Spring 4-1-2005

Merely a pictorial subject: The Turn of the Screw

Adam Sonstegard
Cleveland State University, a.sonstegard@csuohio.edu

"A MERELY *PICTORIAL* SUBJECT": *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*

Adam Sonstegard
University of California, Davis

The Turn of the Screw is a very mechanical matter, I honestly think—an inferior, a merely *pictorial*, subject and rather a shameless pot-boiler.

—Henry James to Frederic W. H. Myers

The visual artists whom critics have recently explored in connection with Henry James—painter John Singer Sargent, sculptor Hendrik Andersen, photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn—could not do what a hitherto neglected group of artists did for James's tales. Starting in the late 1860s and continuing for much of his career, commercial artists who worked for magazines supplied illustrations that appeared on the same pages that reproduced many of his short stories.[1] Their works ranged from crude pictures to elaborate engravings, from decorations that demurely occupied the margins to drawings that crowded the prose off of the page. Unlike the paintings, sculptures, and photographs that inspired the imaginations of James and his readers, these illustrations competed in an immediate way with James's work, occupying space on the periodicals' pages and potentially drawing a reader's attention away from his prose. Many of James's short works appeared with this visual dimension superimposed by editors and illustrators, and though we commonly read them as solely verbal texts, they still reflect their original, illustrated contexts.

The Turn of the Screw, one of James's most widely interpreted but least visually descriptive tales, appeared in illustrated, serialized form in *Collier's* magazine from January to April, 1898. A lifelong friend of the novelist, John La Farge, painted a masthead that began nearly every weekly installment (figure 1). Another illustrator, Eric Pape, painted several dark and suggestive illustrations to accompany the tale. James reprinted the tale later that same year, 1898, without illustrations, as one of two stories in *The Two Magics,* as if he felt rushed to place it in an unillustrated context as soon as he could. He published it again in 1909, with Coburn's photographic frontispiece, in the New York edition. Most of the story's contemporary reviews, and nearly all of the subsequent interpretive controversies, take the unillustrated edition of the tale as the definitive text, neglect *Collier's*

Figure 1. John LaFarge's masthead for *The Turn of the Screw*, as it appeared with each serial installment in *Collier's* magazine from January to April, 1898.

serialization, and ignore La Farge's and Pape's illustrations.[2] The story stands as one of James's most popular narratives, while La Farge's masthead and Pape's paintings rank among the rarest and least reproducible Jamesiana. Five of the illustrations I reproduce for this article have not reappeared in print since their initial 1898 publication.[3]

But in fact, a tale that has become an endless interpretive riddle for James's readers first appeared in a surprisingly visual, pictorial venue, and much of what we now read as the tale's unresolvable ambiguities reflect the original incongruity between the tale's obscurities and the magazine's visual propensities. James knew as he wrote the tale that an editor of a popular periodical would take his turn serializing it, that commercial artists would take their turns illustrating it, and that readers, once it got to be their turn, might take the illustrations as authoritative interpretations. James conducts a subtle conversation with these illustrators, complicates and frustrates their efforts, and works to assure his authority as a writer over theirs as artists.[4] He demonstrates what he could accomplish with ellipses, double entendres, and metaphors that illustrators could not accomplish with ink, paintbrushes, and engravings. Finally resisting the illustrator's efforts, and vindicating the writer who had seen literary prose gradually disappearing from ever-more illustrated pages, the narrative in these respects disarms the editors, artists, and ultimately, critics, who meant to take their turns visualizing *The Turn of the Screw.*

The Editor's Turn

James had done little more than listen to the Archbishop of Canterbury's suggestion for a story and record the idea in his notebooks before a magazine editor began to influence the story's development. James explains in his Preface to story's New York edition that, when "asked for something seasonable by the promoters of a periodical dealing in the time-honored Christmas-tide toy, I bethought myself at once of the vividest little note for sinister romance that I had ever jotted down."[5] James acknowledges Robert Collier's solicitation of the tale, denigrates the magazine tradition of the holiday "toy," but still praises *The Turn of the Screw* as an exceptional but diminutive "little note." The story he both promoted and denigrated evidently suited the magazine's expectations. When it was set to debut, James explained in a letter to George P. Brett, a managing editor for MacMillan and Company, that "the *Collier* people appear[ed] to think that the little work in question—for *their* purposes at any rate—much

of a hit." He even decided to wait "till the story has run something of its course" in *Collier's* before deciding whether to republish it as a book on its own, or include it in his next volume of collected stories.[6] If its successful "course" in the magazine shaped the story's subsequent form, the demands of serial publication threatened to leave the author in bad shape. During the same year he published *The Turn of the Screw*, James apologized for his delay in replying to a correspondent's questions by describing himself as "intensely and anxiously busy, finishing, under pressure, a long job that had almost from the first—I mean from long before I had reached the end—begun to be (loathsome name and fact!) 'serialized'—so that the printers were at my heels and I had to make a sacrifice of my correspondence *utterly*—to keep the sort of cerebral freshness required for not losing my head or otherwise collapsing."[7] The periodical industry's demanding pace and desires for a "hit" shaped this tale as it stymied the author's creativity. Ghosts haunted the world of the tale, as deadlines and editorial demands menaced the author himself.

The propensity of many magazines to illustrate their tales contributed to the menace for James. He sometimes found his work sharing space in magazines with works from artists and engravers. The periodicals often used art works without the authors' approval, and sometimes published art that overwhelmed or even eclipsed the written material printed on the same page. The year that he published *The Turn of the Screw*, James remarked that American magazines' propensity to be "above all, copiously 'illustrated,'" continually gave him pause. The illustrations made him recall a "charming time—charming, I mean, for infatuated authors—before the confirmed reign of the picture." A "golden age of familiar letters doubtless puts on," to the fancy of someone like himself, "something of the happy haze of fable." "Only a fanatic, probably, here and there, holding that good prose is itself full dress," he remarks in self-deprecation, "will resent the amount of costume [illustrators] tend to superimpose."[8] Illustrations made him self-consciously nostalgic for less pictorial periodicals, and prompted him to choose carefully when he selected his own venues for publication. James kept illustrations out of his volumes of collected tales. He permitted only Coburn's carefully monitored photographs to appear in his New York editions. He remarked in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl* that "anything that relieves responsible prose of being, while placed before us, good enough, interesting enough and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all *in itself*, does it the worst of services, and may well inspire in the lover of literature certain lively questions as to the future of that institution."[9] Editors who used pho-

tographs to perform the "pictorial" duties of prose, it seemed, endangered the literary enterprise. Nostalgic for the "golden age of familiar letters," James feared the written word's diminishing status in an increasingly illustrated age.

Collier's presents an interesting case for James's concerns about the stature of the written word. Its weekly issues comprised fewer than twenty-five pages and courted a wide popular audience of readers. *Colliers* had become "a leading early exponent of the halftone news picture" by 1895, three years before the publication of the tale.[10] It followed the lead of *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* turning to photography, "particularly in dense double-page spreads, to produce a magazine that was dominated by the camera."[11] *Collier's* and its chief rival, *Ladies' Home Journal*, consigned written fiction to approximately thirteen percent of the space in each published issue by 1898, which David Reed calls "a very low figure for the period."[12] For every column inch displaying a writer's work, then, nearly eight column inches contained advertisements, announcements or engravings. *Collier's* even became an early leader in disaster photojournalism; it produced a special edition within two weeks of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, featuring sixteen pages of pictures. Issues that lacked a single fictional article began to appear as early as 1909.[13] The magazine's visual orientation could not have been so apparent to James when he wrote the tale in 1898. But as he lamented the passing of a "golden age" of letters, unadorned by graphic art, *Collier's* led the way toward increasingly visual, photographic periodicals.

The magazine's increasing reliance on visual pictures seemed unfortunately to correspond with decreasing sophistication and discrimination on the part of its editor. Robert Collier, who had recently assumed editorship from his father when he published the tale, remarked of his own debut, "I had just come from Harvard with the idea that popular journalism needed a true literary flavor. I showed my judgment of the public taste by ordering a serial story by Henry James. The illustrations were by John La Farge, and I have never yet discovered what either the story or the pictures were about."[15] The young editor, who evidently did not understand precisely what he was publishing, concludes that James's story reconciled literary material with a popular audience's expectations. "What either the story or the pictures were about" mattered less than what acclaim they could garner, or what sales they could generate. When James wrote "Owen Wingrave" for another illustrated periodical called *The Graphic*, he told himself he "mustn't make it 'psychological.'" "They understand that," he wrote, "no more than a donkey understands a violin."[15] An-

other tale, "The Real Thing," also appeared in an illustrated periodical, *Black and White*, named for the artwork it showcased. This tale's narrator hears a friend advise him not to produce work with publishers in mind: "It's not for such animals you work, it's for those who know."[16] James knew his stories sometimes found editors more concerned with commercial ventures than enduring literature, venues more devoted to visual art than innovative prose. Only after graphic magazines and obtuse editors had accepted and published his work could he hope to reach "those who know."

Collier's visual orientation even sheds an interesting light on one of James's famous means of dismissing the significance of *The Turn of the Screw.* He described it in a letter to Frederick W. H. Myers, a founder of the Society for Psychical Research, as "a very mechanical matter," "an inferior, a merely *pictorial*, subject and rather a shameless potboiler."[17] James trivializes the tale, here as well as elsewhere, as a magazine's holiday "toy," even when he lauds its subtle artistry. Its endless complexities of course belie this simplistic label. But the story does accord with a periodical market that published "pot-boiler" material, as well as a "pictorial" venue that favored photographs over prose. James designed his "merely *pictorial*" "subject" to debut, after all, in a venue that made the pictorial its stock and trade.

Even as the opening segment of *The Turn of the Screw* establishes the story's complex time frame, multiple texts, and not entirely trustworthy narrators, it mirrors and even alludes to this pictorial, serialized context. T. J. Lustig points out that the first segment of the tale "begins just after a story has been told and ends just before a story is about to begin."[20] Indeed, sandwiched between other stories, *The Turn of the Screw* appears much as it would in book of collected tales, or in a magazine containing eclectic items. The first narrator remarks early on that the evening's storytelling had proven less than satisfying: "the last story, however incomplete and like the mere opening of a serial, had been told."[21] James, who knew this line would appear in the opening installment of the series in *Collier's,* has his narrator liken the evening's reading to just such an opening installment. As they begin hearing a tale that will unfold in a series of readings, Douglas's audience mirrors James's, who begins *reading* a tale that will unfold in just such a series. Collier had asked for a profitable tale, and Douglas's audience discusses which of a story's possible embellishments would "give the thing the utmost price" (*TS*, 1). Collier had solicited a Christmas tale, and the story's first narrator explains that the group had spent that very holiday listening to a "sinister romance" like *The Turn of the Screw.* Though it was one month tardy in its January debut, it

echoes both the occasion and the publisher's request for the tale.

As the frame of the story reflects Collier's solicitation, it comments on his magazine's tendencies. Douglas will only give enough details about the story to tantalize his audience, vaguely hinting that it contains "general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain" (*TS*, 2). This provocative label could apply to a great deal of popular magazine material, which was often written for compensation and read by less discriminating audiences. Collier himself confessed he had never "discovered what either the story or [La Farge's] pictures were about." The publisher of the tale could not say precisely what he was printing, and the storyteller in the tale does not say precisely what he is reading. In both cases, the story's subject proves less important than its potential to generate "the utmost price." Douglas goes on to explain that "the story *won't* tell" the details of a seemingly lurid love affair, "not in any literal, vulgar way." One of his listeners responds, "More's the pity, then. That's the only way I ever understand" (*TS*, 3). Much like a reader of popular magazines, accustomed to having fantastic effects and romance-novel adventures spelled out in literal terms, this listener will miss the point. Douglas does not adjust his tale to meet her needs, but commences the tale after she and a few others depart. James transforms his editorial decisions about audience demographics and magazine serialization into sly commentary embedded within the tale itself. James and Douglas alike do not tell stories for just anyone, but "for those who know."

As James's tale anticipates the magazine context, *Collier's,* for its part, attempts to accommodate the tale to its illustrated, serialized run. La Farge's masthead regulates the tale for the magazine's readers as it attempts to provide a definitive interpretation of characters and events (figure 1.) Flanked by twin designs that suggest spindly monsters with open mouths, the masthead presents a matronly governess gently counseling Miles as she wraps her arm around his shoulder. Adeline Tintner remarks of the illustrated figures that "each is filled with the consciousness of the other" in "a reciprocal relation."[20] Their mutual regard and Miles's childish countenance give readers little reason to see him as defiant or disobedient, but at the same time, a shadowy set of features in the upper-left corner of the painting recreates Peter Quint as an opposing influence. As S. P. Rosenbaum describes the image's unfortunately obscure left side, "curving across the top of the picture is a filmy streak that blends with a thick curl of fog-like substance separating Miles from a shadowy giant face, half of which is visible at the side of the picture. All that is clearly present of the face are its thin lips and one huge staring eye."[21] A disembodied hand hovers near

Miles's right shoulder and roughly corresponds with the governess's own hand.[22] The relationship between these three figures (two of whom are fully rendered, one outlined and anatomized) preserves some of the story's ambiguity. The governess seems allied with the ghost, in that their hands are similarly placed; but she also remains apart from the apparition, in that Miles, who seems unaware of the ghost, serves to separate the two. La Farge foregrounds two conventional fictional figures of the day, the cherub and the governess, while the image's gothic periphery appears obscure and abstract.[23] The masthead does not recreate a definite moment in the action, but suggests a relationship between an adult and a child, and between a governess's ordinary world and an occult realm.

The image, eight and one-half inches wide by three and one half inches high, took up much of the page as it announced the beginning of each weekly installment of *Collier's*. At the head of the story's first episode, it represented the governess and Miles before James's story introduced them; at the head of subsequent segments, it reminded readers of the identity of the governess as a first-person narrator. It showed ladies who picked up the tale that they should read it in a woman's voice, and gave gentlemen who had missed previous segments some idea of the ongoing action. The masthead in effect enables readers to judge the narrator for themselves before they accept her version of the events she narrates, providing visual continuity for a tale that spanned four months of serial publication and grew increasingly mysterious during that time. Readers may have been as familiar with the masthead by the series' final weeks as they were with Quint's physiognomy or the governess's own voice. The masthead shows the editors' efforts to make the story more visual and accessible for readers, while the story itself reflects James's attitude toward *Collier's* readers, the magazine's serialization, and its visual illustrations.

In serializing the tale, *Collier's* seems at this stage in the tale's history to have had the last word. For the novelist's part, he leaves the tale open-ended, in that even the climactic sequence leave readers wondering, at the moment of Miles's death, if the ghosts were "real," or if the governess had imagined them all along. For the magazine's part, *Collier's* declined to illustrate the tale's conclusion, and even failed to grant it a proper significance on the published page. *Collier's* reserved less than a column inch of white space after the tale's startling final clauses—"we were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped" (*TS*, 88)—before it commenced with an utterly unrelated article, "Spain's Vulnerable Seaports." The political reality of the looming Spanish-American War intruded upon the imagi-

native unreality of the story; the eighty-seven percent of the magazine's space that displayed something other than prose fiction took over from the thirteen percent that did. Without dwelling on the governess's mental condition, without illuminating her pupil's demise, *Collier's* carried on with the next article, subsuming James's carefully obscured conclusion to the magazine's business. Publishing a writer who denigrated "pictorial" art, the periodical accommodates readers who are more accustomed to news items and pictures; writing for a magazine specializing in non-fiction, news and pictures, the novelist creates a tale readers find notoriously difficult to picture.

The Illustrator's Turn

An informed reading of some of the intricacies of the governess's narrative in fact accounts for this conversation between a famously ambiguous tale that resists easy illustration and a popular magazine that increasingly relied upon illustration for its commercial success. John La Farge's masthead remained constant for each week of the tale's appearance, but Eric Pape's illustrations corresponded with specific events in the unfolding action of the tale. The sparse visual details of Bly as the story's setting prepare readers, including Pape, for conventionally gothic motifs. Bly *belies* convention, of course, but not before it has inspired initial images so familiar and safe they could appear in a book of fairy tales. Bly's two towers, the governess explains, "flanked opposite ends of the house and were probably architectural absurdities, redeemed in a measure indeed by not being wholly disengaged nor of a height too pretentious, dating, in their gingerbread antiquity, from a romantic revival that was already a respectable past" (*TS*, 16). T. J. Lustig remarks that the governess gives readers "a brief glimpse of Hansel and Gretel," but that she can scarcely "control the archetypes which she invokes."[24] Indeed, she cannot sustain them, but she can give implicit or deceptive hints to illustrators at work. When she asks, "Was there a 'secret' at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement?" (*TS*, 17), the gothic conventions certainly fit the fairy-tale imagery of the setting.

If an illustrator were to look for fantastic actions to accord with this stereotypical fairy-tale setting, he would find himself faced instead with characters who merely read one another's glances and restrict themselves to mundane or deliberately expressionless activities. The governess finds she must delay one of her conferences with Mrs.

Grose while she watches the children and tries to suppress "any suspicion of a secret flurry or of a discussion of mysteries." She "drew a great security in this particular," then, from Mrs. Grose's "mere smooth aspect": "There was nothing in her fresh face to pass on to others my horrible confidences" (*TS*, 45). A nondescript housekeeper shows no expression; the governess gains her reassurance; the illustrator finds little inspiration. That the governess sees her blank countenance *as* inspiration, only compounds the difficulty. Mrs. Grose's aplomb was "a sound simplification: I could engage that, to the world, my face should tell no tales, but it would have been, in the conditions, an immense added strain to find myself anxious about hers" (*TS*, 45). Their countenances "tell no tales" for readers or illustrators. Supplying scant detail, the governess rejoices in the dearth of detail to supply.

Even when she invites illustration, the prospects are far from promising. "Standing there before me while I kept my seat," Mrs. Grose "visibly turned things over," the governess remarks. She finally lends her supposed conspirator some expressive emotion, but restricts her to inscrutable contemplation (*TS*, 49). She has her own similar moment, when, "with all the marks of a deliberation that must have seemed magnificent had there been anyone to admire it, I laid down my book, rose to my feet, and, taking a candle, went straight out of the room and, from the passage, on which my light made little impression, noiselessly closed and locked the door" (*TS*, 40). Readers of the tale *can* "admire it" if they appreciate her rumination. Viewers of the illustrations *could* "admire it," if an artist chose to render it. But few commercial artists would accept the invitation to render "deliberation," no matter how "magnificent."

A paucity of specific visual detail even accompanies some of the tale's climactic moments. When the governess and Mrs Grose discover Flora by the shores of the pond at Bly, illustrators cannot dispel the story's thick air of implication to discern a single, representable subject. Flora has appeared alone away from her room at night; the current governess has openly said things that impugn her sanity; and the former governess, Miss Jessell, may or may not have made an appearance. As if purposefully specifying how little of this meets the eye, the present governesses remarks, "Still, all this while, nothing more passed between us save that Flora had let her foolish fern again drop to the ground. When she and I had virtually said to each other was that pretexts were useless now" (*TS*, 70). A child's countenance and discarded frond appear at a pivotal moment, but all that readers "see" is a little girl no longer holding a plant—that is, Flora without her flora. The illustrator expecting conventional spectacles finds the tale locating its

meanings in subtle facial affectations. Restricting her story to material few would represent, the governess repeatedly points out how little there is to point out.

But if readers take the narrator's word for it, a story that balks at supplying important visual information absolutely depends upon on the accurate interpretation of the very details it withholds. Even though the governess seldom pauses to describe exactly what other characters look like, she convicts or absolves them of crimes and suspicions based solely on their appearances. Readers who do not even know if Flora is blonde or brunette, dimpled or freckled, know that her angelic demeanor immediately quiets the governess's fears. Miles's countenance inspires her complete faith in his innocence as well, despite written evidence to the contrary in the letter from Miles's school. Mrs. Grose challenges the school's criticism of his character, saying, "See him, Miss, first. *Then* believe it!" (*TS*, 11). Indeed, seeing Miles inspires the governess's profound, but still unsubstantiated convictions:

> So monstrous was I then ready to pronounce it that such a child as had now been revealed to me should be under an interdict. I was a little late on the scene, and I felt, as he stood wistfully looking out for me before the door of the inn at which the coach had put him down, that I had seen him, on the instant, without and within, in the great glow of freshness, the same positive fragrance of purity, in which I had, from the first moment, seen in his little sister. (*TS* 13)

A "fragrance of purity," never specified for readers or illustrators, supplies greater proof of innocence than a principal's letter can supply of guilt. His appearance alone leaves all cross examiners speechless. "You mean the cruel charge—?" Mrs Grose begins to ask about the principal's accusation. It "doesn't live an instant," her companion replies, completing her thought; "My dear woman, *look* at him!" (*TS*, 13–14). Both characters lay their doubts to rest the moment they look at the children; the tale's readers and illustrators, never privy to these exclusively visual "proofs" of their innocence, only wish they could.

The countenances of the supposed ghosts just as quickly convict them of unquestionable guilt. The narrator who readily thinks the best about someone who looks like Miles automatically concludes the worst about someone who looks like Quint. Once Mrs. Grose makes her enigmatic comment,"Quint was much too free," the governess seems obsessed by the valet's physiognomy. The housekeeper's explanation, she narrates, "gave me, straight from my vision of his face—*such* a face!—a sudden sickness of disgust." A famous exchange follows:

"Too free with *my* boy!" Mrs. Grose replies, "Too free with everyone!" (*TS*, 26; James's emphasis). But the governess worries less that Quint could have taken too many liberties, than that someone who looked *like that* could have had his way with her charge. That he has an ungentlemanly mien, and that he has emerged from beyond the grave, only make him seem fantastic; that he has "*such* a face!" convicts him beyond dispute. As for her visions of Miss Jessell, the governess hastily tells Mrs Grose that she had seen "a figure of quite as unmistakable horror and evil: a woman in black, pale and dreadful—with such an air also, and such a face!" (*TS*, 31). The governess's tale hinges upon the interpretation of visual information that she never pauses to describe. She leaves the would-be illustrator—who only "sees" this world through the governess's eyes, who only knows that the ghosts inspire her questionable conclusions—wondering how to render "*such* a face" in visual terms.

Indeed, the story's notorious ambiguity, the narrator's questionable state of mind, and her way of basing conclusions on sparse or withheld visual evidence, bewildered commercial illustrators even before these qualities began to generate literary criticism. Lustig discusses the story's many "screens," which block the governess's direct observation and lead to her ambiguous conclusions. "Although screens may well be deceptive," Lustig writes, "it seems that one can also be misled by believing that they always deceive, or that they have been drawn with a deceptive intention, or that what is concealed behind the screen must necessarily be a portentous reversal of what exists in front of it."[25] Indeed, the governess's interpretation of every screen as insidious and fallacious becomes more arresting for most readers than the rather benign screens themselves. But imagine the visual illustrator assigned to render the screens in the first place. He had to decide whether to credit or impugn the governess's convictions in unambiguous, even monochromatic illustrations. If this story traps its readers in endless loops of interpretation, commercial artists, poised with their paintbrushes, were the first to be ensnared.

Eric Pape, then, as a commercial artist commissioned by *Collier's* to illustrate discrete events in the tale itself, faced a formidable if not an impossible task. One illustration suggests he responded by accepting the story's ostensible conventions as well as crediting the governess's point of view (figure 2). A nocturnal scene painted in dark tones shows a governess in a swaddling gown, lifting her hand to her mouth in shock. The crenelated edifice of the house at Bly accords with the fairy-tale invocations of "gingerbread antiquity" as it looms in the distance like a fortress, and as an intruder, the ghostly Peter

Quint, stands prominently on one of its towers. In a similar image, Pape also hints at Miss Jessell's appearance (figure 3). He shows the governess collapsing upon the ground amid nocturnal shadows, as another swirl of light cuts through the trees and surrounds a figure who observes her from a distance. Pape does not render the faces she invokes so enigmatically, but he does make Quint and Jessell appear even more substantive, even more "realistic," than the governess herself. They stand out in a bold contrast of black and white that seems to authenticate their presence; she instead seems ready to disappear into the undergrowth. Though in some interpretations she merely imagines the ghosts, they appear so distinctly in these images that Pape in effect argues for the ghosts' presence at Bly. Pape dispels some of James's mystery, and resolves some of his riddles, in the supposedly simple act of illustrating the tale.

If these illustrations verify the ghosts' presence, another authenticates Miles's innocence. The only full-page illustration that Pape rendered for *The Turn of the Screw* occupied the central pages of an issue of *Collier's* for March, 1898 (figure 4). A forlorn looking governess, again in swaddling gowns, sinks onto a bench as Miles stands nearby. The caption to the picture, "he presently produced something that made me drop straight down on the stone slab" (*TS*, 57), suggests why she collapses, but also profits from James's phrasing: had Miles "produced" words or objects? That he clutches a book as he seems to speak to her, suggests viewers might want to read the story to get the answer. Hastily rendered flowers and the canvas's darkest spaces serve to frame the governess, while thin, diminishing pencil lines render the graveyard less evident than the darker, more distinct foliage around her. Miles conceals one hand in his pocket, suggesting he speaks shyly, rather than taunting her overactive imagination. The artist emphasizes his rural innocence, giving him a passive stance. He makes the governess stare off in crestfallen meditation, refusing to let her gaze meet Miles's eyes in any critical way. He scarcely seems to be a young man possessed, but neither does she look like a woman who is paranoid and delusional. Pape invokes cherubic, rural innocence instead of lurid gothicism; he draws a boy wearing a rustic tunic and a governess resembling a pastoral shepherdess. He renders an image that actively interprets, and does not merely illustrate, the tale it tries to depict.

Two other illustrations from Pape enshroud detail in appropriately dark and opaque renderings. In one image, Douglas' profile begins to eclipse a hearth's soft glow as he recites the story of the governess to his own ring of faintly-illuminated listeners (figure 5).

Figure 2. Eric Pape's illustration for *Collier's* of a scene in which the governess glimpses Peter Quint in the distance.

Figure 3. Pape's illustration of the governess's encounter with the ghost of Miss Jessell.

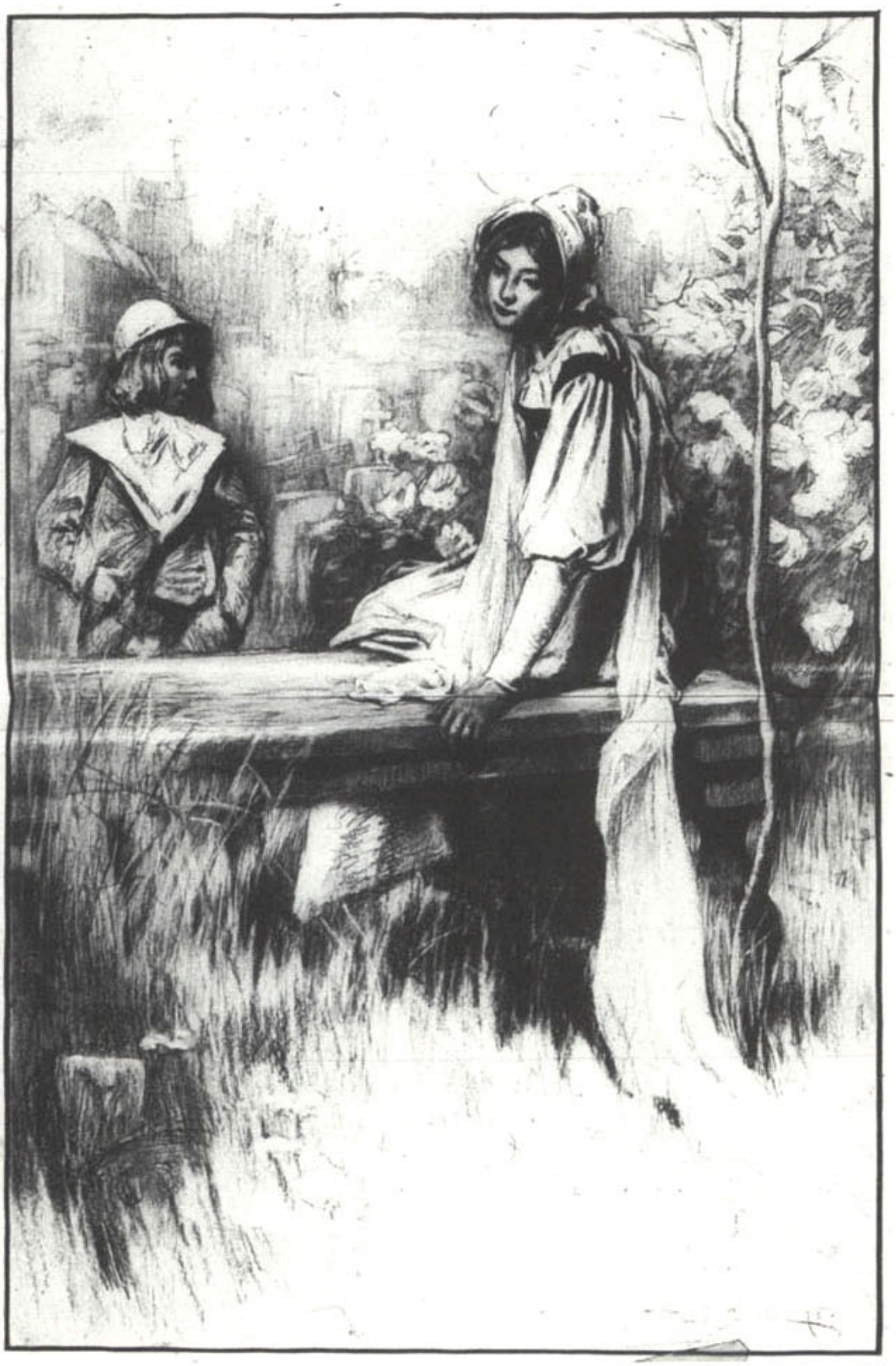

Figure 4. Pape's full-page spread for *Collier's*, March 1898, showing Miles and the governess, and carrying the original caption: "He presently produced something that made me drop straight down on the stone slab."

The image lets the listeners dissolve into the dark background; it even draws more attention to the andirons in the fireplace than to Douglas as a storyteller. In the other, similarly dark image, the governess peers through a window at Bly during yet another supposed sighting of Quint (figure 6). Readers by this point have come to associate the tall windows at Bly with the former valet, who initially seems to be staring through the panes at the governess, who in turn stares through the panes at the bewildered Mrs. Grose. The governess returns at a later moment to the windows, and Pape illustrates the scene in which, according to the caption, "Holding my candle high," she "came in sight of the tall window" (*TS*, 40). Readers' imaginations, and their recollections of Quint's previous appearances, evoke more imagery than Pape's paintbrush is required to supply. The candle illuminates only a small corner of an otherwise dark rectangle, as if Quint's frightening presence occupies more space than the dimly illuminated governess. In both of these images, readers squint into black spaces to verify the story's visions, as Pape sacrifices detail to enhance opaque suggestiveness. Pape is artful with shadow and deft in his appeals to readers, but his images show him coping with a story that frustrates more than it facilitates the illustrator's efforts.

Pape's way of accommodating the magazine's audience of readers has not endeared him to later audiences of critics. Rosenbaum concludes of the image that "the ambiguous nature of the ghost clearly presented no challenge to the artist."[26] Pape, that is, went ahead and painted in black and white what James's story keeps dimly, ambiguously shrouded. He accepts the convention of the crenellated tower as a "gingerbread" edifice and accepts what the governess sees as truth. In summarizing the early reviews of this tale as it appeared, without illustrations, in *The Two Magics* in late 1898, Robin Hoople concludes that "the agonizing consciousness of the corruption of the children is sufficient excuse for the reviewers to take the governess for granted and award her rather limited space."[27] Miles's supposed corruption so preoccupied these first reviewers that they rarely paused to question the governess's authority, let alone perceive her madness. Pape also accepts her authority, even as he in effect colludes with her, rendering and thereby reinforcing her story with his paintbrushes. James's initial audience of artists, reviewers and readers, then, readily translated the artful verbal tale into visual terms. As the storyline resisted visual dimensions and eluded "pictorial" expectations, the editors took its untrustworthy narrator and subjunctive mood as indicative signs and unambiguous guides to what "really" transpired at Bly.

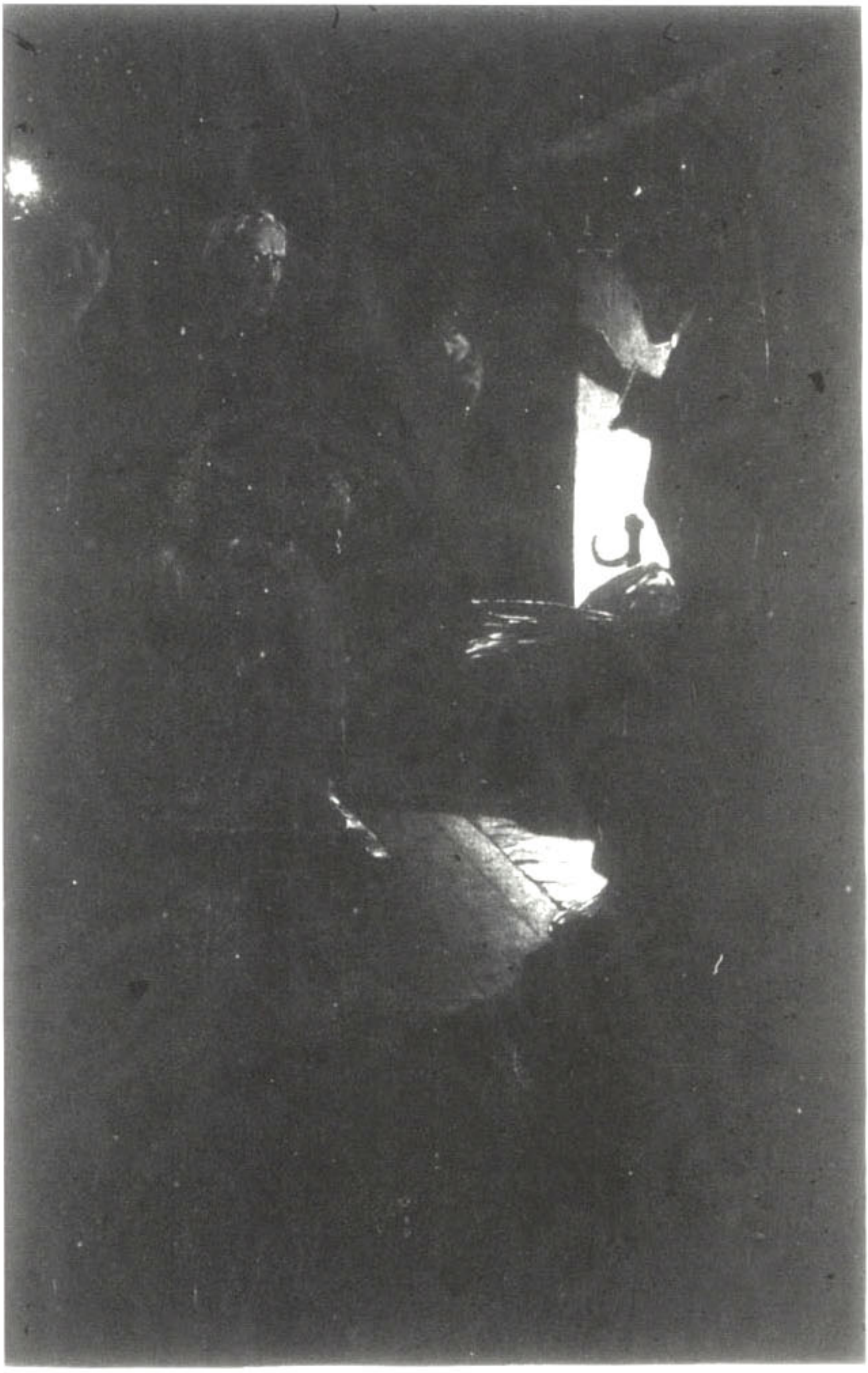

Figure 5. Pape's image of Douglas with listeners grouped around a fireplace.

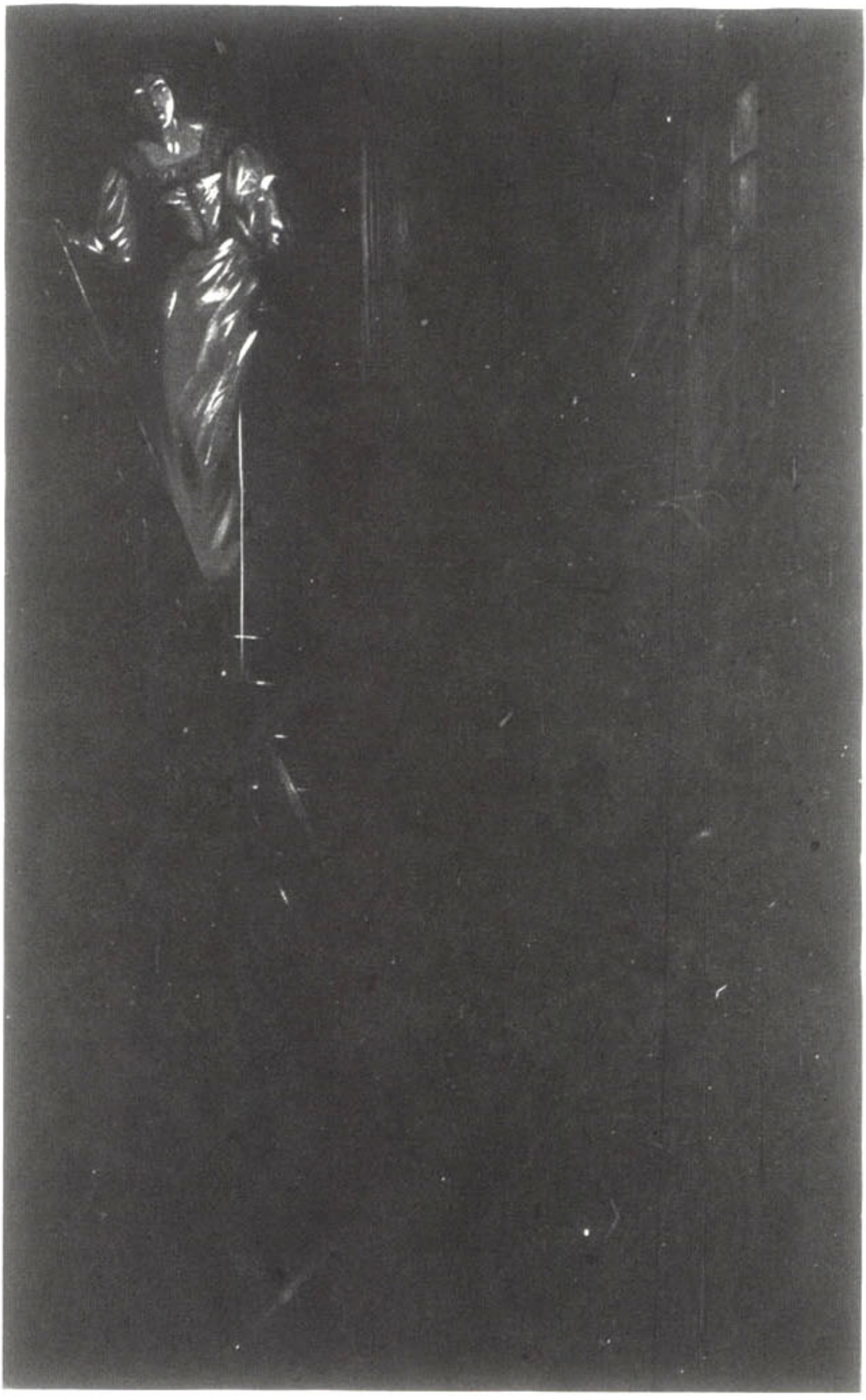

Figure 6. Pape's image of the governess, soon to sight Quint amid the shadows.

The Master's Turn

When the story is not inhibiting La Farge's and Pape's efforts of visual representation, its metaphysics are complicating the same processes. For, if the artists employed by the magazine had come to regard illustration as a mundane task or a commercial obligation, James in some of the tale's most evasive passages makes the act of visual representation a deliberate, philosophical endeavor. The evasive passages work so well in fact that present-day literary critics interpret the story in ways that unwittingly recuperate the efforts of the tale's illustrators in the 1890s. The metafictional aspects of the tale that critics still wrestle with today served to stymie the original illustrators a century ago.

Take, for instance, the governess's famous description of Quint, her single detailed account of someone else's appearance. She begins with the observation that "he has no hat" (*TS*, 23). From that point on, the description becomes a matter of both visual and verbal art, and a conversation between a speaker and a listener, the governess and Mrs. Grose. The speaker begins with the fact of Quint's hatlessness—a signal he was ungentlemanly, even uncouth—and soon says of the reactions of her listener, "Then seeing in her face that she already, in this, with a deeper dismay, found a touch of picture, I quickly added stroke to stroke" (*TS*, 23–24). Quint's lack of headgear gives the housekeeper a "picture," and the governess further obliges her reminiscences with each additional "stroke." Quint, she continues, "has red hair, very red, close-curling, and a pale face, long in shape, with straight, good features and little, rather queer whiskers that are as red as his hair. His eyebrows are, somehow, darker; they look particularly arched and as if they might move a great deal" (*TS*, 23–24). Sartorial details in remarkable abundance only presage further minutiae: "His eyes are sharp, strange—awfully; but I know clearly that they're rather small and very fixed. His mouth's wide and his lips are thin, and except for his whiskers he's quite clean-shaven" (*TS*, 24). Capacious description for once replaces obscure suggestion. The governess assumes that her listener can perceive minute relationships and make quick mental comparisons as she adds each additional, complicating "stroke." Mrs. Grose not only has to "picture" Quint, but must also compare one portion of her mental picture to another, to envision red and redder hair, sharp and sharper expressions, close and closer shaves. Of course Mrs. Grose has to pause to consider the image; of course her countenance reflects her ruminations. James engineers a conversation between a speaker

and a listener within the narrative, and between a verbal "artist" and a commercial artist concerned with the narrative. A self-described "artist" in the tale, who makes "pictures" for her listener with words, anticipates an actual artist for the tale, who makes pictures for his readers in *Collier's*. What threatens to overwhelm Mrs. Grose surely perplexed Eric Pape. If Pape had fancied himself the sole artist assigned to the tale, he finds everyone getting into the act.

The story indeed repeatedly invokes a complicated correspondence between descriptive words and mental pictures. The first time the governess glimpses Quint, she tells readers that "he was in one of the angles, the one away from the house, very erect, as it struck me, and with both hands on the ledge. So I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page; then, exactly, after a minute, as if to add to the spectacle, he slowly changed his place" (*TS*, 17). The governess assures her reader that her vision of Quint is just as real as her own line of printed text. She tells Douglas as he reads her words—and Mrs Grose as she "reads" her face—that she is as certain that she sees Quint as she is that she sees words on the page.

Perhaps the most influential critical pronouncement on this line is Shoshana Felman's formulation that, for the governess, "to see ghosts = to see letters." "But what is 'seeing letters,'" Felman asks, "if not, precisely, *reading*? In observing and in 'seeing,' as she says, the very letters that she forms 'on this page' of the manuscript of her narrative. The governess is indeed *reading* her own story, which she is also writing in the form of a *letter* to Douglas."[28] The complex framing of the story indeed exploits these multiple instances of writing, passing along, and reading letters and texts. The illustrated context in *Collier's* extends and complicates Felman's reasoning even further, for this story originally appeared on magazine pages that invited seeing as well as reading. The pages showed words and pictures. And as we have seen, the pictures showed ghosts. The magazine's readers encountered someone claiming that the ghosts she was writing about were as real as words she was writing. The ghosts the magazine's buyers were reading about, then, were as real as the words they were reading. The story takes a correspondence between reading and seeing, and develops it in ways that implicate the original readers of *Collier's.* "To see ghosts" and "to see letters," after all, they had only to glance at different portions of the same page.

Repeatedly turning in on itself, the tale evokes visual pictures as metaphors for writing, even as it conversely likens writing words to making pictures. "The attraction of my charges was a constant joy," the governess remarks, which inspires her to "wonder afresh at the

vanity of my original fears, the distaste I had begun by entertaining for the probable grey prose of my office. There was no grey prose, it appeared, and no long grind" (*TS*, 19). On magazine pages that contained columns of black and white typeface and black and white illustrations, she delights that she has more to relay than drab, colorless words. Illustrators who are assigned to render images to appear on the page with her tale know that her story is anything but—what, to them, it literally is—"grey prose." She later remarks that several days in succession, "passing, in constant sight of my pupils, without a fresh incident, sufficed to give to grievous fancies and even to odious memories a kind of brush of the sponge" (*TS*, 38). Her metaphor recreates visual art, and once again the lack of any representable event deepens her impressions and enhances her imagined pictures. What should illustrators render to accompany the story? Something other than "grey prose." What should they conclude she had imagined? Something she never describes in the first place, which she says she enhances with a "brush of the sponge." How real are the ghosts that artists must depict on the magazine's pages? Just as real as the words that already appeared on those same magazine pages. Artists who look to translate the verbal story into visual art find the governess reciprocating—but thereby slyly undoing—their efforts. Her discussion of perception, recursive in its verbal construction, anticipates and complicates their visual representations. She never assures illustrators that they imagine her world correctly; she merely refers them back to assurances they must supply on their own.

At a level reached by few of the original readers, and even fewer of the publishers concerned with the tale's appearance in *Collier's*, James's tale even mobilizes inventive wordplay as if to outwit the artist seeking to render the tale in visual terms. Lustig concludes that what would "normally be sufficiently ordinary expressions" deserve special attention in *The Turn of the Screw* precisely because "the 'dead' figures of speech seem everywhere to be coming to life."[29] Critics have famously tabulated everything from the precise number of dashes in the dialogue to the number of days that elapse between supposed sightings of Quint. But few have returned the tale to its original context in *Collier's* or noted the attendant difficulty of deriving figures for paintings from figures of speech. The governess glimpses one of her pupils, who drops a fern by the shore of a pond—Flora, that is, without her flora. She records her other pupil mentioning a past excursion, noting that he had gone "miles and miles away," to where Miles "had never been so free" (*TS*, 82). He either suggests a trip of great geographic range, or makes a punning distinction between

"[M]iles [here] and [M]iles away." Embedded puns recur too often, complicate too many names, and avoid representation too deftly to be mere coincidences.

The wordplay circles back to the concept of perception with the word "pupil." The "new aggravations and particular notes" that arise as the governess watches over her charges contain especially "the note above all, sharper and sharper, of the small ironic consciousness on the part of my pupils" (*TS*, 50). Miles and Flora supposedly play an elaborate game of pretending not to see ghosts, whom she has decided they really see. At the same time, the governess becomes increasingly aware of the need to interpret their expressions and behaviors ironically, as a means of concealing their game. A later meditation prompts us to take this further and notice double meanings in the word:

> I had then expressed what was vividly in my mind: the truth that, whether the children really saw or not—since, that is, it was not yet definitely proved—I greatly preferred, as a safeguard, the fullness of my own exposure. I was ready to know the very worst that was to be known. What I had then had an ugly glimpse of was that my eyes might be sealed just while theirs were most opened. Well, my eyes *were* sealed, it appeared, at present—a consummation for which it seemed blasphemous not to thank God. There was, alas, a difficulty about that: I would have thanked him with all my soul had I not had in a proportionate measure this conviction of the secret of my pupils. (*TS*, 52)

Obsessively considering what she and others can see, as well as whether they can be seen (their "exposure"), she meditates on her pupils in more ways than one. The "secret of my pupils" denotes Miles's and Flora's supposed collusion, but also refers to the knowledge that the governess's eyes are "sealed." James draws attention to her pupils (her means of perception), rather than accepting what she perceives about her pupils (Miles and Flora). For readers to accept Miles and Flora as the governess sees them is to miss part of the point of the story. For artists to illustrate the children without questioning her perception, her *way* of seeing them, is to be fooled into following the wrong set of pupils.

James engineers his tale to evade even the best efforts of these initial, commercial illustrators. Few of the original readers of the tale seem even to have noted its means of dodging visual representation. Few of the people involved in publishing the tale in *Collier's* seem to have understood exactly what James had produced. For Pape, in illustrating and interpreting the tale, is the first, but hardly the only reader

of the tale, to have faltered in visualizing this story's pupils. The deeply embedded puns, the evasive dodges in the narration, and the deliberate obscurities of the tale, first frustrated Pape's artistic efforts in James's day; they continue, in fact, to frustrate critics' interpretive efforts in our day. We might even ask, in their attempts to do the tale justice by way of their visual artwork, did artists like La Farge and Pape keenly anticipate the efforts of latter-day literary critics? Or do latter-day literary critics, in our attempts to do the tale justice by way of biographical research, histories of sexuality, and narrative theory, recreate the work of La Farge and Pape in different interpretive modes? What left artists wondering what to render then, still leaves readers guessing what to picture now.

The novelist understood that many of the story's subtler aspects would go unperceived by the original readers, who would purchase and read the magazine before it reached potentially more discriminating audiences. He did not write, after all, for the broad audiences who purchased magazines like *Collier's*. He wrote "for those who know." Debuting his story in an illustrated venue, before publishing it, without illustrations, in a volume of collected tales, he works hard not to make an illustrator's job any easier. Rendering a "merely pictorial" "subject," he disarms illustrators looking to render it pictorially. Writing a tale that he knew would outpace commercial illustrators' means of representing it, James delights in the subtle linguistic sleight of hand he knew would exceed their grasp.

Notes

I presented a portion of this paper at the 2003 Modern Language Association convention in San Diego, as part of a panel, "Henry James and Visual Art," sponsored by the Henry James Society. I would like to thank Wendy Graham for organizing this panel and including my work, David McWhirter and Kendall Johnson for participating, and Susan M. Griffin for responding. I would also like to thank Vivian R. Pollak, Edward L. Schwarzschild, Tessa Hadley, and Eric Savoy for suggestions and encouragement.

[1] *The Galaxy* began publishing illustrations to accompany some of James's earliest short stories in the late 1860s. Of the stories written in the eighteen-nineties, at about the time of *The Turn of the Screw*, "Sir Edmund Orme," "Nona Vincent," "The Wheel of Time," "Owen Wingrave," "The Given Case," "The Real Right Thing," and "The Beldano Holbein," among others, appeared with illustrations in such magazines as *Black and White*, *The English Illustrated Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Illustrated London News*, *The Graphic*, *Collier's*, and *Harper's Monthly Magazine*.

[2] In 1966, S. P. Rosenbaum described La Farge's masthead and Pape's illustrations, and read the story against this visual evidence. See "A Note on John La Farge's Illustration for Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*," in *The Turn of the Screw: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 254–59. In 1986, Adeline Tintner recovered the masthead, reproduced it visually, and reconstructed La Farge's interpretation of the tale based on the evidence offered by the masthead. *The Museum World of Henry James* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 222–24. Robin Hoople notes the images in passing in accounting for the reactions of the story's first generation of readers. See *Distinguished Discord: Discontinuity and Pattern in the Critical Tradition of* The Turn of the Screw (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1997). Robert Lee Wolfe finds a possible source for the story in another contemporary, illustrated article in a magazine in "The Genesis of 'The Turn of the Screw,'" repr. in Kimbaugh, ed., *The Turn of the Screw*, 125–32. Few readers have gone on to interpret the illustrations in light of an overall pattern of James's disdain for illustrated periodicals. For information on James's attitude toward the literary marketplace, and the marketplace's indirect means of shaping James's tales, I am indebted to Michael Anesko's "'*Friction with the Market': Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) and also to Martha Jacobson's *Henry James and the Mass Market.* (University, AL: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1983).

[3] I would like to thank the libraries of the University of California; MediaWorks and Gabriel Unda of the University of California, Davis; and Kathy Cunningham and Jack LaPlante for their assistance with these images. La Farge's masthead and Pape's illustrations only exist in North American libraries on microfilm, making it especially difficult to reproduce dark items from this medium. I regret the resulting obscurity of these reproduced images. These 107-year-old images, originally published in a magazine with a wide circulation, are covered by fair use.

[4] In this and other portions of this ongoing project, I suggest a new interpretation of James's illustrated short stories in which we read the metafictional aspects of these tales as James's attempts to evade facile representation from illustrators, and indeed to foil the efforts of artists who sought reductively to render James's tales on a magazine's pages. His fictional artists reflect on the work of fiction writers, and often borrow the language of the sister arts, to further the analogies that James draws between verbal and visual artistry. But as his tales become philosophical, often recursive meditations on representation, creativity, and artistic license, James indirectly addresses artists who were paid to illustrate his seemingly unrepresentable tales. The debates that critics have generated in response to these metafictions in many ways reiterate the confusion the original artists must have felt when they found themselves translating James's verbal complexities into unambiguous illustrations in black and white. For the most recent critical investigations into the *mis en abyme* these metafictions create, see Donatello Izzo, *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2001) and Tessa Hadley, *Henry James and the Imagination of Pleasure* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002).

[5] Henry James, "The New York Preface," in Kimbaugh, ed., *The Turn of the Screw*, 118.

[6] Letter to George P. Brett, *Henry James's Letters*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), Vol. 4, 66.

[7] Letter to Frederick F. W. Myers, *Henry James's Letters*, 87–88; James's emphasis.

[8] Henry James, "American Magazines; John Jay Chapman," *Henry James: American Essays*, ed. and intro. Leon Edel (New York: Vintage, 1956), 235, 237.

[9] Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, in *The Novels and Tales of Henry James, The New York Edition* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), Vol. 23, ix–x.

[10] Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1885–1905*. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), 454.

[11] David Reed, *The Popular Magazine in Britain and the United States, 1880–1960* (London: British Library, 1997), 75.

[12] Reed, 75.

[13] Mott, 458, 457.

[14] Quoted in Mott, 455.

[15] *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Kenneth Murdock and F. O. Matthiessen (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), 119–20.

[16] Henry James, "The Real Thing," in *The Novels and Tales of Henry James, The New York Edition* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), Vol. 23, 338–39.

[17] Letter to Frederick F. W. Myers, *Henry James's Letters*, 87–88.

[18] T. J. Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly* (Boston: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 116.

[19] Kimbaugh, ed., *The Turn of the Screw*, 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *TS*.

[20] Tintner, 222.

[21] Rosenbaum, 257.

[22] Tintner bases her reading of the illustration and of the early reception of the tale on this disembodied hand, which she claims cannot belong to the ghost and must, then, belong to the governess (222–24).

[23] Millicent Bell has recovered a thriving genre of contemporary stories about crazed and possessed governesses; see "Class, Sex, and the Victorian Governess: James's *The Turn of the Screw*," in *New Essays on "Daisy Miller" and* The Turn of the Screw, ed. Vivian R. Pollak (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 91–120. Peter Beidler has culled relevant stories of supernatural possession to illumi-

nate dozens of occult narratives that he reads against and alongside *The Turn of the Screw* in *Ghosts, Demons, and Henry James:* The Turn of the Screw *at the Turn of the Century* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1989). While I read governesses and possessed children as stock figures of the period, in contrast to the ambiguous ghosts of the tale, Bell's and Beidler's work suggests that corruptible children and crazed governesses had already become familiar aspects of contemporary occult fictions.

[24] Lustig, 138.

[25] Lustig, 176.

[26] Rosenbaum, 258.

[27] Hoople, 46.

[28] Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Criticism," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1982), 151.

[29] Lustig, 132.