relationship that would answer the Governess' (momentary) EM tonal area with a half cadence, as to do so would be incongruent with the tonal ambiguity that he is setting in motion leading up to the Governess' description of the mysterious man in the window. This is controlled chaos, and as such requires a delicate balance of *almost* tonal landings to develop the element of the uncanny musically. The orchestra has already been foreshadowing Mrs. Grose's rising and falling P4 questions hearkening the interval class generated by the theme on "What's happened?" "What was it?". Britten uses the A2 (+4 / -3) sequence established in the theme to drive the ascending stepwise chromatic modulations in the orchestra. The orchestra repeats the theme's notes, [A-D-E-B-F#-C#] in order at bars 2-3 after Rehearsal 36 as a melodic fragment of the A2 modulatory snake (see Fig. 11 and 12). What follows is a series of unexpected twists. The A2 chromatic sequence indeed ascends chromatically, but not with typical applied dominant relationships. Instead, the tonal center moves chromatically upwards and the tonality changes with each modulation. For example, from bitonality emphasizing D, to the Pentatonic Collection emphasizing D#, to bitonality emphasizing E. The moments of bitonality comprise the I and V chords sounding together.

Melodic Fragment of the Theme

Foreshadowing Theme's A2 Sequential Modulation

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The woodwind section (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, Horn in F) and strings (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello) are shown with their respective staves. The percussion part is labeled 'Perc.' and includes the instruction 'S.D. without snares'. The score features a variety of dynamic markings: 'cresc.' (crescendo) is used for the woodwinds and bassoon; 'sf' (sforzando) and 'p' (piano) are used for the woodwinds and strings; 'mf' (mezzo-forte) is used for the percussion. Performance instructions include 'arco' for the strings and 'S.D. without snares' for the percussion. The lyrics 'runs out and looks through the window.' and 'und sieht durch das Fenster, wie er es tat.' are placed above the string staves.

Fig. 11

The Governess' first words describing what she saw lead us through the tonal centers of D, D#, E, before shifting to Em at Mrs. Grose's "What was he like?", obscured by the III+ chord G^{aug7} (or Em/M7^{add9}). The augmented chord functions as a voice leading chord; however, it leads us to an unexpected place — into a 12-tone universe at Rehearsal 38, as the Governess describes in detail the face she saw. Both descriptions of Quint invoke a lapse into atonality. But it is still controlled chaos; we dive into an abyss for the duration of her descriptions only. Tonally, this gives us the feeling of vertigo, like approaching a black hole. The progression to Quint's visage is increasingly chromatic — then suddenly freely atonal.

Immediately following this postmodern sound world, Britten launches into what sounds like a Purcellian vocal line at Rehearsal 39, characterized by the double dotted rhythm on "Dear God," that returns us to the EM tonality we just left 8 bars ago. However, right after re-establishing E as tonal center, he just as quickly abandons it, exchanging tonality for ambiguity on the descent of Mrs. Grose's melodic refrain with the Whole Tone scale. The WT scale is an example —on the micro level — of the uncanny in its symmetrical structure, following Britten's deconstructive play on mirror images and windows. Mrs. Grose's melody itself is another modulatory snake, perhaps mirroring the slippery character of the person in question, Quint. In the first three repetitions, the "Dear God..." refrain winds from E major to D Lydian, to F Lydian, the first and last repetitions ending with the WT collection followed by a rising P5 (Fig. 12, next page).

Mrs. Grose's Common Tone Modulating Melody

E Major Whole Tone

39 Slow and broad ♩ = 48

f *p*

Mrs. G. Dear God, is there no end to his dread - ful ways?

Str. *ff* *dim.* *pp*

Pno. Red.

D Lydian F Lydian

f *f* *dim.*

Mrs. G. Dear God, Dear God, is there no end

Str. *ff* *f* *dim.*

Pno. Red.

Whole Tone

Mrs. G. Dear God, Dear God!

Str. *mf*

Pno. Red. Str.

Hp., Hrn., Cl., Bsn.

Fig. 12

Britten mixes metaphors with the juxtaposition of the Purcellian double dotted rhythm and rapid-fire interlocution of modes and corresponding tonal centers. This treatment mirrors his setting of the theme's generative double dotted rhythmic cell enveloped within a 12-tone sound world, and it is yet another example — this time on a macro level — of the element of the uncanny that lends a formal structure to the work through repetition. Stylistic markers of the Baroque idiom, including the double dotted rhythm and melismatic text setting, versus a modern, tonally ambiguous harmony will resurface with a literal restatement of the theme in the orchestra undergirding the final moments of the opera, which we will discuss in greater detail later. Dramaturgically, this juxtaposition of old and new sound worlds mirrors the central conversation at the inciting incident, the Governess and Mrs. Grose's conversation of the dead coming back to haunt Bly house.

Mixed Metaphors: Juxtaposition of Old and New Sound Worlds in Mrs. Grose's Melody

Purcellian Double Dotted Rhythm Harmonic Ambiguity: Interweaving Modes, ending with Whole Tone Collection (see also Fig. 12)

39 **Slow and broad** ♩ = 48

f **p**

Mrs. G. *Dear God, is there no end to his dread - ful ways?*

Str. **ff** *dim.* **pp**

Pno. Red.

Fig. 13

Before Mrs. Grose answers the Governess' demand to know "what has happened (*pause*) in this house?" She leaves the Governess in suspense while she reiterates her refrain three successive times in variation, "Dear God, is there no end to his dreadful ways?" The effect sounds like stretto entrances of imitative counterpoint, except in a single voice. This repetition with no more information is maddening to the Governess, who repeats in upwards modulating pentatonic harmony, "Tell me!" The "Dear God..." refrain is then repeated twice more for a total of three global repetitions throughout the scene from Rehearsal 39-44, separated by episodes of the Governess' questioning underscored by melodic fragments driven by Mrs. Grose's lines, in what becomes a rondo form. The rondo, a loose form in which a refrain, repeated at least three times, is separated by contrasting episodes, is a perfect frame to hold this scene — driven by an image at the window — together.

Further driving the disorientation behind this scene, Britten continuously repeats the refrain in imitation and heterophony in the orchestra. The micro form of Scene V reflects the overall structure of the work which itself is a rondo in principle: 16 episodic scenes connected by a "refrain" (theme) and its variations. A closer look at Mrs. Grose's melodic figure in her refrain reveals the theme's generative rhythm of the double dot, on the text, "Dear God." Consequently, the double dotted figure pervades the orchestra in counterpoint to the speech-driven rhythms of Mrs. Grose's ensuing *recitativo accompagnato* episode at Rehearsal 40 on Quint's history at Bly house.

Chapter 7. Framing Chaos with Order: Spiral of The Screw

Having discussed the theme, its generative cells, and their use in the inciting incident, it is now time to map the influence of the theme upon the tonal structure of the opera. As we have unpacked in detail, Britten employs the model of harmonic ambiguity in the 12-tone row in *The Turn of the Screw* theme and successfully dislocates our sense of time in the first 8 bars (plus 9th tremolo bar) of its presentation.

Dramaturgically, each of Britten's 15 variations on the theme creates another layer of separation of time and space in the opera's plot, mirroring James' original intention of temporal ambiguity and mysterious holes in the narrative that dislocate the reader's sense of reality. However, we have mentioned that Britten establishes A as tonal center at the outset. He also ends the opera on the tonal center, A.

Britten's use of the row to drive the pitch centers of each of the 16 scenes of the opera is hardly atonal; rather, the Turn of the Screw theme works within the composer's own harmonic language as our axis through the opera. The tonal centers of each of the first 8 scenes correspond to the notes of the ascending A natural minor scale [A-B-C-D-E-F-G] — plus an additional 7th degree leading tone A^b (G[#]) upon which the opera pivots between the end of Act I and the beginning of Act II. The imagery of the fulcrum at the base of a seesaw was akin in James' mind to the turn of the screw, and it was also a position in which he visualized the children as "small victims."²⁶ We can draw a connection between the screw and the fulcrum as simple machines, within which the children are cogs of adult fabrications. The last 7 scenes correspond to the mirror reflection (or inversion) of the A aeolian mode around the axis 5, the notes of the

²⁶ Whittall, 139.

descending A \flat mixolydian mode, [A \flat -F \sharp (G \flat)-F-E \flat -C \sharp (D \flat)-C-B \flat], and ending — inconclusively as we shall see in our discussion of the ending tonality — on A. Note that some analysts have fallen prey to researcher bias and mistakenly identified this descending A \flat mixolydian mode as an A \flat major scale.

Stepwise Ascending/Descending Tonal Centers Corresponding to the 16 Scenes



Fig. 14

Establishing and balancing order to frame chaos is a crucial component in constructing the musical world of *The Turn of the Screw*. The protagonist in the Governess, and antagonist in Peter Quint each has their own tonal center derived from the A aeolian mode and its A \flat mixolydian mode that comprise the ascending and descending tonal centers of the total design, respectively. However, the Governess and Quint's tonalities are duplicitous in nature, corresponding to their questionable motives. Britten employs deconstructive play with what could almost be termed a pretense of postmodern theory within the context of his tonal language, the idea of aeolian and mixolydian modes, and major and minor chords, as equivalent based on their inversional symmetry. The Governess' tonal center A, is found in both major and minor, as is Peter Quint's A \flat tonal center. Furthermore, Britten plays with dominant-tonic

relationships and equates the A and A \flat tonal centers to their dominant counterparts, E and E \flat , respectively.

The figure below describes Britten's assignment of A and E tonal centers to the Governess and A \flat and E \flat tonal centers to Quint. The symmetry between the two tonic dominant pairs can be found either horizontally or vertically within the final scene of the opera which we will explore in the last chapter of our discussion. We will notice a horizontal symmetrical relationship between E and A \flat in the last scene with the Governess' opening lines in E Major and her eventual dramatic shift to Quint's A \flat tonal area in monophony. Vertically, Britten positions the E \flat -A axis at the opera's closing bars. During these overlaps and symmetrical oppositions of the Governess' and Quint's tonal areas outlined in Fig. 16 and unpacked in the conclusion of this essay, we can perceive a dramaturgical implication of character duplicity and the element of the uncanny.

Deconstructive Play with the Governess' and Quint's Tonal Areas

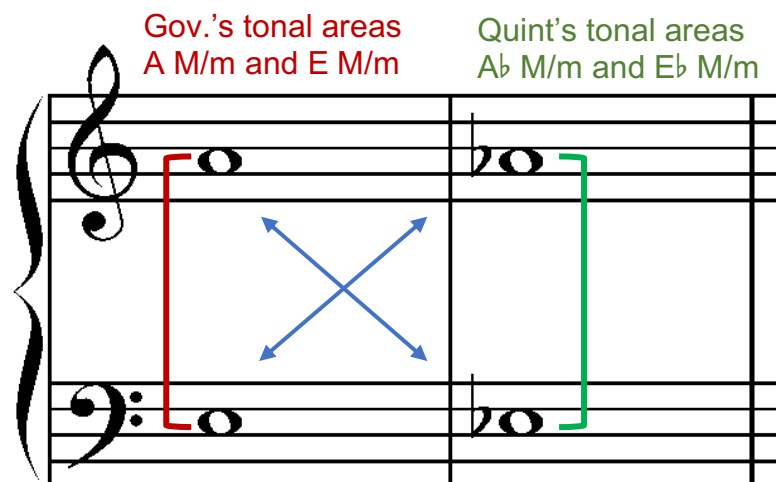


Fig. 15

We will first trace Britten’s employ of tonic-dominant relationships to reflect the Governess in both A and E major before moving on to Quint’s tonic-dominant relationships on A \flat -E \flat . For example, we have noted that Britten uses the Governess’ tonal center of A at the inciting incident as she perceives her antagonist in Quint in A major on the archetypal hero rising M6 motif. Musically and dramaturgically, Britten bookends the Governess’ hero quest at the turning point of the opera in in the final scene of Act II, titled “Miles.” As the Governess’ doubles down on her mission to save the boy, Britten switches her tonal area to E major, an historically heroic key. An analysis follows.

Upon Flora’s emotional breakdown and ensuing exit with Mrs. Grose, the Governess finds herself alone with Miles. After affirming that Flora finally believes her and is not “lost” after all (at the cost of her emotional/mental stability), the Governess confirms that Mrs. Grose must take Flora away from Bly, and asserts what she “must do:” face off with Quint to “save” Miles. The ascending scale, completely spelled out on E major, reinforces her quest to bring the boy home on the tonic. Compositionally, is important to note that Britten leaves the Governess exposed, without orchestration under her; and the meter is free.

Fig. 16, Underscoring the Governess’ Turning Point in E Major,

Bookending the Inciting Incident in A Major

Gov. 

All the same, go, and I shall stay and face what I have to face with the boy.

When the orchestra returns, the texture eases in with monody under the Governess, and at 6 bars after Rehearsal 121, he employs homophonic strings and maintains a sparse and intimate density.

Undermining the Governess' Hero Quest with Her Own Hexachord from the Theme

121 Slow and regular (♩=60)

Harp *pp*

Perc. *pp* Timp. tr. *tr*

Gov. *f passionately*
 O Miles I can-not bear to lose you. You shall be mine, and I shall save you.
 O Miles ich kann Dich jetzt nicht las-sen. Du bleibst ganz mein, ich werd' Dich ret-ten.

121 Slow and regular (♩=60) Mrs. Grose goes quickly to Flora and takes her off.
 Frau Gross geht schnell zu Flora und nimmt sie mit.

Db. *pizz. un-muted pp*

* This low E can be taken (throughout) by the Bass drum.

Harp *pp*

Perc. *tr (very soft rolls always)*

Miles saunters on.
 Miles schlendert herein.

Vln. I *smoothly and elegantly un-muted p*

Vln. II *smoothly and elegantly un-muted p*

Vla. *smoothly and elegantly un-muted p*

Db. *pp*

Fig. 17

All the while, Britten undermines the Governess' historically heroic E major — and seemingly her reliability — with a D major repetition of the theme in the orchestra (Fig. 20 above). Britten repeats the first 6 pitches of the theme, in the double bass, harp,

and timpani, again a very dry and dark color. He uses the theme's IC5 on [A-D-B-E-C#-F#] (Reh. 121), blurring the Governess' A major against D major bitonality. Note that the 12-tone row, split into two hexachords, reflects the Governess' primary tonal area of A major and Quint's primary tonal area of E \flat major, respectively (Fig. 21 below).

Furthermore, many analysts have fallen prey to researcher bias and mistakenly identified this descending E \flat major scale as A \flat . Both tonal centers, A \flat and E \flat , correspond to Quint, and both A and E correspond to the Governess. The point is made regardless of whether the descending scale outlining each tonal area of Act II is A \flat or E \flat ; nonetheless, it is important to note the correct scale. Perhaps the confusion lies in the pitch that connects them, the pivot, A \flat /G#— repeated twice in the global design — of the stepwise ascending and descending sequential tonal areas of the entire work. A \flat /G# serves as the leading tone of the Governess' A major/minor and the tonic of Quint's A \flat major/minor (within his A \flat -E \flat tonic-dominant framework).

The Two Hexachords Comprising the Theme

Corresponding to the Governess' and Quint's Respective Tonal Areas

The image displays two musical staves in bass clef, each divided into two hexachords. The left hexachord is highlighted in purple and contains the notes A, B, C, D, E, F# (ascending). The right hexachord is highlighted in yellow and contains the notes G#, A, B, C, D, E (descending). A purple arrow points from the top staff to the bottom staff, and a yellow arrow points from the top staff to the bottom staff, indicating a comparison or transformation between the two hexachords.

Fig. 18

Piper's dramaturgical gap filling does what James' text evades; she creates a romantic underpinning to the Governess' speech toward Miles, "Do you mind being left alone?... Dearest Miles, I love to be with you. What else should I stay for?" Britten underscores Piper's sign posting with a series of harmonic clues that cause us to doubt the Governess' reliability. After cycling through a melodic sequence (reminiscent of the "Dawn" Interlude from *Peter Grimes*, again symbolic of the calm before the storm) that takes us out of A major and aims towards A minor, he unexpectedly lands on A major again. The unexpected placement of the tonality negates its stability, and by proxy, the Governess' emotional stability. In the ensuing battle with Quint that follows, the Governess' "tonic" narrows from AM to Am to Adim as she closes in on the object of her (and Quint's) desire, Miles. At Quint's first entrance, the melisma on the name of Miles, the Governess seems to join the dark side, entering G#m against Quint's EbM. G#m is the Governess' relative minor of her dominant E major, and the enharmonic equivalent to Quint's Ab-Eb tonal areas. Underscoring her tonal character shift, the strings are cycling through the theme in octave doubling. The celeste, harp, flute, and clarinet add to the "cold" timbre that Britten marks in the strings, a soundscape evocative of night and stars; this instrumentation undergirds Quint at all his appearances throughout the opera.

obsession motif is not lost on us. As she presses, “Who made you take the letter? Who do you wait for, watch for? Only say the name and he will go forever,” the Governess moves through all 12 pitches of the theme. When she arrives at C, the 12th tone, Miles screams the name of Peter Quint and dies in her arms. Miles’ death, underscored by upwards sweeping glissandi breaking into a tremolo marking a tempo change preceded by a fermata, reflects the transition we examined following the first statement of the theme. Again, as in the first instance, Britten’s positioning and treatment of simple ideas such as 12-tone saturation and use of the tremolo as a micro motif, plus his symbolic bookending of the same in both the opening and closing of the opera, are characteristic of his musical efficiency.

Quint, in melismatic polyphony to the Governess, hints at the final pitch of the theme, as his previous E \flat tonal center shifts to C — which he never sings (another ambiguity aligning with James’ intentions) — on the Oct. [0,1] scale. The symmetrical Octatonic scale is still another mirror within mirror that will come back to haunt the Governess as we will discuss in our final paragraphs.

12-Tone Saturates the Canvas and the Governess' Mind (Fig. 1 of 2)

Gov. *p*
 Who? _____ Who? _____ Who made you take the
 Wer? _____ Wer? _____ Wer hiess den Brief Dich

Quint *p*
 On the paths, in the woods, re - mem - - - - - ber Quint! _____
 Auf dem Pfad und im Wald, ver - giss - - - - - nie Quint! _____

131 Quick and urgent
nat.
pp *marked*

Gov. *cresc.*
 let - - - - - ter? _____ Who? _____ Who?
 steh - - - - - len? _____ Wer? _____ Wer? _____

Quint *cresc.*
 At the win-dow on the tower, when the can - die is out, re - -
 Und am Fen-ster, auf dem Turm, wenn die Ker - ze er - losch, ver -

Vln. I

Fig. 20.1

12-Tone Saturates the Canvas and the Governess' Mind (Fig. 2 of 2)

Gov. *cresc.*
 Who do you wait for, watch for?
 Wer ist's den Du wartest, hersehst?

Quint *cresc.*
 - mem - - - - ber Quint! He
 - giss - - - - nie Quint! Er

[132]

Gov.
 say the name and he will go for e - - - - ver, for e - - - -
 Na - men sag und er ver-geht auf e - - - - wig, auf e - - - -

Quint
 he waits, he waits, he waits, he
 er wacht, er wacht, er wacht, er

[133]

Vin. I *always cresc.*

Gov.
 On - ly say the name, on - ly
 Nur den Na - men sag, nur den

Quint
 leads, he watches, he waits, he waits, waits,
 führt, er wartet, er wacht, er wacht, wacht,

Vin. I *mf* *cresc.*

Gov.
 - - ver, e - ver.
 - - wig, e - wig.

MILES *ff* (freely)
 Peter Quint, you de-vil!
 Peter Quint, Du Teufel!

Quint
 waits, he waits!
 wacht, er wacht!

The boy runs into the Governess' arms.
 Er läuft in die Arme der Gouvernante.

[134] *Broadly* (d = 60)

Vin. I *mf*

Vin. 2 *mf*

Fig. 20.2

Following this tragedy, her quest unfulfilled, Britten switches the Governess' tonal area suddenly to $A\flat$ major, Peter Quint's tonality, as the two sing in monophony at the octave over full orchestral tremolo clusters derived from Quint's $A\flat$ major hexachord of the row. Note this change from her starting tonality of E major in the beginning of the scene creates a horizontal dialectical opposition on the E- $A\flat$ axis. As Quint sings, "Ah, Miles! We have failed!" the Governess, unwittingly sings, "Ah, Miles! You are saved!" Britten's final blurring of the lines between the two hexachords corresponding to the Governess and Quint respectively is an example of the principle of construction and deconstruction we visited in chapter 1. Britten must first construct a world before he can systematically deconstruct it.

As we have examined, the symmetrical opposition of the Governess' and Quint's tonal centers on the A- $E\flat$ and the E- $A\flat$ axes points to character duplicity and the element of the uncanny. Compositionally, this positioning sets up a tonal conflict between "hero and antagonist" that leads us through their showdown for Miles' soul to the — tonally ambiguous — end. Britten employs several restatements of the theme and the nursery rhyme, "Malo," throughout. The theme gathers force with increasing subsets of the row, while the "Malo" refrain is a modulatory device, just as Mrs. Grose's "Dear God" refrain was a melodic modulatory device at the inciting incident.

At Quint's first entrance in $E\flat$ m (Rehearsal 125) the theme appears on his $A\flat$ hexachord in pizzicato strings, but it is bookended by the Governess' tonal centers A and E, harmonically implying that the Governess has Quint, and Miles, cornered. Britten employs the (single) dotted rhythmic cell from the theme in the orchestra throughout this section until right before Quint's exit (Reh. 133). It seems the ghost takes the Baroque

idiom with him at his departure. The florid, Baroque style melisma is another example of a traditional element reframed in a new tonal context. Quint's melisma on the boy's name is itself a suggestive and serpentine call that we could see as playfully disengaging the idiom from its historical intention hearkening to Handel's Messiah, "And the Glory of the Lord."

The ending bars of the opera on the tonal center A, the Governess' tonal area mirroring the beginning, are displaced by Miles' haunting nursery rhyme, "Malo," as the Governess takes up his tune in the Oct. [0,1] scale upon his death by fright. Britten remembers Miles' song through the Governess' voice with the two diminished chords that comprise the symmetrical scale, except without the 7ths. The tune fulfills its purpose as a tonal wormhole compromising the Governess' A major tonal area. He emphasizes the D# (E \flat) on the A-E \flat axis, diametrically opposing the tonal center on A, another mirror element working within the already symmetrical octatonic melodic line

We are left to wonder as D# (E \flat) and A each sound more like equally viable tonal centers, who/what is the dissonance or the center, Quint or the Governess? The symmetry of the A-D# tonal axis plays with the symmetry of the textual and melodic rhyme on "Malo."

Miles' Malo Nursery Rhyme

51 Slowly moving (♩ = 60)

E.H. *pp*

Harp *p (heavily)*

MILES
(to himself, hesitating)
pp

Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma-lo I would ra - ther be _____ Ma - lo, Ma-lo in an
 Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma-lo ich würd lie - ber sein _____ Ma - lo, Ma - lo in dem

51 Slowly moving. (♩ = 60)

Vla. *pp (warm)* *(sustained, not marked)*

E.H. *pp* *p*

Harp *mf*

Miles *mf*

op - ple tree Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma-lo than a naugh - ty boy _____
 Ap - fel - baum Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo als ein bö - ser Bub _____

Vla. *mf*

E.H. *p*

Harp *p*

GOVERNESS *p f*
Wh
Acl

Miles *p*

Ma - lo, Ma-lo in ad - ver - si - ty _____
 Ma - lo, Ma - lo in Ge - fahr at - lein _____

52

Vla. *p* *p*

Fig. 22

The Malo poem is a found object that Britten discovered in a Latin textbook and suggested to Piper as the boy’s haunting tune in Act. I, Sc. 6, titled “The Lesson.”²⁷ Britten set the text, a reflexive rhyme memorization device on the various meanings of the root word “malo,” to a musical refrain. As Seymour notes, “the stillness and unreality of this song... preceded by boisterous Latin games,” are what give us — and the Governess — pause²⁸. During this scene, as the Governess sings the refrain, the English horn echoes in imitative counterpoint. The English horn’s repetitions of the refrain (Reh. 137-138) move us into a new tonal area via common tone modulation, sharing its ending pitch with the Governess’ starting pitch of the next repetition of “Malo,” and vice versa (see Fig. 26 below).

Shared Pitches on Beginnings and Endings of Malo Between E.H and the Governess

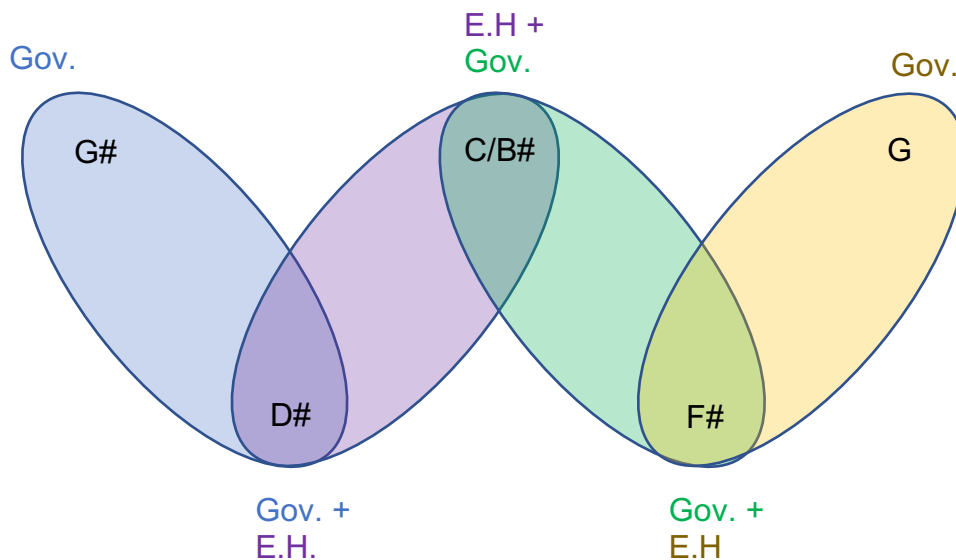


Fig. 23

²⁷ Seymour, 203.

²⁸ Ibid, 202.

As Britten begins his chords undergirding the last iteration of “Malo” on BM/m (the ii of the ambiguous tonal center A), I perceive this D# in two ways; first, as an implied “final” of the Oct. [0,1] subset, diametrically opposing A, and second, as a secondary leading tone to IV of the B mixolydian scale. The doubleness at work in the aural perception is another illustration of the element of the uncanny. This harmonic reframing along the A-D# axis is incongruent with Britten’s pre-established tonic-dominant relationship which would invite us to perceive the pitch D# as leading tone to E major V of I and reinforce the Governess as hero. But why fall into the trap of assuming any resolution to James’ narrative, and why conclude with what one has already done? The work of any conclusion is both to recap and take us to something new. The strangely familiar yet different perception of A vs. E within the new context of the Oct. [0,1] and B mixolydian scales works to reinforce the central theme of haunting ambiguity rather than bring us neatly home.

It is important to note Britten creates an intimate and fragile closeup in his orchestration with *pianissimo* harp and *pianississimo* pizzicato strings. The strings and harp pluck the strong beats only, emphasizing the beginnings and endings of the Governess’ melodic phrasing. An eerie effect echoing the first presentation of the theme, Britten writes a continuous timpani roll on the pedal tone A — this time performed with fingers— throughout the passage. The harmony rocks gently between ii and I in A major (undermined by the “Malo” tune) as the Governess cradles the boy’s body. Dramaturgically, we may perceive this open, dry, and dark voice leading as the question of good vs. evil in the mind of the Governess, a chasm into which Miles has

fallen prey. The plucked chords and timpani continue without the nursery rhyme for the next four bars to the end of the opera, and we may audiate the haunting tune for ourselves, once again left to fill in the gaps.

*Britten's Scoring of Final moments of the Opera
as Miles' Song and his Timbre Haunt the Governess*

The musical score consists of seven staves. The top staff is for Harp, followed by Percussion (Timp.). The third staff is for the Governess (Gov.), with lyrics: "Ma - - lo, Ma - - lo, Ma - - - - - lo." and a "dying away" marking. Below the vocal line is a dashed line. The bottom four staves are for Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.).

Fig. 24

Epilogue: The Haunting Continues Through Blurred Vocal Timbres

Perhaps the final element of the uncanny at work in the opera, Britten uses vocal timbre as much as orchestral timbre to paint the canvas in the last moments of the scene, aptly titled "Miles." The timbers Britten has selected in the boy soprano and the

light soubrette take on an uncanny semblance to each other as the Governess sounds like a boy soprano as she sings Miles' rhyme, especially at the third and final repetition (Fig. 26) on the pianissimo dynamic, haunted by the boy. Britten historically preferred a timbre that sounded more to the folk side of the operatic spectrum²⁹, and this is found especially with the original English Opera Group cast, in the voices of Peter Pears (Quint), Jennifer Vyvyan (The Governess), and David Hemmings (Miles).³⁰

The elements that humanize voices, breathiness, a thin quality, and perceived vocal strain, are the exact elements that opera teachers train out of their students. To Britten these qualities were more timbrally and dramatically attractive than vocal perfection; it is the “stain” not the “purity” that makes a voice or a character interesting and relatable. The unearthly result is the Governess' effective shift from soubrette timbre to boy soprano timbre — which a soubrette can imitate quite well. We draw one last mirror relationship as we come to our close. The boy possesses the Governess as the Governess finally possesses the boy.

²⁹ Interview with Janette Heffernan. *Homage to Flora*, with excerpts from original 1969 UK TV Production of *The Turn of the Screw*, Self-published by Heffernan. London, 2013.

³⁰ See, for example, the 1955 recording with the original cast. Benjamin Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, English Opera Group, Pears, P./Cross, J./Vyvyan, J./Britten, B., Recorded 1955, Decca (1990).

Section 2. *Cristina Doesn't Need Saving*, Composer Note

Any writer or poet reads to write, and the same follows for music composition. It is my hope that deconstructing Britten's construction of vulnerability and altered states will heighten the same in my own circa 105 minute two-act opera in progress, which is my PhD thesis in music composition titled, *Cristina Doesn't Need Saving* (2019-). Currently, I have completed the libretto, sketched the full opera, and orchestrated the music for Act I, Scenes 1 and 5 (the opening and closing scenes) for a chamber orchestra of 15 players. The latter scene has been performed by the West Edge Opera and the Earplay Ensemble of San Francisco, a result of winning the 2022 Snapshot Competition.

Orchestrally, *Cristina Doesn't Need Saving* and *The Turn of the Screw* utilize, as it were, a "child sized" orchestra to develop the internal world of children. Dramaturgically, both operas address themes of superimposition of adult desires onto children and the agency of these young protagonists within claustrophobic environments. The goal of my research has been to understand Britten's craft of creating such an environment, beyond current observations on theme and variations form and the 12-tone technique within his own tonal framework, as I continue work on my opera within my own unique musical language and style. The musical score including front matter is included with this monograph as supplementary material in the appendix.

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