Their Dreams and Ours: Britten, Film, and *The Turn of the Screw*

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ABSTRACT

Britten's 1954 opera *The Turn of the Screw*, based on Henry James's ghost story, has been described by critics and academics as 'cinematic', but little serious academic study has been done to test this. Along with *Peter Grimes*, *The Turn of the Screw* is one of the most frequently filmed of Britten's operas, mostly for television, some using location footage and/or studio work, and others based on live theatrical settings. This thesis explores the notion of cinematic opera in the context of *The Turn of the Screw* and filmed opera in general, and questions what inherent cinematic qualities exist in the work which make it particularly conducive for screen interpretation. The thesis will examine Britten's engagement with film as both a cinemagoer and film music composer, and will find that these experiences informed his compositional and dramatic choices when creating *The Turn of the Screw*. Archival research reveals clues to the composer's adaptation process by using a specific scene from the opera and unpicking its progress from the source story to stage production, via the development of Myfanwy Piper's libretto and Britten's score. A key part of the thesis looks at the subsequent interpretation of the opera on screen, using a case-study approach based on neoformalism as an analysis method, and referring to nearly a hundred screen shots. The case studies evaluate seven directors' interpretations ranging from 1959 up to the 2010s, and include a study of Peter Morley's 1959 ITV version which had previously been thought lost and was only rediscovered many years later. In addition, the influence of cinema on non-filmed productions of the opera will be assessed, together with an examination of the significance of non-opera screen adaptations of James's story. Finally, in conclusion, the importance of other Britten operas on TV during his lifetime, and consideration of his TV opera *Owen Wingrave* as culmination of his engagement with film and TV will be examined.

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I undertook further archival research at the British Film Institute, British Library, and the National Archives at Kew; the staff at all of these institutions were impressively helpful and enthusiastic to assist with my research.

I was fortunate enough to be able to interview Brian Large, Colin Matthews and Janette Miller, all of whom were generous in sharing insights and memories detailing relevant experience of working with Britten on televised projects. I was also able to interview Margaret Williams, director of Channel 4's 2001 production of *Owen Wingrave*, who gave further perspectives on filming Britten's opera.

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In Loving Memory of my Father

Roy Harry Auker (1920 – 2013)

Introduction.

This thesis is primarily concerned with Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), a work which has repeatedly been labelled by critics, opera companies, and other commentators as 'cinematic'. However, there is a lack of academic investigation into what this term actually means in the context of *The Turn of the Screw*. Investigating this concept throws up broader issues about the relationship between stage and screen which can illuminate Britten's wider oeuvre and his attitude towards operatic composing. An essential part of the thesis will be the specific influence of Britten's own early film-composing experience (and his awareness of cinema in general) on his operatic output; this is an area of study which has also not been investigated thoroughly before. The comparatively recent discovery of a recording of Peter Morley's 1959 ITV television production (a recording which for many years was presumed lost) affords a unique opportunity to analyse a filmed interpretation of the opera. Morley's film will be compared with other film and stage productions where such comparisons are relevant to the central investigation of 'cinematic' opera.

The libretto of the opera provides the main title of the thesis, 'Their Dreams and Ours', which in this context alludes to the adaptation process involved in deriving a film from a book via an opera intended for the stage, and the necessity for a collaborative creative approach. It also becomes a metaphor for the reception and perception of the work by the viewer or audience. The quotation can be found towards the end of Act I, as part of an exchange between the two ghosts, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, and the two children, Miles and Flora. The complete phrase, sung by Miss Jessel, is 'Their dreams and ours can never be one'. It is a striking phrase indeed, but in using part of it for my title, I have taken it out of the context of the opera's plot and given it a new significance.

Their Dreams…

Acts of creative artistic invention require something concrete to emerge from an imagination. Writers, painters, sculptors, composers, all begin with an idea which is formed (or at least partially formed) in their imagination before being brought to life as a concrete artefact (a story, novel, poem, painting, statue, symphony, opera). The process of giving birth to an artistic artefact will inevitably involve the creation of sketches, models, scribbled notes, etc. (artists vary in their methods of shaping their preliminary material into a finished product) but the initial spark is in their imagination, and sometimes, almost certainly, comes to them literally in dreams. Britten is known to have been fascinated by dreams, and night-time in general. In a 1969 interview with Donald Mitchell, the composer alludes to dreams releasing 'many things which one thinks had better not be released'[1], and describes how his *Nocturne* (1958) deals with 'the disturbing aspects of sleep'.[2] Elsewhere in the same interview, Britten

[1] Donald Mitchell, 'Mapreading' in Christopher Palmer (ed.), *The Britten Companion* (London: Faber, 1984), p. 91.
[2] *Ibid*., p.92

discusses that close cousin of dreams, the subconscious, as a benign agent in ensuring compositions turn out successfully:

> I can quite often go to the [manuscript] paper perfectly clear that what I'm going to do, and to find that it doesn't work out quite like that […] one has got to have faith in one's subconscious, that it's going to direct one rightly. [3]

Britten's trust in his subconscious appeared to date back to his schooldays; he recounted that when he was faced with a difficult algebra problem to be solved by the following day, he would describe the problem as he was in bed just about to go to sleep. 'If you do that it gives a chance for your subconscious mind to work when your conscious mind is happily asleep.'[4] Given the subject matter of *The Turn of the Screw*, and whether or not one believes in ghosts, it is appropriate that it can be said that dreams are the nearest real-life equivalent to interacting with disembodied entities.

The starting point is therefore the product of an imagination, or, to be more accurate, the product of several imaginations, in bringing *The Turn of the Screw* to the stage and/or the screen. It is Benjamin Britten's name on the front cover of the score, but without the imaginations of many other artists there would be nothing for an audience to experience beyond notes on a page. There would not even be any words. 'Their dreams' must therefore also include, in addition to Britten, the writer of the original story, Henry James, and librettist Myfanwy Piper at the very least. Furthermore, creative artists whose work affects what the audience sees and hears, and who are likely to change dynamically with different performances and interpretations (the directors, conductors, singers, orchestral musicians, designers, and so on) need to be considered. Opera is inevitably a collaborative business, with many imaginations playing their part in achieving the overall vision. The translation of a work conceived for the stage into a filmed or television construct imposes further layers of creative input from collaborators including the producer, director, editor, and art director.

…and Ours

'Our dreams' is a metaphor for the recipient of the artistic act; the audience. It is unfortunate that, in the English language, a single word must stand as shorthand for many types of individuals or groups of individuals. In the current study it must also include the viewer of a film or television production. 'The audience' is sometimes spoken of simplistically as if it is a single entity, and it is all too easy to forget that an audience comprises many individuals, all bringing with them different backgrounds, experiences, expertise, and expectations. As Louis Niebur puts it, 'ultimately, the "meaning" of a work for an audience does not require the composer's authority or permission; rather, meaning is derived from the listener's context and an imagined connection to the entities "composer", performer, and so on'.[5] Audiences can be big or small. In the realms of televised or filmed opera, the numbers can run

[3] Mitchell, 'Mapreading', p. 90.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 91.
[5] Louis Niebur, 'Britten's (and Pears's) 'Beloved': Sacred Parlor Song, Passion, and Control in *Canticle 1*', in Vicki P. Stroeher and Justin Vickers (eds), *Benjamin Britten Studies: Essays on an Inexplicit Art* (Aldeburgh: The Boydell Press, 2017), p. 193.

into many hundreds of thousands or even millions overall, and the experience for each one of them will be unique to them. The artefact called *The Turn of the Screw* will arrive in each person's imagination differently according to what each person brings to the experience themselves.

In Chapter 1, I examine Britten's own interaction with the medium of film, primarily during his early life, as a cinemagoer and a documentary film composer. I will consider the influence on his work of Gerhard Lamprecht's 1931 film of Erich Kastner's *Emil und die Detektive*, an early obsession of Britten's, the consolidation of his learning the craft of writing film music, his music for the feature film *Love From A Stranger* (dir. Rowland V. Lee, 1937), and finally, elements of quasi-film-music construction that can be detected in *The Turn of the Screw*.

Chapter 2 investigates the concept of cinematic opera in relation to Britten's operas in general and *The Turn of the Screw* specifically. Film-music techniques were themselves largely inspired by the musical practices of opera and melodrama. It is not so surprising to find a film-apprenticed composer like Britten using similar techniques in both media. There is a growing literature within film-music scholarship which discusses in detail the influence of opera on film music, but this is beyond the scope of this thesis.[6] I address the question of whether a stage work can be regarded as essentially 'cinematic' in its dramatic and musical approach.

The Turn of the Screw gave rise to what appears to be a consensus amongst commentators that Britten is in many ways a 'cinematic' opera composer. Cinematic qualities might be considered to include the musical or operatic equivalents of the basic 'language' of film (such devices as dissolves, fades, and zooms). Commentators' views, however, appear to be based on rather vague impressions as opposed to systematically assembled evidence. TV director Peter Morley who, upon being taken somewhat reluctantly to see *The Turn of the Screw* in London in 1954, whilst stopping short of alluding to 'cinematic qualities' as such, at least recognised that Britten had written the opera in a way that would transfer effectively to a set-bound studio drama. He wrote, many years later:

> it occurred to me that Britten could have written this opera for television. It is a story, which is intimate, claustrophobic, haunted and haunting, with a small cast and small orchestra.[7]

As a result of this impression, Morley went on to direct a production for ITV (its first opera production). There is a strong argument that Morley's intuition that *The Turn of the Screw* has identifiable cinematic qualities is entirely correct, beyond the fact that, as a pioneering and expert practitioner in television arts, we should trust his judgement. There is evidence that Britten composed music for this and other operas in a way that makes a transition to film or television seem natural, making his operas something of a gift for film and TV directors.

Chapter 3 traces the genesis of *The Turn of the Screw*, detailing the process of adaptation from Henry James's original novella, with particular emphasis on the development of the libretto. The adaptation process is observed through the investigation of a key passage from the opera, outlining

[6] A good starting point is Chapter 4, 'Stage and Screen', in Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), particularly the section headed 'Film in opera; opera in film', pp. 141 – 145.
[7] Peter Morley. *A Life Rewound* (London: British Film Institute, 2010), p. 76.

its journey from source text to music and eventual staging. This involves the detailed analysis of the development of the libretto text from Myfanwy Piper's initial rough notes, numerous drafts, and final libretto as set by Britten, always relating these back to James's novella. This element of the chapter represents the culmination of much careful archival research at the Britten-Pears Library, where Piper's notebooks are kept. The same key passage's representation musically is also explored, examining how adaptation can also influence and mould musical material.

An audience's imagination can, as Shakespeare puts it in *Henry V*, 'Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts; / Into a thousand parts divide one man, / And make imaginary puissance'.[8] Consider, for example, a recorded performance of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, or a radio broadcast of the work rather than a stage production. The action is experienced taking place in the imagination, exactly as if the drama is unfolding on the mind's internal cinema screen with full colour widescreen, stunning locations, huge panoramic long shots, atmospheric medium shots and high-definition close-ups. There are aspects of film theory (for example in the work of Jean-Louis Baudry) that connect with this model of how we experience films by constructing our own internal mental cinema screens. I will consider these, along with other philosophical and psychological theories of film in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 also includes a critical overview of existing scholarship on intersections between opera and cinema or television, and questions what remains distinct between staged opera and filmed opera. One of the additional functions of Chapter 4 is to consider existing methods of analysing the use of music in film to ascertain whether they may be useful as tools to scrutinise specifically filmed opera. It will be shown that in most cases a 'one size fits all' approach will not be especially fruitful, but a more general methodology will yield more meaningful results. Film scholar Emilio Audissino's idea of adopting a modified version of neoformalism has proved particularly helpful. Neoformalism, a method of film criticism often associated with the work of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, is an attempt to focus less on interpretation, and more towards an empirical analysis of film. I demonstrate that there are musicological shortcomings, but a modified neoformalism allows the film, and its music (operatic or otherwise), to plainly 'speak' its meaning. Within the field of filmed opera, where the starting point is not a traditional screenplay-driven combination of moving images and soundtrack but a pre-composed operatic text, I have mostly favoured a combination of neoformalist-style descriptive analysis with use of screenshots and score extracts, an approach which comes to fruition mostly in Chapter 6, but is also used in Chapters 5 and 7.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of Morley's televised version, again making use of archival material and examining how the opera adapts naturally into screen form. Alongside this, the fascinating story of how the programme was filmed and how the videotaped production fortuitously survived destruction is told. Much of the archival material on which this account is built (which includes Morley's memoirs, the original shooting script, and also the private memoirs of a surviving cast member) has not previously been examined thoroughly beyond some descriptive approaches in literature such as Jennifer Barnes's *The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television* (2003). The

[8] William Shakespeare, 'Prologue' from *Henry V* (lines 23–5), ed. W. J. Craig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

reconstruction of the story behind this production, and the audio-visual analysis of key aspects of the production itself, are major and unique features of this thesis.

Chapter 6 compares three crucial scenes from the opera as they are presented in six different screen versions. Of these, four versions are films of theatrical productions, and two were specifically intended for television transmission. For purposes of comparison I also examine some notable stage productions which were not filmed, together with a brief summary of non-opera films based on the James novella, adding a consideration of their significance in terms of influencing, and being influenced by, films of Britten's work.

Chapter 7 examines television films of two other Britten operas, *Billy Budd* (1951; BBC, 1966) and *Peter Grimes* (1945; BBC, 1969), in the context of the experience the composer gained as a result of Morley's production of *The Turn of the Screw*. This leads on to a discussion of the opera Britten subsequently wrote specifically for television, *Owen Wingrave* (BBC, 1971), and considers whether this can be regarded as a culmination of lessons learned by the composer through the televising of his previous operas. Britten chose another Henry James ghost story for adaptation as a television opera, and the use of various television techniques as an integral part of the development of the work is clearly indebted to the composer's previous film and television experiences. Consideration will here be given to Britten's collaboration with his assistant Colin Matthews and director Brian Large, drawing upon interviews with them conducted as part of my research.

Chapter 8 summarises the salient arguments and findings of the thesis as a whole, returning to the initial area for investigation: what leads critics and other commentators to describe *The Turn of the Screw* as a cinematic opera when it was originally intended for the stage, and seeking to draw conclusions based on the evidence detailed in the thesis.

Chapter 1. Britten and Film

Britten as cinemagoer during the pre-war years

> Go to Playhouse with Beth, for rather a poor (silent) film, 'The 4 feathers', little similarity to the book.[1]

So reads one of Britten's first references to going to the cinema, which can be found in his diary entry for 7 April 1930, displaying the typically judgemental attitude normally reserved for his comments on musicians, fellow composers and conductors. John Evans's selections from Britten's diaries kept between 1930 and 1938 reveal seventy trips to the cinema, but there may well have been many more. Although even seventy may seem a somewhat high number, this was not a particularly unusual frequency of cinemagoing for people during the period from the 1930s until approximately the mid-1950s. My father, who was roughly a contemporary of Britten's (born in 1920), would often describe how going to the cinema at least once a week was a common pastime for people of his generation. Britten's frequency of cinemagoing was therefore typical for the time, and it is remarkable that even his first encounters with the medium (special film nights held at weekends in Gresham's School) reveal a streak of critical discernment, together with some anti-American prejudice, as demonstrated not only in the diary extract above, but also in a letter to his sister Beth on 22 February 1930:

> I am sorry to hear of your sudden passion for the flicks; I hope it's wearing off now, & that you aren't going so frequently now. I think I described to you the two films we had here, of the 'Epic of Everest' & 'Napoleon'. We are going to have two more educational ones, from Yankee land, that we have been asked to try – namely Christopher Columbus, & the Pilgrim Fathers; they are sure to be awful […] Also there was the thought that we were going to have a very good other film, some comedy or other, done by Cambridge amateur film Society or something; and now we can't have it because of these wretched Yankee films.[2]

As with music, it can be said that Britten's critical judgement was called into play whenever he was discussing something he cared about (sport is another example). There is an implied antipathy to American films in this letter to Beth, but one could speculate that his sister had perhaps expressed her own dismay at going to the cinema so frequently and Britten was merely echoing her view rather than providing his own. It is undoubtedly true that he was enormously enthusiastic about what film had to offer, and found both light entertainment and serious, thought-provoking artistry within the dark confines of the cinema auditorium:

> Go to Palace to see Talkie film Charlie's Aunt […] in evening. Screemingly [*sic*] funny.

[1] John Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy – The Diaries of the Young Benjamin Britten* (London: Faber, 2009), p. 36.
[2] Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed (eds), *Letters from a Life – Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten* Vol. 1 1923-39 (London: Faber, 1991), pp. 124-5.

> […] go to an amazing Film 'Catherine the Great' with Bergner, Flora Robson, & Douglas Fairbanks Jun. B. is everything imaginable in an actress & the whole film is a high artistic achievement.[3]

Britten's cinemagoing habits were demonstrably wide-ranging, encompassing comedies, newsreels, documentaries, dramas, adaptations of stage plays, foreign-language films, cartoons, and many more. Amongst the commentators on his work as a composer of music for documentary films in the 1930s, David Crilly underlines the importance of Britten's enjoyment of film at that time:

> [Britten] had become something of a cinema aficionado regularly going to see stars of the screen such as Greta Garbo *et al*. Rather than being merely a passive observer of film, he regularly commented in his diaries about the effectiveness of various elements of the film's composition.[4]

Occasionally, Britten allowed himself to get caught up in the burgeoning celebrity culture that was beginning to grow up around film personalities, especially if the 'star' was attractive and good-looking. Humphrey Carpenter described how the commission to compose music for the documentary *The King's Stamp* in 1935

> came at a time when [Britten] was doing much cinema-going. He would tour the London news theatres in search of Walt Disneys – he called the best of them 'masterpieces' – and he enjoyed Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, which had a score by Arthur Benjamin,[5] though Britten was chiefly interested in the performance of *gamine* Nova Pilbeam, 'a little darling […] so lovely to look at'. He went again to *Poil de Carotte*, noting that the boy actor Robert Lynen was 'glorious'.[6]

Neil Powell also confirmed

> whenever [Britten] was in London, he had developed the slightly eccentric habit of nipping into news cinemas, even on the busiest days, to catch the Disney shorts: he was especially partial to a *Silly Symphony*.[7]

According to the British Universities Film and Video Council, news cinemas were highly popular during the 1930s:

> people went to the cinema to watch the newsreels, to see and now hear about people, places and events that they had read about in the papers. The ten minute newsreel was at the beginning of the programme, squeezed in between cartoons and travelogues before the main feature […] People wanted to experience the new realism of sound news but didn't always have the time or money for a whole cinema programme. The newsreel theatre showed the news in hour long programmes, giving people the chance to view it when they wanted and for as long as they liked. It was an early example of what we now take for granted, news on demand.[8]

The most popular of these news cinemas in London, and one which Britten most certainly will have patronised, was the British Movietone News Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue. This was formerly the

[3] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 80 and p. 222.
[4] David Crilly 'Britten and the Cinematic Frame' in Lucy Walker (ed.), *Benjamin Britten – New Perspectives on his Life and Work* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), p. 57.
[5] Britten's piano teacher at the Royal College of Music.
[6] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten – A Biography* (London: Faber, 1992), p. 65.
[7] Neil Powell, *Benjamin Britten, A Life For Music* (London: Random House, 2014) p. 91.
[8] *News on Screen*, www.bufvc.ac.uk (accessed 23 January 2017).

Avenue Pavilion Theatre, and was converted into the news cinema during 1930, opening with great success on 18 August of that year:

> Reports claimed that in its first ten hours [,…] four thousand people had visited the theatre with over one thousand turned away. By January 1931 Movietone claimed that half a million people had visited the theatre. With a capacity of 500 that meant it had filled up over 1,000 times.[9]

Attendance figures like that might call into question Powell's description of Britten's behaviour in frequenting the news theatre as 'eccentric', since it was clearly something which appealed to most of the London population. Beyond the capital, also, the news theatre was attracting large audiences. This public thirst for newsreel and its close cousin, documentary film, formed the background for the rise of organisations such as the GPO Film Unit, which played such a significant role in Britten's formative years as a composer.

Leaving aside the factual footage of newsreel and documentary, the kind of films Britten went to can be judged from his diaries and letters. These films are presented in tabular form in Appendix Two, but it is helpful to pick out a few highlights. It is to be remembered that his film-going always needed to be accommodated within his busy musical life of composing, performing, concert-going, and the many hours spent listening to music on the radio.

On 13 August 1931, Britten recorded in his diary that (in Lowestoft) he composed 'a bit more ballet' in the morning, and then: 'Go to Marina Theatre to see Charlie Chaplin in 'City Lights', with Mum, Beth and Bobby. A wonderful piece of acting.' [10]

Chaplin was to be on Britten's film-going agenda again much later, in 1936, when the film *Modern Times* caused the composer to comment: 'Much maligned, but I enjoyed it no end'.[11]

On Wednesday 11 May 1932 Britten is much less complimentary, dismissing the film *Strictly Dishonorable* as 'utter tosh'.[12] There is a decidedly curmudgeonly air to the whole diary entry; on the same day, he reports: 'Listen [on the radio] to Prelude to Tristan from Covent Garden, before dinner, under Beecham – Disgraceful!' [13]

An enthusiastic entry on Wednesday 29 November records what appears to be a genuine emotional response to the French film *Poil de Carrotte* which goes far deeper than the mere sexual attraction for Robert Lynen implied in Carpenter's biography (see above):

> Simply superb show. Photography & Acting, producing and plot all first rate. The father is grand & as for Poil – he is a magnificent emotional artist. I was thoroughly harrowed, intensely amused, & thrilled beyond measure, the whole time.[14]

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[9] *News on Screen*, www.bufvc.ac.uk (accessed 23 January 2017).
[10] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 80.
[11] *Ibid*, p. 344.
[12] *Ibid*, p. 105.
[13] *Ibid*, p. 105.
[14] *Ibid*, p. 155.

Even when abroad, in Florence during March and April 1934, Britten found time to go to the cinema (one of the films he saw was obviously in Italian without subtitles), commenting upon them thus:

> Saturday 31st March 1934 […] go to Savoia […] cinema to see Film '1860' – abt [about] Garibaldi, but find it extremely hard to follow.[15]
>
> Sunday 1st April 1934…we go to see Maurice Chevalier & Horton in 'Learn to Love'[16] at the Edison – bit more intelligible than last evening.[17]

On Friday 6 April 1934, the day his father died (although Britten was not to learn of this until arriving back in Lowestoft on 9 April), he recorded going to the cinema accompanied by the young man with whom he was subsequently to become romantically involved:

> Young Wulff Scherchen (son of Hermann) attaches himself to me, & I spend all the time with him […] sit about until about 9.0 when we suddenly decide to go to see 'Fra Diavolo' at a very low cinema.[18]

There are a few recurring genres that can be observed in Britten's diaries between 1930 and 1938. One of the most frequent is an enthusiasm for Disney films, culminating in the first full-length animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (released in late 1937 and seen by Britten shortly afterwards), as the following extracts further illustrate:

> I go to a Lyons [tea-room] for food – then to a News cinema to see some Walt Disney masterpieces – a Silly Symphony (clock shop) & Two-guns Mickey – Both lovely. [8 April 1935]
>
> I am booked to do the music for a film […] Talk much about this – go to Lewisham for 2 hrs (see a good Mickey Mouse) [27 April 1935]
>
> go to Tatler cinema for an hour (2 Mickey Mouses – 2 Silly Symphonies…v fine) [2 May 1935]
>
> go to see a Mickey Mouse (v good Silly Symphony – Bird Store) at a News Theatre [25 May 1935][19]
>
> Take afternoon off to see Piers Dunkerley[20] – take him to a cinema (only see a very poor Tom Walls-Ralph Lynn show – saved by two good Disneys 'Music Land' and 'Pluto's Judgement day' [16 January 1936][21]
>
> go to Tatler for Disney season. Some lovely, witty, Silly Symphonies. Adored by all ages & classes. [15 April 1936][22]
>
> see 5.00 pm the first full length Disney 'Snow White' – grand entertainment & some terrific incidents. [25 February 1938]
>
> Lunch with [Francis Barton] & Montague Slater at Café in Aft[ernoon], see films (Snow White – Disney, V. fine) & Rene Clair's pretty poor [*Break the News*] with Chevalier & Buchanan. [23 May 1938][23]

[15] Evans (ed.) *Journeying Boy,* p. 205.
[16] The actual title was *The Way to Love*, directed by Norman Taurog, an American pre-code romantic comedy released in 1933, also starring Ann Dvorak. Its Italian title was *La maniera di amare.*
[17] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 205.
[18] *Ibid*., p. 206.
[19] *Ibid*, pp. 256, 259-60, 264.
[20] Britten's friend, Piers Dunkerley, was later one of the dedicatees of *War Requiem*.
[21] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 327.
[22] *Ibid*, p. 346.

We may note that Britten does not comment upon the musical content of *Snow White*, even though the film is an animated musical with many songs and much dramatic underscoring by composers Frank Churchill, Leigh Harline, and Paul J. Smith. Typically, Britten did not comment on musical scores of the films he saw, perhaps because he felt they were unworthy of serious consideration as musical art.

An early obsession: *Emil und die Detektive*

In 1933, Britten went to see a German children's film called *Emil und die Detektive* (dir. Gerhard Lamprecht, 1931) describing it as

> the most perfect and satisfying film I have ever seen or ever hope to see. Acting as natural & fine as possible – magnificent & subtle photography – plot very amusing & imaginative – a collosal [sic] achievement.[24]

We have seen that Britten is frequently generous in his praise (and also in his condemnation) for films he has viewed, but *Emil and the Detectives* (to use its English title) seems to have struck an especially strong chord in him. John Bridcut described how the composer, three days after seeing the film, bought a copy of the book by Erich Kastner on which the film was based, and then

> cut out the film's publicity photographs from magazines, glued them inside the covers of the book, and wrote a caption for each one. Faithfully preserved inside the volume is a yellowing 1930s cutting from the *Radio Times* about a wireless dramatization of the story.[25]

The dramatization to which Bridcut refers was broadcast almost a year later, on 8 February 1934.[26] Britten records his response in his diary as follows:

> Listen to a very clever & effective broadcast of the immortal 'Emil' at 8.0. Hugh Green[27] was very good as Emil, & the other kids were very natural. The nightmare was pretty good.[28]

Bridcut discusses *Emil and the Detectives* at some length, with good reason, and concludes:

> we know how deep an impression *Emil and the Detectives* made on [Britten], and it doubtless resonated with him down the years, particularly when it touched on aspects of childhood that continued to preoccupy him, such as the choices and the complicity of the innocent.[29]

There are a number of dramatic and narrative themes running through the film which Bridcut believes Britten especially identified with. Bridcut maintains this may explain why the composer became so obsessed with it: 'It was a film about the triumph of children over adults, the strength of

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[23] *Evans (ed.), Journeying Boy,* pp. 465 and 472.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 137.
[25] John Bridcut, *Britten's Children* (London: Faber 2006), p. 26.
[26] See *Radio Times*, Issue 540 (08-02-1934), https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/page/87454d0368df40fa8458f5cd8ebf3e6b?page=54 (accessed 24 November 2019).
[27] Identified in the cast list as 'Master Hugh Greene', this was Hughie Greene, later to become a noted TV personality and presenter of *Opportunity Knocks* during the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1930s he was a successful child actor.
[28] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 199.
[29] Bridcut, *Britten's Children*, pp. 34 – 35.

boyhood camaraderie and the power of mother-love'.[30] The very opening shots show Emil and his friends in mischievous, prank-playing mode as they somewhat irreverently apply a false moustache to a monument of an important dignitary in their hometown. This immediately establishes a theme of childhood playfulness, and also independence from adults. However, within a few minutes we are seeing Emil at home, showering love on his mother in a way that must surely have resonated with Britten, and will possibly have reminded him of how, in his letters to his mother from Gresham's, his language was frequently that of a lover rather than a son: 'Farewell, darling pet of my heart […] With tons of love, […] your worshipping, adoring loving (etc.) son Benjamin.'[31] Bridcut alludes to this aspect by referring to a scene a little further on in the film, after Emil has reached Berlin and has been befriended by the gang leader Gustav:

> Emil is devoted to his mother (as Britten was) but wary of being called a milksop. When he describes his home life one of the Berlin boys observes: 'You and your mother must love each other very much'. Emil's reply is almost involuntary: 'Hugely', but he quickly recovers himself by adding: 'But that's not to say I'm a Mummy's boy. And if you don't believe me I'll throw you against the wall!'[32]

Another theme Bridcut identifies in the film is that of sexual threat. Although the film is ostensibly a children's entertainment, it is Bridcut's view that these more adult themes have been smuggled in. According to Bridcut, it is possible that Kastner, the author of the original children's book, was of the opinion that his story had been 'vulgarised', but it is not clear what precisely Kastner was referring to. Bridcut discerns an emerging sub-text which he believes to be deliberate on the part of the director. Emil becomes trapped in a railway carriage with the man who steals his money, the sinister 'Man in the Bowler Hat'. Bridcut observes that we 'become aware of a miasma of sexual threat from the man. The fear is not only in Emil's mind. It is in ours too.' [33]

The elements of thinly disguised predatory sexuality are not unusual in German cinema of this period – one only has to recall the German expressionist school of filmmaking which achieved prominence only a short time before the advent of the talkies, with films such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (dir. Robert Weine, 1920*)* and *Nosferatu* (dir. F.W. Murnau, 1922). The scene in the train compartment, especially the nightmare sequence, is an example of German expressionism, causing Michael Rosen[34] to comment:

> Matching the novel's naturalism, most of the action takes place away from the studio, but two sequences in particular enabled the filmmakers to practise their expressionism: Emil's dream and Emil's encounter with the thief in his hotel room. In the book, Emil's dream combines his guilt over his offence against public order with his view of the big city that the thief himself suggested in the train compartment. In the film, Emil is closer to the world of Dr Caligari. In the hotel, the filmmakers give Emil

[30] Bridcut*, Britten's Children*, p. 27.
[31] Mitchell and Reed (eds) *Letters from a Life* – Vol.1, p. 108.
[32] Bridcut, *Britten's Children*, p. 28.
[33] *Ibid*, p. 31.
[34] Michael Rosen (b. 1946), the poet and novelist. Not usually known for film criticism, Rosen was Children's Laureate (2007-2009).

> the role of protagonist, where the book has him contemplating the illuminated street-jazz of Berlin.[35]

Bridcut, perhaps not surprisingly, also implies that the scene in the railway carriage involving the sinister man in the bowler hat and Emil foreshadows many of the quasi-sexual 'older man/young boy' interactions in Britten's operas (e.g. Quint/Miles in *The Turn of the Screw*, Aschenbach/Tadzio in *Death in Venice*).

Related to the sexual overtones Bridcut identifies in the film are the instances where he believes the film brings out a more general theme of corruption of innocence. For example, during the train journey the thief encourages Emil to accept a cigarette, an attempt, Bridcut says, to tempt the boy into the adult world via a corrupt method (the offering of a narcotic). Emil does not take the cigarette, an action that Bridcut recognises has a parallel in Britten's own life: 'like Benjamin, he is in no hurry to grow up'.[36]

One final speculation Bridcut allows himself concerns the fact that, not long before Britten became obsessed with *Emil and the Detectives*, he also encountered Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* for the first time. As we have seen, Britten saw *Emil* initially on 28 March 1933, but less than a year before, he listened to a radio dramatization of *The Turn of the Screw*, as he reports in his diary:

> listen to Wireless – Saint-Saens Carnival des Animaux – and a wonderful, impressive but terribly eerie & scary play 'The Turn~~ing~~ of the Screw' by Henry James.[37]

The dramatization which made such an impact on Britten was featured in that week's *Radio Times*[38] with an impressively ghostly illustration of Quint at the window (Fig. 1.1), on the same page of which were the details of the concert featuring *The Carnival of the Animals* (Fig. 1.2). And just a few months before *Emil and the Detectives*, Britten was reading James's story for himself, in January 1933: 'practise Pft, & walk – shopping with Mum in morning. Read more of the Turn of the Screw'.[39]

[35] Michael Rosen, 'Emil and the Detectives', essay contained in the booklet accompanying the British Film Institute's DVD release of the film (2013).
[36] Bridcut, *Britten's Children*, p. 32.
[37] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 106.
[38] https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/page/7bd445ee34cd481fafa95a22958569bf?page=34 (accessed 15 May 2019).
[39] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 128.



'The Turn of the Screw'

A version for broadcasting by E. J. King Bull of the famous story by

HENRY JAMES

The cast will include:

LILIAN HARRISON, OLIVE WALTER, JOYCE MOORE, IRENE FREEMAN, H. R. HIGNETT, DENIS FREEMAN.

The incidental music by GERRARD WILLIAMS
The orchestra directed by LESLIE WOODGATE
Produced by E. J. KING BULL

Tonight at 9.35. *Note in col. 3.*

graceful, charming little piece *The Swan*. Many of the numbers are supposed to reflect the idiosyncrasies of some of his friends and associates, others to burlesque musical conventions; but with all that we need not worry. It will be enough to listen to the suite as the jolly kind of music that one would expect from little sound pictures of birds, animals, domestic fowl, and 'pianists.'

Time Signal, Greenwich, at 9.0

9.0 'The Second News'

WEATHER FORECAST, SECOND GENERAL NEWS BULLETIN

9.15 Shipping Forecast; New York Stock Market Report

9.20 'MUSINGS WITHOUT METHOD'
Captain G. CRAWSHAY

9.35 'The Turn of the Screw'

A version for broadcasting
by
E. J. KING BULL
of the famous story
by
HENRY JAMES

THE famous story by the Anglo-American writer, Henry James, on which this play is based, is perhaps the greatest psychological thriller written by a man of genius, certainly outstanding in its power to terrify by suggestion. It tells of the gradual haunting of two beautiful children by malignant spirits, and of the struggle waged for their souls by a loving governess. There is little action, but the mounting excitement of the struggle is conveyed in writing of great subtlety and beauty, heightened in this broadcast version by the music faded in and out above the dialogue to denote the interplay of the supernatural apparitions and the lives of the characters. Lilian Harrison, whose performance in 'Jane Eyre' will be remembered, has the leading part.

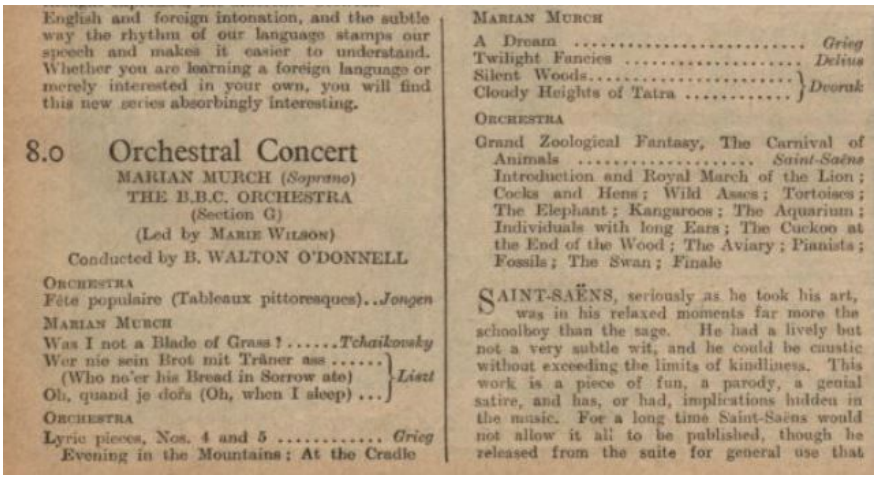
(*See centre of page*)

10.35-12.0 DANCE MUSIC

MAURICE WINNICK and his ORCHESTRA from THE CARLTON HOTEL

Time Signal, Greenwich, at 11.30

Fig. 1.1: Detail of the *Turn of the Screw* feature from *Radio Times*, 1 June 1932



English and foreign intonation, and the subtle way the rhythm of our language stamps our speech and makes it easier to understand. Whether you are learning a foreign language or merely interested in your own, you will find this new series absorbingly interesting.

8.0 Orchestral Concert

MARIAN MURCH (*Soprano*)
THE B.B.C. ORCHESTRA
(Section G)
(Led by MARIE WILSON)
Conducted by B. WALTON O'DONNELL

ORCHESTRA
Fête populaire (Tableaux pittoresques)...*Jongen*

MARIAN MURCH
Was I not a Blade of Grass?.....*Tchaikovsky*
Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen ass.....
(Who ne'er his Bread in Sorrow ate) } *Liszt*
Oh, quand je dors (Oh, when I sleep)...

ORCHESTRA
Lyric pieces, Nos. 4 and 5 ..... *Grieg*
Evening in the Mountains; At the Cradle

MARIAN MURCH
A Dream ..... *Grieg*
Twilight Fancies ..... *Delius*
Silent Woods..... } *Dvorak*
Cloudy Heights of Tatra ..... }

ORCHESTRA
Grand Zoological Fantasy, The Carnival of Animals ..... *Saint-Saëns*
Introduction and Royal March of the Lion; Cocks and Hens; Wild Asses; Tortoises; The Elephant; Kangaroos; The Aquarium; Individuals with long Ears; The Cuckoo at the End of the Wood; The Aviary; Pianists; Fossils; The Swan; Finale

SAINT-SAËNS, seriously as he took his art, was in his relaxed moments far more the schoolboy than the sage. He had a lively but not a very subtle wit, and he could be caustic without exceeding the limits of kindliness. This work is a piece of fun, a parody, a genial satire, and has, or had, implications hidden in the music. For a long time Saint-Saëns would not allow it all to be published, though he released from the suite for general use that

Fig. 1.2: Concert featuring *Carnival of the Animals* in *Radio Times*, 1 June 1932

Bridcut finds the close juxtaposition of Britten's encounters with both *Emil and the Detectives* and *The Turn of the Screw* significant:

> [*The Turn of the Screw's*] disturbing undercurrents must have informed his understanding of *Emil and the Detectives* when he saw the film two months later. The confluence of the two stories may have fed the psychological and musical torrent of the opera.[40]

Bridcut deals skilfully with both the psychological aspects of the film and their resonances within Britten's personality, but gives scant consideration to the musical content of the film and its possible influence on Britten's composing. The only reference Bridcut makes to any musical connection between the film and Britten's music is a very brief mention regarding Britten's 1953 song cycle *Winter Words*, drawing a parallel between the sounds of the train journey in *Emil and the Detectives* and the piano accompaniment of the song cycle. However, there are some undeniable similarities between Allan Gray's score for the film and the music Britten was writing during the 1930s and beyond. There are a number of substantial music cues: many sequences have little or no dialogue and, apart from a little diegetic sound, much of the soundtrack is music. A probable explanation for this is that technically the filmmakers found the lip synchronisation of dialogue a challenge, as film historian Caren Willig suggests, citing 'the new and complicated sound equipment',[41] which may have resulted in an enhanced reliance on musical background.

A sequence worthy of attention is the train journey to Berlin. Clearly, this bears direct comparison with Britten's famous music for the documentary film *Night Mail*, composed in early 1936. The most striking example concerns the very beginning of the music cue from *Emil and the Detectives*, where the train starts up, gathers steam, and begins to move. Gray's music begins with percussion imitating the diegetic sound of the steam engine, which then fades out as a double bass ostinato takes hold. Above this, tremolo strings and woodwind play non-functional dissonances (Ex. 1.1) [42]. This strategy is similar to that adopted by Maurice Jaubert when composing music for Jean Vigo's films in the early 1930s, in which sound effects metamorphose into nondiegetic music. An example of this is the departure of a barge in *L'Atalante* (1934), in which the rhythm of the barge's motor is taken up by the rhythm of the accompaniment for the folk-style song which almost immediately starts. Cooke describes a 'poetic realism', in keeping with broader aesthetic trends in French cinema at the time and here specifically referring to the film's 'ostinato pattern which opens into expansive watery music and […] other musical cues […] similarly triggered by diegetic sounds'.[43]

[40] Bridcut, *Britten's Children*, p. 35.
[41] Caren Willig, 'The Zeitgeist of Emil und die Detektive', essay contained in the booklet accompanying the British Film Institute's DVD release of the film (2013).
[42] All musical transcriptions from the soundtrack of *Emil and the Detectives* are mine.
[43] Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, p. 313.



Ex. 1.1: The opening of Allan Gray's train music from *Emil and the Detectives*

In the comparable sequence from *Night Mail*, again, Britten's approach is considerably more sophisticated, but nonetheless similarities can be detected (perhaps, due to the colouring of the sound, more to the ear than to the eye in examining the score). See Ex.1.2:



Ex. 1.2: Music from *Night Mail* (Britten)

Given the similarities, it is plausible that the train music from *Emil and the Detectives* might well have been in Britten's mind when composing his music for *Night Mail*, even if only subconsciously.

Britten as cinemagoer, 1939–1976

Britten's film-going habits are quite well documented within his diaries and letters up until 1939, providing evidence that he was an avid and interested viewer of films. However, with the diaries subsequently becoming little more than a record of appointments after 1938 it is to the letters that we must turn to find further mentions of his enthusiasm for film. In fact, such mentions are few and far between, but we should not necessarily conclude from this that Britten simply stopped going to the cinema. The published letters are but a small fraction of Britten's correspondence, and it is not really necessary to trawl through every one of the unpublished ones for mentions of films. At any rate it is fair to comment that Britten did not regard going to see films as an important enough activity to continually draw attention to. We should therefore regard the following survey as only a small but nonetheless representative glimpse of Britten's encounters with cinema as a viewer between 1939 and 1976, as far as these are revealed in the published letters.

On 18 July 1939, Britten wrote from Woodstock, New York, to his sister Beth, describing a number of aspects of his life in America, including, in very general terms, going to see films:

> Then tennis perhaps till 7.30 or 8.0. Then the big meal of the day at a snack bar called Trolley Car; and after that either here or at Aaron's

> [Copland] we gossip or play piano, or go to cinema at Kingston 9 miles away. So we're occupied – you see![44]

On 31 March 1940, Britten's letter to violinist Antonio Brosa (written from Britten's and Pears' lodgings with the Mayers in Amityville, NY) contains an allusion to a cinema advertisement with which they would have been familiar at the time:

> many thanks to the most accomplished, intelligent, natural & sweet sounding (sounds like a M.G.M [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer] advertisement, but it's true!) violinist in the world![45]

Amongst Britten's cinema enthusiasms were films featuring the Marx Bros, and he became a very discerning viewer, including offering a critical judgement on their 1941 film *The Big Store* by describing it in a letter to William Mayer (29 July 1941) from Escondido, California as 'not one of their best, but still very funny'.[46] Also from Escondido, a little later in 1941 (9 September), in a letter to Wulff Scherchen, Britten demonstrates an ability to make a distinction between the technical aspects of filmmaking and artistic merit, together with a wry comment about the whole Hollywood environment:

> [Hollywood] is like another world, from the world we know. Money, time, distance – nothing has the old meaning. It explains why so many of the films that come from Hollywood, although technically so good, are artistically so rotten. All the weaknesses of the civilised world, all the lack of direction, find their epitome in California.[47]

By this point Britten was attending the cinema with actual experience of working in the film industry, and for this reason he would inevitably have been better informed. In going to America he had hoped that his friend Aaron Copland might have assisted his introduction into the film music milieu in Hollywood.[48] There is a possibility that he was feeling a little disenchanted that this did not materialise.

Having returned to England, arriving on 17 April 1942, Britten wrote a somewhat ill-tempered letter to Pears, dated 1 June 1942, in which he angrily describes a cinema trip. It is not clear from the letter if Britten's companion for seeing the film was Wulff Scherchen (it reads a little as if it was), but Pears was away touring with a production of *Tales of Hoffmann*, and Britten evidently was not coping very well without his partner (the letter describes how Britten had missed a phone call from him). The film in question, *How Green Was My Valley*, based on Richard Llewellyn's novel, was directed by John Ford (1941) and starred Walter Pidgeon and Maureen O'Hara. It had ten Academy Award nominations and beat *Citizen Kane* (dir. Orson Welles, 1941) for Best Picture that year. Although clearly a highly regarded film, it is possible the composer's critical judgement was affected by his bad mood, since he wrote testily:

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[44] Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed (eds), *Letters from a Life – Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten* Vol. 2 1939-45 (London: Faber, 1991), p. 688.
[45] *Ibid*, p. 788.
[46] *Ibid,* p. 965.
[47] *Ibid,* p. 977.
[48] In his autobiography, Copland wrote that he arranged a film contract for Britten through his agent, Abe Meyer. However, no work came of this arrangement. See Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (London: Faber & Faber. 1984), p.293.

> I'm too sleepy to go on with this diary [i.e. letter] – but I came back this morning & saw Wulff, then 'How Green was my Valley' (easier than talking to him – but a lousy picture) then Spenders, & then waiting for you…but we won't go into that again.[49]

One may speculate that Britten's low opinion of *How Green Was My Valley* would not have been such a surprising judgement, given the subject matter of the documentary film *Coal Face*, and its treatment, for which Britten composed the music. *How Green Was My Valley* was a somewhat romanticised depiction of life in a coal-mining community, whereas *Coal Face* was grim and starkly realistic by comparison.

A few years later, whilst in Switzerland Britten wrote to Eric Crozier (3 February 1948), demonstrating that his propensity for strongly opinionated (and not necessarily justifiable) views when passing judgement on films had not faded.

> We saw M. Vincent the new Fresnay film you talked about. Coming on the top of Gandhi's death it was overwhelmingly moving. He's a fine actor, & it's a most serious film.[50]

The film was a dramatized account of the life of St. Vincent de Paul, starring the French actor, Pierre Fresnay.

In a letter to Eric Walter White (undated, but sent in early December 1948), Britten refers to vividly remembering 'the Reiniger Film'. This is in connection with the work of Charles Kingsley's relevance to Britten's opera for children, *The Little Sweep* (1949). There is a reference to a 'silhouette film about London Street Cries', but the precise title of the film remains elusive. However, the *Letters* editors speculate that some musical sketches in Britten's handwriting discovered in the Britten–Pears Library and entitled 'Street Cries' may have some connection with the film.[51] German-born Lotte Reiniger was a filmmaker who experimented with animation using silhouettes. In 1935, Britten composed his *Rossini Suite*, used as the music for her film, *The Tocher*, made under the auspices of the GPO Film Unit.

It is inconceivable that Britten would not have seen any films after 1948, but, in the published letters at least, there are no further references to cinema-going (the editors' choice of which letters to publish was no doubt unlikely to have been based on whether a trip to the cinema was mentioned). However, an intriguing connection with the film industry came in July 1956, when Britten attempted to enlist Marilyn Monroe to help launch an appeal for funding for a proposed new theatre for the Aldeburgh Festival, writing to Edith Sitwell:

> we are looking for the most terrific, film-starry person to open [the appeal…] Because you always say how nice & simple, & also interested in 'cultural' things she is, I wonder whether you could help us approach

[49] Evans (ed.) *Journeying Boy,* p. 1056.
[50] Donald Mitchell, Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke (eds), *Letters from a Life – Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten* Vol. 3 1946-51 (London: Faberl 2004), p. 354.
[51] *Ibid*. , pp. 467 – 468.

> Marilyn Monroe. I don't know her at all […] so a word from you would help enormously.[52]

Sitwell and Monroe had met in 1954, for an article in *Life* magazine, and the writer had become impressed with the actress' personality. However, Sitwell's response to Britten's proposal was negative: 'there *isn't a hope* that we can get Miss Monroe. For both she and her husband told me, when they came to see me, that she […] will be filming[53] […] twelve hours a day'.[54] In the event, the new Festival Theatre did not come to fruition.

On 24 September 1967, Britten wrote to Rosamund Strode from The Royal Embassy Hotel in Montreal, Canada:

> When you get this Miss Hudson [Britten's housekeeper] will be back, & I hope that my dreams that 1) Red House is falling down 2) I am dead & no one to run the Festival or the Cinema […] are all untrue.[55]

Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke offer a helpful explanatory note about the reference to the cinema at Aldeburgh:

> Aldeburgh's tiny cinema […] began showing films in 1919 as the Aldeburgh Picture House. In later years it was occasionally used as a venue for recitals at the Aldeburgh Festival […] and also to house the Festival's administrative offices. The latter function began in 1966 after the cinema […] was purchased for £14,000 […] by a local consortium led by Laetita (Letty) Gifford and including Britten and Pears.[56]

Amongst Britten's early cinematic enthusiasms, as noted above, was the work of Charlie Chaplin, an enthusiasm which the composer clearly continued to hold dear, since he wrote to the actor on 17 February 1969. In the letter the composer, representing the 'Artistic Directors of the Aldeburgh Festival', invited Chaplin to the Aldeburgh Festival, where, it seems, the plan was to celebrate Chaplin's birthday by showing his films:

> We are the greatest admirers of your genius, and we would very much like to pay tribute to you in this way. Our cinema here is not enormous, but it has great charm, and it plays a considerable part in the life of the community […] we should be honoured to invite you to spend some days at the Festival; its dates are June 6th to 29th, and we hope to show the films at regular intervals throughout those weeks.[57]

Chaplin does not appear to have replied to the invitation, and certainly did not attend the Festival, although some of his films were indeed shown, with the support of the BFI. The intention had been to show Chaplin's less familiar films, which in the event fell through (they showed some famous ones instead) but it does suggest a certain connoisseurship and the desire to make a cinematic mark. The Festival organisers would have needed Chaplin's help to get the necessary access to the obscure films they had in mind.

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[52] Philip Reed, Mervyn Cooke and Donald Mitchell (eds), *Letters from a Life – Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten* Vol. 4 1952-57 (London: Faber 2008), p. 468.
[53] The film in production was *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1957).
[54] Reed, Cooke and Mitchell (eds), *Letters from a Life* Vol. 4, p. 469.
[55] Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke (eds), *Letters from a Life – Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten* Vol. 6 1966-76 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012), p. 146.
[56] *Ibid.* , p. 149.
[57] *Ibid.* , p. 259.

During 1971 Britten was deep in preparations for composing his final opera *Death in Venice*. On 3 April he wrote to his friend Anthony Gishford, referring to the contemporaneous Visconti film of Mann's novella which starred Dirk Bogarde. The tone of the letter implies that Britten did still go to the cinema to see films on occasions, although not, for personal and contractual reasons, this one:

> Yes, I'd heard (& seen a few deplorable photographs) much that made me determine to miss Death in Venice – but anyhow the lawyers prefer me not to see the film because of contract complications.[58]

The copy of the Penguin edition of the Mann tale which Britten owned was a film tie-in edition with photos from the Visconti film on the cover. To prevent even the slightest accusation of being influenced by the film, Britten put a paper cover over the book so that he would be unable to see the pictures. This cover was not simply a plain piece of paper, but featured an original design by John Piper.

Britten's letters and diaries reveal an early enthusiasm for film which inevitably tailed off as his life became busier, and demands on his time from his three main professional activities of composing, performing and overseeing the running of the Aldeburgh Festival became more and more insistent. It is noticeable, also, that the period during which he was most active as a film-goer was during the 1930s, not unsurprisingly coinciding not only with his employment as a composer for the GPO Film Unit, but also (more broadly) with an era of filmmaking in which early experimentation with synchronized sound offered exciting artistic possibilities to both directors and composers.

Britten as Film Composer

It is likely that the idea of composing for film had not crossed Britten's mind until April 1935, when he recorded the following entry in his diary on Saturday 27 April:

> A most surprising day. Edward Clark's secretary 'phones at breakfast saying would I get in touch with a certain film impresario, M. Cavalcanti, which I do, with the result that I lunch with him (and another director Mr Coldstream) at Blackheath – where the G.P.O. Film studio is – and that I am booked to do a film on the new Jubilee Stamp.[59]

The young composer had found himself in the midst of a rapidly developing and artistically exciting form of documentary filmmaking, the hub of which was the GPO Film Unit. At its core was the innovative Scottish director John Grierson, whose first film, *Drifters* (1929), explored the lives of herring-fleet fishermen in the North Sea. Grierson quickly became in charge of a small team of filmmakers at the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit (EMBFU), which was subsumed into the Post Office hierarchy in 1933 and became the GPO (General Post Office) Film Unit. As Cooke observed, 'left-wing political beliefs here bore creative fruit under the influence of techniques pioneered by Soviet film-makers.'[60] It is no coincidence that Sergei Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), banned in the UK, had a private screening at the London Film Society in 1929, an event which surely

[58] Reed and Cooke (eds) *Letters from a Life vol. 6,* p. 415.
[59] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 258.
[60] Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, p. 273.

influenced Grierson's work. According to Cooke, 'Grierson regarded cinema as a pulpit, telling his staff to avoid being "aestheticky" and declaring that art should be a hammer for propaganda and not a mirror of life'.[61]

Despite Britten's very conventional middle-class upbringing, his own political views had steadily drifted leftwards during the 1930s, and he became, in John Evans's words 'more left-wing and outspoken in his politics […] forever lamenting the Baldwin government's mishandling of international affairs'.[62] Given Britten's left-leaning political views at this point in his life, it is likely that he felt very much in sympathy with the aims of the film unit, which was similarly left wing in its political stance.

Britten's connection with the GPO Film Unit came about through Grierson contacting the Royal College of Music to ask if they could recommend a promising student (or recent ex-student) of composition who might be interested in working with him on documentary films. This strategy, in itself, represents a practical example of Grierson's political philosophy, as Reed explains:

> That Britten was not a nationally recognised figure was no objection; rather, he personified exactly the kind of youthful talent upon which the Unit thrived. The principal thread throughout Grierson's tenure, and inextricably entwined with the Unit's phenomenal success when judged retrospectively, was his ability to single out largely unknown men and women and nurture their hitherto unsuspected talents […] The acquisition of Britten's specifically musical abilities in 1935, to be followed not long afterwards by the literary skills of W.H. Auden, shows remarkable strength and foresight.[63]

The 'impresario' Britten refers to in his diary on 27 April 1935, was of course not Grierson himself, but Brazilian-born Alberto Cavalcanti, who had originally made a name for himself as a film director in France, with documentaries such as *Rien que les heures* (1926), an exploration of city life in Paris, and *En lisant le journal* (1932), a documentary about Montmartre cabaret artists, before moving to London to take up a post under Grierson at the GPO Film Unit.

The world of film composition in the 1930s was then, as now, fast-moving, and Britten's diaries reveal a flurry of activity in the days and weeks following his engagement as composer for *The King's Stamp*.

> Literal hell of a day. I spend the whole blessed day slogging at the film music in my room – with a watch in one hand and a pencil in the other – trying to make what little ideas I have […] syncronize [*sic*] with the Seconds.[64]

The stressful tone of his diaries contain phrases such as '[ideas] are precious few on this God-forsaken subject' and 'I slog away until abt.[*sic*] 11.0 at night – trying to concoct some rubish [*sic]* about a Jubilee Stamp.' [65] Although the composer was clearly feeling overwhelmed, one is not

[61] Cooke*, A History of Film Music,* p 274.
[62] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 315.
[63] Philip Reed, 'The Incidental Music of Benjamin Britten: A Study and Catalogue of His Music for Film, Theatre and Radio', PhD dissertation, University of East Anglia (1987), p. 25.
[64] *Ibid*, p. 259.
[65] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p.315.

completely left with the impression that he loathed what he was doing. It is well known that he had a work ethic bordering on puritanical, and there seems to be a sense that he secretly revelled in being constantly busy.

Sometimes the work was more of an administrative nature:

> Go to Soho Square at 10.30 to meet Cavalcanti, Coldstream, & a Mr. Hudson of G.P.O. & we go to the Central Telegraph Office to see some details about new S.O.S. film. [28 May 1935] […] going to Blackheath via a meeting at Soho Square before lunch, with Cavalcanti […] Odd jobs at Films before a committee meeting on scrip [*sic*] of film on Mining. [29 May 1935][66]

And early the following year, on Wednesday 15 January 1936, Britten is found writing in buoyant and positive mood about the music he has written for the documentary film *Night Mail*:

> The music I wrote really comes off well - &, for what is wanted, creates quite a lot of sensation![67]

Learning the craft, and consolidation

Getting from the 'literal hell of a day' in April 1935 to the 'music I wrote really comes off well' in January 1936 was not an automatic process, despite Britten's natural ability. There was a learning curve to navigate, which is fascinating to observe playing out in his diaries and other archival material, including the films themselves. One must also remember that Britten was also carving out a career as a composer for the concert hall at the same time. Several entries demonstrate that he was working on multiple projects (film and concert work) on the same day. Typical amongst these is the following (26 June 1935):

> Spend morning phoning & also do a lot of work at VIn Suite. Lunch here, & straight down to Studio after. Here do abit more recording […] & see film as it now stands in cutting.[68]

Britten was fully aware of his limitations when it came to the technical side of filmmaking and film music, especially at the start, in April 1935. The published diaries contain several hints that he was having to learn the craft as he went along, sometimes learning from his own mistakes:

> Try to put thoughts in order for 'J. Stamp', but so far I can make no tangible improvements on Wednesday's work – tho' there are plenty to be made. [4 May 1935]
>
> The whole day is spent in trying to improve on what I've already written of the film & in writing new stuff. Not very satisfactory in either case. [8 May 1935]
>
> I do a little work before setting off for Blackheath at 3.15. Have tea there before seeing what is done of film – but I cannot yet get definite times and lengths. [11 May 1935][69]

[66] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy,* p. 264.
[67] *Ibid*, p. 326-327.
[68] *Ibid*., p. 268.
[69] *Ibid*, p. 259-261.

Practical methods of film composition developed in Hollywood such as the use of cue sheets and stopwatches had, by 1935, generally become standard procedure in British and European filmmaking too, and had also inevitably cascaded down into the documentary world at the time Britten was employed in the industry. Britten did indeed work from cue-sheets for much of the time (see Fig. 3.5 below), but in some projects he had the somewhat easier task of composing the music prior to the film being edited, as referred to in this 1940 interview with film historian Jay Leyda:

> JAY LEYDA*:* To consider first the single film sequence – do you work on the music from the script or from the finished film sequence?
>
> BENJAMIN BRITTEN: All depends on the kind of film. In some documentaries I have done, the picture was cut to the music after the latter was recorded – a luxurious procedure.
>
> JL: What […] is the effect of your procedure on 1) the music, 2) the film?
>
> BB: If the music is free of the fetters of synchronisation, it can be more interesting qua music.[70]

To a certain extent Britten depended on his own instincts, but also relied on the expertise of musical colleague Walter Leigh to guide him in his first steps. Reed regarded Leigh as a crucial influence on Britten's often innovative approach to instrumental sound colour:

> Acquisition of sound-recording equipment by the GPO Film Unit led to some deliberate experimentation in the sound film, and striking results were achieved. *Pett and Pott* and *The Song of Ceylon*, both with music by Walter Leigh […] evidently provided useful role-models for the youthful Britten when he arrived as a new member of Grierson's team.[71]

Leigh had achieved an enviable reputation as an innovative expert in the field. John Huntley, writing in 1947 about Leigh's music for a prize-winning documentary *Song of Ceylon,* considered his music a crucial component in the international success of the film. He argued that, without it, the film

> might have passed off as an ordinary, competent travelogue. Many innovations were used by Leigh for this film […] the sound track sometimes involved seven channels, as Leigh worked solidly for over three weeks on a long series of recording studio experiments – again a technique many years in front of its time.[72]

And Huntley quoted an earlier source, Kurt London, writing in 1936, recognising Walter Leigh's contribution to the art of film music:

> Leigh has realised that the sound-film, a new art, requires a new musical technique. His music departs from tradition, not only in its form but in connection with the tonality of the whole film; his instrumentation also displays in its transparent economy a striking understanding of the special requirements of the microphone. Wind, above all woodwind, dominate in delicate contrapuntal sound-texture, even in combination

[70] Paul Kildea (ed.), *Britten on Music*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 28.
[71] Philip Reed, 'Britten in the cinema: *Coal Face*', in Mervyn Cooke (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 54.
[72] John Huntley, *British Film Music* (London: Skelton Robinson, n.d. [1947]), p. 101.

> with strings, used solo. The score of *Song of Ceylon* points the path which real film music has to follow.[73]

Britten's willingness to learn from Leigh and be inspired by his approach to film music, to stand on his shoulders metaphorically and come up with innovations of his own, represents a practical kind of praise, an instance of 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery' perhaps.

In a BBC interview with Joseph Cooper from 1957, Britten spoke of the technical demands and the available orchestral forces combining to provide a springboard for creative innovation:

> BB: […] other composers: Walter Leigh […] and Howard Ferguson used to come and help us.
> JC: Did you feel you learnt anything out of that?
> BB: Oh I learnt a great deal […] It was of the most – the utmost value to me in several ways. It made one practical as a composer; if one was asked to write a piece of music this length in twenty-four hours, one jolly well had to do it, ideas or no ideas. But I suppose the most useful quality of the Film Unit for me was this learning to handle small forces orchestrally.[74]

Britten's approach to film composition found a further practical application when writing music for the theatre. An example can be found as late as the 1950s, when he set about writing the dances to his only significant foray into ballet music, *The Prince of the Pagodas* (1955−6), and he followed a kind of 'shooting script' to help him interpret John Cranko's choreography. Cooke described how

> A detailed scenario in Cranko's hand is preserved at the Britten–Pears Library together with a list of approximate timings for the individual dances. This scenario differs from the stage directions in the published full score […] in many respects, but those alterations were evidently made at a comparatively late stage: Britten's composition sketch contains directions corresponding to this handwritten scenario which must therefore have been the document from which the composer worked.[75]

Coincidentally, in the year that Britten began working on film music projects, 1935, a slim but concise book by Leonid Sabaneev, *Music For The Films*, was published in London. This indeed was one of the first two books on film music published in English and therefore a pioneering text. Originally in Russian but translated by S.W. Pring, this 'handbook for composers and conductors' contains so many parallels with Britten's own words that it is reasonable to speculate that he had a copy of the book at his elbow when composing for documentary films. The paucity of such publications indicates further that Britten probably had a copy as there were few, if any, available alternatives. For example, when discussing the need for composing quickly, this passage could easily have been in the back of Britten's mind during the Cooper interview:

> The composer must certainly have mastered the technique of his profession, and should be able to write music rapidly and confidently, and be ready, in case of need to alter it without delay. In practice it is very

[73] Kurt London, quoted in Huntley, *British Film Music*, p. 101.

[74] Kildea, (ed.), *Britten on Music*, p. 149.
[75] Mervyn Cooke, *Britten and the Far East* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998) p. 98.

> often necessary to compose, and even score, the music for a big scene in the space of a few hours, so that it may be ready for filming.[76]

Elsewhere in his handbook, Sabaneev discussed the aesthetics behind film music (as he saw them), and considered how there may be a conflict between the music and the diegetic sound, and how these conflicts should be managed by the composer. In general he concluded that 'music should cease or retire into the background when dialogues and noises are taking place';[77] however, he acknowledged that 'when we have noises and music simultaneously, the former become part of the musical whole and have the effect of percussion instruments'.[78] Crilly commented that

> Britten's role was not to be merely the provider of incidental music, but rather to integrate sound into the fabric of the visual dramatic narrative – a role that would require a more detailed knowledge and understanding of the film-maker's craft.[79]

Reed drew attention to the technical paraphernalia around film music, which could be regarded as an integrated part of the composer's creative armoury:

> The status of the microphone as a properly recognised tool at the disposal of the film music composer was […] very much central to Britten's film music aesthetic, a credo not so much initiated by Britten but, rather, evolved from that of Walter Leigh, Alberto Cavalcanti and others.[80]

Sabaneev's handbook contained a generous amount of material on the subject of orchestration, which not only makes fascinating general reading, but also illuminates what must have been the collective wisdom of film composers of the day, principles which have inevitably influenced Britten's own handling of instrumental forces, both in his film music and, later, in his opera scores. Sabaneev carefully explained how the technical limitations of the sound-reproduction equipment available in cinemas affects the orchestration, and described the appropriate sound-palette as 'photogenic'. He then proceeded to advise on each orchestral timbre in turn. For example, when explaining that stringed instruments 'cannot claim to be sufficiently photogenic' he wrote:

> Their timbre is transmitted with the loss of certain characteristic features – the harmonics, which impart a pungency to the tone colour […] depend on the oscillatory vibrations of the string, are inadequately caught by the microphone, and hence the timbres of the upper and middle registers of the violin resemble the flute and clarinet respectively. [81]

Sabaneev's use of the word 'photogenic' is rather ambiguous. On the one hand he may be referring here to string music not photographing very clearly in a technical sense; the 'soundtrack' in the recording process used in film making of this era is indeed a photograph of the patterns of light and dark generated by the photo-electric cell in response to the amplified input from the microphone. On the other hand, he may be using 'photogenic' in a more aesthetic sense (such as we might describe a physically attractive person as photogenic), and simply mean that stringed instruments do not, in his

[76] Leonid Sabaneev (trans. S.W. Pring) *Music For The Films*. (London: Pitman, 1935), p. 32.
[77] *Ibid* p. 20.
[78] *Ibid*, p. 20.
[79] Crilly, 'Britten and the Cinematic Frame', in *Benjamin Britten: New Perspectives*, p. 56.
[80] Reed, 'The Incidental Music of Benjamin Britten', p. 17.
[81] Sabaneev, *Music For The Films*, p. 58.

experience and opinion, convey a cinematic message very effectively. Sabaneev mentions quite often how the timbre of one particular instrument can sound like a different one after it has been recorded ('the viola becomes very like the saxophone'[82]) but his personal professional experience comes through clearly as he qualifies this by adding 'the violoncello comes through much better, particularly in the upper register.'[83] If we can, for a moment, speculate that Britten was familiar with this book (although no copy is catalogued amongst the books in the Red House library), it is likely that he would have been impressed by Sabaneev's level of practical detail, and also that he would have been keen to experiment with the orchestral sound in his own film scores. In particular, his handling of small ensembles (up to about twenty-five players, as recommended by Sabaneev) will have surely been a beneficial experience when it later came to orchestrating chamber operas such as *The Turn of the Screw*, and as he himself acknowledged in his Cooper interview. Enticingly, Sabaneev affirms that if 'the scoring and the distribution of the functions of the instruments are skilfully handled, it is possible to obtain with a band of this size the effect of a huge symphony orchestra'.[84] This is an effect that Britten routinely went on to achieve in his chamber-opera scores.

It should be noted that Sabaneev was basing many of his principles on European practices and their tendency towards smaller ensembles (and in which doubling of parts within the ensemble would have the effect he described). Hollywood composers and orchestrators, who generally had much larger orchestras at their disposal, did not shy away from doubling of instruments.

Integrating sound, including music, 'into the fabric of the visual dramatic narrative' (as Crilly expresses it) touches upon the very functionality of film music and its purpose. An early book on the subject, John Huntley's *British Film Music* (undated, but published in 1947), grasps one of the paradoxes of effective film music: its way of acting almost unnoticed on the viewer's experience of the film. He writes:

> We do not go to the cinema to hear music. We require it to deepen and prolong in us the screen's visual impressions. When you see a film you should not be conscious of the music as a separate entity, but if it is a good score, your enjoyment of the film will be greatly increased […] if it is a good score you will not hear it consciously.[85]

Despite what Huntley says, for Britten the integration of picture, sound, music and speech achieved possibly its fullest flowering in the documentary *Night Mail* (1936), in which the musical content most certainly is memorable in its own right and makes an impressive impact as a valid part of the foreground of the film. E. Anna Claydon detected operatic resonances in Britten's setting of Auden's words, and even in the orchestration, which 'was clearly designed to work in partnership with the poem […] viewers of the film should think of the music and voice working together as a complete composition, with the spoken voice as a recitative.' [86] The viewer, far from not being 'conscious of the music as a separate entity' accepts and embraces its presence as an important element of the film.

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[82] Sabaneev, *Music For The Films* p. 58.
[83] *Ibid*., p. 58.
[84] *Ibid*, p. 69.
[85] Huntley, *British Film Music*, pp. 20–21.
[86] E. Anna Claydon, 'National Identity, The GPO Film Unit And Their Music' in Scott Anthony and James B. Mansell (eds) *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 181.

Rightly regarded as a classic of its genre, and therefore with justification the most well-known of the GPO documentaries, it was the sixteenth film score Britten composed (out of twenty-seven). The film has attained iconic status as a representative of the documentary style adopted by the GPO Film Unit, although its historical significance was not appreciated at the time. As Steve Foxon has observed, no effort was made to preserve the original negatives:

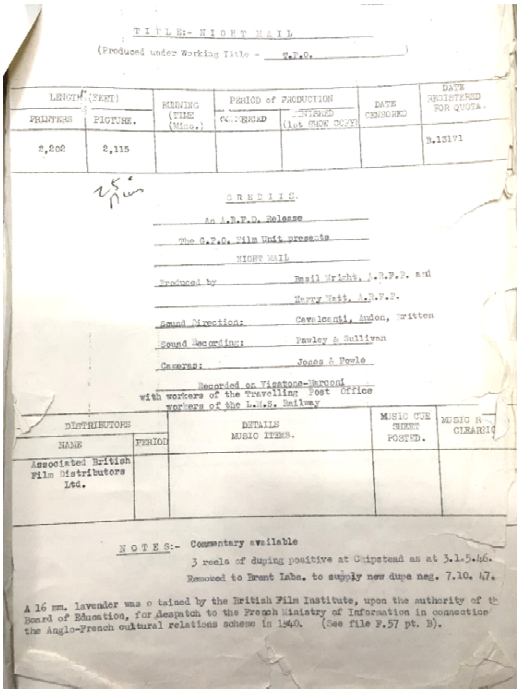
> Most likely they were worn out and disposed of during the 1940s […] It never fails to surprise people that ever-popular titles such as *Night Mail* do not actually have an original negative […] No expectation ever existed that sixty or even seventy years after the original production people would still be interested in them.[87]

Although most studies of Britten's work (including the standard biographies) refer to him as the 'composer' of *Night Mail*'s score, the on-screen opening credits simply list him under 'Sound Direction' along with Cavalcanti and Auden (Fig. 2.3) and a contemporaneous cataloguing entry leaves a blank space for 'composer' (see Fig.2.4). Cavalcanti said, many years later: 'Everybody knows that the credits in the GPO film unit were full of fantasy, and of Grierson fantasy'.[88] Undoubtedly Britten regarded himself as the film's composer: 'the music I wrote really comes off well'[89] and 're-cutting the *musical* end to T.P.O. ' [90] (referring to the film's working title, *Travelling Post Office*). However, in his note at the beginning of his 1936 diary, he does mention the added duty of 'supervising sounds' alongside 'writing music' and being paid £5 per week 'owing to the fact I can claim no performing rights (it being Crown property) with the possibility of it being increased to £10 per week'.[91]



Fig 2.3. Opening credits for *Night Mail* (Source: BFI)

[87] Paul Foxon, 'An Archivist's Perspective On The Work Of The GPO Film Unit', in *The Projection of Britain*, p. 42.
[88] Anthony and Mansell (eds) *The Projection of Britain*, p. 139.
[89] Evans (ed.) *Journeying Boy*, p. 326.
[90] *Ibid*, p. 328 (my italics).
[91] *Ibid*, p. 323.



TITLE:- NIGHT MAIL

(Produced under Working Title - T.P.O.)

LENGTH (FEET) PRINTING	PICTURE.	RUNNING (TIME (Mins.)	PERIOD of PRODUCTION COMMENCED	COMPLETED (1st SHOW COPY)	DATE CENSORED	DATE REGISTERED FOR QUOTA.
2,202	2,115					B.13171

SYNOPSIS.

As G.P.O. Release

The G.P.O. Film Unit presents

NIGHT MAIL

Produced by: Basil Wright, G.P.O. and Harry Watt, G.P.O.

Sound Direction: Cavalcanti, Auden, Britten

Sound Recording: Pawley & Sullivan

Cameras: Jones & Fowle

Recorded on Tiegtone-Marconi with workers of the Travelling Post Office workers of the L.M.S. Railway

DISTRIBUTORS NAME	PERIOD	DETAILS MUSIC ITEMS.	MUSIC CUE SHEET POSTED.	MUSIC R... CLEARED
Associated British Film Distributors Ltd.				

NOTES:- Commentary available

3 reels of duping positive at Chipstead as at 3.1.5.46.

Removed to Brent Labs. to supply new dupe neg. 7.10. 47.

A 16 mm. lavender was o tained by the British Film Institute, upon the authority of th Board of Education, for despatch to the French Ministry of Information in connection the Anglo-French cultural relations scheme in 1940. (See file F.57 pt. B).

Fig 2.4. Cataloguing information for *Night Mail* (Source: National Archives)

The duty of generally supervising sounds combined with musical composition frequently guided him into creative territory bordering on the avant-garde. For example, in the documentary *Coal Face* (May–June 1935), according to Cooke, 'Britten's extended percussion section supplied ingenious sound effects in an avant-garde mixture of Foley techniques and *musique concrète* that would have stunned audiences of the time if divorced from the images and played in a concert hall'.[92] The *Britten Source Book* entry for the film lists a percussion section of twenty-one components (although chains and sandpaper are listed twice). In addition to conventional percussion instruments such as side drum, triangle, bass drum, etc., more unusual sound-sources are called for. These include coconut shells, a large drill, cup in a bucket of water, trip gear, notched wood, sheet of metal, small cart on sandy asbestos, rewinder, and hooter. Furthermore, Britten uses recording technology to modify the sound quality and create effects: 'the reversed sound-track of a cymbal struck with a hard beater to achieve the "whoosh" effect of a train'.[93] Britten also used piano, a whistler, and an SATB chorus in the score. Crilly commented that the political stance of the film, with its harsh delineation between the human aspects of the mining community and the industrial machinery ('images of machine and man are quickly juxtaposed so that the miners […] become part of the machinery around them'[94]) is clearly

[92] Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, p 276.
[93] John Evans, Philip Reed, and Paul Wilson (eds) *A Britten Source Book* (Aldeburgh: Britten-Pears Library, 1987), p. 132.
[94] Crilly 'Britten and the Cinematic Frame' in *Benjamin Britten – New Perspectives*, p. 60.

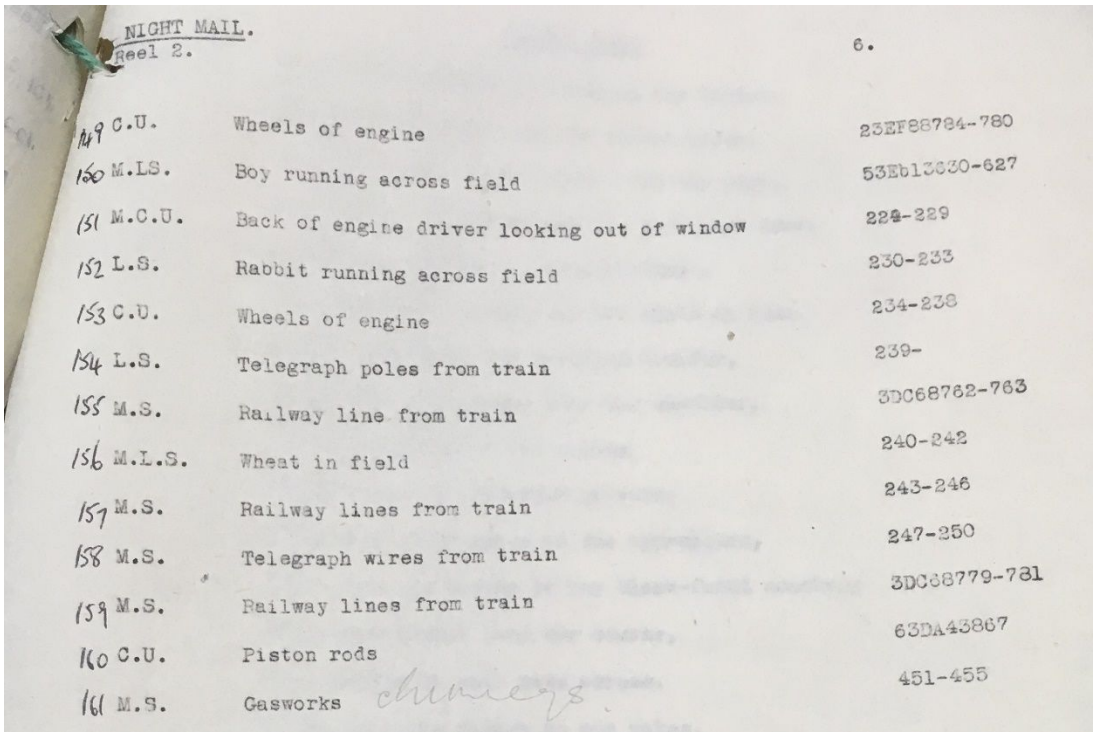
translated in the musical score: 'as they rise from the pit to rejoin their families the music gives way to a "heavenly choir" to reflect the contrast between the communal and industrial landscapes'.[95]

Britten's film work often consisted of generally assisting with the sound recording:

> In aft go down to Studio & work with Legg & Pawley (sound electrician) on general Sound problems. Also work with MacNaughten (sound cutter). [14 October 1935][96]
>
> I go down to Tring with Watt, Pat Jackson etc, to do with GPO film – T.P.O. – in order to shoot some railway sound. [12 November 1935] [97]
>
> From (9.20 am)… 12.30 help Watt record stuff for his T.P.O. film. [1 December 1935][98]

Reed described how Britten's employment entailed not only composing the score, but overseeing its recording and editing process. He emphasised that Britten was 'forced to accept and assimilate the exacting and largely unfamiliar technical requirements incurred', and that it was 'no meagre achievement that he so rapidly conquered such obstacles'.[99]

Cue sheets for *Night Mail* have survived. Working from these, together with notes made when viewing the film, and a stopwatch, Britten was able to ensure the music matched the visual cuts. The level of detail contained within the cue sheets was sufficient for the composer to tailor the music with precision, as can be seen from the detail in the example at Fig. 2.5.



NIGHT MAIL.
Reel 2.

6.

149	C.U.	Wheels of engine	23EF88784-780
150	M.LS.	Boy running across field	53Eb13030-627
151	M.C.U.	Back of engine driver looking out of window	229-229
152	L.S.	Rabbit running across field	230-233
153	C.U.	Wheels of engine	234-238
154	L.S.	Telegraph poles from train	239-
155	M.S.	Railway line from train	3DC68762-763
156	M.L.S.	Wheat in field	240-242
157	M.S.	Railway lines from train	243-246
158	M.S.	Telegraph wires from train	247-250
159	M.S.	Railway lines from train	3DC68779-781
160	C.U.	Piston rods	63DA43867
161	M.S.	Gasworks chimneys	451-455

Fig. 2.5. Detail from *Night Mail* cue sheet (Source: National Archives)

[95] Crilly 'Britten and the Cinematic Frame' in *Benjamin Britten – New Perspectives*, p. 60.
[96] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 282.
[97] *Ibid*, p. 285-286.
[98] *Ibid*, p. 288.
[99] Reed 'The Incidental Music of Benjamin Britten', p. 26.

The left-hand column contains shot numbers and shot type, for example '156 M.L.S' stands for 'Shot 156, Medium Long Shot'. The middle column gives a very brief description of what can be seen in the shot. The right-hand column is a reference which identifies the original film stock (e.g. shot 156 is identified as 240–242). Many of these references are sequential (shots 151–154 and 156–158, where index numbers are in the range 224–250). However, shot 161 finds the index numbers in the 451–455 range, and then there are anomalous indexes for shots 155, 159 and 160, where the numbers are in a different format (e.g. 3DC68779-781). It is not altogether clear why these particular indexes are different, but it is likely that the long prefix containing letters denotes a different original film reel to the majority of the cues, since film editing frequently entailed splicing lengths of film together which had come from different cameras. Alternatively the labels may refer to stock library footage. *Coal Face*, for example, was created entirely from such existing footage, so this is a distinct possibility here also.

Writing for feature film: *Love From A Stranger*

In August 1936, having accumulated a substantial amount of experience of writing film music, both technically and artistically, Britten was approached by Boyd Neel (a British conductor he had known for some time) about the possibility of another film score. The initial approach contained few details; according to Britten's diary entry of 26 August it is not clear if the composer even knew the project was a feature film, although he may have guessed because a telegram received from Neel the previous day mentioned the production was based at Elstree (then, as now, a major British film studio):

> I phone [Neel] at Elstree. He wants me to do the music for a film, but gives no details. He wanted me to meet the Director on Friday but I think I've got to put it off until Monday.[100]

Reed pointed out that, at this stage, Britten's 'knowledge of film-making [was] solely confined to the progressive documentary movement'.[101] Such a documentary movement, according to Reed, was

> a moving spirit in the film world which certainly regarded itself, in the crudest terms, as intellectually 'superior' to the commercial, box-office cinema. Britten's experiences in the GPO Film Unit, while not always ideal, always confirmed his role in the creation of the finished product.[102]

A postcard Britten sent to his friend, composer Grace Williams, on 28 August at least confirms he knew it would be a commercial film, and therefore likely to be a feature, not a short documentary:

> I have to start work on Monday & feel sehr traurig[103] – A commercial film, but it sounds interesting.[104]

The film turned out to be *Love From A Stranger*, a mystery thriller based on a short story, *Philomel Cottage* by Agatha Christie. It starred Basil Rathbone and Ann Harding, and was directed by Rowland V. Lee, who was later to direct the Hollywood horror classic *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) for

[100] Evans (ed.) *Journeying Boy*, p. 369.
[101] Reed *The Incidental Music of Benjamin Britten,* p. 16.
[102] *Ibid,* p. 16.
[103] i.e. 'very sad'
[104] Mitchell and Reed (eds), *Letters from a Life vol. 1*, p. 442.

Universal Studios. The plot begins with Carol (Ann Harding's character) breaking up with her fiancé Ronald as a result of her acquiring sudden wealth following a lottery win. Carol is then pursued by a handsome and mysterious stranger, Gerald (Basil Rathbone), who persuades her to marry him against the warnings of her friends. After a while, events convince Carol that Gerald is a dangerous individual, only after her money, and she realises that she is in great peril.

The film was still being shot when Britten was invited to Denham Studios on 23 October with Neel, where they met Harding on set. Despite being keen to start work on the project, the composer was informed that his services would not yet be required. There was a further delay before the film had been shot and edited and a rough cut ready to have the music added. This resulted in Britten only having a matter of days to complete the work. On 17 November 1936 he wrote:

> Hear from Boyd Neel in morning that we've got to start work on the Capitol Film[105] stuff tomorrow.[106]

A slight note of overworked frustration can be detected the following day:

> In aft Boyd N. & I go down to Sound City (Shepperton) to see Reels 1 & 2 of Love from a Stranger & to decide over music – which is going to be damned difficult. I get down to it after dinner here, but do some bloody awful stuff.[107]

The reality of the enormity of the task struck on 20 November:

> Meet Boyd at 9.45 & go with him to Shepperton where we spend the day with Rowland Lee seeing the picture (or first 4 reels of it) & measuring it. There of course is a colossal rush on the film, & recording must be done by Wednesday! – very likely! ~~since then~~ with all these gallons of stuff to be done, scored & copied.[108]

Many years after the composer's death, in 2000, Colin Matthews transcribed the score from the extant rough sketches (no full score of Britten's original has survived) into a suite of six pieces. Matthews allocated titles reflecting their position in the film's narrative, as follows:

1. Title Music
2. Traffic Music
3. [Brighton]
4. Love Music
5. Channel Crossing
6. End Titles

Matthews stated in his Preface to the score that the third item, 'Brighton', was not actually used in the film (hence his placing the title in square brackets), and that there are other omissions:

[105] Capitol was the name of the main film company responsible for *Love From A Stranger*, although two other companies, Trafalgar, and Guaranteed, were also involved.
[106] Evans (ed.) *Journeying Boy*, p. 389.
[107] *Ibid*, p. 389.
[108] *Ibid*, p. 389.

> Cuts were made[109] in nos. 5 and 6 […] In the latter, a savage cut deleted […] the trombone's scale, which alludes to a scene in which a child practises the piano unseen.[110]

Matthews based the orchestration on the original scoring that can be heard on the soundtrack of the film, on which Reed sheds some light:

> a list in the sketches, together with the film itself, gives evidence of a quite normally-constituted orchestra. The composer's remarks in his diary for 25 November – 'a large orchestra […] of about 30' – must be comprehended in the light of the tiny resources he was usually granted in documentaries; generally, the commercial cinema could boast far more spectacular musical forces.[111]

Some of the principles in Sabaneev's 1930s handbook on scoring for films have been incorporated, as discussed earlier possibly intuitively rather than as a direct result of consulting the book (for example keeping the orchestration quite sparse, mainly using primary colours in orchestral sound, not too much complicated counterpoint, etc.). In Matthews' reconstruction, this has resulted in the following instrumentation: 2 flutes (second doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, alto saxophone, 2 bassoons, 2 trumpets, trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

Given that the character of Carol is a piano teacher, it is intriguing that there is no piano present in the orchestra. The only piano audible on the film soundtrack is diegetic, its scales weirdly distorted by the orchestra when news of the lottery win comes through during one of Carol's piano lessons. This effect, which would arguably have been less striking if the piano timbre was also included in the nondiegetic orchestra, is uncannily like Miles' later diegetic piano playing in *The Turn of the Screw*, which is also based on patterns resembling technical exercises.

Matthews' preface to the published score mentions that Grace Williams helped out by acting as Britten's amanuensis; this is one of the first of many such instances of the composer using an assistant, this role taken later in his career by Arthur Oldham, James Bernard [112] (himself a noted film composer, associated with Hammer horror films) Imogen Holst, Rosamund Strode, and both Colin Matthews and his brother David Matthews himself. Matthews' preface also provides some interesting background details, including the fact that Britten was unhappy with the way his music was used, and this was perhaps one reason why *Love From A Stranger* remained the only British feature film he scored, although there was a suggestion that in going to America he might have wanted to do some film work, perhaps helped to find it by Copland.[113] There is evidence in Britten's diary that he was disappointed with the final result: 'I feel very dissatisfied with it – as I feel it is just ordinary film stuff'.[114]

Love From A Stranger runs (on video) for 86 minutes, with only just over 11 minutes containing music cues. This timing is from a commercial release on DVD by Alpha Video from 2004. Online sources relating to the actual film give 90 minutes and 92 minutes (the discrepancy being

[109] The cuts were made by Britten, not by Matthews.
[110] Colin Matthews, 'Preface' to *Love from a Stranger*, Britten (1937), arr. Matthews (London: Faber,1995).
[111] Reed, *The Incidental Music of Benjamin Britten,* p. 154.
[112] Bernard assisted with the writing out of the score of *Billy Budd* (1951)
[113] Matthews, Preface to *Love From A Stranger*.
[114] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 391.

because videos play more quickly owing to the scanning technology used). The film was released in the USA under a different title: *A Night of Terror*. Using the timings from the Alpha release, approximately 5 minutes are non-Britten music (Phil Green's dance band music during the trip to Paris), leaving just over 6 minutes of Britten's work, which is a meagre amount for a feature-film score, even in those early sound-film days. Reed expanded upon Green's input by describing how Britten and Green (whom Reed identifies as a 'jazz pianist') met on 5 November:

> Britten and Green discussed the music for the Parisian night club scene, which the latter was to compose. Two days later Britten heard the result of Green's work: since his own 'Channel Crossing' sequence would later be required to dovetail into the jazz sequence. The jazz sequence was the only part of the score to be written at this time and, in Boyd Neel's absence, Britten was required to supervise Green's contribution on 9 November during the shooting of the appropriate sequence. Presumably it was 'live' music taken on set.[115]

Britten was struck by the professionalism and versatility of Green's jazz players, compared with the classically trained musicians who were hired for the orchestral score, writing in his diary

> it is amusing if surprising to see the difference in attitude between the 'hot' and the 'straight' bands – the former all keen & there ¼ early – the latter dull & slow & few there before 2.15.[116]

Matthews' reconstruction runs for about 8 minutes, due to the inclusion of 'Brighton'. Furthermore, somewhat surprisingly, the majority of Britten's music is located in the first 30 minutes of the film, giving a very unbalanced impression. Cooke asserted that this imbalance is perhaps explained by the fact that 'little of interest' occurs in the first half of the film, and that the presence of Britten's music there 'is a good illustration of the tendency [in the film industry] for music to be relied upon to bolster weak scenes'.[117] It might also have been the case that more music had been envisaged, but the production (and Britten) simply ran out of time.

Especially awkward is the use of Grieg's 'In The Hall Of The Mountain King' (from *Peer Gynt*) during a scene in the second half of the film where the villain Gerald is working in his photographic darkroom. Alongside Britten's music cues earlier in the film, it is difficult to see the point of the inclusion of this pre-existing classical piece, unless this could be simply an old-fashioned use of a popular piece of classical music with broadly appropriate dramatic connotations. To contemporary sensibilities it does not particularly suit the action, either from the point of view of timing or mood, although perhaps it may be argued that it at least has an indirectly sinister implication and may suggest the parallel to the 'hall of the mountain king' could be the equivalent of the 'criminal in his darkroom lair'. Apart from the Grieg extract and the end titles, there is no nondiegetic music at all during the last 57 minutes of the film. The table at Fig. 2.6 below illustrates how Britten's music is distributed throughout the film, and provides a basic analysis of its function within each section.

There remained just one more important film commission for Britten, resulting in a work which has endured beyond its cinematic origins. In 1946, he composed the music for an educational

[115] Reed *The Incidental Music of Benjamin Britten,* p. 156.
[116] Evans (ed.) *Journeying Boy*, p. 390 – 391.
[117] Cooke *A History of Film Music*, p. 229.

documentary film about musical instruments directed by Muir Mathieson. The film, *Instruments of the Orchestra*, featured the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Malcolm Sargent, and a narration written by Montagu Slater, who was Britten's librettist for *Peter Grimes*. Britten wrote an ingenious score for the film in the form of a theme (the 'Rondeau' from Purcell's *Abdelazar*) and variations. Each variation systematically highlighted each instrumental section of the orchestra and then each instrument separately. Finally, all the instruments were recombined in a sprightly fugue (with the subject beginning in the upper registers of the piccolo) before a final, triumphant and majestic statement of Purcell's melody brought the piece to a close. The film is rarely seen anymore, but the work has gone on to have a life of its own as a concert piece usually presented as *The Young Person's Guide To The Orchestra*.

Although *Love From A Stranger* remained the only feature film score Britten wrote, in subsequent years he was regularly courted by the film world, with a number of high-profile directors (John Gielgud and Richard Attenborough amongst them) trying to persuade him to accept film commissions. These included an invitation from Disney in 1956. The composer was approached, via Anthony Gishford of Boosey & Hawkes, by Howard Connell, the Production Manager of Disney's British branch, to propose that Britten wrote music for a short travelogue about Wales. Britten brushed off the approach, writing to Gishford: 'I am afraid it is the usual "no" to Walt Disney. At the moment my policy about films is a negative one, unless it is a particularly interesting project in which music is an integral part, and in which I could be involved from the start.'[118] The nearest Britten came to agreeing to another film project came towards the end of his life, in 1972, when director Peter Hall invited him to compose the music for *Akenfield*, the semi-scripted chronicle of life in a fictitious Suffolk village, not unlike Snape. The composer wrote to Donald Mitchell on 5 September 1972 in a positive frame of mind: 'I was very pleased with [the producers'] ideas for the film of the book Akenfield. […] and I have decided that I would like to join the team since they can fit in with my schedule.'[119] In the published letters it is explained why Britten had to decline to be involved; clearly a result of ill-health and not simply a case of 'cold feet', despite Hall's persistence:

> Illness forced Britten to withdraw from the project towards the end of November. Hall wrote to Britten again on 28 February 1974 to say that their year of filming had produced some 42 hours of excellent improvised material and that only now had he been able to assemble a first rough cut. His principal sponsors, London Weekend Television, had given him until the beginning of July to complete the project [and Hall wrote to Britten]: 'In these radically changed circumstances, it seems to me discourteous to you and foolish to ourselves not to ask the question: Could you now contemplate doing the music? […] Britten declined apologetically on 18 February.[120]

[118] Reed, Cooke and Mitchell (eds) *Letters from a Life vol. 4*, p. 472.
[119] Reed and Cooke (eds) *Letters from a Life vol. 6*, p. 522.
[120] *Ibid*, p. 525.

Identifying elements of film music in Britten's musical language

A comparison of the orchestra used in *The Turn of the Screw* (Table. 1.2) with that Britten used for *Love From A Stranger* (as reconstructed by Matthews) and three of Sabaneev's suggested 'typical' (i.e. 'type 1') film orchestras is illuminating, since it reveals that the instrumentation of the opera has distinct similarities with Sabaneev's 'medium orchestration', especially in the strings, percussion, and 'other' sections. In his conversation with Joseph Cooper (1957), Cooper asked why the orchestras were small, to which Britten responded it was lack of money (one of the reasons often cited for his development of chamber opera as a genre in the first place).[121] Cooper encouraged the composer to comment on the fact that lack of studio space may also have played a part, and Britten, whilst agreeing, expanded the idea thus:

> I suppose it's partly a contemporary quality, but I think all art is tending […] towards the intimate, and especially in the opera world, one has to reduce one's orchestra to the minimum, and I have learnt, largely through my experiences in the Film Unit, I think, to handle – to make a small group of instruments sound not inadequate.[122]

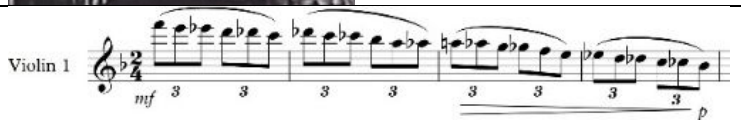
It is worth noting Cooper's reply, which unconsciously echoed some of Sabaneev's principles for orchestrating film music:

> It's interesting: it sort of clarifies too – I mean it clarifies your whole scoring, instead of knowing you can just lay things on thick.[123]

This point can be taken further, in that we can note that even when using large orchestras, Britten tends to subdivide them into smaller groups, most likely an instance of Mahler's influence on him (especially given the fact that he arranged Mahler for chamber orchestra). In this context, it is worth noting Donald Mitchell's obsession with Mahler which has, through his writing, influenced the way Britten's music is perceived, causing Alan Hollinghurst to write of Mitchell's 'tireless and revelatory investigations of both Britten and Mahler'.[124] Exploring Britten's view that 'art is tending towards the intimate', leads to the possibility that the composer's later willingness to become involved with television projects (e.g. the filming of *Billy Budd* and *Peter Grimes* and the composition of *Owen Wingrave*) was one response to this position. There are few arenas more intimate than television, where the image and sound appear to exist within one's own private living space. We should also not forget that even film screened in a cinema likewise has an intimate quality with its very tight close-ups of the human face. These close-ups, involving the revealing of a character's features enlarged to enormous dimensions on a cinema screen, are a form of almost microscopic, or at least forensic, intimacy of which a theatre director can only dream.

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[121] During the 1960s, economy was also a factor in the even smaller format of the three church parables (another new operatic genre of Britten's invention), *Curlew River*, *The Burning Fiery Furnace* and *The Prodigal Son*.
[122] Kildea (ed.) *Britten on Music*, p. 150.
[123] *Ibid*.
[124] Alan Hollinghurst, 'Foreword' in Donald Mitchell, *Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936* 2nd edition (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), p. iii.

Title (Matthews' Suite)	Cue start time	Cue end time	Total music cue duration	Notes	Screenshots / Musical examples
Title Music	00:00:00	00:01:01	00:01:01	Matches Matthews' Suite. Segues into music cue 2.	
Traffic Music (i)	00:01:01	00:01:20	00:01:19	Based on 'Westminster Chimes' motif – F#, D, E, A. Although Big Ben is not seen in the first establishing shot of the London landscape, the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Bridge are clearly seen (also, the musical phrase is heard diegetically later in the film, in the chimes of a grandfather clock at the country cottage which forms the location for the third 'act' of the film). Music develops subsequently into a flurry of chromatic runs. In the film, the cue fades out at b. 20 of Matthews' Suite.	
Traffic Music (ii)	00:03:56	00:04:34	00:00:38	Music resumes after an interior scene of mostly dialogue, returning to the exterior of London streets. Music picks up from b. 16 of Matthews' Suite, and plays until b. 65, fading out on the soundtrack. Mostly chromatic runs in violins(ex. 1) and upper woodwind, with a few fanfare-like trumpet calls in the middle of the texture.	 Ex. 1
N/A	00:06:49	00:07:08	00:00:19	Not represented in Matthews' Suite, but appears to be derived from 'Channel Crossing', starting with the harp glissandi at b. 108 and extending for approximately 19 bars (although some of the orchestration is missing in the Suite, e.g. trumpet flourishes).	
[Brighton]	N/A	N/A	N/A	At the start, rushing woodwind triplets in sixths, and melodically centring around minor thirds (see ex. 2 i) recall the cascading chromatic triplet scales of 'Traffic Music', providing a useful aural link between two bustling cities. These flurries are punctuated by crotchet octave leaps in brass and strings, and later on by fanfare-like passages in the brass (ex. 2)	 Ex. 2 

					Ex. 3
Love Music	00:09:08	00:11:19	00:02:11	Mostly a dialogue between alto saxophone and solo violin (representing, presumably, the two protagonists, Carol Howard and Gerald Lovell).	
N/A	00:16:59	00:17:17	00:00:18	Not represented in Matthews' Suite, but derived from some of the alto saxophone phrases in 'Love Music' (e.g. bb. 53 and 54 – see example).	
Channel Crossing	00:20:39	00:23:22	00:02:43	Matches Matthews' Suite, segues at the end into non-Britten material (see below).	
N/A	00:30:54	00:31:12	00:00:18	Not directly represented in Matthews' Suite, but this short cue is partially derived from violin phrases in 'Channel Crossing' (e.g. at bars 203-214: see example)	
End Titles	01:26:27	01:27:09	00:00:42	Matches Matthews' Suite.	
Non-Britten material				There is some diegetic music of a child practising scales on a piano.	
Non-Britten material	00:23:22	00:25:20	00:01:58	Dance-band music (nondiegetic).	
Non-Britten material	00:44:20	00:46:08	00:01:48	Diegetic music of piano playing. It is unclear if the actress Ann Harding (playing Carol Howard) was playing or if it was dubbed.	
Non-Britten material	00:49:32	00:51:00	00:01:28	Grieg's 'In The Hall Of The Mountain King' (nondiegetic), accompanying the scene of the villain Gerald Lovell in his photographic darkroom.	

Table 1.1: Table showing overview of music cues in *Love From A Stranger*

Orchestral section	**Sabaneev ('Small orchestration type 1')**	**Sabaneev ('Medium orchestration type 1')**	**Sabaneev ('Large orchestration type 1')**	***Love From A Stranger* (Matthews reconstruction)**	***The Turn of the Screw***
Woodwind	2 saxophones (doubling clarinets)	Flute, 2 saxophones (doubling clarinets), oboe (doubling cor anglais)	Flute, oboe (doubling cor anglais), 2 saxophones (doubling clarinets), bassoon	2 flutes (second doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, alto saxophone, 2 bassoons	Flute (doubling piccolo and alto flute), oboe (doubling cor anglais), clarinet (doubling bass clarinet), bassoon
Brass	Trumpet, trombone	2 trumpets, trombone, tuba	2 trumpets, horn, 2 trombones, tuba	2 trumpets, trombone, tuba	Horn
Percussion	Celesta, xylophone, drums	Celesta, xylophone, vibraphone, drums	Celesta, xylophone, vibraphone, drums	Timpani, xylophone, drums	Glockenspiel, tubular bells, triangle, wood block, tom-tom, side drum, tenor drum, bass drum, timpani, cymbals, gong, celesta
Strings	2 violins, cello	2 violins, 2 cellos	3 violins, viola, 2 cellos, double bass	Conventional orchestral string section	2 violins, viola, cello
Other	Piano	Piano, harp	Piano, harp, organ, harmonium	Harp	Piano, harp

Table 1.2: Comparison of the orchestrations of *The Turn of the Screw*, with *Love From A Stranger* and Sabaneev

There has historically been an assumption that publicly Britten did not regularly discuss music in words (especially his own music). According to Reed, this assumption was encouraged by the composer due to 'the attitude of certain music critics toward his work'[125]. Reed's essay continues to give examples of how Britten wrote quite extensively about music in his own diaries (sometimes quite critically), but, more than that, wrote music-criticism articles which were published in the magazine *World Film News* in 1936. This encompasses quite authoritative criticism, often in warm terms, of film music by some of his contemporaries, such as this assessment of Walton's music for the Twentieth Century-Fox film of *As You Like It*:

> There is, of course, the Grand Introduction over the credit titles – pompous and heraldic in the traditional manner […] written with great competence, and indeed Walton is incapable of any sort of inefficiency.[126]

Despite his enthusiasm and support for Walton, Britten is nonetheless rigorous, and observant of shortcomings in his colleague's expertise within the field of film music:

> Once [*sic*] cannot feel that the microphone has entered very deeply into Walton's scoring soul. A large orchestra in which strings are very prominent has been used, and in the accompanying pastoral music one is conscious of the energetic ranks of the London Philharmonic sweating away behind the three-ply trees.[127]

Arthur Bliss's music for the film *Things to Come* came in for some harsh words in Britten's diary entry for 12 September 1935:

> I haven't been so insulted for ages as to have to listen to Arthur Bliss's new Film music […] Not even amusing – dull – violently badly scored & outraging every principle of taste - & - Lord, what chances he had! [128]

The available evidence thus indicates that Britten had a perceptive and critical ear when it came to discussing film music, even if, in the case of his demolishing of Bliss's *Things to Come* score, his tone and language could be rather extreme and hyperbolic. This evidence encourages us to conclude that this discernment came from his genuine understanding of and affinity with the art of film music as a practitioner. This is supported by detailed written answers he gave to film historian Jay Leyda in a kind of round robin questionnaire which was also circulated to Marc Blitzstein, Paul Bowles, Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, Ernest Krenek and Karol Rathaus in 1940 and 1941. For example, in response to a question about the difference between composing for a film sequence and a sequence 'in any other dramatic medium' [129] Britten wrote 'The technical side of the recording. The possibility of gradual fades in and out.' [130] Revealingly, earlier in the same questionnaire, Britten responded: 'I don't take film music seriously qua music anyhow.' [131] This last comment suggests that, although Britten was certainly capable of exercising his critical judgement with regard to film music, he more often than not chose not to do so. It is almost as if he lost interest in film music as soon as his

[125] Philip Reed, 'Writing About Britten' in *Benjamin Britten Studies: Essays on an Inexplicit Art*, p. 1.
[126] Benjamin Britten, 'As You Like It: Walton's Music' (1936), reprinted in Kildea (ed.) *Britten on Music*, p. 21.
[127] *Ibid.,* p. 21.
[128] Evans (ed.), *Journeying Boy*, p. 278.
[129] Jay Leyda 'On Film Music' (c.1940–41), reprinted in Kildea (ed.) *Britten on Music*, p. 28.
[130] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[131] Leyda 'On Film Music', reprinted in *Britten on Music*. Oxford 2003, p. 28.

career as a 'serious' composer was firmly established in the late 1940s with the advent of *Peter Grimes*.

There are only sporadic, brief, and sometimes unsupported mentions in the Britten literature of possible connections between his film music and other works. For example, Stephen Arthur Allen attempts to link *Love with a Stranger* to dramatic preoccupations in other works. Allen finds resonances from the *Love From A Stranger* music in *Death in Venice* (1973). He describes the sonority of the tuba, which 'prefigures the plague motives of *Death in Venice*, and the erotic overtones of the infection that will kill Aschenbach'.[132] Allen arrives at Britten's final opera via a somewhat convoluted route – beginning with what he calls the 'St Kasi' sequence from 'Rats Away!' (*Our Hunting Fathers,* 1936), which predates *Love From A Stranger* by a few months, and eventually reaching *Death in Venice*; a resonance so subtle that it would be very easy to miss, or even suspect that, in his enthusiasm, he overstates his case.

Reed sees a connection between the scoring style of one of the GPO film scores and the later chamber operas, which is more plausible. In his discussion of Britten's score for the film *Negroes* (GPO Film Unit, 1939) he illustrates how the composer makes use of a type of recitative that strongly resembles later recitative passages in the operas *The Rape of Lucretia* and *Albert Herring*:

> The final sequence […] is the most extended and original passage in the entire score, […] the created pattern is redolent of the convention of recitative and aria, in which the 'aria' sections in this most musically-oriented of film scores are not sung but spoken by the soprano soloist in metricated rhythm, while the oboe and piano present a musical commentary which reflects the words ironically […] Their flowing arioso style encapsulates what the composer was to achieve in similar passages over ten years later, in the first of his chamber operas, *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946) and *Albert Herring* (1947). [133]

However, most interesting of all (for the purposes of this thesis) Rupprecht talks about 'montage', in a way which illuminates the relationship between what he calls musical utterance, drama, and text in 'Rats Away!', again making connections between *Our Hunting Fathers*, the film scores, and later operatic scores. He talks of an 'experimental overlay of sharply distinct registers of utterance […that] bears a resemblance, as an act of montage, to the inter-cutting of text and utterance types Britten was employing in his contemporary work on documentary sound film.[134]

Rupprecht's recognition of the presence of montage in Britten's music for the stage, brings us one step closer to our exploration of how the notion of 'cinematic opera' can be identified in Britten's oeuvre and how it can be seen at work in *The Turn of the Screw.*

[132] Stephen Arthur Allen, '"O Hurry to the Feted Spot of Your Deliberate Fall" – Death in Britten, 1936-1940', in Philip Rupprecht, (ed.) *Rethinking Britten*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 23.
[133] Reed, 'Writing About Britten', p. 1.
[134] Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 8.

Chapter 2. Britten and 'Cinematic' Opera

The term 'cinematic opera' refers to elements which appear to occur in operatic repertoire, as distinct from 'filmed opera', which refers to a film version of an operatic stage work or an opera purposely composed for film or television. Historically, this idea is also linked to operatic influenced film-scoring practices in general, but the influence is not confined to opera. Cooke has observed that the influence of Russian ballet music, especially Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev, with its colourful orchestration and dramatic pacing is 'ubiquitous in mainstream Hollywood scoring'.[1] Cooke cites the film music of Dmitri Tiomkin and Alex North in particular, and states that ballet 'has long been neglected by scholars on account of the emphasis traditionally placed on sometimes unconvincing parallels with the classical genres of opera and symphony.'[2]

There is a perception amongst many critics and commentators that Britten's operas are 'cinematic' in style, perhaps a view that is unsurprising given the composer's experiences with documentary film music. As recently as April 2019 Richard Fairman, in his online review for the *Financial Times* of *Billy Budd* at the Royal Opera House (directed by Deborah Warner), wrote that 'Britten cut his teeth writing soundtracks for the cinema and *Billy Budd* […] [is] as well told as the most compelling art house film.'[3] Amongst the first Italian reviews of *The Turn of the Screw*, according to Patricia Howard, we already find the production techniques being described as cinematic, in notices by Louis Barcata and Franco Abbiati.[4] The cinematic quality of the opera is also referred to by Claire Seymour, who writes of the formal structure as 'a cinematic sequence of sixteen short scenes separated by instrumental interludes',[5] and, in reviewing Jonathan Miller's 1979 English National Opera production, it is interesting that it is the work of a film, not stage, director to which Tom Sutcliffe refers: 'Dr. Miller finds it's a Bergmanesque psycho-drama about incest rather than paedophilia'.[6] In a more recent production (Glyndebourne Tour, 2014), in which the director, Jonathan Kent, similarly suggests themes of incest between Miles and Flora, 'cinematic' is even used as the sole adjective in the title of John Allison's online review for the *Daily Telegraph*. In the course of the review, Allison makes reference to the language of film several times: 'the Prologue […] incorporates grainy film footage showing the children Miles and Flora at play', 'Paul Brown's airy set – allowing the 16 scenes to flow cinematically – is designed to accommodate shadows', 'his tautly written work, in which the composer plays his every stylistic trick, can sound like the soundtrack to the picnic of some peculiarly

[1] Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, p.120.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[3] Richard Fairman, 'Billy Budd (Review)' in *Financial Times* (April 2019): https://www.ft.com/content/11cf07be-673e-11e9-a79d-04f350474d62 (accessed 13 May 2019).

[4] Patricia Howard (ed.), *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, Cambridge Opera Handbook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 130.
[5] Claire Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), p. 185.
[6] Tom Sutcliffe, 'The Turn of the Screw' in *The Guardian*, 8 November 1979, p. 11.

Anglican demons'.[7] Howard, in similar fashion, uses language which suggest the opera's instrumental interludes could be interpreted as musical equivalents of screen transitions:

> The interludes flow from one scene to the next, often overlapping and merging at either end, so that, in spite of the episodic structure of the drama, each act of the opera is a continuous stream of music.[8]

In Summer 2018, English National Opera collaborated with Regent's Park Open Air Theatre to present a short run of the opera, directed by Timothy Sheader. The company provided an introduction to the work on its website, in which the quasi-cinematic structure was once again highlighted, in what appears to be an echo of Allison's review of Jonathan Kent's Glyndebourne production:

> Britten matches the controlled precision of James's short story with an equally concise, carefully worked out musical structure in which is embedded one of the composer's favourite instrumental techniques – theme and variations – into the opera's dramatic arch, with the variations being used to punctuate the rapid almost cinematic sequence of different scenes.[9]

It is not just *The Turn of the Screw* which has caused critics and commentators to remark on Britten's incorporation of cinematic influences. There is equal consideration for this topic in reviews and literature about *Death in Venice* (1973), Britten's final opera, which also has a libretto by Myfanwy Piper. The director of the first production, Colin Graham, wrote in 1979: 'the script of *Death in Venice* reads even more like a film-script than *Owen Wingrave* [Britten's opera written for television] and makes greater 'cinematic' demands on its staging than its predecessor'.[10] This filmic quality was also noticed by Peter Heyworth, reviewing the first production in June 1973, remarking on how the influence of film contributed to the smooth dramatic flow:

> Myfanwy Piper and, one must assume, Britten himself have succeeded in fashioning a libretto that is faithful to the story in all its aspects and yet succeeds in weaving its many strands into a series of seventeen brief scenes that for the most part move with the rapidity of a film scenario.[11]

Also reviewing the first production, Bayan Northcott writes something similar, comparing *Death in Venice* with the more overtly screen-based *Owen Wingrave*, and concluding, like Graham in 1979, that the latter is less successful in its filmic style. Northcott refers to a staging style that 'realises just that fluid, televisual directness that *Owen Wingrave* failed to achieve'.[12] Similarly, John Evans wrote '*Death in Venice* is, after all, Britten's most cinematic opera, yet it was designed for the stage.'[13] In retrospect, the comparison of *Wingrave* unfavourably with *Death in Venice* seems a little harsh. There

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[7] John Allison, 'The Turn of the Screw, Glynde bourne Tour Review: Cinematic' in The Daily Telegraph, (2014) https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/11179777/The-Turn-of-the-Screw-Glyndebourne-Tour-review-cinematic.html (accessed 23 May 2019).
[8] Patricia Howard, 'Myfanwy Piper's 'The Turn of the Screw': libretto and synopsis', in Howard (ed.), *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 27.
[9] English National Opera, *Turning the Screw: Getting to know Britten's Opera* (2018), https://www.eno.org/discover-opera/turning-screw-getting-know-brittens-opera/ (accessed 23 May 2019).
[10] Colin Graham, 'Staging First Productions', in David Herbert (ed.) *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1979), p. 55.
[11] Peter Heyworth, 'Death In Venice' in *The Observer*, 24 June 1973.
[12] Bayan Northcott, 'Death in Venice' in *The Observer*, 22 June 1973.
[13] John Evans, 'Benjamin Britten 'Death in Venice' – Perspectives on an Opera', PhD Thesis (University of Wales, 1983), p. 65.

are many aspects of the visual representation of *Wingrave*'s story which illustrate that Britten had a firm grasp of the dramatic possibilities of television (for example, the sequence shot in Hyde Park). I will consider these in more detail in Chapter 7.

In an online article about Britten's 'cinematic mind' for the British Film Institute's website, Paul Kildea refers to the popularity of the film musical in the 1930s, crediting this as evidence that 'there was an audience for the sung word if only it could be cultivated'.[14] He goes on to cite theatre director Tyrone Guthrie, director of a 'magnificently dark' early production of *Peter Grimes*, and who 'had already fashioned English opera in cinematic terms'[15] as an influence, along with designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch, on the kind of dramatic and operatic environment in the 1940s which partly gave rise to Britten's quasi-cinematic style. Kildea continued by identifying some of the cinematic characteristics of Britten's operas:

> And though [Britten] owed his sense of narrative mainly to literature (he remained a great lover of Dickens), his operas are full of crossfades and underscoring, of internal monologues and elliptical conversations, all taken from film. When Elizabeth I dies at the end of *Gloriana* (1953), she hears in a series of flashbacks the spoken voices of those she has loved and destroyed. *Billy Budd* (1951) is even more cinematic, the action framed by prologue and epilogue.[16]

Although much commentary has quite rightly focussed on Britten's experiences when composing for the GPO documentary films (for example, David Crilly discusses the use of a cinematic-style 'flashback' in *Peter Grimes* as being traceable to his first GPO film project, *The King's Stamp*)[17], Donald Mitchell wrote in 1988 apposite comments about Britten's experience of writing film music as a precursor to his operatic work.

> If one is looking for the precedents that were the guarantors of *Grimes*'s success in 1945, then it is to the scores that Britten wrote as a young composer when working in the 1930s for the experimental theatre and film groups, and for the radio, that we must turn […] [I]n the 1930s radio was itself a new, exciting and innovative dramatic medium which could sometimes approximate to a form of broadcast musical theatre […] it was in the film and radio studios in particular that he refined and sharpened his already exceptional aural imagination […] a talent that was to stand him in good stead in the theatre.[18]

Britten had an undeniable instinct for how scenes in his operas would look, not just theatrically but cinematically as well. Some commentators, such as Mitchell as we have seen, have attributed this to his experiences in the 1930s with the GPO Film Unit, working with film every day for an extended period of time (one must remember that he was a salaried member of staff at the GPO Unit, and immersed in the world of film for that period). Colin Matthews indicated agreement with this view by referring to the composer's film work in the 1930s and commenting that it was 'one of the things that

[14] Paul Kildea, 'Storming the Stage: Benjamin Britten's Cinematic Mind' (BFI, 2017) https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/storming-stage-benjamin-britten-s-cinematic-mind (accessed 24 May 2019).
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] David Crilly, 'Britten and the Cinematic Frame' in *Benjamin Britten: New Perspectives* p. 70.
[18] Donald Mitchell, writing in the Programme Book of the 51st Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, reprinted in *Cradles of the New* (London: Faber, 1995), p. 309.

gave him his incredible facility'.[19] Matthews gave the view that the discipline of writing to a strict creative brief, an exact length of time (down to less than a second), and composing to tight deadlines was something that gave him his very imaginative response. Matthews concluded that all of this experience sharpened Britten's sensitivity for drama: 'all his instincts were in place; he knew, when it came to writing opera, he knew how it worked. He had a very dramatic sense.'[20]

Part of the dramatic sense Matthews refers to is revealed in one of the distinctive features of *The Turn of the Screw*: Britten's use of the Theme and Variations form, in which the variations become orchestral interludes between each scene of the opera. We should remember that Britten wrote an entire film score that was based on a Theme and Variations form: *The Instruments of the Orchestra* (dir. Muir Mathieson, 1946). There are a number of instances where these interludes contain resonances of the composer's work with documentary film, especially with regard to orchestration. In the opera, Britten manipulates a small orchestra with a skill and assurance that we can trace back to his film career. An example is Variation IV, which immediately precedes Scene 5. The music of the variation foreshadows the accompaniment to the opening of the scene, in which the children are singing the nursery rhyme *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son*. The orchestration here is sparse, relying on strings and percussion, with the lower register of the piano providing snatches of the Theme on which the variation is built (Ex. 2.1). In its orchestration and general style this could easily have been written for one of the documentary films.



Ex.2.1: Britten *The Turn of the Screw* extract from Variation IV

[19] Colin Matthews, interview with Peter Auker, 15 October 2015
[20] *Ibid.*

Elements of cinematic language and their representation in music

Much of what we might term 'cinematic language' is technical in nature, as explained in any practical book on filmmaking such as *The Filmmaker's Handbook*,[21] and includes such devices as dissolves, wipes, fades, etc. As Britten discovered, many of these devices have their counterparts in music, and can be emulated musically in order to influence audience perception of the drama. For example, many of Britten's operas end quietly. This may be understood as the musical equivalent of the visual fade-to-black, and in the theatre there would probably be an actual fade to black in the lighting at the end before the curtain calls. In the case of Britten's operas, the quiet ending of *Gloriana* (1953) backfired on a personal level when nobody clapped at the end of the premiere. Britten was very annoyed, but the absence of immediate applause may have been because the ending (as with other Britten operas) was thought-provoking; indeed, contemporary productions of *Gloriana* on stage invariably result in a short silence before the eventual applause. Effective examples of quiet endings are the final bars of *Peter Grimes* (1945), in which the opera ends with three chords marked *ppp* and a diminuendo, *Billy Budd* (1951) in which the aging Captain Vere concludes the opera by singing his final words unaccompanied, *Owen Wingrave* (1970) in which the final phrase of the 'Ballad' is sung *pianissimo* by a small, unaccompanied chorus (with a score indication of 'fading away *calando*'), and *Death in Venice*, in which the music fades into a long silence. All these examples mirror what happens at the end of *The Turn of the Screw* itself, similarly, *ppp*. [22] Perhaps Britten, with all his prior experience of writing film music, felt that a fade-to-black ending style (common in the visual language of film) was readily translatable into musical language simply by opting for a quiet close, as it possessed just the kind of understated yet powerful dramatic gesture he was looking for. The musical fade-outs create for these, the most ambiguous of his operas, the equivalent of a question mark. This was an idea which he revisited in the finale of his third String Quartet (1976), a work intimately connected to *Death in Venice* and one which he famously commented that he wanted to end with a question.

Fade-out endings are not the only cinematic devices to find an equivalent in Britten's operatic music. There is a striking example of a musical invocation of a cinematic cross-fade at the end of Act II of *Gloriana*, in which Britten's reimagined diegetic Elizabethan dance music dissolves into a non-diegetic orchestral conclusion. This is achieved mostly by combining two tempi simultaneously, the fast dance tempo of the 'Coranto' running alongside a slow tempo in the main orchestra. The former fades out by means of a diminuendo, and the latter cross-fades in by means of a crescendo, until the main orchestral material completely takes over to conclude the act. In cinema, the cross-fade (or, as it is sometimes known, the dissolve) is related to the fade-in or fade-out. This is a transition between

[21] Stephen Ascher and Edward Pincus, *The Film-maker's Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age* (New York: Plume 2013).
[22] As an aside, it is interesting to note that Leonard Bernstein, who conducted the first performance of *Peter Grimes* in the USA, ends his musical, *West Side Story*, in a similar, understated yet powerful fashion – marked *ppp* in the score.

two shots in which the first shot begins to fade-out at around the same time as the second shot fades in. In the pre-digital age of filmmaking this was quite a difficult effect to achieve technically, and required the use of a specialised piece of equipment called an optical printer, a device which could both project and film footage simultaneously. In music, it is easy to achieve, just involving ending a section with a diminuendo and beginning the next section with a crescendo, but overlapping them. *Billy Budd* contains a number of examples of musical dissolves, including the transition from Act I Scene 2 into Act I Scene 3, in which Captain Vere can hear the sailors singing below decks. As the curtain falls, this singing becomes seamlessly part of the musical transition from Scene 2 and Scene 3 ready for the curtain to rise for Scene 3, when the choral singing segues via full chorus, then a reduced semi-chorus, into Donald and the others sharing sea shanties. Elsewhere in *Budd*, the so-called 'interview chords' during which Vere informs Billy off-stage that he is going to hang (i.e. figuratively 'out of camera shot') imply a series of slow dissolves even if they are not strictly overlapping, and the transition into the Epilogue at the end of the opera is effectively a musical dissolve as Vere's past memory merges into his present day to close the opera. In *Peter Grimes*, too, there is a scene which John Evans regards as an example of how Britten's film-music experience has impacted on his operatic work, stating

> Ellen's conversation with Grimes's new apprentice is cross-faded with the music of the offstage church service. An offstage chorus is, of course, a familiar operatic convention, but the way in which the two levels of the music are here made to reflect on one another shows extraordinary theatrical flair.[23]

Evans is describing the opening of Act II ('Sunday Morning'), in which Britten uses dynamic variation such as crescendi and diminuendi to allow each view of the scene (outside the church and inside the church) to sonically cross-fade. It can be argued that the composer adopted the effect from cinema, or, equally, as the effect is principally aural, from his experiences with radio. Either way, the fundamental concept is a cinematic one.

To return to the musical dissolve occurring at the end of Act II of *Gloriana* as mentioned above, the 'Coranto' dance is in progress, complete with what might be described in film terms as diegetic musical accompaniment (in other words, it is obvious from the context that the characters on stage can hear the music; it is part of their world). This on-stage music gradually gives way to nondiegetic music as the act closes; it ceases to be music within the world of the characters and becomes operatic orchestral accompaniment. Britten uses a similar technique in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in Act II ('Let's have the tongs and the bones'). However, on this occasion he reverses it, allowing diegetic music played by the fairies on percussion and recorders (loosely based on the nursery rhyme 'Girls and Boys Come Out to Play') to emerge out of the non-diegetic accompaniment in the manner of a dissolve. Unsurprisingly, it is in the opera Britten wrote especially for television, *Owen Wingrave*, that the matching of dissolves in the music with dissolves in the visuals becomes inherently interlinked, featuring passages in different superimposed tempi.

[23] Evans,' Benjamin Britten Death in Venice' (PhD Thesis), p. 61.

I have used the film terms diegetic and nondiegetic here purposely because the whole discussion of these musical features centres around the influence of film on Britten's work. However, Carolyn Abbate argues for the use of the terms 'phenomenal' and 'nuomenal' when discussing the similar concepts in an operatic context. In a review of her book on nineteenth century opera, *Unsung Voices*, Richard Taruskin refers to operatic narrative as

> authored not only by the composer but by the characters who sing them. Hence they are […] unreliable as information [but also…] reflexive on the work they inhabit, enriching it with dimensions of meaning we as listeners read better than we may know. They achieve this status by playing on the distinction between 'phenomenal' music (music heard by stage characters as music) and its opposite, which Abbate Kantishly christens 'noumenal', music - the most fundamental of all discriminations to operatic literacy, but rarely discussed.[24]

Abbate's theories demonstrate how close narrative theory in an operatic context can be to film theory in some areas.

Montage is a device that Britten uses frequently, structuring the music and libretto to perform much the same temporal function as the cinematic version, compressing time and conveying information. Montage in cinema may be defined as follows:

> a single pictorial composition made by juxtaposing or superimposing many pictures or designs. In filmmaking, a montage is an editing technique in which shots are juxtaposed in an often fast-paced fashion that compresses time and conveys a lot of information in a relatively short period.[25]

David Crilly postulates that Britten translated the montage device into musical form for the express purpose of achieving multiple views of a subject, in much the same way as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein draws attention to 'aspect change' : the 'ability within us to perceive one "scene" from different perspectives [using…] the famous duck-rabbit drawing.'[26] Crilly gives a specific example from Act I scene 3 of *The Turn of the Screw* (the point at which Flora and Miles sing the folk song 'Lavender's Blue'), and suggests, albeit somewhat obliquely, that the composer's reference to cinematic montage has its root in a familiarity with the techniques of Eisenstein:

> Britten exploits and directs our shifting perspectives within key moments of his operas in order to manipulate and direct our attention, and to articulate a precise dramatic point. As with Eisenstein's cinematic montage technique, dramatic meaning is generated by the collision of opposing images which explode into a concept.[27]

We have seen that Crilly particularly emphasises the use of montage, especially in *The Turn of the Screw*, identifying that Britten's own creative inventiveness is the source of this layered approach, rather than something interpreted by him from the libretto:

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[24] Richard Taruskin, 'Review of Unsung Voices. Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century by Carolyn Abbate', in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Jul., 1992), pp. 187-197.
[25] *Elements of Cinema: A Student's Guide to the Fundamentals of Filmmaking*. http://www.elementsofcinema.com/editing/montage.html (accessed 28 June 2017).
[26] Crilly 'Britten and the Cinematic Frame' in *Benjamin Britten: New Perspectives*, p. 65.
[27] *Ibid*, p. 65.

> An examination of the early drafts of the libretto […] reveal that the stratified layers of meaning in the scene […] were not the work of Myfanwy Piper, but were rather insisted upon by Britten himself.[28]

We can infer from this observation that Britten intended to compose music which itself contained elements of montage within its structure. There are several Britten operas, aside from *The Turn of the Screw*, in which a montage approach is adopted. In Act I Scene 1 of *Peter Grimes*, for example, the solo voices, set in conversational prose, fade in and out of the texture, often in character groups (e.g. Rector, Nieces, Mrs Sedley and Ned), interspersed with the chorus singing passages in iambic pentameter based on Crabbe's original verse. Later in *Peter Grimes*, in Act III, the transition between Scene 2 and Scene 3 is marked by another example of cinematic-style montage; the distant call of 'Peter Grimes' by the crowd in Grimes's mad scene is very cinematic in this way. *Albert Herring* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, similarly, display elements of montage. In the former, this is suggested in the interweaving of voices during the 'Threnody' (Act III Scene 1), and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act III) there are hints of a montage effect, musically, in the overlapping phrases 'I have found Lysander like a jewel' etc. Once again, both of these effects give the director an opportunity for a cinematic-style staging. Britten used this device (or elements of it) so often in his operas, it seems almost instinctive for him; it is part of his integral dramatic and musical response to a text. Even the opening song of his opera for children *The Little Sweep*, with its audience participation, contained enough of a suggestion of montage for it to be interpreted in this way by Basil Coleman in his 1990 televised version for TVS, which, being filmed on location at Great Glemham House in Suffolk, was not able to utilise a live audience track.

Additionally, a common feature of many cinematic montages is the simultaneous soliloquising of more than one character, sometimes, but not necessarily, temporally separated. This allows the audience to see the thought processes of several characters at once, and examples occur in films such as *Citizen Kane* (dir. Orson Welles, 1941) and *Chariots of Fire* (dir. Hugh Hudson, 1981). This effect of multiple soliloquizing is present in many operas predating the invention of cinema, and therefore may be assumed to be a dramatic device where the influence went the opposite way, i.e. opera influenced cinema. This device can be found in every Britten opera, but *Gloriana* provides a typical and apposite example in Act I scene 1, where the Queen, Essex, Mountjoy, Cuffe, Raleigh and the Chorus all display their innermost thoughts at the same time.

As well as the musical components, dramatic devices familiar to the cinemagoer find their way into Britten's operas, sometimes as framing devices. For example, the entire core narrative of *Billy Budd* is presented in flashback, which allows the story to be observed through the lens of Captain Vere's experience and memory (which may, or may not, reflect the actual 'reality' of the events). This device also allows the audience, as Mervyn Cooke observes, to regard Vere as a more 'credible and sympathetic character'.[29] *The Rape of Lucretia* demonstrates a slightly more complicated form of flashback, in which the action is framed by the Male and Female Chorus's

[28] Crilly, 'Britten and the Cinematic Frame' p. 68.
[29] Mervyn Cooke, 'Britten's *Billy Budd*: Melville as Opera Libretto' in Mervyn Cooke and Philip Reed (eds) *Benjamin Britten:* Billy Budd*, Cambridge Opera Handbook* (1993), p. 32.

Christian commentary. In orthodox productions of the opera, the Chorus is somehow 'outside time', and so the flashback device is not fully formed. However, Fiona Shaw's production for Glyndebourne (2013) uses the conceit that the Chorus are contemporaneous with the opera's composition (1940s) and are represented as archaeologists digging up Roman artifacts. Shaw explains:

> A chorus always represents us, the audience. They speak on our behalf […] The Male and Female Chorus are in this case two contemporary people, telling a story about Rome before Christ, a time that nobody alive now remembers […] Sometimes Tarquinius's thoughts are told by the Male Chorus. You get a feeling that Tarquinius doesn't even have thoughts of his own; it is our thoughts projected onto him by the Male Chorus.[30]

There are many films which make use of similar dramatic devices, although not necessarily giving the instigator of the flashback to a voice or character outside the main narrative of the story as in Shaw's production of *Lucretia*. Flashbacks in films often begin with a protagonist setting the scene (sometimes as a voiceover), and recur at key points in the story, in a very similar manner to Captain Vere's opening and closing monologues in *Budd*. This is a device which came to fruition with film noir, where many narratives are told in flashback with a voiced-over protagonist as narrator. For example, *The Big Sleep* (dir. Howard Hawkes, 1946), based on the novel by Raymond Chandler and generally regarded as an iconic film noir, features flashbacks and a first-person voiceover narrated by its main character, investigator Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart). The use of flashbacks in film noir has an element of pre-ordained, grimly compelling fate about it, something which we can also observe in *Billy Budd* (the whole story unfolds in Captain Vere's memory) and *The Turn of the Screw*, with its double level of narration (the Prologue plus the Governess's story).

It is not difficult to find numerous other examples in Britten's operas where the composer has utilised a musical device or effect which is analogous to a cinematic device. An examination of the opera scores reveals that the influence of cinematic techniques is not limited to montage, flashbacks and dissolves, although in many cases, quasi-cinematic moments within the composer's operatic music are concerned with transitional passages: places where the action changes gear or emphasis: the appearance of a new character; beginnings and endings of acts and scenes; and so on. In cinema also, these are often the places where the techniques of the medium are most employable; they frequently represent instances which are especially suitable for portraying on screen, rather than on a theatrical stage.

Another kind of cinematic sequence relies on rapid cutting from one shot to another to give a sense of urgency and relentless activity, building tension. A mixture of shot types and angles are used, which may include hand-held camera, seeking to create an immersive experience for the viewer. This technique is often seen in action or war films. Battle sequences in films that Britten will almost certainly have seen, such as *Henry V* (dir. Laurence Olivier, 1944) and *Angels One-Five* (dir. George More O'Ferrall, 1952), with its vivid aerial combat sequences, are typical examples of this kind of editing. It is not strictly montage, because normally the intention of the director is to give the

[30] Fiona Shaw in 'To harness song to human tragedy', interview with Cori Ellison in *Glyndebourne Programme Book* (2013), p. 29.

effect of the action happening in real time. It should be remembered that *Billy Budd* has its own battle sequence (although the single cannon shot at the French enemy falls short, the mist closes in, and the battle cannot continue), and so Britten creates a musical equivalent of the rapid sequence of shots. The arrangement of the multiple vocal parts suggests a quasi-cinematic rapid cutting, implying a range of perspectives from close-up to medium and long shots. We know that Britten struggled a little to get this exactly how he wanted it, a struggle referenced by Philip Reed in his chronology: 'the "Battle Scene" caused some problems in early January 1951'[31], but the effort was clearly worth it. Donald Mitchell described how, in the 'great chase of the French frigate […] the score deploys all available vocal and instrumental resources – the total acoustic space, from top to bottom, and at every level, is filled out'.[32]

In conclusion, this chapter has defined what we mean by 'cinematic opera' as distinct from 'filmed opera'. It reviewed how several Britten operas have regularly been described by critics and academics as cinematic, and then began to focus on the cinematic qualities in *The Turn of the Screw*, some of which can be traced to Britten's film music for documentary films. The chapter concluded by looking at the visual 'language' of cinema, including montage, fades and dissolves, and how this language can find representation in Britten's operatic music. All of these areas will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

[31] Philip Reed, 'From first thoughts to first night: a Billy Budd chronology' in Cooke and Reed (eds), *Billy Budd*, p. 62.
[32] Donald Mitchell, 'A *Billy Budd* notebook (1979 – 1991)' in Cooke and Reed (eds), *Billy Budd* , p. 119.

Chapter 3. *The Turn of the Screw*: Creating a Stage Opera

> Adaptations of any kind […] a play into an opera, an opera into a film, […] have been often viewed with grave critical distrust […] The possible merit of an adaptation is gauged in direct, if arbitrary, relationship to its perceived 'fidelity' to its model, or original. […] Adaptation has also been interpreted […] as an act of disruption, necessitating a power struggle for dominance by one medium over another.[1]

A text such as Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* does not easily lend itself to the process of adaptation, and therefore tracing the various transformations that a given passage undergoes upon its journey from James's written material, through the operatic adaptation and finally to screen can be tortuous. It cannot pretend to be an exact science, and must necessarily be subjective and intuitive. And yet this process has the potential to unlock new perspectives on not only the original work, but also on the numerous adaptations themselves. The attempt to trace the process an artist (or artists) has gone through to achieve an adaptation requires us to accept that much of what existed in the original text will have been altered, simplified, or even removed altogether, causing the disruption that David Francis Urrows refers to in the quotation above. Sometimes adaptations involve considerable amounts of abstraction, Walter Bernhardt using the term 'intermedial transposition' to describe this process, which does 'not involve a direct transformation from one medium into another, but rather tend[s] to pass through a stage of a far more abstract, essentially extra-medial condition'. [2]

Linda Hutcheon refers to Virginia Woolf's comments on early cinema, stating that Woolf 'deplored the simplification of the literary work that inevitably occurred in its transposition to the new visual medium and called the film a "parasite" and literature its "prey" and "victim"'.[3] Hutcheon, echoing Urrows, also points out that adaptations 'are most often put down as secondary, derivative,[…] or culturally inferior',[4] although it should perhaps be noted that she refers here to film adaptations of novels, not operatic adaptations. Hutcheon's consideration of *The Turn of the Screw* later in her book discusses the ambiguity of the presence of the ghosts in the original story (i.e. are they actually ghosts, or are they figments of the Governess's imagination?) and concludes that Jack Clayton's film version, *The Innocents* (1961), does not successfully manage to achieve this ambiguity because of the 'naturalistic medium of film'. It could be argued that Hutcheon's view here is somewhat simplistic, since film is a superb medium for creating supernatural effects (indeed, whole genres have arisen because of this capability). However, in the context of the film itself her view does have some validity. *The Innocents* certainly captures something of the gothic atmosphere of the novella.

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[1] David Francis Urrows. 'Introduction' in *Essays on Word/Music Adaptation and on Surveying the Field* (New York: Rodopi, 2008) p. x.
[2] Walter Bernhart, 'From Novel to Song via Myth: *Wuthering Heights* as a Case of Intermedial Adaptation' in *Essays on Word/Music Adaptation*, p. 14.
[3] Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn: *A Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2nd edn. 2013), p. 3.
[4] *Ibid* p. 2.

Nonetheless, Hutcheon continues by asserting that the opera achieves greater success than film in evoking a supernatural ambience, citing the music as the agent of this:

> it is Britten's music that pulls it off […] (the children) do not sound musically like Clayton's 'innocents', for even while looking guileless and singing 'Tom Tom the piper's son', they manage to sound very sinister indeed. Here the ghosts do appear, but their eerie and exotic music makes clear they are from a different realm, even if their malign but seductive power over the children is palpable – and audible. Yet the novella's famed ambiguity is retained to the very end, as the music underlines the doubt as to the real cause of Miles' death by having the governess' vocal line fade on a chromatic dissonance.[5]

Hutcheon chooses to acknowledge the effect Britten's music has on the supernatural atmosphere in the opera, but surprisingly does mention the music within the film, composed by Georges Auric, which, actually, is very well-written and evocative. Also, her description of the Governess's music in the opera as fading on a chromatic dissonance is incorrect, since the music presents a simple A major triad at that point. This is a good example of the consequence of Britten's 'fade-to-black' ambiguous ending; Hutcheon is led into thinking the music is less stable harmonically than it actually is.

Myfanwy Piper has written:

> There was a particular fitness for Britten in the idea of making *The Turn of the Screw* into an opera, not only because of the subject, corruption and innocence and their mutual effect, but because of Henry James's stylistic means. He tells the story with an elaborate fabric of words against which the action and the conversations that take the action further stand out to make the dramatic shape […] Britten used the voice as an instrument that detaches itself from the orchestra to tell the story, but depends for its full dramatic, as well as musical, effect on its relation to the whole fabric of sound and of echoes and memories of sound. He builds up the weight of musical experience as James builds up the weight of evidence and fantasy.[6]

This paragraph provides some evidence that Piper correctly recognised that there were elements of stage drama that were latent in James's sometimes dense prose. She also acknowledged the essential part the vocal sound plays in the presentation of the drama, even if divorced from the orchestral sonorities. She makes the connection between Britten's use of music and James's use of words to create what she rather ambiguously refers to as 'the weight of evidence and fantasy'. Both Piper and Britten recognised the potential pitfalls in adapting this story, which Piper observed when seeing a stage adaptation, *The Innocents* (the basis for Clayton's film), soon after she had started work on the libretto. Piper wrote that 'in spite of extraordinary performances by Flora Robson and the two children', the dramatic impact was adversely affected by 'losing the sense of time passing, the shifting of places […] the long months when nothing and everything happened'.[7] By laying the drama

[5] Hutcheon and O'Flynn: *Theory of Adaptation*, p. 69.
[6] Myfanwy Piper, 'Writing for Britten', in Herbert (ed.) *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, p. 8.
[7] *Ibid*, p. 8.

on 'thick *and* fast', wrote Piper, 'it lost the ambience and the drama as well'.[8] She mentions the play in one of her preliminary notes on the opera adaptation, clearly intending to warn herself not to fall into the same trap:

> *The Innocents* took elements of the story and re-wrote or telescoped other elements in order to compress the action and the scene into one place and one time. By doing it they entirely lost the pervasive atmosphere which is the whole point.[9]

Patricia Howard recognised the difficulties Piper faced in representing the temporal aspect of the story, but did not feel the libretto was completely successful in solving the problem:

> The libretto is certainly much more faithful to James than is *The Innocents*. But the variation-interludes are too short to imply 'the long months when nothing and everything happened' (for example the whole of James's Chapter 13).[10]

Piper stated, revealingly, 'neither Britten nor I ever intended to interpret the work, only to re-create it for a different medium.'[11] The question of how a work can be recreated in a different medium *without* involving elements of reinterpretation leads to a suspicion that Piper may have been merely playing with semantics here, even though the hope to maintain authenticity to the original text still stands. Equally, this may have been a somewhat defensive reaction to those critics and authors who had criticised the decision to have the ghosts sing. That being said, Howard noted that, although there are some substantial differences between the James story and the opera, we should remember that 'the libretto is based so closely on the actual words of Henry James that phrases, sentences and even short dialogues are sometimes "borrowed" from one scene to appear in another.'[12] This is also true of other Britten operas based on prose texts (e.g. *Billy Budd* and *Death in Venice*). An audience member who is familiar with James's work would thus undoubtedly recognise these passages, even the phrases which open the opera, 'It is a curious story. I have it written in faded ink – a woman's hand', jumps out as being taken from the James text almost *verbatim*: 'Is in old faded ink and in the most beautiful hand […] A woman's.'[13]

Somewhat contradicting her earlier statement that *The Innocents*, in its use of a 'naturalistic' film medium, failed to achieve the effect of the story's ambiguity, Hutcheon has written:

> To experience [a work] as an adaptation […] we need to recognize it as such and to know its adapted text, thus allowing the latter to oscillate in our memories with what we are experiencing. In the process we inevitably fill in any gaps in the adaptation with information from the adapted text.[14]

[8] Piper, 'Writing for Britten', p. 8.
[9] Myfanwy Piper, preparatory notes on the libretto of *The Turn of the Screw*. Unpublished document, Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh.
[10] Patrica Howard, 'Myfanwy Piper's The Turn of the Screw', in Howard (ed.) *The Turn of the Screw* p. 28.
[11] Piper, 'Writing for Britten', p. 11.
[12] Howard (ed.), *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 28.
[13] Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, (London: Everyman edn. 1975) p. 5.
[14] Hutcheon and O'Flynn: *A Theory of Adaptation* pp.120–21.

Hutcheon's view would suggest that anyone seeing Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* without having prior knowledge of James's book would not be perceiving the opera as an adaptation at all, but as an entirely original work. There are undoubtedly many opera-goers who have *not* read James's text, but few would not at least be aware that the opera has been adapted from a book. The knowledge that there is a book, whilst revealing nothing about its contents, subtly affects audience expectations, as they begin to look for signs of its literary provenance. Perhaps this very knowledge may modify their expectations compared to an opera which is fully original in its own right. Cooke pursues this idea in connection with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960), the opera Britten composed with himself and Pears as librettists, adapting Shakespeare. Cooke believed himself to be the first person to point out (as late as 1993) that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ends with the lovers going to bed unmarried, and argued that this had not been noticed before because the Shakespeare is so well-known that we tend to assume events which have not taken place on stage have actually happened.[15] Somebody seeing the opera with no prior knowledge of the Shakespeare (which is, admittedly, unlikely) may have been more likely to notice this anomaly.

From Page to Stage

A chronology of the opera's gestation by John Evans provides background information about the early stages of the adaptation.[16] We learn from Evans that Britten chose Myfanwy Piper as his librettist following discussions with her about ideas for, ironically, a film version initially. Reed, Cooke and Mitchell expand on this detail:

> Eric Crozier recalled that *The Turn of the Screw* arose from the possibility that the EOG [English Opera Group] might be involved in an opera film, in which the producer Michael Balcon was interested. Myfanwy Piper recalled in an interview with Elizabeth Sweeting […] that it was she who first suggested Henry James's novella to Pears as a possible subject for the opera film. In the event, the opera film was abandoned, but 'some time later Ben was casting about for something to do, and Peter said he'd just re-read *The Turn of the Screw*, and he remembered that I'd suggested it.' Mrs Piper recalled that the collaboration began on a casual basis: 'Ben said to me, 'Would you try and think of a way it [*The Turn of the Screw*] might be done and then we might get someone in to write it.' So I worked out a possible way, and then we began to work on it together, and there seemed no reason to ask anyone else'.[17]

The reality, however, was slightly different. William Plomer had been Britten's initial choice for librettist, but declined because he did not admire the story. According to Lord Harewood, Plomer's

[15] Mervyn Cooke, 'Britten and Shakespeare: Dramatic and Musical Cohesion in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', in *Music and Letters*, May, 1993, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.255
[16] John Evans, 'The sketches: chronology and analysis', in Howard (ed.) *The Turn of the Screw*
[17] Reed, Cooke and Mitchell (eds) *Letters from a Life* vol. 4, p. 88.

unexpectedly lukewarm response after reading James's story made Britten 'disconcerted, even indignant, and [he] needed much reassurance.'[18]

After the idea for a film was dropped, a commission for a chamber opera was received from the Venice Biennale Festival, along with a proposed premiere at La Fenice in 1954. Britten considered the idea of adapting *The Turn of the Screw* to be feasible, although time was tight, especially as he was not in the best of health at that time, suffering from bursitis in his shoulder, which affected his writing. Evans reports that '[Britten's] physical condition was such that his early letters to [Piper] were written with his left hand'.[19]

Piper began the adaptation process by making copious preliminary notes. Although her notoriously spidery handwriting, in which some words remain illegible[20] (see Fig. 3.1), make deciphering this process a challenge, it is possible to uncover some of the general principles of how the adaptation proceeded. Rosamund Strode attempted to collate the early set of notebooks despite the difficulty of the task, using the order in which Piper filled her notebooks:

> it seems that a start was made at each end, leaving a certain number of empty pages at the centre. Some leaves were torn out and used as single sheets, and the book has become disbound.[21]

In this example, Piper considers the roles of Quint and Jessel, whom she identifies merely as 'the ghosts':

> The ghosts must not at first sing/speak at all when the gov is present. Since part of the horror is the familiarity of the children with them and the out in the cold portion of the governess could be treated either as a {???} or {???}, the supernatural played with comparative matter of factness. But the devastating horror of it arriving out in the {???} and to the {???} of the rest a straightforward stating of the story within the minds of the {???} or the whole thing could be treated in a much more oblique way so that <u>nothing</u> is quite daylight or often {???}[22]

[18] George Lascelles (Earl of Harewood), *The Tongs and the Bones: The Memoirs of Lord Harewood*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1981), p.139.
[19] Evans, 'The sketches: chronology and analysis', in Howard (ed.) *The Turn of the Screw,* p. 63.
[20] In transcriptions of Piper's notes, the many illegible items are represented by question marks enclosed within curly brackets, e.g. {???}
[21] Rosamund Strode, introductory notes to Myfanwy Piper's unpublished notebooks, (Aldeburgh: Britten-Pears Library)
[22] Piper, preparatory notes on the libretto of *The Turn of the Screw*..

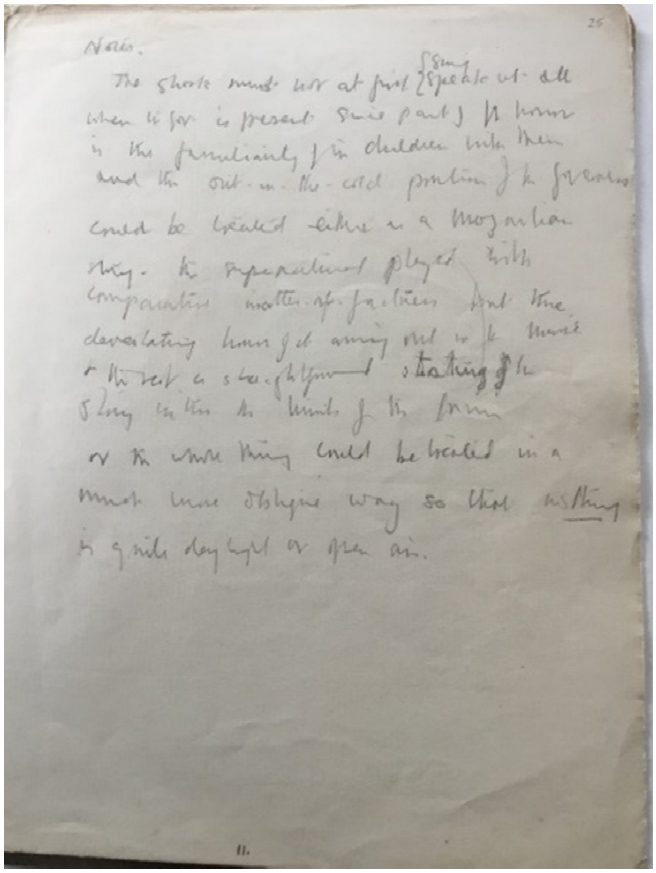


Fig. 3.1: A page from Myfanwy Piper's preparatory work on the libretto (Source: Britten–Pears Library)

In this way, Piper's rough notes already reveal something of her method of working: placing as much emphasis in these early stages on the development of the characters and their portrayal on stage as the structuring (or restructuring) of the plot.

Britten's use of the Prologue to begin the narration of the story is a simplification of James's structure. In early sketches of the opera, the Prologue did not exist. In a letter to Myfanwy Piper, in which Britten discusses the libretto for Act I Scene 3, he adds '[Basil Coleman and I] have been having one major discussion which he will talk to you about. It arose out of a sudden fear that the work is going to be much too short. The first three scenes, incidentally, play only ten minutes.'[23] A postscript to this letter contains the first mention of a Prologue: 'I don't want it to sound as if the proposed alteration comes only because the piece might be too short, because it has been in my head for some little time - - a prologue?... the interview or the ghost-story party? possibly spoken?'[24] This letter was dated 12 April 1954, and by July of that year Piper had responded with two versions of the Prologue, the second of which she describes as 'a rather gay scene from Henry James's

[23] Reed, Cooke and Mitchell (eds), *Letters from a Life Vol 4*, p. 236.
[24] Reed, Cooke and Mitchell (eds), *Letters from a Life Vol 4*, p. 236.

introductory ghost story party.'[25] By 1 August 1954 the Prologue was in place, although still, as this letter from Britten to Piper demonstrates, the subject of discussion and revision:

> The second version of the Prologue has just arrived - &, my dear, I am afraid I prefer the first, as the present idea stands I can't do the 2nd Version Recitative – it needs fuller accompaniment to match its nice lyric quality.[26]

Nicholas Clark argues that the Prologue is most certainly significantly more than a mere time filler or summary of events. He writes: 'It succinctly invites the audience to 'play' the guests in much the same way […] as James draws his reader to examine the facts presented in the Governess's strange but tantalising tale.'[27]

In James, the core narrative is buried within three layers. The overall narrative is the authorial voice of James himself, writing as if present in a country house on Christmas Eve (the 'ghost story party' as described by Britten and Piper):

> The story has held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless, but except the obvious remark that it was gruesome, as on Christmas Eve in an old house a strange tale should essentially be, I remember no comment uttered till somebody happened to note it as the only case he had met in which such a visitation had fallen on a child.[28]

After hearing the ghostly story about a child, another guest at the house, Douglas, mentions: 'it's not the first occurrence of its charming kind that I know to have been concerned with a child',[29] thus providing the second layer of narration. Douglas continues: 'The story's written. It's in a locked drawer […] I could write to my man and enclose the key; he could send down the packet as he finds it.'[30] The manuscript is duly sent for, and the core narrative, in a 'woman's hand' (the Governess) is finally arrived at, distancing itself from the reader threefold.

During the remainder of this chapter I will take a fairly substantial and representative passage from the original text, and then trace how it is transformed both verbally and musically into the operatic medium. The text in question comprises some of James's Chapter IV, all of Chapter V, and part of Chapter VI. The text is reproduced in full in Appendix 4, but here is a brief synopsis:

It is Sunday morning. The Governess, intending to attend church with Mrs Grose, encounters a disconcerting apparition looking in from outside at the dining-room window. She realises it is the same vision that she saw previously on the tower, and she goes out to confront it, only to find he (for it appears to be a male) has disappeared. At the same time, Mrs Grose comes into the dining room, and is alarmed to see the Governess outside the window looking scared. She asks the Governess what has happened to make her frightened, whereupon the Governess tells her about the apparition and says she is too worried to go to church now. She feels she must stay and keep watch in case he

[25] Reed, Cooke and Mitchell (eds), *Letters from a Life Vol 4*, p. 261.
[26] Reed, Cooke and Mitchell (eds), *Letters from a Life Vol 4*, p. 261.
[27] Nicholas Clark, 'James, Britten, Piper and the Literary Supernatural: The Changing 'vision of evil' in *The Turn of the Screw* and *Owen Wingrave'* in Kate Kennedy (ed.) *Literary Britten* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2018) p. 58.
[28] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 3.
[29] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 4.
[30] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, pp. 4 – 5.

comes back. Mrs Grose asks her for a description of the man, which the Governess provides, remarking on his red hair and pale face. Mrs Grose is shocked, and identifies the man as Peter Quint, who was once a manservant at Bly. Mrs Grose then reveals the horrific fact that Quint is dead. Realising that they are dealing with a ghost, the Governess tells Mrs Grose that Quint appears to be on the lookout for Miles. She is puzzled that neither Miles nor Flora has ever mentioned Quint or his death, but Mrs Grose confirms that the children *did* know him, and, in the case of Miles, that Quint had been unnaturally close to the boy, using the phrase 'Quint was much too free'.[31]

Examining Piper's notebooks, an early reference to this scene[32] can be found in her preliminary notes, within a page devoted to Quint's appearances (Fig. 3.2). She writes:

> 2nd appearance of Quint <u>outside dining room window</u>
> {???} every day. She had gone in to collect gloves – new fact. She noticed that she was looking for someone else. She shot out and round to look for him but he had vanished. He was there or not there. Not there or I didn't see him. She repeats the process – looking through the window at Mrs Grose and wonders why Mrs G should be scared – conversation with Mrs G about Quint and what 'Yes Mr Quint's dead' After {???} she knows that Quint is looking for Miles.[33]

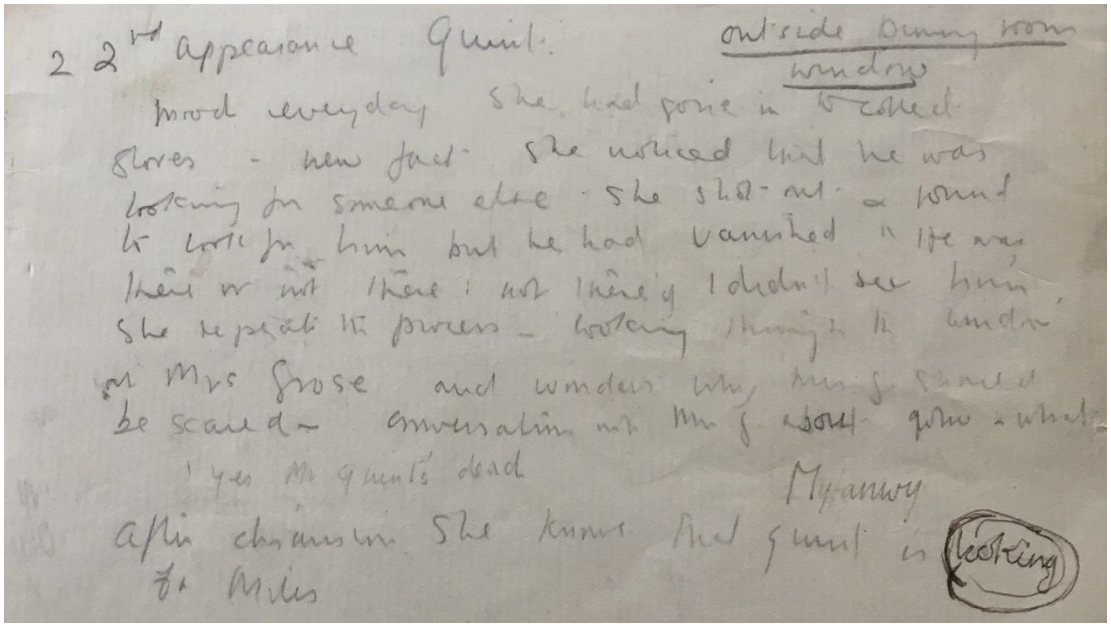


Fig. 3.2: Quint's second appearance as described in Piper's preliminary notes (Source: Britten–Pears Library)

[31] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p.48.

[32] The equivalent section of the opera begins a short way into Act I Scene 5 ('The Window'), at rehearsal figure 35, and extends to a point towards the end of the scene, at rehearsal figure 44.

[33] Piper, preparatory notes on the libretto of *The Turn of the Screw*.

Reading through the illegible words and using a certain amount of extrapolation, it can be seen that Piper seeks to reproduce the general direction of James's original. For example, James offers this detail about the gloves:

> Coming downstairs to meet my colleague in the hall, I remembered a pair of gloves that had required three stitches and that had received them – with a publicity perhaps not edifying – while I sat with the children at their tea, served on Sundays, by exception, in that cold, clean temple of mahogany and brass, the "grown-up" dining room. The gloves had been dropped there, and I turned in to recover them.[34]

It may be noted from my transcription below that Piper's draft of this scene is designated 'Scene III'. Once again, interpreting her handwriting is not easy, although this attempt at the scene is in slightly neater writing than her earlier, rough notes (see extract in Fig. 3.3).

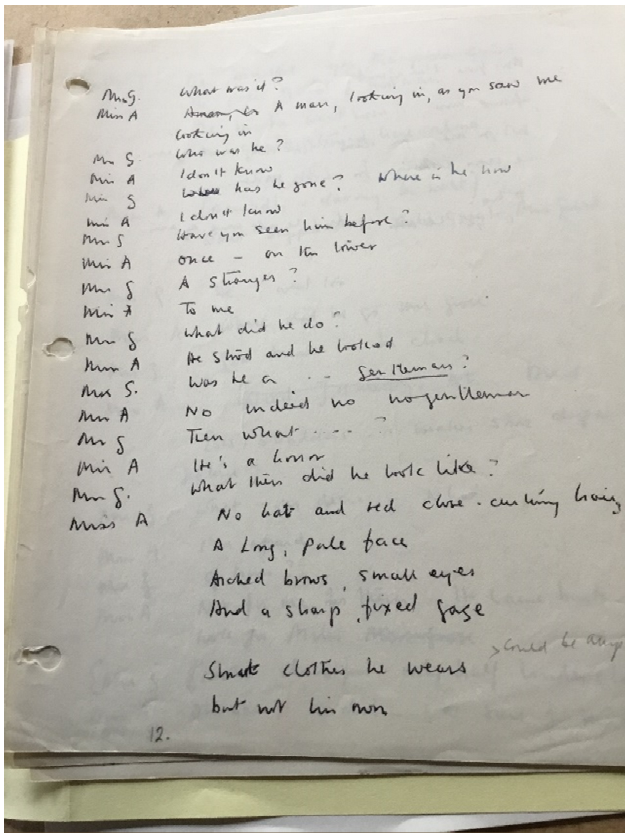


Fig. 3.3 Page of dialogue from Piper's libretto draft (Source: Britten–Pears Library)

Here is the text of the draft:

Scene III

[34] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 37.

The room downstairs with the window.

Orchestra [Flora and Miles come in dressed /to go out/ for church (put down their ~~prayer books~~ and silently play grandmothers steps] *Miles giggles. Saw you. giggles. Miles. Saw you.*[35]

Miss A (off) Flora Miles

F & M We're here

Miss A (appearing) Are you ready

F & M yes Miss A

Exeunt

Miss A (off) Go on dears, I've left my gloves behind

[she comes in again about 16 seconds. Almost instantly Quint appears at the window. Gazes at her and then moves his head to {???}. She pauses and instantly draws a deep loud breath half shiver half surprise stares a little longer and makes out to replace Quint, who vanishes, at the window herself. Mrs Grose comes in, catches a glimpse of her and {???} a little shriek {???} And {???} to meet her as she returns to the room.]

Mrs Grose Oh my dear you look so white

{????} so white and {???} has anything happened

Miss A I have been frightened

Mrs G What was it?

Miss A A man, looking in, as you saw me looking in

Mrs G Who was he?

Miss A I don't know

Mrs G Where has he gone? Where is he now

Miss A I don't know

Mrs G Have you seen him before?

Miss A Once – on the tower

Mrs G A stranger?

Miss A To me

Mrs G What did he do?

Miss A He stood and he looked

Mrs G Was he a …. <u>gentleman?</u>

Miss A No indeed no gentleman

Mrs G Then what…?

Miss A He's a horror

Mrs G What then did he look like?

[35] The italics here indicate a later addition in blue ink. The rest of the draft is in black ink.

Miss A No hat and red close curling hair.
A long, pale face
Arched brows, small eyes
And a sharp fixed gaze

Smart clothes he wears
but not his own

Mrs G The masters yes
Tis Peter Quint, his man
The master went
And Quint stayed here alone

Miss A [pointedly – {???} the wrist]
What happened to Peter Quint Mrs Grose

Mrs G He went too

Miss A Where did he go Mrs Grose

Mrs G God knows – he died

Miss A ~~[Died] o mercy Ah~~. Died

[She shudders – or makes some despairing gesture]

Mrs G What … my dear … what

Miss A I'm afraid

Mrs G Of him?

Mrs A Not for me, for them. He came back to look for Miles ~~Mrs Grose~~

[Mrs G looks doubtful only half understands]

Miss A Oh yes, he did – I'm sure of that
And he'll come again
Tell me – what happened here before I came?

Mrs G Twas not for me to say miss – no indeed. I'd nought to do but see to all the house. But things I saw elsewhere I did not like. No, not when he made free with everyone, with little master Miles – no Mr Quint I did not like your ways – and then with her who should know better, lovely Miss Jessel, so far above him – governess to those pets. True angels, those sweet babes – a lady {???}
But he had ways miss – ways to twist them round his little finger – pretty he liked them.
Miss Jessel she was everything to him {???} then she went away ~~to die~~
To die. She couldn't stay – not then – and then she died
He had it all his way morning and night
But he died too; fell on the ~~slippery~~ icy road
And struck his head and lay there dead till morning.
Good riddance then – dear God, I can't abide such and their dreadful ways

[She bursts into tears]

But then, I had my lambs, and now you've come.

Miss A Why did you not tell their uncle

Mrs G I daren't. He ~~hated~~ never liked complaints
Twas not my place
They were never in my charge
Oh Quint was too clever. What could he <u>not</u> do
No no I'd no right. Indeed I hadn't

[cries again]

At this point the draft breaks off with some crossed-out words: 'Mrs Grose you will help me to protect the children' (see Fig. 3.4).

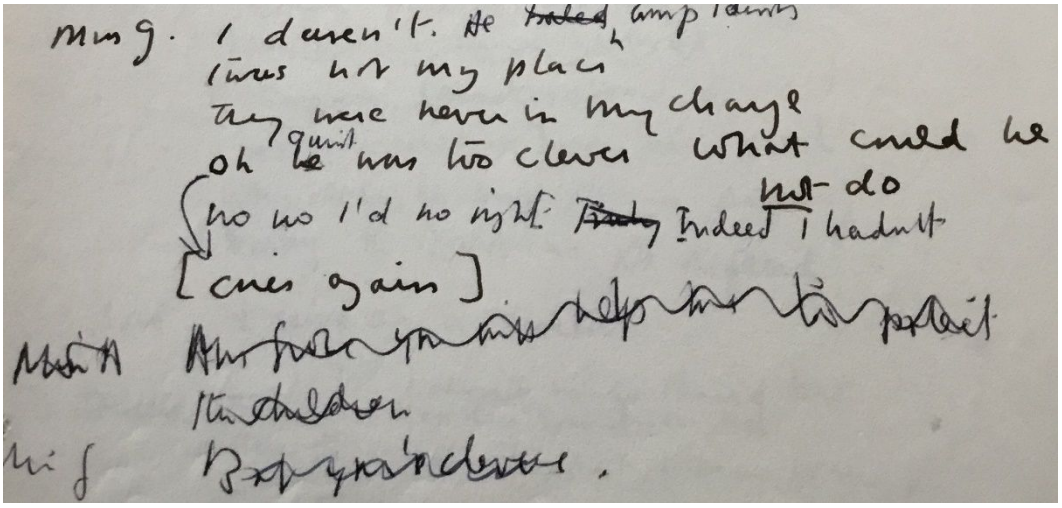


Fig. 3.4 The last page of this scene in Piper's libretto draft (Source: Britten - Pears Library)

It is notable that Piper identifies the Governess as 'Miss A' in this dialogue. It is not clear where this name comes from since the character does not have a name in James's novella, and in *The Innocents* she is called 'Miss Giddens'. It may be speculated that Piper could have originally intended to supply the Governess with a name, and then changed her mind, deciding to follow the lead provided by the book and keep her anonymous, but there is no documentary evidence to support this assumption. More likely is that the designation 'Miss A.' simply refers to the Governess as the protagonist (i.e. character 'A') in light of the fact there is also a character 'B' mentioned in an earlier draft, pointed out by Clark.[36]

Piper's notes are undated, so it is not possible to ascertain how they all fit together sequentially, but one can speculate that at some point the next significant stage was to assemble a reasonably finalised synopsis of the entire opera, in which we find this scene is now designated as 'Scene 5', and 'Miss A' is now 'Governess':

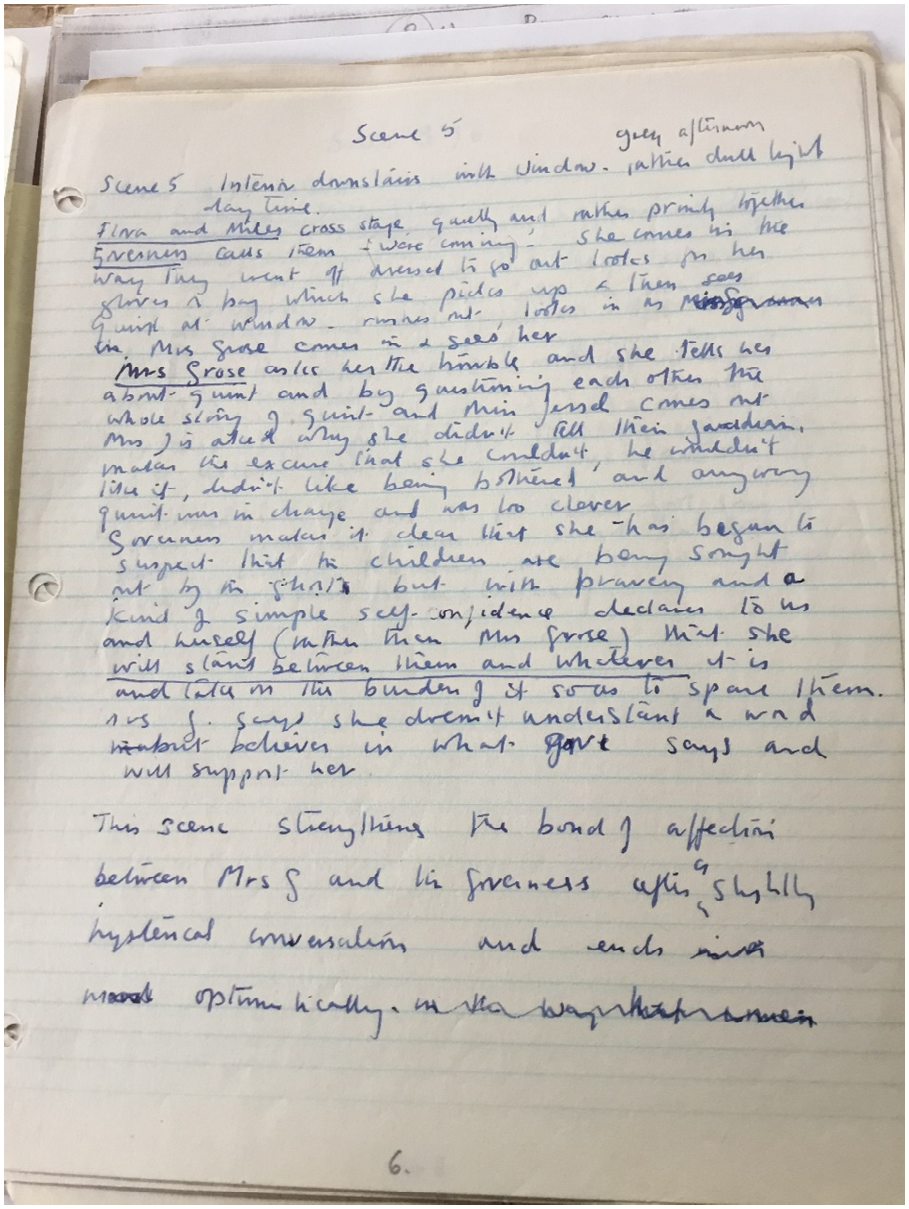
> Interior downstairs with window. In the grey afternoon dull light daytime.
> <u>Flora and Miles</u> cross stage quickly and rather primly together.

[36] Clark, 'James, Britten, Piper and the Literary Supernatural', p. 58.

> Governess calls them. 'We're coming'. She comes in the way they went off dressed to go out. Looks for her gloves and bag which she picks up and then sees Quint at window. Runs out, looks in as Mrs Grose comes in and sees her.
> Mrs Grose asks her the trouble and she tells her about Quint and by questioning each other the whole story of Quint and Miss Jessel comes out. Mrs G is asked why she didn't tell their guardian, makes the excuse that she couldn't, he wouldn't like it, didn't like being bothered and anyway Quint was in charge and was too clever.
> Governess makes it clear that she has begun to suspect that the children are being sought out by the ghosts but with bravery and a kind of simple self confidence declares to us and herself (rather than Mrs Grose) that she will stand between them and whatever it is and take on the burden of it so as to spare them. Mrs G says she doesn't understand a word but believes in what Gov says and will support her.
> This scene strengthens the bond of affection between Mrs G and the Governess after G slightly hysterical conversation and ends optimistically.[37]

This synopsis, although still clearly a working document containing some mistakes and crossings out, is much neater and easier to read (see Fig. 3.5) than the previous rough notes. We may speculate that it was meant for eyes other than Piper's own, and was almost certainly intended to be read by Britten himself. It should be noted that a rejected prologue she had been asked to write for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was in very clear handwriting too, demonstrating that she was perfectly able to write neatly when she needed to.

[37] Myfanwy Piper, synopsis for the libretto of *The Turn of the Screw*. Unpublished document, (Aldeburgh: Britten-Pears Library, 1954).



Scene 5

grey afternoon

Scene 5 Interior downstairs with window. rather dull light
daytime.
Flora and Miles cross stage quietly and rather primly together
Governess calls them + were coming - she comes in the
way they went off dressed to go out - looks for her
gloves + bag which she picks up + then sees
Quint at window - comes out - looks in as
in. Mrs Grose comes in + sees her
Mrs Grose asks her the trouble and she tells her
about Quint and by questioning each other the
whole story of Quint and Miss Jessel comes out
Mrs G is afraid why she didn't tell them Governess
makes the excuse that she couldn't, he wouldn't
like it, didn't like being bothered, and anyway
Quint was in charge and was too clever
Governess makes it clear that she has begun to
suspect that the children are being sought
out by the ghosts but with bravery and a
kind of simple self-confidence declares to us
and herself (rather than Mrs Grose) that she
will stand between them and whatever it is
and take on the burden of it so as to spare them.
Mrs G says she doesn't understand a word
but believes in what Gov says and
will support her.

This scene strengthens the bond of affection
between Mrs G and the Governess after a slightly
hysterical conversation and ends more
optimistically. on the way [illegible]

6.

Fig. 3.5: Piper's Scene 5 synopsis – a reasonably fair copy (Source: Britten-Pears Library)

Comparing what appears to be the next draft of the dialogue between the Governess and Mrs Grose with Piper's first attempt, we find a number of changes. I have italicised phrases which differ in wording or placement from the earlier draft:

Mrs Grose	O my dear! You look so white and queer has anything happened
Gov	I have been frightened
Mrs Grose	What was it
Gov	A man, looking in *at the window* ~~as you saw me looking in~~
Mrs Grose	Who was he?
Gov	*A stranger. A stranger.*

Mrs Grose	*Did you never see him before*
Gov	Once ~~I saw him~~ on the tower ~~that~~ Yes! I saw him
Mrs Grose	What did he do (both times)
Gov	He stood and he looked
Mrs Grose	Was he a ….. gentleman
Gov	No, indeed no … no gentleman
Mrs Grose	*No one from the village*
Governess	*(No) No-one*
Mrs Grose	*Then miss what was/is he*
Governess	~~He was~~ he's a Horror a horror
Mrs Grose	*A horror. O lord. A horror* What (~~then~~ was did) he look like?
Gov	*He had* no hat, and red ~~hair~~ close curling hair and a long pale face. *His [illegible] eyes small, and his gaze was sharp and fixed and strange*
Mrs Grose	*Red? Did you say red miss? What did he wear?*
Governess	Smart clothes but not his own
Mrs Grose	*No indeed they were the master's*.
Gov	*Then do you know him – who is he? Why is he here*
Mrs Grose	*Quint*
Gov	*Quint?*
Mrs Grose	*Peter Quint – the master's valet. When the master went Quint stayed on in charge.*
Gov	*Was he in charge of you? Of the children*
Mrs Grose	*O yes of everything*
Gov	What happened to Peter Quint (Mrs Grose)
Mrs Grose	He went … too
Gov	Where did he go Mrs Grose
Mrs Grose	God knows … he died
Gov	Died!
Mrs Grose	(only half understanding the plain point of all this) What … my dear … what
Gov	I'm afraid
Mrs Grose	Of him?
Gov	Not for me: for them *for the children*. He has come back to look for Miles

Mrs G (looks doubtful) *O yes he did … I'm sure of that … and he'll come again*.

Gov Mrs Grose what happened here before I came

[On the facing page of the notebook, Piper has inserted the following note: 'This speech could be punctuated with Governess echoing such phrases as seemed to her significant: as Made free with Miles']

Mrs Grose *It was* not for me to say Miss. No indeed. *I had only to look after the house.* But things I saw elsewhere I did not like. *When Quint* made free with everyone, with little Master Miles – *Hours they spent together [illegible, crossed out] He made free with her too – (who should have known better)* Lovely Miss Jessel, Governess to those pets, those angels those sweet babies – *and she a lady so far above him too. No Mr Quint: I did not like your ways.* But he had ways miss … ways to twist them round his little finger. *The master twisted him and when he left Quint was master here*~~. Oh he liked them pretty I can tell you.~~ Miss Jessel she was everything to him (you understand me), *oh he liked them pretty I can tell you*. *And then she went away, she couldn't stay with them. Fancy, a governess. Yes, she went away to die [illegible]. He had it all his way, morning and night.*

Governess *What happened to him*

Mrs Grose He died too: fell on an icy road one night and struck his head and lay there dead till morning.
Good riddance then – dear God, I can't abide such and their dreadful ways. (She bursts into tears) But then I had my lambs – and now, *dear miss*, you've come

Governess Why did you not tell your master their uncle

Mrs G I daren't[38] ~~he doesn't~~ he never liked complaints. Twas not my place, they were never in my charge. Quint was too clever, *I feared him, feared what he could do.* No no, I'd no right/business Indeed I hadn't (cries again)

Governess I have heard of wickedness

The next time some of this dialogue appears, in a typed draft libretto, it is almost identical to the handwritten libretto, but in the final libretto it has been cut and altered quite drastically, as these two extracts demonstrate:

Mrs Grose I only had to see to the house. But things I saw elsewhere I did not like. When Quint made free with everyone – with little Master Miles – hours they spent together – He mad [*sic*] free with her too, - with lovely Miss Jessel, governess to those pets, those angels, those innocent babes – and she a lady too, so far above him. But he had ways Miss to twist them round his little finger. Oh he liked them pretty I can tell you, he had it all his way, morning and night. No, Mr Quint, I

[38] In later drafts, this word was changed to 'dursn't', but it is not clear why.

did not like your way. And then she went. She couldn't stay, not then. Yes, she went away to die.[39]

[Typed draft libretto]

Mrs Grose I had only to see to the house. But I saw things elsewhere I did not like. When Quint was free with everyone – with little master Miles –

Governess Miles! [40]

Mrs Grose Hours they spent together.

Governess Miles!

Mrs Grose Yes, Miss, he made free with her too – with lovely Miss Jessel, governess to those pets, those angels, those innocent babes – and she a lady, so far above him. Dear God! Is there no end! But he had ways to twist them round his little finger. He liked them pretty, I can tell you, Miss – and he had his will, morning and night.[41]

[Final libretto version, as set by Britten]

To summarise, it is clear that Piper favoured a five-stage process in which some phases involved an iterative approach resulting in multiple drafts. The first stage was the compiling of preliminary notes on James's text, with an emphasis on character development and an indication of some of the plot restructuring which might need to take place. In stage two, Piper produced a scene-by-scene synopsis that provided a blueprint for the operatic adaptation, and this blueprint underwent several drafts, as did stage three: drafts of the words to be sung by the characters in the opera. All of these stages were handwritten into her private notebooks with only the later, neater ones being shared with Britten. Stage four was a typed version of the libretto intended for Britten to work from, and the fifth stage was the final typed libretto which is virtually identical to the eventual published libretto.

We will now turn our attention to Britten's music, in which tracing a line of succession back to the literary text is less straightforward than making comparisons between the novella and libretto. Although searching for sound cues in a literal sense (as in the birds' chorus earlier in the opera) is possible, it is the musical communication of elements of atmosphere, psychology, character and setting (all, incidentally, elements that are prevalent in film music, where historically they were ultimately derived from the musical practices of opera and melodrama) that analysis can illuminate here.

Peter Evans, the first scholar to examine Britten's output systematically in a single integrated analytical study, indicated a certain Mahlerian quality to the opera's score, stating that Britten

[39] Myfanwy Piper, typed draft libretto of *The Turn of the Screw*. Unpublished document, (Aldeburgh: Britten-Pears Library, 1954).
[40] This is likely to have been Britten's suggestion, both for dramatic effect and to show how important Miles already is to the Governess.
[41] Myfanwy Piper, libretto of *The Turn of the Screw*, Act I Scene 5.

reflected ‘the strange personality racked by a conflict between youthful aspirations and self-consuming irony’,[42] and noting how the music hints

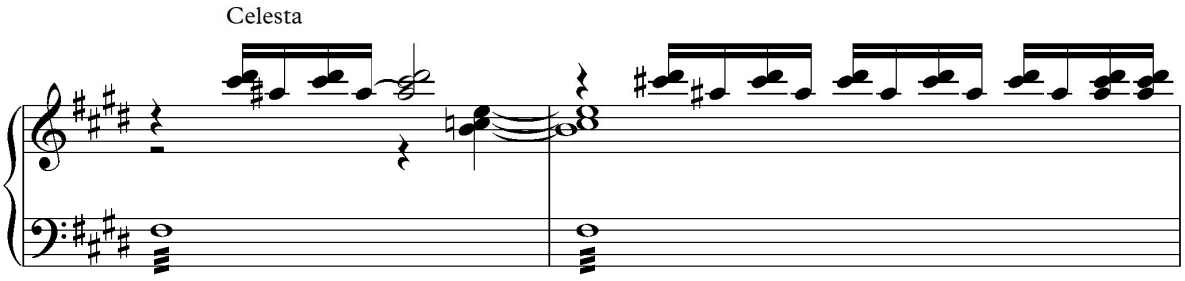
> at the emotional subtleties and undertones which, before and (if decreasingly) after Freud, make their effect chiefly at a subconscious level. Henry James […] was another pioneer in making an imperfectly glimpsed emotional world a subject of his art […] James’s careful depiction of the complacently disenchanted world of the English country house which is revealed none the less, to be undermined by indefinable (and therefore virtually unassailable) powers of evil, demanded for its musical treatment all the ambiguities, of innocence touched with a worldly wisdom, of terror mounting below high spirits, that are of the essence of Mahler’s art.[43]

Near to the start of our case-study passage, James’s text states:

> The day was gray enough, but the afternoon light still lingered, and it enabled me, on crossing the threshold, not only to recognize, on a chair near the wide window, then closed, the articles I wanted, but to become aware of a person on the other side of the window and looking straight in. One step into the room had sufficed; my vision was instantaneous; it was all there. The person looking straight in was the person who had already appeared to me. He appeared thus again with I won’t say greater distinctness, for that was impossible, but with a nearness that represented a forward stride in our intercourse and made me, as I met him, catch my breath and turn cold. He was the same – he was the same, and seen, this time, as he had been seen before, from the waist up, the window, though the dining room was on the ground floor, not going down to the terrace on which he stood. His face was close to the glass, yet the effect of this better view was, strangely, only to show me how intense the former had been. He remained but a few seconds – long enough to convince me he also saw and recognized; but it was as if I had been looking at him for years and had known him always.[44]

James creates an atmosphere of ghostly ambiguity through phrases such as ‘become aware of a person’, ‘appeared thus again with I won’t say greater distinctness, for that was impossible’, and ‘it was as if I had been looking at him for years and had known him always’. Britten achieves a similar ambiguity musically through the dramatic change of timbre from a reasonably conventional chamber orchestra sound to the other-worldly and rather chilling sound of the celesta at the point where Quint appears (Ex. 3.1). The celesta’s timbre, perhaps because of its resemblance to the sound of a wind-up musical box frequently found in nurseries and playrooms, has associations with childhood, and is a common trope in horror-film music such as that for *Rosemary’s Baby* (dir. Roman Polanski, 1968) and *The Ring* (dir. Gore Verbinski, 2002). The ambiguity lies in a childlike, innocent sonority being used in a frightening way.

[42] Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* 2nd edn. (London: Clarendon, 1996), p. 203.
[43] Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, p. 203.
[44] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, pp. 37–8.



Ex. 3.1: **Quint's appearance expressed by the entry of the celesta at rehearsal figure 35**

As an aside, it is worth mentioning Britten's use of a sharp key signature here, which contradicts the flat-dominated key signature in other instances where this material appears (e.g. Act I Scene 8 'At Night'). At this point, it is also indicating the near presence of the children, who have just been singing a passage in E major. However, quite quickly the music comes into focus by presenting melodic material which is a little more clearly defined, although still based on the same 7-note chord cluster (Ex. 3.2):



Ex. 3.2: Celesta melodic material – rehearsal figure 35 +8

A similar effect in James, that of bringing the ambiguity into sharper focus, can be found in the passage 'his face was close to the glass, yet the effect of this better view was, strangely, only to show me how intense the former had been'.[45] Britten's idea of bringing a musical ambiguity into sharper focus suggests a quasi-cinematic effect. This is similar to Aschenbach's first sight of Tadzio in *Death in Venice*: his five-note theme is presented above the other seven pitches of the chromatic scale (representing the hotel guests) but those seven pitches are then removed to allow the theme to shine forth more clearly as Aschenbach becomes captivated by the boy's appearance.[46]

Following the initial vision of Quint, the novella describes how the Governess 'bounded straight out of the door again…as fast as I could rush'.[47] The language is that of rapid movement, reflected in the opera by a more urgent musical motif (Ex. 3.3) accompanying the stage direction 'The Governess runs out and looks through the window'.[48]

[45] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 38.
[46] See Mervyn Cooke, *Britten and the Far East* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), pp. 238 - 239
[47] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 38.
[48] Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, Act I Scene 5 rehearsal figure 36.



Ex. 3.3: The Governess runs out (rehearsal figure 36)

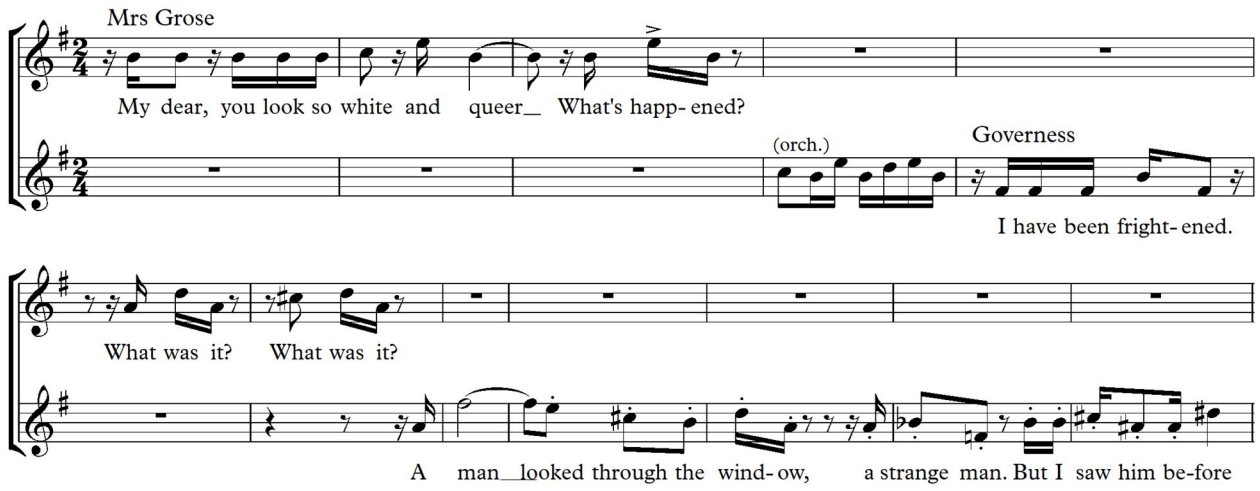
Britten uses the verbal rhythms here ('Who is it, who?') to create the nervously busy effect. It is very possible that he knew the Fritz Lang film *Secret Beyond the Door* (1947), which is generically similar to *The Turn of the Screw*, and in which the composer Miklós Rózsa transforms a 'verbal rhythm ("Why had he gone? Why had he lied?") into a naggingly insistent orchestral ostinato […] underscoring the [character's] voiced-over anxieties'.[49] The parallel is noteworthy because the use of such verbal rhythms is rare in mainstream film scoring. Britten repeats this motif in a number of places, most notably in the timpani part at the conclusion of Act I.

Britten's frenetic musical background extends into the dialogue that follows, mirroring the conversation in the novella at the beginning of Chapter V:

> "What in the name of goodness is the matter--?"
> She was now flushed and out of breath.
> I said nothing till she came quite near. "With me?" I must have made a wonderful face. "Do I show it?"
> "You're as white as a sheet. You look awful."
> I considered; I could meet on this, without scruple, any innocence. My need to respect the bloom of Mrs. Grose's had dropped, without a rustle, from my shoulders, and if I wavered for the instant it was not with what I kept back. I put out my hand to her and she took it; I held her hard a little, liking to feel her close to me. There was a kind of support in the shy heave of her surprise. "You came for me for church, of course, but I can't go."
> "Has anything happened?"
> "Yes. You must know now. Did I look very queer?"
> "Through this window? Dreadful!"[50]

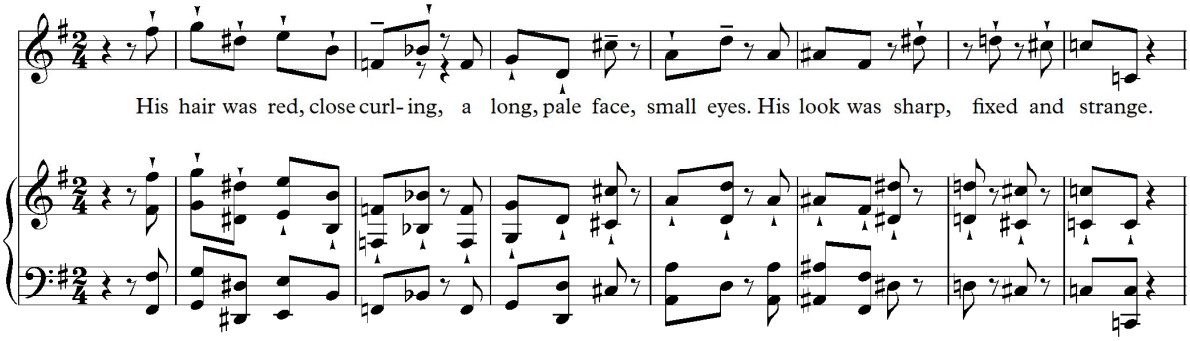
As can be seen in Ex. 3.4, Britten treats this as a kind of 'patter song' approach, incorporating a limited range of notes and featuring a persistent perfect fourth. The perfect fourth is often associated with evil in Britten's operas; a good example is Claggart's aria 'O beauty, handsomeness, goodness' in *Billy Budd*, which makes significant use of the interval. And of course the Theme in *The Turn of the Screw* itself which forms the basis of all the variations, is littered with perfect fourths.

[49] Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, p. 114.
[50] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 40.



Ex. 3.4: Dialogue between Mrs Grose and Governess (rehearsal figure 37)

At the point where the Governess describes Quint's appearance, using words which are recognisably almost direct quotations from James, Britten simplifies the material rhythmically, but retains the insistence on the interval of the fourth. The simplification extends to the accompaniment, which merely follows the vocal line in pizzicato strings octaves (rehearsal figure 38 – see Ex. 3.5). Paring the musical material back to these bare bones throws emphasis on Quint's physical appearance as perceived through the mind of the Governess.



Ex. 3.5: Description of Quint (rehearsal figure 38)

This operatic clarity of expression matches the similarly stark words of the Governess's description in James's story:

> He 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. His eyes are sharp, strange – awfully; but I only know clearly that they're rather small and

> very fixed. His mouth's wide and lips are thin, and except for his little whiskers he's quite clean-shaven.[51]

Immediately following this passage, the harmonic waters are clouded at the mention of Quint's name by Mrs Grose, with the celesta used, once again, as the sonority of the supernatural at 4 bars before rehearsal figure 39 (Ex. 3.6).



Ex. 3.6: Mrs Grose utters the name of Peter Quint.

In the very next bar (rehearsal figure 39), Mrs Grose's despairing cry at the realisation that Quint's evil influence continues beyond the grave (Ex. 3.7) has no exact representation at the equivalent point of the story, only a somewhat understated and matter-of-fact acknowledgment that he is dead in answer to the Governess's questioning what became of him. In the story, it is the Governess's 'almost' shrieking reaction that seems more extreme:

> [Mrs Grose] hung fire so long that I was still more mystified. 'He went too,' she brought out at last.
> 'Went where?'
> Her expression, at this, became extraordinary. 'God knows where! He died.'
> 'Died?' I almost shrieked.
> She seemed fairly to square herself, plant herself more firmly to express the wonder of it. 'Yes. Mr Quint's dead.'[52]



Ex. 3.7: Mrs Grose's despairing cry

As Mrs Grose becomes more and more agitated, the 'Dear God' gesture assumes greater presence and importance as part of the accompanying orchestral texture, sometimes in its original form and sometimes inverted. Once again, the interval of the fourth is especially pervading here (see Ex. 3.8).

[51] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 43.
[52] *Ibid.,*, p. 45.

Immediately following this outburst, the texture thins out, leaving a passage of recitative supported by a simple bass line, a two-part invention started by Mrs Grose and turning into a dialogue with the Governess (Ex. 3.9). After a few bars in which the accompaniment expands to incorporate woodwind chords over a slow moving bass *cantus firmus*, the 'Dear God' motif once again, starting innocuously in the bass, takes hold, this time in eerily quiet string sonorities (Ex. 3.10). Much of the string quartet writing displays the influence of Bartok, as does Quint's celeste music.



Ex. 3.8: proliferation of the 'Dear God' motif



Ex. 3.9: Two-part invention



Ex. 3.10 Eerie string sonorities – a further treatment of the 'Dear God' motif

The passage at Ex. 3.10 is made all the more chilling by Mrs Grose's emphatic repetition of the note B over the shifting harmonies underneath. This is analogous to James's frequent literary device of wrapping an essential simple fragment of narrative within a complicated sentence structure. For example, this sentence is from the first paragraph of Chapter VI (just after Mrs Grose tells the Governess that Quint is dead – and therefore around the same point that the opera has reached in Ex. 3.10):

> There had been this evening, after the revelation that had left me for an hour so prostrate – there had been for either of us [i.e. Mrs Grose and the Governess] no attendance on any service but a little service of tears and vows, of prayers and promises, a climax to the series of mutual challenges and pledges that had straightway ensued on our retreating together to the schoolroom and shutting ourselves up there to have everything out.[53]

At 77 words, this is (typically for James) a long and complex sentence, but its essential meaning is 'about an hour after the shock of finding out that Quint was dead, all Mrs Grose and I could do was retreat to the schoolroom for tears, vows, prayers and promises'. Britten is here not

[53] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 46.

simply rendering into music the story, characters and setting of *The Turn of the Screw*, he is also responding in musical terms to James's literary style.

Gathering together the evidence from previous chapters, coverage of Britten's interaction with film, and the principles we have explored in connection with cinematic opera, we may conclude that an important effect of Britten and Piper's approach to the adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw* makes the opera an ideal candidate for screen treatment. I will continue to explore this specific line of argument in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4. Methodologies: Analysing Filmed Opera

Emilio Audissino advises that musicologists take a cautious approach when attempting to analyse film in connection with film music. He states that the academic study of film is still a comparatively young discipline, dating from the 1960s and 1970s, which initially commonly aligned itself with literature and the humanities, and warns that film studies can be regarded as a 'sort of trump card that anyone in the Humanities can play without a specific background'.[1] He also attributes the comparative lack of meaningful analytical techniques in the field of film-music studies to the arcane nature of musicological analysis, which requires specialised knowledge gained over many years of study:

> Musicologists are sometimes quite harsh when they defend the exactitude of their terminology and the borders of their discipline from amateurs. It may happen […] that when some film scholar ventures into some film-music analysis, musicologists promptly expose her/his inaccuracy.[2]

Conversely, Audissino states, the reverse can also be a danger: 'A superficial knowledge of the film medium can often be detected in musicologists that is comparable to the superficial knowledge of music detected in film scholars'.[3]

There are a number of established methods of analysing film, together with ideological, philosophical and critical theories of how the language of film works, and how that language can be described and evaluated. It is a vast area of study, and far beyond the scope of this thesis. However, some elements of standard practices in the analysis of film might be applied specifically to analysing filmed opera. This section will include a consideration of some basic theories of adaptation, aspects which are particularly relevant to a branch of filmmaking which predominantly involves adapting for the screen an existing (operatic) text. Finally, there will be some thoughts on how musical and textual analysis can be incorporated alongside the analysis of filmed elements, demonstrating how the ideas of Sergei Eisenstein, Roger Manvell and John Huntley, Sergio Miceli and others, whilst partially useful, do not really provide an adequate model, thus resulting in a requirement for building an alternative method of analysis for use when examining film treatments of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*.

Cognitive film theory

Some film theorists, primarily triggered by the work of David Bordwell, have embraced cognitive film theory, which has been gaining influence steadily during the last twenty-five years or so. According to Berys Gaut, cognitive film theory seeks to 'throw light on viewers' emotional responses to films and on how these responses are guided by film genres and narrative patterns.'[4] As such, it is seemingly allied to psychological approaches to film analysis, but there are some elements which are not the same.

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[1] Emilio Audissino, *Film/Music Analysis: A Film Studies Approach* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 6.
[2] *Ibid*. p. 5.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 5.
[4] Berys Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5.

Bordwell regards character and narrative as the principal drivers of viewer response, asserting that 'narrative form motivates cinematic representation […] cause-effect logic and narrative parallelism generate a narrative which projects its action through psychologically defined, goal-oriented characters'.[5] However, it is the emotional and affective response of the viewer to a film that is central to the cognitive model of film theory, and this aspect makes it attractive as a possible approach to analysing filmed opera. In considering this question, Gaut offers four basic cinematic elements which he believes uniquely contribute to the viewer's experiencing an emotional response (something which, in many ways, is manipulated by the director).

Gaut's first element is 'the pictorial nature of cinema'. Comparing a pictorial image with the words of a novel, he declares 'there is a greater immediacy of response, a more visceral impact in cinema than is available in novels.'[6] Gaut gives the example of being startled by a hand unexpectedly being placed on your shoulder from behind, and being interpreted at a sensory level as a potential threat. More broadly, he notes that '[c]inema is capable of inducing the startle response in a wide variety of contexts, from action sequences to horror films […] but novels cannot directly induce the startle response, since there is no sudden sensory input',[7] he says. Furthermore, the 'cognitively higher function of language interpretation'[8] required for understanding a novel results, according to Gaut, in a slower response.

The second element, related to the first, is the illusion of movement in film. Not only the movement of the action in front of a static camera (a particular feature of early cinema), but camera movements as well: panning, tracking and zooming, and movements of a different sort added during the editing process (fast cutting, slow dissolves, etc.) which create a visual rhythm of movement. As Gaut states, the use of movement 'is a strong factor in producing emotions in the audience and [can be] important […] in fostering identification with a character through [for example] the reaction shot.'[9]

Third, the way that time works in a film is a key cognitive element, according to Gaut, who identifies 'four kinds of temporal properties that are important in film'.[10] These are: a) story time (i.e. the total time encompassing the entire story), b) plot time, which is the 'temporal stretches of the story that are shown, in the order that they are shown',[11] c) viewing time (typically, for a feature film, 110–120 minutes), which rarely bears any relation to the length of time covered by the story events (which may be months, years, or even, as in the case of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1969) many centuries), and d) 'work time'. The last of these is closely related to viewing time, and so Gaut offers some explanation as to the distinction, distinguishing the implications for emotional engagement:

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[5] David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice' (1979) in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism* 5th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 716.
[6] Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*, p. 247.
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 247–8.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 247 – 248.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 250.
[10] Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice' , p. 250.
[11] Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*, p. 250.

> Since the filmmakers determine the exact length of time and viewing order of the film, the emotional effects can be far more precisely controlled than with media that do not support works with work time […] Most emotions have a natural temporal profile: if one is afraid […] it takes some time for that fear to dissipate […] in the case of a film, its makers can employ this fact to pile emotion on top of emotion without respite.[12]

The filmic presentation of the passing of time sets filmed opera apart from most other genres of film because not only is the overall work time dictated by the length of the score, the internal tempi of the musical phrases within the score also have an effect on dramatic pace. Both of these elements are outside the control of the director, being the sole domain of the composer (and to a lesser extent the conductor who is in charge of the musicians when recording the music track). The director therefore has to work within time frames externally set rather than following his or her own creative instinct. This is rarely a feature of any genre apart from opera as normally the score is performed in its entirety with no cuts, changes or additions. Even musicals which are written to be through-sung in the theatre (such as *Les Misérables*) tend to be at the mercy of musical tampering (and even sometimes plot alterations) by the director when adapted for film.[13]

Finally, Gaut highlights the role played by music in film. He states: 'it is hard to overstate the importance of music in eliciting emotional reactions in films'.[14] Gaut goes on to give the example of how Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001 – 2003) involves twelve hours of music which is orchestrally scored and employs an almost Wagnerian musical landscape complete with leitmotivs. He concludes that the score is 'absolutely central to the emotional effect of the films.'[15]

In his concluding statements, Gaut underlines that these clear examples of the cognitive model of film theory, whilst in no way exhaustive, show how 'traditional films can emotionally engage their audiences by employing features of the medium', and that it illustrates how

> some of these ways deploy aspects of the medium unique to cinema (for instance, camera movement), but others employ aspects differential to it, so that one should compare and contrast the way films emotionally engage with the ways that works in other media do.[16]

Filmed opera and ideology

Related to general film theory is the examination of the role of ideology in filmmaking, or at least, its role in the interpretation of film. The work of Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni is especially significant, and has considerable relevance when considering filmed opera. Comolli and Narboni edited the magazine *Cahiers du cinéma* during the late 1960s. Based in Paris and writing just after the 1968 student uprisings, their view of Western cinema was unequivocally Marxist, in that it

[12] Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* p. 251.
[13] The original London production of *Les Miserables* opened in 1985, and was adapted for film in 2012, directed by Tom Hooper.
[14] Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*, p. 251.
[15] *Ibid*., p. 251.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 252.

regarded such films as commodities 'produced by labour and exchanged according to the laws of the market […] part of the ideological superstructure determined by the capitalist economic system'.[17]

As far as opera films are concerned, Losey's production of *Don Giovanni* (1979) has been described as a Marxist reading of the work, or, as Jeremy Tamblyn would have it, Brechtian,[18] and Syerberg's *Parsifal* (1982) had a political dimension also:

> Wagner is seen as writing for popular middle-class tastes; and the leitmotifs are likely to catch the listener second or third time round and insert him/her into that onward dynamism, that long statement of grief and of a psychic wound. Syberberg is too thoroughly moulded by that discourse, and the psychic wound joins with a Romantic melancholia, an inability to mourn, itself a questionable sentiment: was Germany bereaved of Hitler that it should be thinking about mourning? From these motifs, what is constructed is a nostalgic requiem – the motif behind each of his films; inscribed in the very idea of playing *Parsifal* over the death mask of the composer.[19]

Shunning a 'scientific' approach to film analysis and criticism by declaring that such an approach is meaningless unless and until a 'rigorous analysis of the proposed field of study, the conditions which make the work necessary […] and the special function it intends to fulfil'[20] has been completed, Comolli and Narboni continued to argue that 'every film is political',[21] more so than, for example, books. They asserted that the very tools of the trade (the camera, film, etc.) are intrinsically interlinked with, and an expression of, prevailing ideology, along with what the tools produce: 'what the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out world of the dominant ideology'.[22]

Comolli and Narboni saw the essential task of the filmmaker as a subversive one, with a measure of success being how far the film manages to disconnect cinema from its ideological function. They describe the majority of films as being

> imbued through and through with the dominant ideology in pure and unadulterated form, [giving] no indication that their makers were even aware of the fact. We are not just talking about so-called 'commercial' films. The majority of films in all categories are the unconscious instruments of the ideology which produces them.[23]

We should remember that Britten's film work in the 1930s, which included, but was not limited to, his GPO documentary scores, was closely aligned with left-wing politics. The GPO Film Unit itself was a particularly clear example of ideology-influenced film-making. There is an echo of this in some of Britten's operatic work (socialist elements in *Peter Grimes*, for example, and the politically pacifist

[17] Braudy and Cohen *Film Theory and Criticism*, p. 726.
[18] Jeremy Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 174.
[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 210 - 211
[20] Jean-Luc Comolli, and Jean Narboni, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism' (1969) in Braudy and Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, p. 752.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 754.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 755.
[23] Comolli and Narboni, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism', p. 755.

content of *Owen Wingrave*, which was said to be partly a response by the composer to the Vietnam war).

Tambling, writing specifically on the subject of ideology in filmed opera, commented:

> Film might act as a challenging contrast to opera: the work of art be relativized by mechanical reproduction: but it becomes more evident that these cultural changes do not exist in isolation: they are determined by the interests and ideology of a society, and it is evident, at present, that the government […] will [in 1987] have opera stay as it is.[24]

Tambling went on to point out that, in 1983 under a Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher, approximately fifteen percent of all government spending on the arts went to Covent Garden (both opera and ballet productions) and English National Opera. Although this sounds generous, the actual amount for the arts (£92 million) was only 0.3 percent of all public expenditure. As Tambling puts it, 'in "culturalist" terms, there is nothing here for the government to be proud of […] quite the reverse.'[25] Tambling considered that this lack of government subsidy resulted in opera companies haggling for sponsorship money from private companies, thus ensuring that

> the reign of the well-known and safe is perpetuated, that the links between culture and the capitalist State are affirmed by making the cultural products overtly advertise the interests of the State, and that only the establishment companies get the sponsorship.[26]

To encapsulate his rationale for asserting the ideological importance of filmed opera, Tambling concluded:

> Cultural activities are of course, political: as 'culturalism' is in its naturalising of ruling-class values and making them into the whole middle-class consensus. Perhaps […] the sense that there are differences within operas, that they were not all produced in one way and with one aim, whatever homogenising appropriation they have received, and that even the property of that culture might be freed from its present placing, and be seen to be capable of reaccentuation, makes the extension of opera to film possible and even necessary.[27]

Reviewing methodology for the analysis of filmed opera

One of the earliest attempts at audio-visual analysis dates from 1942, when the director Sergei Eisenstein presented a graphic analysis of a sequence from his film *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) in his book *The Film Sense*.[28] This analysis is quite detailed, dealing with the 'Dawn of Anxious Waiting' sequence before the climactic 'Battle on the Ice', in both of which Prokofiev's score features prominently. In Eisenstein's analysis, the feeling of tension reflecting the soldiers' anticipation of likely

[24] Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film*, p. 9.
[25] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[26] *Ibid*., pp. 9 – 10.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[28] Sergei Eisenstein (ed. and tr. Jay Leyda), *The Film Sense*, rev. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

death and defeat is represented by what the director calls ‘audiovisual correspondences’. Eisenstein demonstrates this in his book by a diagram showing how frames from the film align with musical motifs and phrases. Alongside this are diagrammatic representations of visual elements (supported by both photographic stills and pictorial diagrams for each shot) and even a graphic illustration of alleged eye movements on the part of a spectator (Fig. 4.1).

Eisenstein’s diagram has been discussed at length by film scholars. Rick Altman, for example, makes the point that Eisenstein, in his text, discusses Prokofiev’s music before moving on to deal with the images, thus giving priority to the musical content. Of necessity, Eisenstein keeps them as separate entities in the diagram. However, the screenshots are placed at the top of the diagram. Altman concludes that

> when vertical correspondences are configured in the composite diagram occupying the lower half of the double-page figure, it is the images that receive priority. The terminology used and the divisions created within Eisenstein’s graph are thus systematically image-based.[29]

It is certainly true that the pictorial elements dominate simply because there are more of them (three of the rows are pictorial), but the musical information is at least embedded within the diagram as rows two and three. If Altman is claiming a hierarchy, as he appears to be, music is not too far down the pecking order; it is primarily a film being discussed, after all, and like it or not, the visual aspect is the dominant one for most viewers of mainstream cinema.

Mervyn Cooke is critical of Eisenstein’s diagram, describing it as ‘neat but contrived’, and saying that it ‘appears fundamentally flawed by assumptions of a direct equivalence between musical and visual rhythm’.[30] For example, he points out that the diagram implies that the viewer will look at the two flags in Shot IV in turn, apparently in direct synchronization with the slow repeated notes in the music, something which in practice is not likely to happen. Tim Smith, using a scientific approach, tested out this correlation between music and image by mapping viewer attention to the film utilising eye-tracking technology.[31] In order to do so it was necessary for him to add extra content of his own to the diagram (see Fig. 4.2).

[29] Rick Altman, 'Visual Representation of Film Sound as an Analytical Tool' in David Neumeyer (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 77.

[30] Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, p. 350.
[31] Tim Smith, ‘Audiovisual correspondences in Sergei Eisenstein’s Alexander Nevsky: a case study in viewer attention’ in Paul Taberham and Ted Nannicelli, *Cognitive Media Theory* (New York: Routledge,2014), pp. 85 – 105.

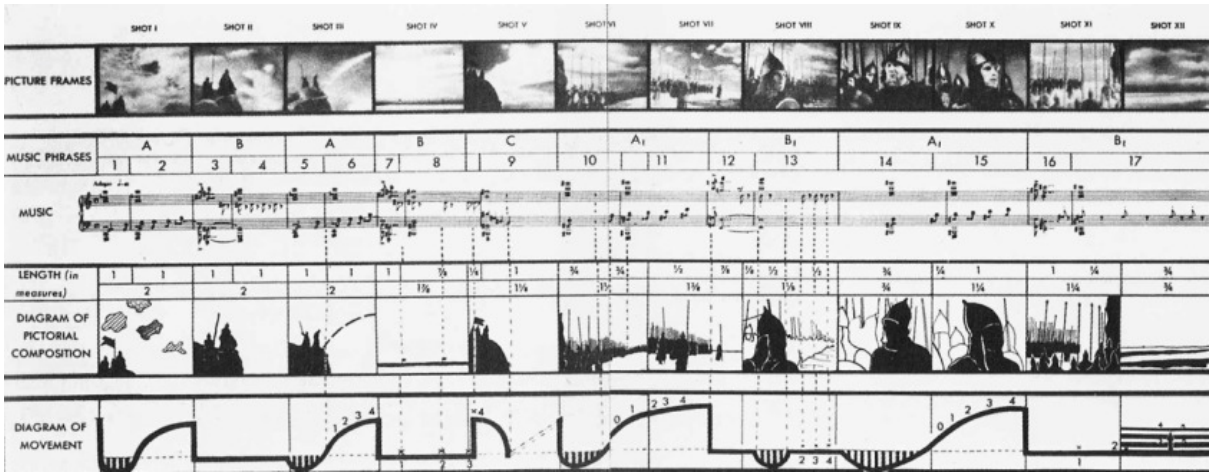


Fig. 4.1: Sergei Eisenstein's audio-visual diagram for the 'Dawn of Anxious Waiting' sequence from *Alexander Nevsky*

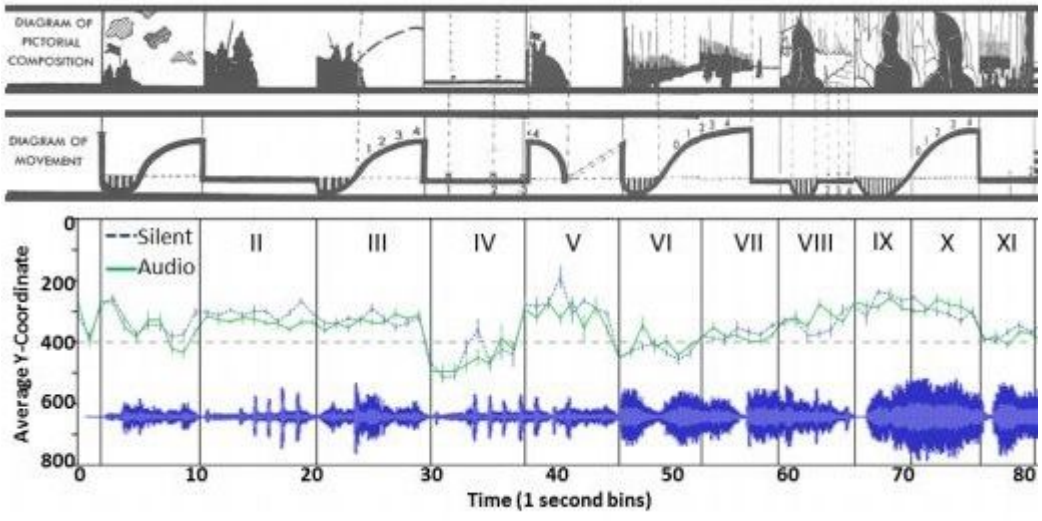


Fig.4.2: Eisenstein's diagram with eye-mapping added (Tim Smith)

Smith concludes:

> This analysis of eye movement behavior during the sequence […] has confirmed some of Eisenstein's predicted correspondences between movement of the musical score and movement of viewer gaze across the image. By formalizing Eisenstein's predictions made over 60 years ago as hypotheses testable using modern empirical methods (for example, eye-tracking), we have finally been able to confirm some of Eisenstein's intuitions and to provide empirical evidence that some filmmakers do indeed have the "uncanny facility to have your brain 'watch and note' your [own] eyes' automatic responses."[32]

However, Smith sounds a note of caution that has to do with the musical content:

> We cannot rule out the possibility that, by adding complimentary [*sic*] musical transitions, Prokofiev has vertically cued visual attention to covertly shift away from fixation, thereby influencing the perception of each shot. Such covert shifts are not measurable by eye-tracking and would require follow-on behavioural measures.[33]

Although Eisenstein's analysis (or at least his presentation of the information in tabular form) dates from the early 1940s, most subsequent attempts to analyse music and film alongside each other adopt a similar model. For example, Roger Manvell and John Huntley presented an analysis of music from the 1945 film of *Henry V* (directed by and starring Laurence Olivier, and which itself was influenced by *Alexander Nevsky* both visually and in certain aspects of its score by William Walton), as a chart which sets out to analyse how music supports the scene showing the charge of the French soldiers at Agincourt.[34] In Manvell and Huntley's chart, the score runs along the bottom of the page, above which, from top to bottom, are lines giving screen shots, a description of the action, dialogue (a field which remains empty, since this is an all-action sequence), and effects (i.e. sound effects, such as the sound of horses' hooves). A detail from this chart is given at Fig. 4.3.

[32] Tim Smith, 'Audiovisual correspondences in Sergei Eisenstein's Alexander Nevsky', p. 101.
[33] *Ibid*.,p.101.
[34] Roger Manvell and John Huntley, *The Technique of Film Music*, (London: Focal Press, 1957), pp. 80 – 91.

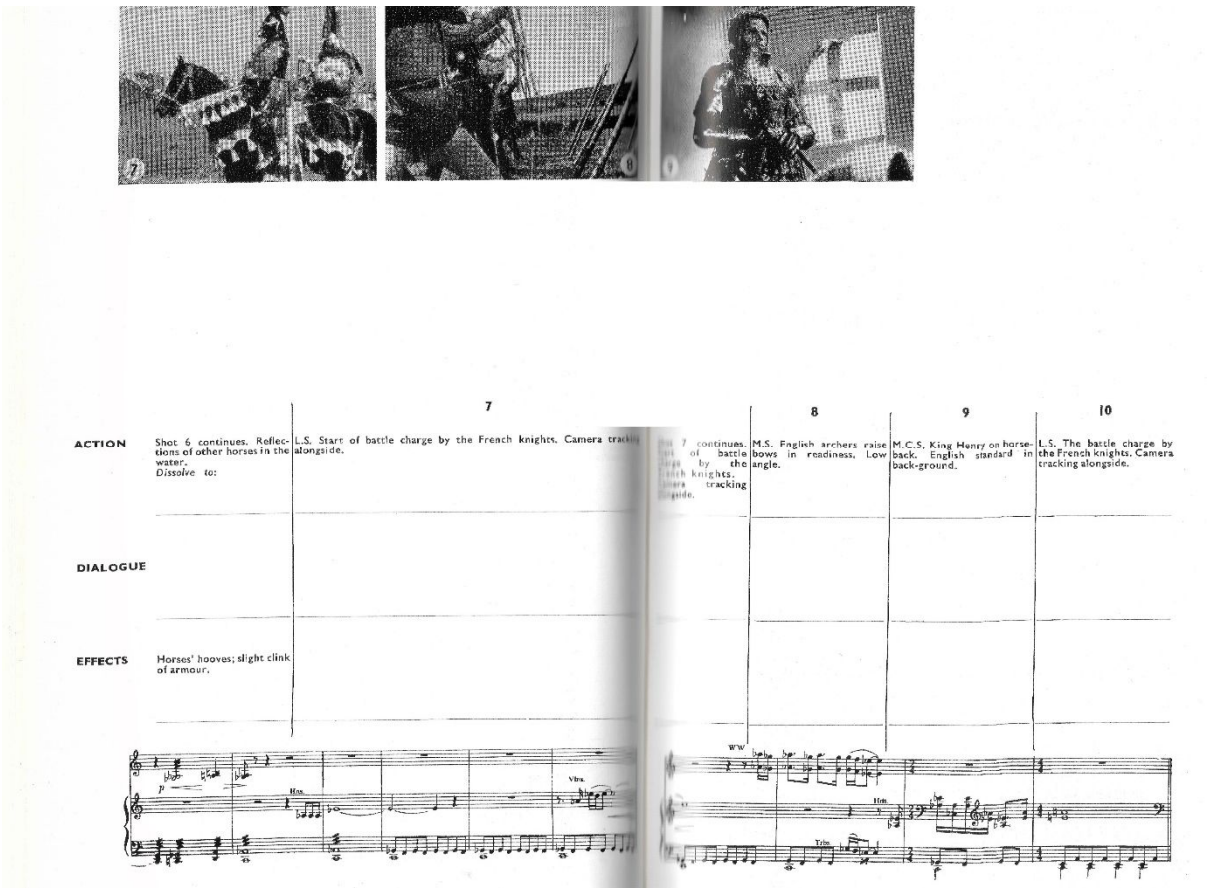


Fig. 4.3: A detail from Manvell and Huntley's chart from *Henry V*

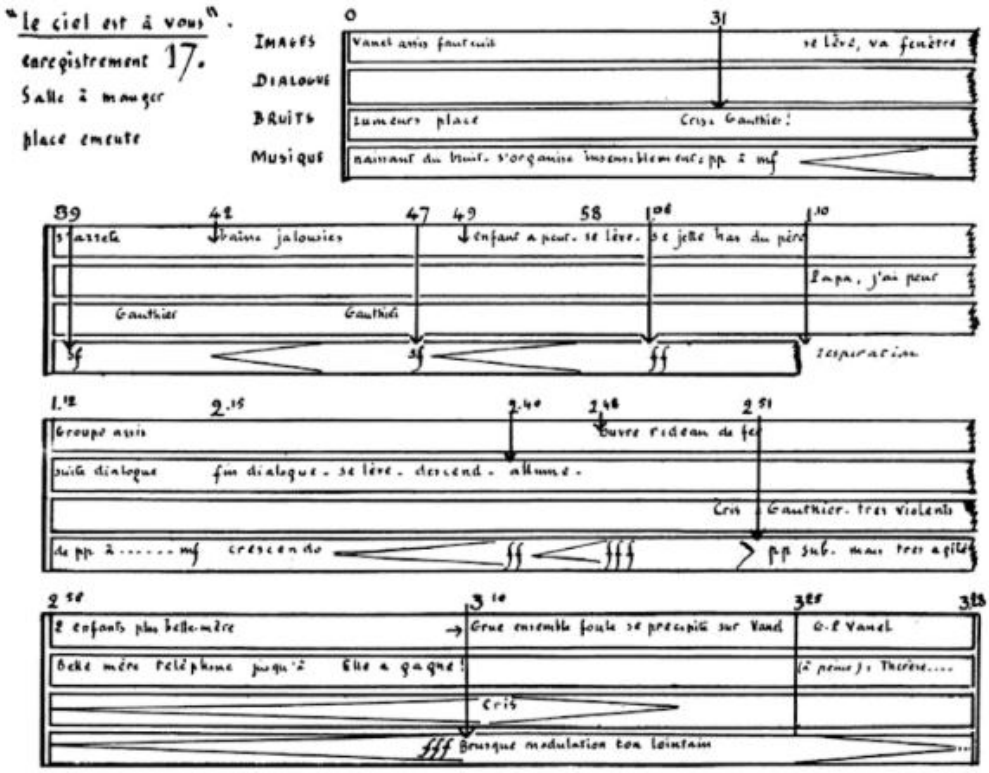


Fig. 4.4: Pierre Schaeffer's diagram of music from *Le Ciel est à Vous*

Altman praises Manvell and Huntley's approach to charting film music in his assessment of their analysis of music for a different film, *Odd Man Out* (dir. Carol Reed, 1947). He describes the approach as giving enough information to allow the reader to 'easily follow the film – not just as a narrative, but as a multifarious text featuring complex sound-to-sound and sound-to-image correspondences.'[35] Altman had earlier in his chapter criticised a lack of precision in Pierre Schaeffer's diagrammatic analysis of music from *Le Ciel est à vous* (dir. Jean Gremillion, 1944) by saying it was 'not a record of careful viewing and listening, but a reproduction of Gremillion's own outline'[36] produced before the sound recording was even mixed. The diagram (Fig. 4.4) does indeed appear to contain a minimal amount of representation of the musical and visual material.

Mark Brownrigg makes an attempt, albeit only partially successful, at analysing John Barry's music for *Dances With Wolves* (dir. Kevin Costner, 1990) using such a tabular layout (Fig. 4.5).[37] The table lists a range of parameters such as timing and narrative, together with a number of genre paradigms, without directly quoting from the score or including visual images. This is an adequate model for the purposes of Brownrigg's thesis, examining as it does how film music can reflect a number of separate generic types (Western, Melodrama, War Film, Horror) within a single cinematic genre; this is a kind of musical intertextuality. Its weakness lies in that it makes questionable assumptions about the musical characteristics of the numerous genres. Even if adjustments in descriptions were applied to address this weakness, this is not an analysis model which can be easily applied in other contexts.

Timing	Narrative Synopsis	Western Paradigm	Melodrama Paradigm	War Film Paradigm	Horror/Action
0.00.00	Orion Pictures logo				Silence
0.00.26	Kevin Costner's title card.	Over an expansive E flat bass pedal, a nostalgic solo trumpet plays an arpeggiated melody, soon harmonised by violins backed with harp. This is the sound world of Aaron Copland, sparse yet colourful orchestration, a slight modernist edge, and a simple, direct melody over. A French horn echoes the closing phrase of the trumpet.			
0.01.07	Over title cards, music prepares us for the image opening up on the Medical tent of a war hospital, John Dunbar awaiting amputation of his leg.			Over pedal bass, a snare drum sounds a martial rhythm. The solo trumpet begins a metamorphosis into a bugle call.	
0.01.13	Dunbar's POV of his bloody leg, doctors bathed in blood.				Horror cue: E flat Minor. Quietly discordant string chords, and a move to an uncomfortably high trumpet tessitura type War as Horror.
0.01.53	Dunbar struggles to sit up and look at war wounded around him.			E flat minor, but dissonant strings replaced with gentle harmony: elegiac mode. Soft strings play, solo trumpet now a bugle call, snare drums return.	

Fig. 4.5: Extract from Brownrigg's analysis of *Dances with Wolves*

[35] Altman, 'Visual Representation of Film Sound as an Analytical Tool' , pp. 79 - 82.
[36] I*bid*, p. 77.
[37] Mark Brownrigg, (2003) 'Film Music and Film Genre', PhD thesis, University of Stirling, pp.251 – 279.

Sergio Miceli provides an analysis of the use of Ennio Morricone's score in the final gunfight scene of *For A Few Dollars More* (dir. Sergio Leone, 1965).[38] This is a relatively unusual example in that Miceli was a close personal friend of Morricone's; they taught university seminars on film music together, and it may be assumed that his analytical approach was sanctioned and indeed encouraged by the composer. There is a specific purpose behind this particular analysis in that it seeks to demonstrate the various levels (e.g. 'mediated level') at which music operates in film, as argued in the text of his essay. As an example of what he calls a mediated level, Miceli considers that Morricone's music notably provides 'an essential dramaturgical, or narrative, element, starting from musical micro-elements that can be identified with characters'.[39] For instance, he mentions the flute, which is associated with the character Il Monco. A tabular layout is used (see extract in Fig. 4.6), but does not include screen shots or examples in musical notation, although music examples elsewhere in Miceli's essay are cross-referenced in the table.

Fiona Ford eschews any hint of Eisenstein's tabular musical/pictorial model in her analysis of song sources in the animated film *Happy Feet* (dir. George Miller, Warren Coleman, Judy Morris, 2006).[40] This film uses existing pop songs 'mashed up' and synchronising with the on-screen antics, and so Ford encodes each song with a 'Song Code' (Ed Fletcher and Melle Mel's 'The Message' becomes 'B1', 'No Scrubs' by Kevin Briggs, Kandi Burruss and Tameka Cottle becomes 'B2', and so on), then matches the Song Code with the relevant extract from the film's screenplay (see Fig. 4.7). Some of the unnamed characters also have codes (e.g. 'FP#3' = 'Female Penguin number 3'). This type of approach is perfectly appropriate for the kind of analytical outcome Ford requires, having the advantage of simplicity, clarity, and enough precision for the task in hand. However, in order to make sense, not only of the mash-up but also how it is used in the film, the reader would need to be familiar with the songs in their original form, and the film extract itself. These missing elements Ford does not supply.

[38] Sergio Miceli, 'Leone, Morricone and the Italian Way to Revisionist Westerns', in Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp.282 – 293.
[39] *Ibid*., p.275.
[40] Fiona Ford, 'Mash-ups and Mating Penguins in Happy Feet', in Cooke and Ford, *Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, p. 151.

No.	Running Time	Event	Visuals	Dialogue Sounds Music	Notes
01		<u>Exterior Day</u> Monco and Colonel Mortimer kill the members of El Indio's gang.			**Background Event 5**
02		<u>Interior Day</u> El Indio and the last member of his gang, Groggy (Luigi Pistilli), speak about their enemies. El Indio becomes pensive as he pulls the chiming pocket watch towards himself. El Indio opens the pocket watch. Groggy asks for the meaning of the object. El Indio does not answer but…	Camera tracks in on the Extreme Close Up of El Indio. Detail shot of the pocket watch, then gradually out of focus.	Sound effect of a metal object pulled on the table: explicit sync point. Chimes*: internal level – explicit sync point* at the opening of the watch. Chimes ostinato (repeated five times); then:	**Background Event 4** There are no short-cuts or compressions in the time dimension. Story time corresponds to film time. This certainty is essentially established by the music.
03		… a flashback begins. El Indio recalls the whole episode of the killing of the man, and the rape and suicide of the woman. Red flash of light and end of the flashback.		*Mediated level* Special acoustic effect: string harmonics mixed electronically with fragments of the chimes motif.	**Background event 3**

Fig. 4.6: Analysis of gunfight scene from *For A Few Dollars More* (Miceli)

		Song Code
SEYMOUR:	*Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge*	B1
FP#3:	*I don't want no scrub*	B2
SEYMOUR & MP CHORUS:	*I'm trying not to lose my head / G-L-O-R-I-A, Glo-ri-a / It's like a jungle sometimes* *It makes me wonder* *How I keep from going under*	B1 JP3
GLORIA & MP CHORUS:	*Midnight creeps so slowly* *Into hearts of those / Glo-ri-a* *Who need more than they get* *Daylight deals a bad hand to a penguin /* *G-L-O-R-I-A, G-L-O-R-I-A /* *Who has laid too many bets / Gloria*	B3 / JP3

Fig. 4.7: Analysis of song mash-up in *Happy Feet* (Fiona Ford)

A final example is an analysis of a section from a James Bond film, compiled by David Kershaw (see Fig. 4.8). Although detailed and clearly the product of much forensic teasing out of the numerous elements, it is in many ways misleading and unhelpful, due to some incorrect terminology and false attribution of a motif to the title song instead of an allusion to the 'Bond' theme.[41] Although each part of the content of the soundtrack is pulled out of the overall texture of sound and meticulously notated (even down to precise notation of spoken rhythms in the dialogue), there is little sense that this notation adds very much to our understanding of how the sounds interact, which is presumably the author's intention. The principle of indicating diegetic/nondiegetic sound elements at the bottom of the chart (labelled intrinsic/extrinsic) is a good one, but the interpretations he gives by using those terms are generally unconvincing and lacking in useful detail. Furthermore, there seems little point in notating speech rhythms since these are merely the actor's natural voice and not something that has been pre-composed rhythmically, and there are descriptions of the action, but they are not precise enough temporally to provide a true correlation with the sonic elements. Here is certainly a case where screenshots would be beneficial to give clarity.

Most of the above examples have merits, and they go some way towards fulfilling the purposes for which they were originally designed. Each analyst has found their own individual method which they feel works (albeit in some cases in a rather imprecise way) in the context of a particular

[41] David Kershaw, 'Film and Television Music', in Stephen Banfield (ed.), *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain, Vol 6: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 125 – 144.

film or particular analytical approach. In some cases it is doubtful whether they really provide anything substantially more than slightly heightened descriptions of film and music. The purpose of such graphic analyses is not always clear: the implications of the charts are not always integrated with a sustained argument or critical discussion, giving the sense that the illustrative material has sometimes been included gratuitously.

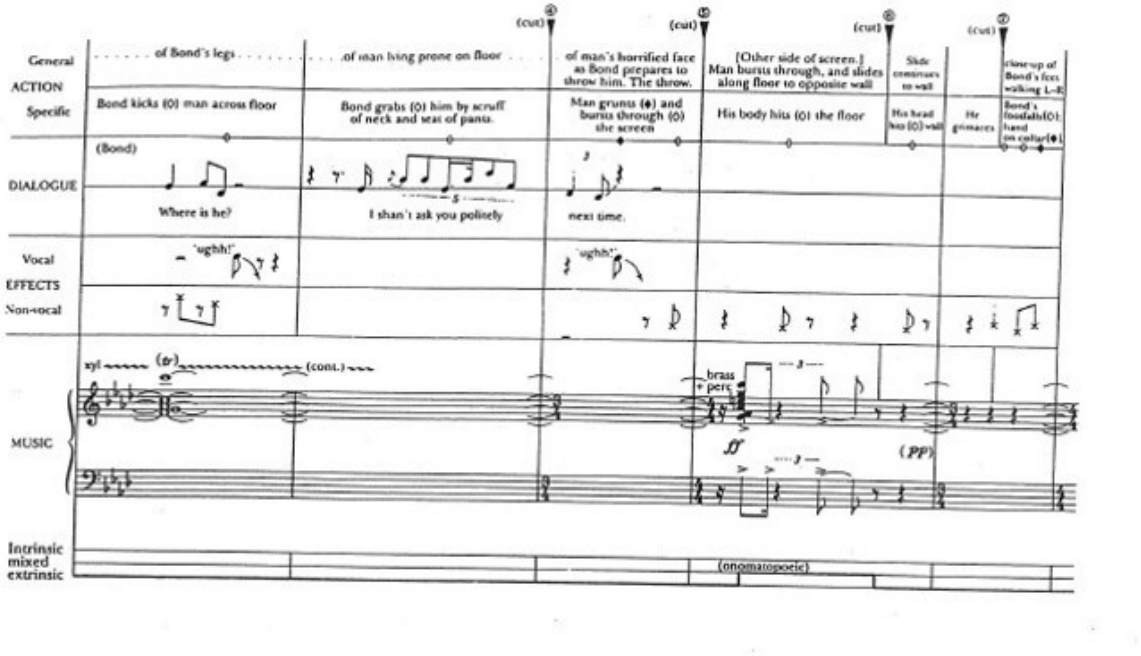


Fig. 4.8: Analysis of extract from a James Bond soundtrack (Kershaw)

A film-studies scholar, not a musicologist, has proposed a more meaningful way of analysing film 'in which particular attention is placed on the music as to its interaction with the other components'.[42] Emilio Audissino's adoption of neoformalism as a method of studying film music, he claims, would seem to address the problem of finding a method which can act as a template for analysis of many types of films and their musical content. Neoformalism as a method of film criticism is an attempt to focus less on interpretation, and more towards an empirical analysis of film. Thompson wrote: 'Neoformalism does not do "readings" of films. For one thing, films are not written texts and do not need to be read. For another, "reading" had come to equal "interpretation" and […] for the neoformalist, interpretation is only one part of the analysis'.[43]

Audissino gives examples of neoformalist analysis that he has performed on films, covering somewhat general subjects such as the use of songs, title music and opening credits, and music used

[42] Audissino, *Film/Music Analysis*, pp. v – vi.
[43] Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 34.

to connect emotions in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (dir. Jacques Demy, 1964). The film is a through-composed musical (with music by Michel Legrand), in which even the most mundane of dialogue is sung by the characters, and which features (in Audissino's words) 'set pieces and *recitativi*'[44] which brings it close to opera in genre. For this reason some short extracts will serve to illustrate this style of film-music analysis, which is devoid of any diagramming, score examples or screenshots (apart from two very small images of snow and rain), and which contains musical descriptions that are sometimes subjective and even naïve. This is perhaps hardly surprising since Audissino, somewhat defensively (as shown by the quotation at the beginning of this chapter), makes no claims to have any kind of expertise as a musicologist. He writes:

> The film opens with a high-angle view on the Cherbourg harbour and then tilts down and stops perpendicularly to a street nearby […] Over this image the main theme is introduced in an instrumental version – what later is revealed to be the 'Love Theme'. The music is in minor mode and played melancholically by the woodwinds and then reprised by violins backed by a dreamy arpeggio of the celeste.[45]
>
> The music in these moments is nostalgic but also a bit hardened by resentment; it is played not by strings but by brass in a more jazzy style, telling of a more disenchanted and more mature attitude that has taken the place of the youthful romanticism.[46]
>
> The music gets more and more dramatic, and even desperate, speaking of a sentimental laceration that will probably never get mended, and tellingly the film closes on a minor chord, the exact contrary of a happy ending. The macro-configuration of the music (minor mode and dramatic orchestral and choral writing) coupled with the micro-configuration of the visuals (sad and nostalgic glances, awkward detachment, Christmas time, coldness, and snow) but also the fact that, at this moment in the film, the appearance of the 'Love Theme' is like a powerful and multi-layered recapitulation of the whole love story.[47]

There is a valid argument that an apparently superficial description of musical events, especially when in emotive terms, is useful for readers who are not musicians, and therefore, rather than a scholarly theory being put into practice, Audissino's adoption of neoformalism could be thought of as a perpetuation of a long-established way of writing about music for a non-specialist readership, and which bypasses the need for technical expertise. Nonetheless, despite the musicological shortcomings, there are some attractions in using neoformalism as a possible model for analysis; it allows the film to 'speak' its meaning plainly, unadorned with undue interpretation and the pursuit of deeper aspects which may say more about the personality of the analyst than the intentions of the filmmaker.

It must be said that devising a 'one size fits all' method of analysing film music and film together continues to be problematic, particularly within the field of filmed opera where the starting

[44] Audissino, *Film/Music Analysis*, p. 181.
[45] *Ibid*., pp. 181 – 182.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[47] *Ibid*., p. 185.

point is not a traditional screenplay-driven combination of moving images and soundtrack, but a pre-composed operatic text. Evidence from the above examples would suggest that the method most likely to achieve clarity of analysis will be one that is customised for each individual project, and which draws freely upon previous methods. In Chapters 5 and 6, this flexible approach is the one I adopt, selecting appropriate elements from some, if not all, the methods discussed above, but mostly favouring a combination of neoformalist-style descriptive analysis with the use of screenshots and score extracts.

Filmed Opera and Musicals: Theatricality and (Pseudo)realism

When considering approaches to filming stage works, particularly opera, we can see that there are distinct differences between stylised theatricality and 'realism'. Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffman*, was subtitled 'opera fantastique', a subtitle which reflects the non-realistic alternative realities of tales utilised, such as *The Sandman*. In filming the work in 1951, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (working together as joint directors) brought to life what Citron calls its 'non sequiturs of dream and imagination'[48] by fashioning an artistic blend of realism and fantasy. In common with almost all opera films and film musicals, *The Tales of Hoffman*'s soundtrack was completely pre-recorded, there being no spoken dialogue in the film, which allowed a filming approach similar, paradoxically, to creating a silent film. It is likely that the absence of the paraphernalia of sound recording (microphones, booms, etc.) encouraged greater experimentation, innovation, and improvisation, and that this took the film into new realms of fantasy. However, there is an inherent theatricality in the film, giving an initial illusion that the viewer is watching a staged performance. For example, there is a programme book which is leafed through before each 'act' by a gloved hand, identifying cast members and indicating titles of acts. Citron reads into this theatricality a conscious decision by the directors to 'question the so-called realism of cinema and suggest that it may be a sham'.[49] Expanding on this view, she continues:

> Theatricalism in cinema provides a means of highlighting cinema as a system of representation rather than a naturalistic rendering of the world. This helps create irony and a desirable distance between spectator and work.[50]

The Operavision Project, which aims to bring the art form to people unfamiliar with opera through live streaming, commented perceptively:

> Far from substituting for the operatic experience, opera-based films provide a different, complementary take on the operatic repertoire: they become a genre of its own […] *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) by Powell and Pressburger take the viewer to a phantasmagorical world filled with technicolor animated dolls, courtesans and mad scientists.[51]

[48] Citron, *Opera on Screen*, p. 113.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 120.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 120.
[51] Operavision website https://operavision.eu/en/library/stories/opera-and-cinema (accessed 9 June 2019).

Regardless of the reason for Powell and Pressburger's directorial decisions, there is no doubt that the use of a theatrical background provides much scope for exploring the many non-realistic aspects of the opera, and their work is said to have influenced Martin Scorsese; an influence which, according to Cooke, can be seen in films as diverse as *Raging Bull* (1980) and *Taxi Driver* (1976).[52] This is in contrast with the approaches often taken by directors of films of musicals which have been adapted from stage versions. The filmed versions of *Oklahoma!* (dir. Fred Zinneman, 1955) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (dir. Norman Jewison, 1971) both make extensive use of location filming, realistic sets, and large numbers of extras to give a feeling of scale. However, Cooke is critical of some of the productions of this era of Hollywood film musicals, describing the acting and singing styles in certain films as 'wooden and characterless'[53] and paraphrasing Gerald Mast by saying 'in all but *Oklahoma!* the camera does not for a single instant depart from the singer, throwing emphasis on the song as song performance rather than plausible extension of character'.[54] Although this criticism has some merit, by the time *West Side Story* and *The Sound of Music* were filmed (both directed by Robert Wise, in 1961 and 1965 respectively), emphasis had generally returned to the story, and a more naturalistic approach to characterisation (as far as this is possible in a musical), with *The Sound of Music* in particular making spectacular use of location shooting. In opera films, too, the use of location shooting disrupts the conventional theatricality of opera by allowing the viewer to see realistically rendered environments. An intrinsic element of this is the inclusion of quasi-diegetic sound effects which are not part of the musical score, an aspect of production which has occasionally led to friction between collaborators, as was the case with Losey's film of *Don Giovanni* (1979). The project was conceived by Rolf Leibermann, who hired Losey to direct, despite Losey's unfamiliarity with the opera. It was clear that this was not to be a straightforward filming of an opera-house production. There was a palpable visual tension between sumptuous location settings and highly stylised costumes. David Caute wrote: 'Confronted by the visual stasis of operatic convention, Losey eased apart the orchestral and the dramatic'.[55] Losey's approach led to what Cooke describes as a 'major rift between Liebermann and Losey when the former objected to the latter's inattention to matters of dynamics in the score, and his tendency […] to allow sound effects to dominate the singing'.[56] We should also remember that in film, the sound quality may be artificially manipulated in order to affect the sound canvas (for example, by using surround-sound technology, digital sound effects, reverb, and so on), whereas traditional staged opera only makes subtle use of amplification (if at all) for the voices, and none at all for the orchestral accompaniment. This creates a less immersive sound world than a filmed version of the opera. We should also keep in mind that filmed performances are permanently preserved; each presentation, regardless of where or when it is experienced, is identical in terms of acting style, gesture, facial expression, and sonic nuances.

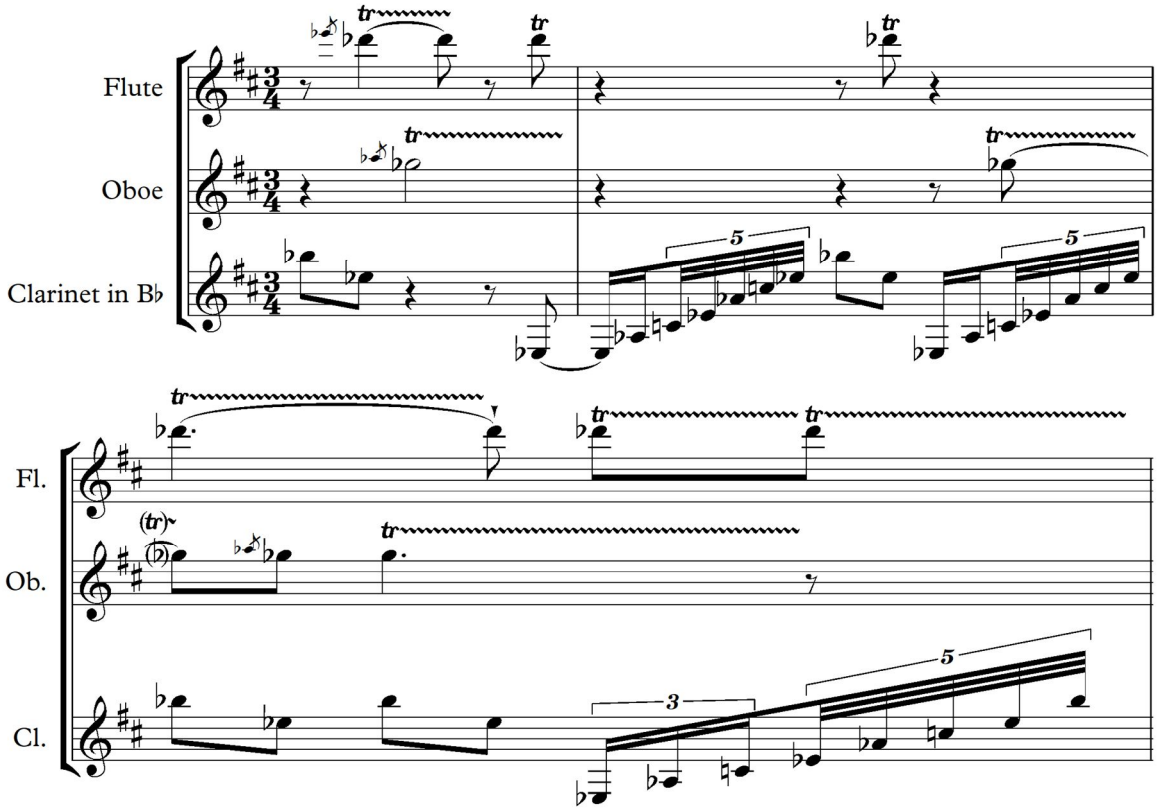
[52] Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, p. 136.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 155
[54] *Ibid*., p. 155
[55] David Caute, *Joseph Losey: A Revenge on Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 431.
[56] Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, p. 139.

There is some common ground between opera presented in the traditional environment of the opera house and opera presented on film (not least the fact that the music and libretto tends to be replicated relatively unchanged in filmed opera), but we can summarise some differences between them; there are therefore certain aspects which remain distinct between staged opera and filmed opera. Some of these distinctions may seem obvious ones, but they are nonetheless important and have an impact on the kind of experience a viewer or audience may have.

A stage performance is, by definition, live, and each performance is unique. For example, in one performance of *The Turn of the Screw* attended by the author at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in 2018 (directed by Timothy Sheader) a flock of birds flew overhead, coincidentally at the precise point in the opera where birdsong was being imitated in Variation III (Ex. 4.1).

In a filmed performance, the viewpoint for the audience or viewer is completely under the control of the director, although directors such as Orson Welles attempted to relinquish some of this control by having an unchanging camera shot, prolonged at considerable length to allow the viewer's eye to roam around the depicted setting. This 'composition in depth', as it was termed, is only effective if the viewer has some awareness that this is a deliberate artistic strategy on the part of the director, otherwise there is a danger that, expecting the cinematic norm of multiple camera angles and shot changes, they will merely find the static shot boring or tedious. The audience at a live performance are at liberty to look at any part of the stage, and, indeed, their view of the stage may be different according to the location of their seat. Even two different seats in the stalls will have different views according to how far back from the stage they are, whether they are on the right, left, or in the centre, and even whether their view is restricted by the audience member in front of them. However, because of the size of a cinema screen, audience viewpoint is unlikely to be a factor, even less so to someone viewing a film or television production on their television, computer screen, tablet, or smartphone.

Filmed opera, even a film of a live opera-house performance, will usually incorporate different shot types (long shots, medium shots, two-shots, close-ups) which will further influence and affect the viewer's experience. Filming techniques such as zooming, panning and tracking, and editing techniques like rapid alternation of shot types, multiple views, montage-influenced effects, etc. are also likely to be used; all these effects set filmed opera (and filmed theatre in general) apart from a live performance.



Ex. 4.1 Birdsong gestures in *The Turn of the Screw*, Variation III

Although this chapter has necessarily been merely a brief overview of principles of film theory and analysis as applied to filmed opera, it has allowed us to create a basic road map with which to navigate the task of analysing *The Turn of the Screw* in order to examine its cinematic frameworks. We have seen that film scholarship has a part to play in the analytical contextualisation of filmed opera, and we have considered the importance and relevance of the work of Bordwell, Eisenstein, Gaut, and Tambling. Within the field of film-music analysis, the work of Ford, Kershaw, and Miceli has been evaluated, but it is Audissino's neoformalist approach which I have chosen to be particularly appropriate for the present study. Audissino himself states that neoformalism 'entails a sort of reverse engineering: from the finished artefact, one has to reconstruct and examine the creative steps that led to the result.' [57] My methodology in testing *The Turn of the Screw*'s status as a cinematic opera relies on the analysis of several finished artefacts (to use Audissino's words), together with a case-study approach necessary for conciseness; both of these requirements find a close match with a neoformalist approach (or at least my own variant of it) as postulated by Audissino.

[57] Audissino, *Film/Music Analysis*, p. v.

Chapter 5. *The Turn of the Screw* from stage to screen: Peter Morley's Television Production

The Turn of the Screw is amongst the most screened of Britten's operas, along with *Peter Grimes, Billy Budd* and *Death in Venice*. This chapter looks at its first appearance on screen, in a pioneering 1959 television transmission which, despite being the first time the opera was filmed (and also having the distinction of being the first opera by any composer to be screened in its entirety on ITV), is not currently commercially available, and, indeed was almost lost completely to posterity. For these reasons, the production has considerable historical significance.

At 11.00 pm on Christmas Eve 1959 ITV transmitted Act I of the opera, prefaced by a somewhat stilted spoken introduction by a dinner-suited Earl of Harewood. The transmission was followed by Act II a few days later, on 28 December. For viewers familiar with the Henry James story, it may not have gone unnoticed that the original tale is narrated by a storyteller during a late-night country-house gathering at Christmas, a traditional time for the telling of ghost stories. The story of this TV transmission reveals something of the process of television production in the early days of independent television, how programmes were commissioned, produced, transmitted, and, in many cases, disposed of.

The idea for a television production of *The Turn of the Screw* which would draw heavily on the 1954 London premiere (even using some of the same cast members) originated with the eventual director of the programme, Peter Morley. Morley was an early pioneer of television during the 1950s, in particular within the developing independent sector. He made a name for himself as a documentary maker, his credits including innovative programmes like *Tyranny: The Years of Adolf Hitler* (1959), which included an interview with Hitler's sister, the current affairs series *This Week* (1958−63*)*, the live broadcast of the funeral of Winston Churchill in 1965 and *The Life And Times of Lord Mountbatten* (1968). *The Turn of the Screw* was one of the few non-factual programmes he directed, but he recognised the opera's potential for a television treatment immediately upon seeing it on stage:

> I didn't know anything about opera [...] [I was dragged] somewhat reluctantly, to the London premiere […] with Benjamin Britten conducting. I was totally captivated […] It occurred to me that Britten could have written this opera for television […] so I harboured a desire that one day I would bring it to the small screen.[1]

It can be understood that Morley, even if he had expertise in directing drama, would not have been a natural choice of director for an opera transmission. By his own admission he was not familiar with opera in general, much less knowledgeable about Britten's work, and, indeed, was a reluctant attendee at the premiere of *The Turn of the Screw*. However, the impact of the work on stage, driven by Britten's quasi-cinematic music and dramatic instincts, was such that Morley was able to visualise how the opera might look on the television screen.

[1] Peter Morley, *A Life Rewound*, (London: British Film Institute, 2010), p. 76.

Morley's production was only screened once. More than thirty years later, on 28 February 1990, *The Independent* carried a report about important television programmes which had been lost. They included 400 episodes of the iconic police drama *Dixon of Dock Green*, over 100 episodes of *Doctor Who* (some featuring William Hartnell and others Patrick Troughton as The Doctor), plays in the *Armchair Theatre* series by major playwrights such as David Mercer and Dennis Potter, and many episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment*, *Saturday Night At The London Palladium*, and *What's My Line*. Amongst the programmes listed was Morley's 1959 *The Turn of the Screw*. Very few of these programmes have been recovered, but *The Turn of the Screw* is one of the lucky ones, due to a number of improbable but fortunate events.

Considering the praise heaped contemporaneously on the programme by the composer and others, together with its unquestionable artistic significance, to twenty-first century sensibilities it seems surprising that the recording of the programme was lost. (However, as we shall see later in the chapter, there would have been no videotaped recording at all if twin studios had been available for a live transmission.) One factor was the immense expense of the two-inch videotape recording medium. It was common practice to re-use the tape for new programmes, taping over the old ones simply to save money. This is certainly what happened to the original tape. However, there was a second legal reason why the tape was not preserved. Morley recalls:

> Boosey & Hawkes were Benjamin Britten's publishers, and A-R had to enter into a contract with them for staging the television version. One of the clauses stipulated that if the production process entails any form of recording, these recordings would have to be destroyed within two years of transmission […] But B&H was afraid of possibly losing control of their material, and with hindsight, they cannot be blamed.[2]

Fortunately, the tapes were still in existence two years later; the destruction demanded by the contract had not yet been executed. In 1961 Lord Cottesloe, who by that time was Chairman of the Arts Council and a Britten enthusiast who had missed the original transmission, contacted Associated-Rediffusion to ask if he could view the tape. In recognition of keeping Cottesloe as an ally, a screening date was scheduled at the television company's headquarters, Television House. However, the enormously expensive Ampex video machine was in constant demand and not available. As a workaround, engineers were brought in at a time when the video machine was not being used during a weekend to transfer the recording onto 16mm film using the standard telecine process. According to Morley, the first attempt was of poor technical quality and was discarded, but a second attempt was successful. Cottesloe duly got his screening, and, soon after, the requirements of the Boosey & Hawkes contract were fulfilled by the destruction of the 16mm film and the wiping of the videotape. Morley's production of *The Turn of the Screw* was categorised as lost forever, hence the reference to it in the 1990 *Independent* article. Morley recounted a phone call he received in November 1990, nine months after the latter was published, and thirty years after the screening for Cottesloe, informing him that an exciting discovery had just been made:

[2] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 87.

> I received a call from Pam Logan, assistant curator of the British Film Institute's Television Archives in Berkhamsted, telling me that an old crate had been discovered with rusty cans of film, marked *The Turn of the Screw*. This must have been the discarded 'take one' of the telerecording, and no one has been able to explain how it found its way to the archives.[3]

The BFI transferred the film back onto videotape, making two VHS copies – one for Morley, and a second copy to be lodged at the Britten Archive, where it can still be viewed. There are no immediate plans for a digital transfer to DVD at this stage, and certainly no prospect for a commercial release. The making of copies is fraught with copyright difficulties, and at the moment the only way of seeing the film is either at the Britten Archive or at the BFI where, for a fee, they will book a screening room and show the original 16mm film. As mentioned above, this is believed to be the first, technically inferior, print: there are portions which are extremely scratched, and the soundtrack is at times distorted. Nevertheless, much of the film is viewable, and underlines what a significant contribution had been made to the field of television opera by Morley and his team. It is also believed to be the only visual record of Jennifer Vyvyan's portrayal of The Governess, apart from still photographs.

Preparation

It was to be five years before Morley returned to the idea of making a television version of the opera. He always knew persuading those who controlled the budget at Associated-Rediffusion to fund his opera production would be a challenge, but he also knew that the company was anxious to retain its contract to provide an independent television service for the London area when it came up for renewal in 1964. Although the renewal was five years away, the company were already planning their strategies for this. Morley recounted:

> To this end they went on a mission to score 'brownie points' by backing programmes that were out of the ordinary, and that might bring prestige to the company and chalk up some plus marks on the ITA's franchise scorecard. Support of the arts was on the agenda, with both the London Symphony Orchestra and the Hallé Orchestra benefitting from this largesse, not only with financial support but also with a spate of outside-broadcast concerts finding a place in the television schedules.[4]

Morley's reputation as a documentary maker had grown, following the success of his recent film, *Tyranny*, and it was partly on the back of this reputation that he first proposed the idea for televising *The Turn of the Screw*, in a meeting with programme controller John McMillan. At first McMillan was sceptical, pointing out that Morley had not directed drama before, but promised to think about it, scheduling a further meeting for a few weeks later. At the second meeting, McMillan was more supportive, and asked Morley for further details. Morley had already been thinking hard about the project and made some decisions which turned out to be crucial in eventually gaining Britten's approval for the venture. Morley also realised that these decisions might, however, cause difficulties in getting approval for the project from McMillan:

[3] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 86.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

> The first one was that I wanted to make it clear to Britten that I would not allow one note to be cut from his score. John agreed after I explained that the work was in two acts, each one lasting approximately sixty minutes. And then I stipulated the really tough one: 'No commercial breaks.' I thought that this would kill the whole project stone dead. To my surprise, he saw the point and said the two acts may have to be interrupted by the ITN News. As it turned out, the ITV network stipulated that the acts had to be separated and aired over two nights – possibly the longest commercial break in history![5]

Having agreed on his two essential conditions and secured a budget, Morley's next step was to arrange a meeting with Britten. Morley travelled to Aldeburgh, staying at the Brudenell Hotel overlooking the North Sea. The meeting itself took place at Britten's home, the Red House, where Morley had been invited to lunch. Both Britten and Pears were present, and Morley set about sharing his ideas and vision for his televised production. He recalled:

> I soon got the impression that Britten was intrigued by the idea of trying something new. Television was new, and rather foreign to him, and he said that he liked experimenting, and seemed very open to ideas and new challenges. Peter Pears, who had created the role of Quint in *The Turn of the Screw*, was also excited by the thought of a television version. Sadly, this time he would not be able to take part as he had other commitments in Switzerland that would clash with the crucial production dates.[6]

Morley went on to reiterate that he wanted much of the spirit of the original stage production to remain, despite the inevitable adaptations that would have to be made to create something suitable for the televisual medium. He reported in his autobiography that Britten demonstrated a positive reaction to this. The formal part of the meeting and lunch over, Britten invited Morley to accompany him on one of his regular walks along the beach, during which the two men continued to discuss opera and television in more general terms. This discussion clearly found Britten in a jovial mood:

> He was probing me about ITV and the sort of programmes I had made. He asked what my opera experience was, and when I told him that I did not know anything about opera, and could not even read one note of music, he laughed and said that we would probably get on quite well with each other. The look of relief on my face must have been palpable, and I got the distinct feeling that he thought this enterprise was worth trying.[7]

More meetings at Aldeburgh followed, at which Stephen Reiss (general manager of the English Opera Group), stage director Colin Graham, and artist John Piper all became involved with the project. Britten's publishers, Boosey & Hawkes, were also consulted, resulting in certain contractual details which were to become significant later on in the life of the project. As far as Morley was concerned, getting Piper on board was a crucial step in achieving the visual style he wanted. His memory of seeing the 1954 stage version was still vivid, and he was delighted to find that Piper was, like Britten, most positive about the prospect of a television version. Prior to meeting Piper, Morley had been working on the project back in London, using the Decca recording of the opera to help him

[5] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 77.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

in his planning.[8] Although Morley's ability to read music was very limited, with the aid of the recording he annotated the score with his thoughts on how to visualise the opera in a studio setting.

Morley quickly realised that one of the biggest challenges would be how to interpret the instrumental variations which link the consecutive scenes. He had noticed that the stage version used a combination of darkness and painted gauzes designed by Piper to effect scene changes and to create atmosphere, but realised this would not transfer to the screen well:

> One simply could not plunge a television network, let alone a commercial one, into screen blackout – and some of the 'Variations' lasted two minutes! […] My proposal was for the cameras to explore specially created abstract paintings for the 'Variations', which would be in harmony with the music, and enhance it, without causing a visual distraction.[9]

The proposal was indeed adopted, with set designer Michael Yates (previously Head of Television Design at the BBC) not only preserving the original Piper stage sets, copying and resizing them where necessary for practical use in a television studio, but also using paintings Piper quickly produced especially for Morley's production. During the course of these discussions, Morley was invited to spend time with Myfanwy and John Piper at their home, Fawley Bottom, near Henley-on-Thames. He found conversation with Myfanwy about the opera's libretto both stimulating and insightful, allowing him to re-evaluate some of his directorial ideas.

Morley continued to assemble his team, and with the contractual negotiations between Associated-Rediffusion, Boosey & Hawkes, and the English Opera Group complete, he was able to finally gather his cast together for the beginning of the rehearsal period. The cast included two members of the original 1954 production: Jennifer Vyvyan (The Governess) and Arda Mandikian (Miss Jessel). Raymond Nilsson played Quint and Judith Pearce replaced Joan Cross as Mrs Grose. Janette Miller and Tom Bevan completed the cast as Flora and Miles respectively. Charles Mackerras conducted the orchestra, with support from Paul Hamburger who functioned as assistant conductor and repetiteur. Morley, in recognition of his own lack of experience of directing drama, let alone opera, engaged Colin Graham to help with directing the singers and general staging.

Janette Miller recalled in her unpublished memoirs that she did not have to audition for the role of Flora, although she reported that Ronald Duncan claimed Britten auditioned forty other girls and rejected them.[10] Miller was known to Britten and Graham, having played the part of Mrs Sem in the first performances of *Noye's Fludde* at Orford Church in June 1958 (alongside a young Michael Crawford). In a subsequent performance of *Fludde* in Lowestoft which was also conducted by Britten and directed by Graham, she was called back after a rehearsal to be informed that she was to play Flora in *The Turn of the Screw* and that she needed to start learning it. At that stage she was not informed it was to be a television production, and did not receive written confirmation of the job for a

[8] Decca catalogue number LXT 5038 / 5039 (2 LP Mono discs, 1955)
[9] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 79.
[10] Many of Miller's memories of rehearsals and the filming process revolve around her impressions of the cast members and crew she worked with. The writing is very candid and often critical and opinionated, containing much conjecture of a personal nature. Much of what she writes cannot be independently verified, and therefore quotations from this document will be limited to relevant factual information.

number of months until a personal letter from Morley arrived, giving her a start date and informing her that she would be paid £72 for six weeks of rehearsal and two transmissions of an hour each.

Learning the part was a challenge for Miller. At first, she asked the music staff at her school to help, but they were not able to, although the reason for this is not clear from her memoirs.[11] A telephone call to the Aldeburgh Festival office yielded the recommendation that she try Viola Tunnard, a rehearsal pianist who often worked for Britten. However, this did not work out; Miller believed that Tunnard took a dislike to her because of jealousy that her friend Olive Dyer (who had played Flora in the original production) had not been offered the part in the television version. This is possible, but there is no independent evidence that this was the case. Miller maintained that she was even required to buy her own copy of the score and do her best to teach herself the part. In the event, she enlisted the help of her piano teacher, a Miss Hill, who attempted to take her through the music, even though she had no voice-training experience and found many aspects of the score challenging technically.

According to Morley, Graham took responsibility in the rehearsals to train the cast and to make sure they were up to standard. Morley's autobiography revealed his initial nervousness at working with performers, but also contained a hint that his friendly and collaborative personality allowed the rehearsals to proceed effectively:

> I had never worked with artistes before, let alone opera singers, and it was with some trepidation that I welcomed them to our rehearsal rooms in the YWCA in Museum Street. […] I think everyone felt a bit awkward at first, but coffee and sticky buns procured by my PA soon broke the ice. I asked them to gather round to explain the difference between a stage and a television production and introduced them to some of the technical disciplines demanded by television. I got a very warm response from them all, and from that moment on an atmosphere developed based on hard work and friendly banter [...] I found it particularly rewarding working closely with Colin Graham in creating the cast's stage directions, which were quite different from those they had all mastered for the opera stage.[12]

By the time rehearsals started, Morley had a clear idea of how he intended to film the opera, documented carefully in the highly detailed camera script he had developed from his annotated vocal score. The script now resides in the archive at the Britten−Pears Library, and provides a fascinating insight into how Morley visualised the opera.[13] It consists of two large heavily bound volumes, one for each act. Morley had painstakingly pasted each page of the vocal score on the right hand side of each double-spread, and on the left-hand facing page was a blank area on which he wrote his camera directions (Fig. 5.1) and instructions for the sound crew. Coloured index tabs (pink for Act I and yellow for Act II) inserted down the right hand side of the page provided a quick method of navigating through the document. Although Britten had no direct involvement with the production, Morley reports that the composer did attend one of the rehearsals:

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[11] Janette Miller, *Memoirs* (unpublished, 2015), p. 4. Miller wrote: 'I tried first at my school. Aida Foster. No one there was interested or able to help in any way. In fact Mrs. and Miss Foster were positively against me doing it. They both counseled me not to accept this part.'

[12] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 80.

[13] British Film Institute Online Catalogue, https://www.bpfcatalogue.org/archive/MSC3 (accessed 1 June 2018)

> Halfway through the rehearsal period, Benjamin Britten came up to London to spend the day with us at the YWCA. He said that he simply couldn't stay away, and was very intrigued by the strange way that television went about portraying his precious opera. He made some very helpful suggestions and said that he would really have liked to be able to conduct the orchestra. Sadly, he couldn't spare the time, and in any case he was suffering from a painful shoulder ailment, which would have made it impossible.[14]

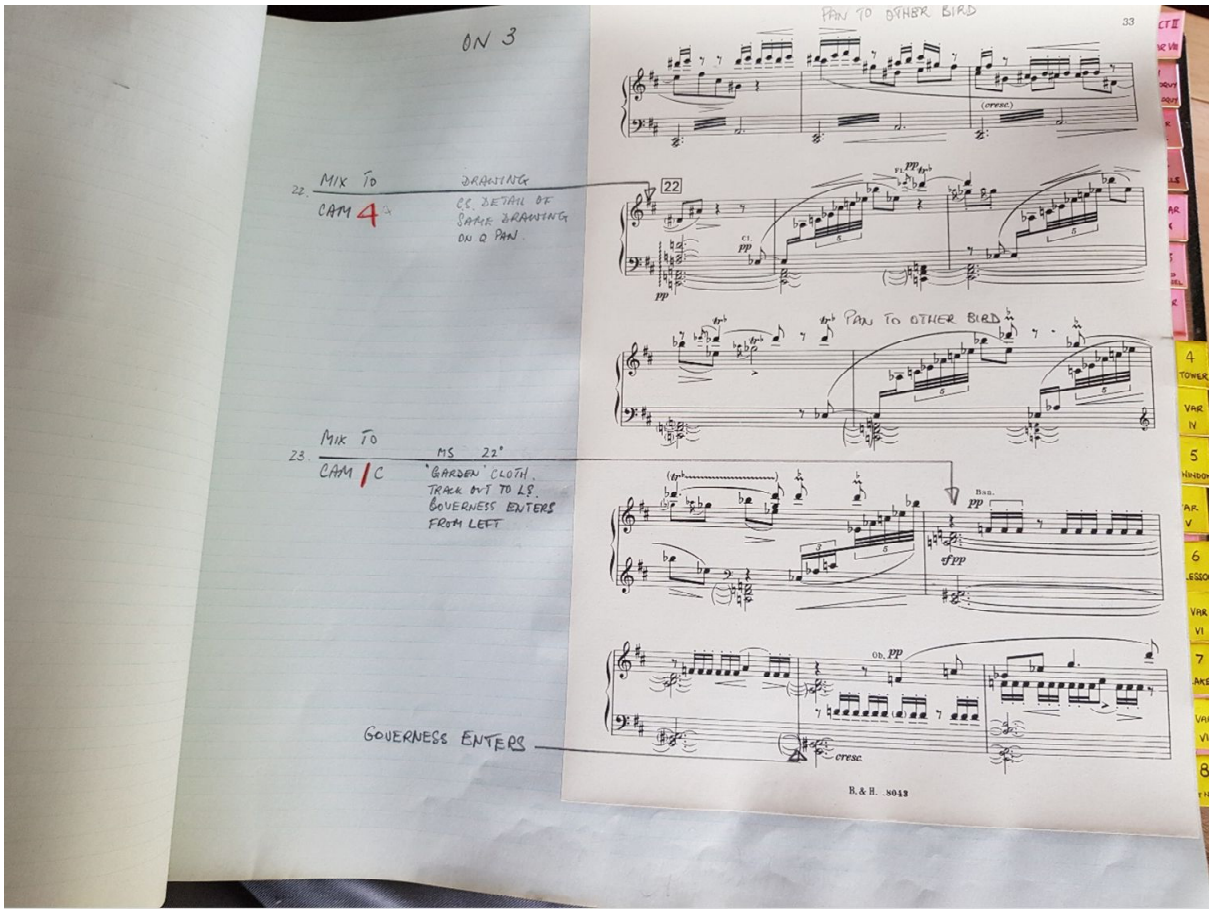


Fig. 5.1 Morley's camera script: Act I, Variation III (Source: Britten - Pears Library)

Miller also wrote about the rehearsals in warm tones in her memoirs:

> Everything that could be done to make life enjoyable was done. After a week of musical rehearsals in Kensington we rehearsed in the Young Women's Christian Association Hall in Bloomsbury opposite the British Museum and next door to the TUC. It was huge, light and airy and a pleasant place to rehearse.[15]

The rehearsal period complete, it was time to go into the studio for the video-recording process.

[14] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 81.
[15] Miller. *Memoirs*, chapter 11.

Video recording

In order to film the opera, Morley required two studios: one containing the set, cameras, and singers; and a second studio for the orchestra. Television opera was in its infancy, but this twin-studio setup was becoming commonplace and, indeed, was used for the BBC production of *Billy Budd* a few years later in 1966 (discussed in Chapter 7). Alec Nisbett gives some further information on the use of this technique:

> Miming opera was once extensively used in continental Europe. In Britain it has been used less, in the belief that the singer's full performance has greater musical conviction. One arrangement employs separate studios. That for the orchestra has good musical acoustics; the action studio has all of the regular facilities to cover sound and pictures – for which the original grand, and deliberately unrealistic style of stage opera may be modified to that of music drama [...] The conductor has a monitor for the action, and a camera relays the beat to the action studio, where a repetiteur takes it from another monitor and passes it to the singers.[16]

For Morley, occupying two studios for more than two hours (which would have been necessary for a live transmission of *The Turn of the Screw*) posed timetabling difficulties:

> The only way A-R [Associated-Rediffusion] could make [the studios] available was to allow me to pre-record – 'as for live' – on two weekends, with Act I on the first and Act II on the second, using two of the largest studios in A-R's Wembley complex. On the Saturday, we would have our first camera rehearsal and a 'stagger through', and on the Sunday, a 'run through', a final camera rehearsal, and then, in the evening, the actual recording.[17]

In 1959, video recording onto tape was still very much under development, prohibitively expensive, and very difficult to work with. As a result, editing of recorded footage was virtually impossible; it could, in extreme circumstances, be done using a razor blade, splicing tape, and a microscope to examine the magnetic particles recorded on the videotape, but it was time-consuming and results were somewhat crude and hit-and-miss. Fred Pfost, an employee of Ampex, the company who developed and manufactured the videotape recorders in use by the television industry at this time (including Associated-Rediffusion's machine), wrote in detail of the process:

> In order to cut and splice video tape […] we found that a solution of a volatile liquid (e.g. turpentine) with a little powdered iron (called carbonyl iron) evenly dispersed in it and spread thinly over the recorded tracks would allow [the tracks to be …] plainly visible. […] With a razor blade and a straight edge and a sharp eye it was possible to make the cut. This sounds difficult (or impossible) but this was the method used for years by the industry to edit tapes.[18]

The technique was still in regular use as late as 1967, as this quotation from the commentary accompanying a BBC training film demonstrates (see Fig. 5.2):

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[16] Alec Nisbett, *Sound Studio: Audio Techniques for Radio, Television, Film and Recording* (London: Focal Press, 7th edn, 2003) p. 150.
[17] Morley, *A Life Rewound*, p. 81.
[18] Engineering and Technology Wiki website, https://ethw.org/First-Hand:My_Ten_Years_at_Ampex_and_the_Development_of_the_Video_Recorder (accessed 21 November 2019).

> The editor adjusts the videotape in the editing block for his exact edit point and clamps the tape in the correct position, cutting off any excess tape with the guillotine […] By lifting the tape ends, the adhesive splicing tape is positioned beneath them. They are then pressed firmly onto this with a swab stick. The trimming block is placed on the videotape and the surplus splicing tape cut off. After the tape is unclamped and lifted out of the editing block, the join is complete.[19]

This was an editing technique to be avoided if at all possible, a procedure that would only be adopted if something catastrophic happened on set (such as a piece of scenery falling over, or a camera breakdown). Therefore its rare use was confined to correcting unescapable technical problems which could not be solved any other way, never for creative or aesthetic reasons. Video recording was in effect only a time-shift device, so that programmes could be pre-recorded as if live, simply for planning reasons. Any errors in the performance would still be seen by the audience, as Morley admitted:

> If a microphone boom came into shot, or a floor manager tripped over a camera cable, let alone an actor drying up, it was seen by all. You simply pressed on, there was no going back, there was no means of 'doing that bit again'.[20]

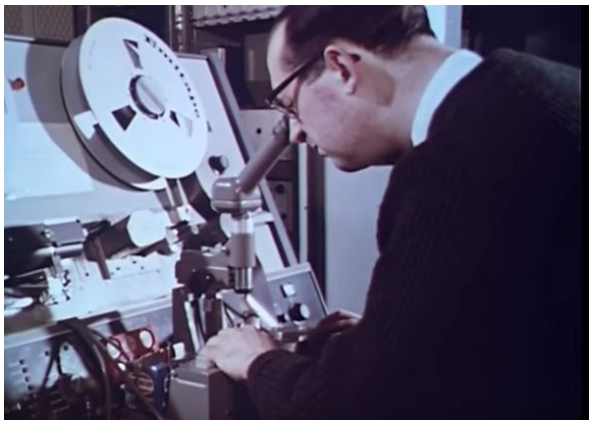


Fig. 5.2 Using a microscope to enable videotape editing (BBC training film, c. 1967)

During the recording Morley arranged for a camera to be permanently trained on the conductor in the second studio, with the output relayed to several TV monitors placed in strategic positions in the main studio so that the singers could see him. The orchestral sound was piped through at a low volume level into the main studio so that the singers had some aural guidance from the accompaniment, which was clearly a very different experience for the artists than performing in an opera house. As a backup for the singers for the times when they were not in a position to see Mackerras's beat on the monitors, Morley gave Hamburger the task of 'hopping around the set,

[19] *Videotape Editing* (BBC training film, c. 1967), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZVaK2TKgFA (accessed 21 January 2020)
[20] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 81.

repeating the conductor's arm movements, taking his cues from the monitors'.[21] Miller recalled her experience with the twin-studio system:

> We had to listen to the accompaniment through loudspeakers and if we were lucky see the monitors but mainly we had to rely on Paul Hamburger for the beat. Unfortunately the cameras and Mr. Hamburger did not see eye to eye and on one occasion Mr. Hamburger and the cameramen came to blows. After a very heated conversation bordering on a fight Peter Morley had to come down from the director's box and calmed the situation. He did it awfully well. I recall Peter walking quietly up to Mr. Hamburger and very gently explaining that sometimes the cameras came first.[22]

It is hardly surprising the cameras sometimes needed to compete with the singers for physical space. In the 1950s cameras were large and heavy, mounted on wheeled pedestals or, sometimes, cranes. Due to the lack of zoom lenses, which did not come into common use until the 1960s, directors had to rely on physically moving the cameras backwards and forwards in order to enlarge or decrease the size of the objective in the frame. Morley gives a vivid account of life in the control box during the rehearsal process:

> In the control gallery, which overlooked the studio floor, I had my PA, Rosemary Winckley, on my left, calling the shot numbers, and Bridget Booth, my vision mixer, to my right. We faced a clutch of monitors displaying each camera's output and, of course, immediately in front of us, my mammoth camera script. Colin Graham was also present, and whenever we broke the rehearsal we went down on the studio floor to give notes to the cast. The set that Michael Yates had realised from John Piper's original designs was quite magical. As I walked around it, I could sense the atmosphere of Henry James's ghostly novella – what a shame that we had to wait another eight years in the UK for colour television.[23]

On the Sunday evening, with all rehearsals and preparations completed, it was time to record the performance ready for transmission. Characteristically, Britten sent the team a telegram, wishing them good luck (Fig. 5.3).

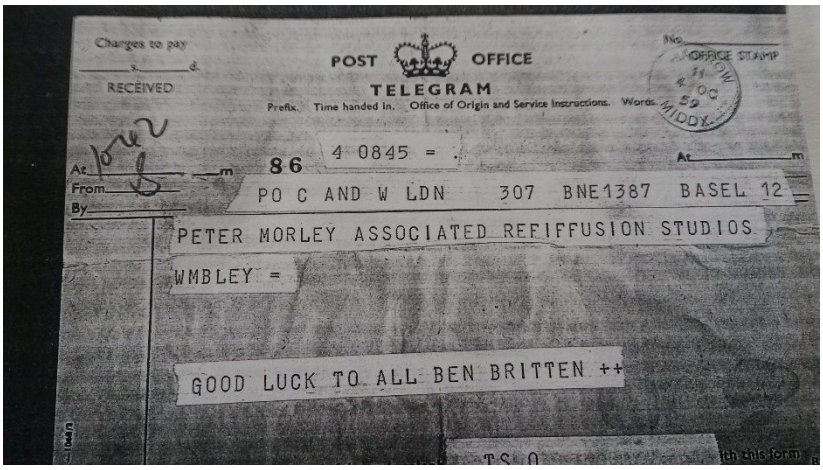

Charges to pay
RECEIVED
POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM
Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.
OFFICE STAMP
At
From
By
86 4 0845 =
PO C AND W LDN 307 BNE1387 BASEL 12
PETER MORLEY ASSOCIATED REDIFFUSION STUDIOS
WMBLEY =
GOOD LUCK TO ALL BEN BRITTEN ++

Fig. 5.3 Telegram from Britten to Morley (source: Britten – Pears Library)

[21] Morley, *A Life Rewound*, p. 82.
[22] Miller, *Memoirs*, chapter 13.
[23] Morley, *A Life Rewound*, p. 82.

Morley's vision for the piece as a televised opera, his meticulous planning of camera moves, cues and lighting plot, together with Graham's direction and Mackerras's musical expertise, all resulted in the taping of Act I going smoothly and faultlessly. However, some way through Act II one of the cameras failed, throwing all the careful planning out of kilter. Morley's description of this crisis is typically understated and calm, indicative not only of the director's unflappable personality, but also of his acknowledgment of the skill and professionalism of his team:

> At a blow, all the detailed planning became meaningless, and we had to act very quickly and improvise; luckily it sprang back to life after a few long minutes. The brilliance of the camera and boom operators, floor staff and vision mixer saved the day. Through their skill, we managed to cover up so well that viewers were unaware of this disaster.[24]

Miller's recollection of the situation gives an impression of something a little more frenetic and panic-ridden, and as such, is worth quoting at length:

> On transmission[25] all progressed smoothly until after the church scene and then something went horrible [*sic*] wrong. One of the four cameras broke down. It was a nightmare and an hour that I shall never ever want to repeat. We could not stop, if we had the whole production would have been lost. We just had to get through. All the carefully prepared script went out of the window as Peter and the crew attempted to save some of the ghost scenes with the few trick shots. It took a couple of minutes to find out that something was not quite right and then we were sort of told in confidence as if it was something of a secret. At first Tom [the boy playing Miles] and I did not realize the seriousness of the situation and he had far more to do than I although it was a fairly easy sing. But one could see by the way everyone was behaving that this was a major problem. I thought why don't they stop as we were not far into Act II but it seems in those days this was not done and I suppose the technicians are the were [*sic*] as the musicians and would start creating about overtime so we carried on. With all the upheaval and change in plans it meant the cast could no longer see the slung monitors or see Paul Hamburger. To make matters worse the loud speakers were not directed in our direction as everyone who could was lining up the shot and heaving the scenery about as a wall had to be removed to move the camera that was working into place. And we were on our own with no conductor, hardly any playback [and had] to fend for ourselves having spent six weeks of being taught to rely on the conductor for every entry and exit. One felt as if one had been left in the middle of the Sahara desert without a camel in sight. It was controlled chaos because being a ghost story we had camera 'effects'. Well ghosts sort of come and go. Peter had limited these effects with great restraint but 'Miss Jessel' disappearing in the school room [Act II Scene 3, RF 64[26]] was the biggy and the camera crew were not going to miss their chance to shine that [*sic*] so a quite [*sic*] pandemonium ensued while very quietly with no noise and a lot of miming by the crew to line up the second wall so 'Miss Jessel' could make her spectacular exit everything we had rehearsed went out of the window. I think another camera eventually arrived from studio two but the script and staging so carefully rehearsed went by the board. We really were adrift musically as Paul Hamburger already a chastened man for once did not fight for his rights and disappeared never to be seen again just when we could have done with him. Tom and I, not the most experienced were left to fend for

[24] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 82.
[25] Miller uses the word 'transmission' here, but she is describing the recording.
[26] In this thesis, I use the abbreviation 'RF' to denote 'Rehearsal Figure' in the score.

> ourselves. I remember him grabbing my arm and whispering 'What do we do? There's no conductor'. I said 'We keep going, we know it' and we did. This must have been Jennifer Vyvyan's finest moment. What a trouper! Cables to the right of her scenery to the left and she sang like an angel. Absolutely wonderful. I couldn't have done it.[27]

Another passage from Miller's memoirs gives a vivid depiction of the heightened, nervous atmosphere of a recording undertaken where retakes are not possible. It also highlights the typically magnified self-critical response of an artist (particularly a young and inexperienced one) to errors or perceived weaknesses in their own performance:

> When it got to my dreaded Pussycat's cradle [Act II Scene 6] something went wrong musically. The setting for the scene had been improvised [due to the earlier camera breakdown] and my chair was in a new position. This is the most difficult entry and I was cat's cradling at the time with string everywhere as I was determined to do it properly. I really needed and relied on Paul [Hamburger] as I had been taught to watch for the entry and he was nowhere in sight. I could hardly hear the music and there was a camera right between me and Jenny [Vyvyan] which had not been there before so I couldn't even see her singing. I don't know what happened I just knew there was a musical mistake. I was mortified. The final Lake scene [Act II Scene 7] came off in its usual brilliant style but all the special camera angles were jetisend [*sic*] to a single not very well composed shot. But in my heart I was disgusted with myself as I felt I had let Mr. Britten down. I had made a musical mistake. It took all the pleasure away and I was just so frightened during the panic. My dislike of live performing began at this moment. It put me off doing this for life. I have never recovered.[28]

The remainder of the recording proceeded without further hitches, Morley's television interpretation of the opera was complete, and all was set for transmission during Christmas 1959.

Reaction

Prior to the transmission, on 10 December 1959, Associated-Rediffusion arranged a preview for the press at their headquarters, Television House in Kingsway, London. In addition to the usual journalists and critics, including Britten experts Donald Mitchell (representing Boosey & Hawkes, for whom he was working at the time) and Desmond Shawe-Taylor, the full cast were invited to be present, as were Britten, the Pipers, Lord and Lady Harewood and Reiss. Morley reported that Britten and the Pipers were 'pleasantly surprised how well the translation of the opera to television had worked, and especially how the adaptation had caught the spirit of the original production much better than they

[27] Miller, *Memoirs*, chapter 13.
[28] *Ibid.*, chapter 13.

had thought possible'.[29] Britten wrote to Morley a few days after the screening, praising the production in the warmest terms:

> I must write a note (only a note because other operatic matters press on me![30]) to congratulate you most sincerely on a really fine achievement. I thought the production of the *Turn of the Screw* most convincing. I am not very experienced in 'watching' T.V. but all the people I mind about who were there said that it was easily the best operatic T.V. production they had seen, & I can quite believe it. Anyhow you've quite convinced me that serious opera works on that screen, as long it is done with your taste & skill. Do let's talk sometime about the whole subject, & in the meantime many thanks for your endless trouble and patience.[31]

Britten's letter to Pears on 14 December also described how impressed he was with Morley's work as director, if not so much with the musical aspects: 'TV of Screw was awfully good, scenically rather than musically, actually. Peter Morley is really quite a chap (the producer) & John has done some spiffing new designs'.[32] Both of these letters go against what has become a popular belief that Britten was mistrustful of the medium of television. This belief possibly has its origins in the well-known fact that he did not even possess a TV set until the BBC gave him one in 1971 so that he could watch *Owen Wingrave*. The perception that Britten was not a television enthusiast was further cemented when Graham wrote, in a Glyndebourne programme book of 1997: 'Britten disliked and despised the medium of television and was most suspicious of people who worked in it or who regularly watched it.'[33] There is a possibility that Graham's observation here was reflecting a growing antipathy on Britten's part following the lukewarm critical reaction to *Wingrave*. Rather than necessarily accepting criticism of the piece itself, it was much easier to blame its shortcomings on the medium. The composer engaged successfully with television at several key points in his career, and judging by his early professional work writing music for documentary films in the 1930s, it can be said that he was hardly averse to working with a screen in mind. Indeed, Britten wrote a most encouraging contribution to a glossy brochure Associated-Rediffusion published to accompany the transmission:

> This is the first time in this country that an opera of mine has been specially produced on television, and I am extremely grateful to Associated-Rediffusion for its enterprise and courage in mounting *The Turn of the Screw*. I am particularly happy that it should have been this opera that was chosen because it is one of my works most close to me, and also the one I feel most suitable for television. Television can do an enormous amount to popularise opera in this country, especially if it avoids the spectacular Grand Opera so beloved by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and concentrates on the intimate and concise, which seems to me to belong particularly to the present day. I cannot praise too highly the skill, taste and knowledge shown in adapting this difficult opera for television, especially when coupled with a respect for the score which did not allow one note to be cut.[34]

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[29] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 83.
[30] Britten was at this time in the throes of writing (at considerable speed) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, due to be premiered at the 1960 Aldeburgh Festival.
[31] Britten's letter, quoted in Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 83.
[32] Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke (eds), *Letters from a Life* vol. 5, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010) p. 199.
[33] Colin Graham 'Owen Wingrave', in *Glyndebourne Festival Programme Book* (1997).
[34] Benjamin Britten. writing in *The Turn of the Screw publicity brochure* (London: Associated-Rediffusion, 1959).

There is no evidence that Morley was familiar with previously televised Britten operas (for example *Billy Budd*, for NBC, produced by Samuel Chotzinoff in 1952, which had in any case been edited heavily for television). Therefore his statement citing 'respect for the score', extending to a demand that it be used in its entirety, may not have been made in the light of those. It is more likely that Morley's intuitive reaction to the opera led him to his own conclusion that a cut down version would damage the dramatic effect and pace of the work. Other contributors to the booklet wrote in similarly glowing terms. Amongst them were these perceptive comments by Myfanwy Piper:

> What surprises and delights is, that without distorting or adapting, the producer has made it seem as though [the opera] were specially created for the medium. It has illusion without apparent trickery, reality without realism, as it must in any presentation, but a new kind − so it is a new experience. It makes me realise how much can be done with the exuberant possibilities of television when they are used with tact and sensibility.[35]

The previous chapter refers to the disruption of operatic theatricality inherent within a location-shot opera film, and there is a parallel in Piper's intriguing phrase 'reality without realism', which introduces the notion that a viewer can suspend their perception of what is real, but nevertheless experience a work such as an operatic ghost story as if it were a reality. This is similar to our experience of being absorbed in a compelling novel, where our imagination constructs an alternative 'unreal reality'. The 'reality' that Piper refers to is not a literal reality, but an internal, imaginative and expressive one. Piper's view foreshadows Hutcheon's favouring of the opera's music over Clayton's film *The Innocents* (1961) in generating a disquieting atmosphere.[36] John Piper added some further insightful comments from his own viewpoint as an artist:

> This scenery is a matter of creating atmosphere, not of presenting facts. Scale, texture and a telling disposition of darks and lights are all-important. As to texture, I was surprised to find how well it could be realised by the television cameras, and how many new means of suggesting it are possible. The matter of lights and darks I found exciting, because the medium does not so much reflect light, as it allows light to pierce through darkness, as in stained glass. Here again the possibilities seem enormous. But it is in the matter of scale that I was most interested of all. You can move, for instance, from a small drawing, with some tiny scribbles or spots of darkness on it, to a full-sized theatre cloth with a figure in front of it without any jolt to the eye, so that scale momentarily disappears, and there is the thrill of being in a no-man's-land of dimension, which can be most helpful in a highly atmospheric work.[37]

Although he was not a practitioner in the film or television industry, Piper's words reveal an instinctive sense of cinematic quality, demonstrating an artist's response to notions of refracted rather than reflected light, a sensibility towards visual texture, and an awareness of how to use scale powerfully.

A reaction which especially delighted Morley was a letter received by Paul Adorian, Managing Director of Associated-Rediffusion from Sir Kenneth Clark, Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain:

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[35] Myfanwy Piper. writing in *The Turn of the Screw publicity brochure*.
[36] See previous chapter.
[37] John Piper. writing in *The Turn of the Screw publicity brochure*.

> I feel I must write you a letter of congratulation on A-R's production of *The Turn of the Screw*. Programmes of this kind done for a minority very often don't come off, and succeed in pleasing nobody, but this was really a masterpiece of television, both as production, performance and photography. In fact, as a work of art I think it the best thing the medium has ever produced. I have seen the opera many times, and to tell the truth I thought it came off better on the T.V. than it had ever done in the opera house. I am quite sure that one or two productions of this kind do the medium an immense amount of good, and even from the commercial point of view, are money well spent. They are the sort of argument which the friends of commercial television will be able to use when the whole subject comes up for review.[38]

Of some interest here is the fact that Clark never mentions the director and instigator of the entire project, Morley, in the letter. It is likely that protocol required him to address the letter to A-R's Managing Director, but it seems a surprising omission to not acknowledge Morley by name, preferring instead to single out programme controller John McMillan.

Despite the enthusiasm of the Press and other luminaries, in terms of popular television, audience figures for *The Turn of the Screw* were disappointing. In the 1950s, viewing figures for independent television were measured by meters attached to TV sets in several thousand sample households throughout the country. These were mechanical devices containing graph paper, rotating drums and inked needles tracing what time the set was switched on, and whether it was tuned to BBC or ITV. It did not have the functionality to determine if anyone was actually watching a programme, only if the TV was on, so it was a somewhat crude tool. Research in the 1960s by statisticians A.S.C. Ehrenberg and W.A. Twyman described audience measurement procedures as follows:

> Continuous "panels" of homes are run in each of the existing dozen or so independent television areas (London, Midlands, etc.), with net sample sizes ranging from 100-400 homes capable of receiving ITV transmissions […] In the eight larger areas, each panel home has an electro-mechanical meter (Tammeter) attached to the television set, which records whether the set is switched on and to which channel or station it is tuned, for each separate minute of transmission time.[39]

The figures were carefully monitored by programme controllers and by advertisers. The output from the devices had to be physically collected from viewers' homes by a representative of TAM, the company who administered the devices and statistics. As Morley put it, '*The Turn of the Screw* broke an Olympic record – it registered a rating of precisely nil – the inked needles failed to spring into action […The programme] failed to produce a measurable audience'.[40] Spurred on by his belief in the project, McMillan commissioned some independent research to ascertain the true level of audience numbers for the opera. It is not clear who undertook the research, or how, precisely, it was done, but it revealed that approximately 200,000 people had viewed the programme over the two nights.[41] To put this figure in perspective, it was pointed out that this level of engagement with the opera would have filled the Sadler's Wells opera house (with a capacity of 1600) with all seats sold for eight

[38] Sir Kenneth Clark, letter quoted in Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 83.
[39] A. S. C. Ehrenberg and W. A. Twyman, 'On Measuring Television Audiences' in *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. 130, No. 1 (1967), p 2. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2344037 (accessed: 21 November 2019).
[40] Morley. *A Life Rewound*, p. 84.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

performances a week for sixteen weeks. As Morley explains, 'as a TAM rating, where audiences are measured in millions, this miserable total was an unmitigated disaster. But in terms of opera-going audiences, it would have been declared an unprecedented and colossal triumph'.[42]

Case studies: three key scenes

In chapter 6 I analyse how three key passages from the opera have been filmed, in order to compare the approaches of six different directors, and also I give details of the musical context of each passage within the score. There is specific rationale for selecting these particular passages, which I explain below. For reasons of consistency, I will base the remainder of the current chapter on an overview of how the same passages have been treated in Morley's version. I have selected two passages from Act I and one from Act II.

Passage 1: 'Prologue', 'Theme' and 'Journey'

This passage is selected because the opening of any dramatic work (or film) is particularly worthy of study. By definition, it gives the viewer their first impression of many aspects of the piece. Openings provide initial context, setting, character, musical style, and impact. *The Turn of the Screw*'s Prologue, although it was initially an afterthought on Britten's part, alludes to the distancing narrative at the start of James's story in which the core narrative is deeply embedded within a number of layers. This section also contains an example of Britten's 'journey' music in which musical onomatopoeia is used; a recurring device in many of his operas (for example Tarquinius's journey by horse in *The Rape of Lucretia* or Aschenbach's journey to Venice in *Death in Venice*).

In the published vocal score of *The Turn of the Screw* that Morley used as his reference, the stage direction at the beginning of the opera reads 'The Prologue[43] is discovered in front of a drop curtain', a suitably vague instruction which has been interpreted by directors in a number of ways. In Morley, the setting implies a library; the Prologue is seated, an open book on his lap, and is dressed in period (i.e. Victorian) middle or upper-class costume. However, a note of ambiguity is introduced immediately; walls of the room which we are able to see appear not to be walls at all, but a swirling, abstract John Piper design based on the artist's original 1954 stage designs. (Fig 5.4.)

[42] Morley*, A Life Rewound,* p. 85.
[43] Somewhat confusingly, the term 'Prologue' is used by Britten to denote both the opening section of the opera, *and* the character singing the part.



Fig. 5.4 The Prologue in his 'library'

As can be observed in the image, Morley uses close framing, giving an intimate impression, as if the Prologue is speaking to the viewer individually in their living room. This is further emphasised by having him directly address the camera, and keeping gestures to a minimum, intensifying the mood of closeness. He rarely looks at the open book, but sometimes turns a page, usually during piano flourishes in the accompaniment. The format is similar to that used by the children's storytelling series, *Jackanory*, transmitted by the BBC from 1965 until 1996, which used 'the simplest form of television presentation − a talking head reading to camera with cross fades to static illustrations'.[44] At the end of the Prologue, the camera moves down to show the book on his lap, almost immediately then dissolving to an abstract design based on one of John Piper's original stage backdrops for the 1954 premiere production (Fig. 5.5). This is very similar to the background used as the 'library' setting for the Prologue itself, and so provides a useful visual connection between the two sections.

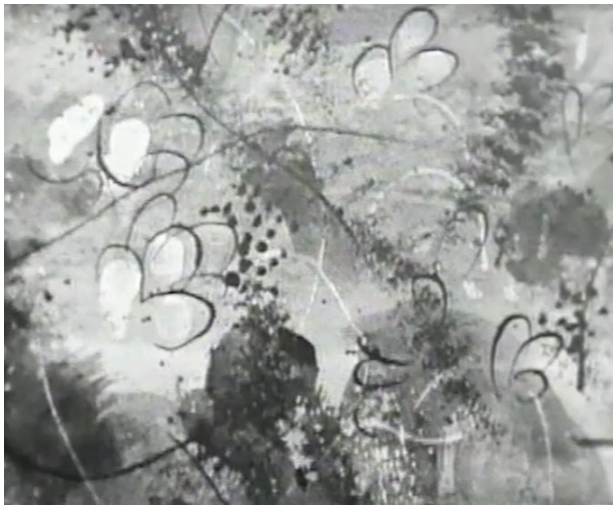


Fig. 5.5 Background to 'Theme'

[44] Screen Online website, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/569183/ (accessed 8 June 2019).

The third part of this passage is designated in the score as ‘Scene 1 The Journey’. Morley, being heavily influenced by the 1954 premiere stage production, features a studio mock-up of the interior of a coach. This feature parallels the discussion between Britten and his associates during preparations for the 1954 premiere performance of the opera, during which the composer insisted on having a ‘realistic’ coach, even though others told him the onomatopoeic music was more than suggestive enough of the setting. This is indicative of an omnipresent tension in all Britten’s art between ambiguity and precision. In Morley, the Governess is seated, occasionally looking out of the window through which we can see a blurred moving ‘exterior’ which gives a good impression of travel. A single medium shot is used for the most part, echoing the previous framing for the Prologue, and the Governess sings towards the wall of the coach, not directly at the camera. Towards the end of the journey, the camera pulls in tighter as the Governess concludes her soliloquy with ‘Be brave, be brave. We’re nearly there. Very soon I shall know. Very soon I shall know’, as if physically pulling the viewer into the Governess’s thoughts.

Passage 2: Act I, Scene 8, ‘At Night’.

This passage is selected because this part of the story brings four of the main protagonists together in one scene for the first time, pairing Miles with Quint and Flora with Jessel. It has much musical interest due to the presence of the somewhat feminine melismatic phrases Quint uses to summon Miles juxtaposed with Jessel’s more masculine-sounding calls to Flora. (Gender stereotypes are further challenged in the score by Quint’s constant association with high celeste and Jessel’s with a deep gong stroke.) Also, interpretations of this passage by different directors tend to place the emphasis on one of three dramatic themes (the supernatural, the psychological, and the sexual), providing a useful means by which to compare the contrasting meanings highlighted by the different productions.

The scene opens with Morley’s segue from the previous instrumental variation (Variation VII). Quint’s calls to Miles are heard against a background of John Piper’s painting designs, with close-ups of Miles’s head fading in and out, superimposed on the image (Fig. 5.6). Morley’s use of superimposed images is not confined to simple dissolves (where the superimpositions only last briefly, and are barely noticeable), but instead have an artistic function, either to provide a striking juxtaposition, as here, or to imply a supernatural presence.



Fig. 5.6 Miles superimposed on the John Piper background image

The John Piper background gives way quite quickly to a view of the tower at Bly. There is not particularly an impression of towering height here, however, and the appearance is of battlements such as one might find on a castle rather than a country house. Quint simply walks on to the battlements (his entrance is not especially supernatural in appearance) and continues to sing the call. Miles responds with 'I'm here', and Morley creates a composite image (functionally a close relation to superimposition) with Quint in the upper right-hand quadrant of the screen, and Miles in the bottom left-hand quadrant (Fig. 5.7).



Fig. 5.7 Composite image showing Quint and Miles

Due to the technical limitations of 1950s television, it is tempting to underestimate the sophistication of Morley's direction. However, there are some interesting moments of subtlety. For example, during Quint's words 'The unknown gesture, the soft persistent word, the long sighing flight of the night-winged bird', Quint's hand gestures are mirrored exactly by Miles's head movements, almost in the manner of a puppet master, giving rise to the suspicion that Miles is under Quint's control.

As Miss Jessel begins her own call for Flora, Morley transitions to this with a quick dissolve to another composite. This time it is the opposite of the layout for Quint and Miles; Flora is positioned

high up on an ornate balcony (a kind of feminine equivalent of Quint's 'masculine' battlements) whereas Jessel is below this at some distance (Fig. 5.8).



Fig. 5.8 Composite of Flora and Miss Jessel

This continues through the scene, with occasional cuts back to close-ups of the characters, but at Quint's prying phrase 'What goes on in your dreams?', Morley creates a composite of three superimposed images. He places Quint in the top right hand corner of the screen, Miles in the bottom right-hand corner, and Flora, with Jessel, in the top left-hand corner. It would be modern practice to create this effect digitally in post-production, but in the 1950s studio the only way of achieving such a visual effect would be to mix the image as it was in the process of being videotaped. Such technology was still rather crude, but it could be done quite easily with some advance planning and rehearsal with the cameras. The use of a collage layout gave precisely the visual equivalent of what Britten was setting out to achieve in the music in order to tell the story, thus making the effort of creating such a shot worthwhile.



Fig. 5.9 Composite showing (clockwise from top left) Flora, Jessel, Quint and Miles

Morley's camera script reveals something of the meticulous planning which went into the filming of this scene (Fig. 5.10). Morley indicates the precise moments in the music where certain camera movements must occur, further evidence that, in Morley's vision of the opera, the visual and musical content was dictating the format.

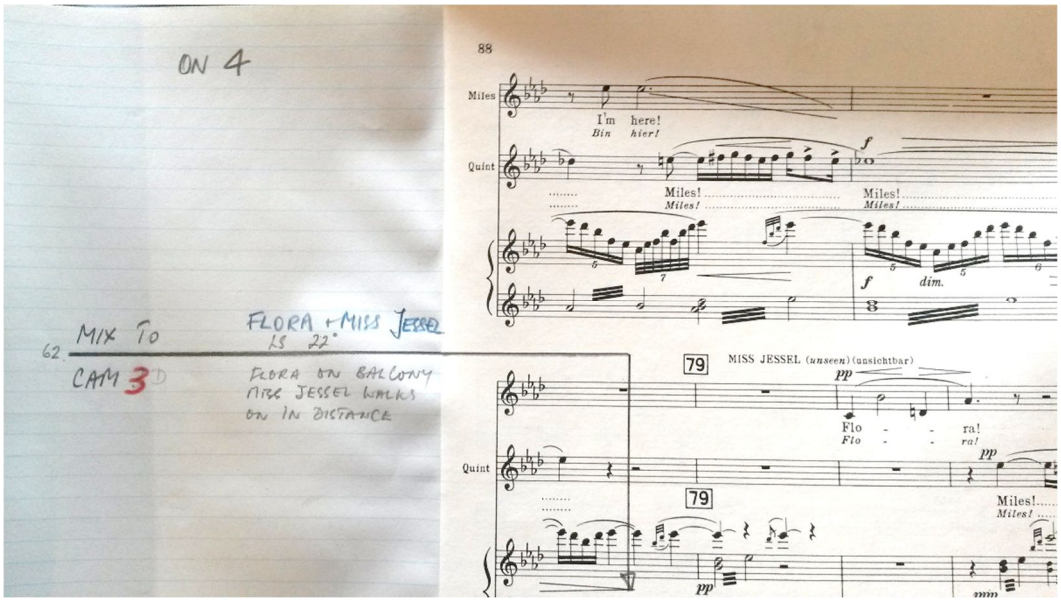


Fig. 5.10 Detail from camera script for Morley's production of *The Turn of the Screw*

Passage 3: Act II, Variation IX, and Act II, Scene 2, 'The Bells'.

This passage is selected firstly because it provides a view of how a purely musical section not reliant on dialogue (Variation IX) has been rendered visually, comparing this with the representation of the Theme in passage 1, and considering its transition into Act II Scene 2. Also, the dramatization of Scene 2 itself, with its ecclesiastical and graveyard setting, brings rich opportunities to observe and contrast the different approaches directors take to the theme of 'corruption', since a large part of the scene involves the children desecrating what is holy, pure, and socially conventional.

The previous variation (no. IX) segues into the scene; John Piper's painting dissolves into a shot of the graveyard, with visual continuity provided by having the backdrop strongly based on the corresponding variation painting. As the children begin to sing (off camera), the camera pans across the graveyard, a shot which dissolves into a view of the graveyard with the church building partially visible on the right hand side of the screen. The children enter from the right hand side at RF28 ('O Sing unto them a new song'). Camerawork here is mostly static, occasionally alternating with closer two-shots. To give emphasis to certain key moments, Morley sometimes pulls in even closer to create a two-shot or extreme close-up. For example, a little later in the scene, the exchange between the Governess and Mrs Grose is tightly framed ('his house is poisoned, the children mad'), serving to create an intense claustrophobic effect of paranoia (Fig. 5.11).



Fig. 5.11 '**His house is poisoned, the children mad'**

In summary, this chapter has explored aspects of the process of television commissioning during the late nineteen-fifties, especially how this applied to the independent television networks, and how programmes were typically produced and transmitted. In the case of Morley's production of *The Turn of the Screw*, I was able, using archive material together with written memoirs of two participants, to provide a detailed account of its pre-production preparation and the technical process of video recording in the studio. An appraisal of critical reaction to the transmission was provided, together with analytical case studies of three key scenes. None of this archival work would have been possible without the vigilance of the BFI's archivist, Pam Hall, who discovered a telecine transfer to 16mm film stock hitherto thought lost. The account of this discovery is notable in itself, and formed part of this chapter.

There do not appear to be any further televised versions of the opera until Petr Weigl's 1982 film made in the Czech Republic, apart from a production for Danish television in 1968 mentioned by Patricia Howard, and which seems to have disappeared without trace.[45] The next chapter examines non-opera films of James's story, subsequent filmed versions of the opera, and also some non-filmed productions which explicitly bring out the cinematic qualities of the work.

[45] Howard, 'Stage History: Performances since 1954', in Howard (ed) *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, p. 140.

Chapter 6. *The Turn of the Screw* on film: Case Studies

This chapter will investigate six films of *The Turn of the Screw*, each one being used as material for case studies. An outline production history with technical details (plus Morley's version discussed in Chapter 5) can be found in Appendix 3. Two of the versions examined in this chapter were especially made for television, and the remaining four have been filmed in a theatre or opera house, in most cases with an audience present for all or part of the filming process. These versions have been chosen in order to provide a suitably comprehensive set for comparison.[1] Although there are a number of filmed versions of the opera (some more complete than others) available for viewing on YouTube,[2] these are generally not filmed to commercial standards, and therefore are not included in this study.

There is also brief study of two non-operatic films based on or inspired by Henry James's story: Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961), Michael Winner's *The Nightcomers* (1971), and one televised dramatisation directed by Dan Curtis (1974). Although all three of these films postdate the opera, they each display qualities which find resonance within the opera films, and therefore some of the opera films will be referenced here.

In Chapter 5, three passages were analysed, dealing with Morley's treatment of them in his 1959 version. The present chapter will discuss the musical and dramatic contexts of these passages in more detail, before providing a group of analyses based around the passages (not including Morley). These films will be examined under a number of subheadings, providing a comprehensive coverage of cinematic devices in use by directors. Finally, for comparison, there will be a consideration of two other notable stage productions which, although they have not been filmed, nonetheless display the influence of cinema: Jonathan Miller's 1979 production for English National Opera and Timothy Sheader's 2018 production at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, also involving ENO.

The opera films

Film 1 was directed by Petr Weigl. It is not currently available commercially, although it is easy to find on YouTube.[3] Its original UK TV transmission was on Channel 4 shortly after its release in 1982, and it has, in the past, been available to buy on VHS but no subsequent edition (e.g. on DVD) has been released. Despite this, it has been included here because of the numerous directorial choices which

[1] Throughout the chapter, in order to distinguish between the different filmed versions of the opera, they will be referred to by the surname of the director. In versions which originated as stage productions, the name of the stage director is used as the reference. Also, for reasons of consistency, all screen versions will be referred to as 'films', even though some versions used alternative recording media rather than standard film stock.
[2] A typical example is a production by 'Brava! Opera' (2014): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G14sVJLU30I (accessed 2 October 2019).
[3] Britten, *The Turn of the Screw* (dir. Petr Weigl 1982): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qb8_SnrZWzk (accessed 9 January 2018).

make it noteworthy, even somewhat eccentric in some areas. It was filmed in the Czech Republic (the landscape and architecture immediately disrupt the expected Victorian English setting), and the cast is also Czech; they are actors, rather than opera singers, who mime to a previously recorded commercial recording of the opera conducted by Colin Davis.[4] It is also entirely filmed on location (there is no sense in which this is a film of an opera-house production), and finally, there is a rather curious seven-minute prequel (referred to by commentators as a pre-prologue), that sets up the director's interpretation of the backstory and establishes the general aesthetic for the film before Britten's music begins**.** Film 2, directed by Michael Hampe, is the earliest of the films in this study that is still currently available on DVD. It has the added attraction of featuring noted Britten interpreter Steuart Bedford at the musical helm. This production was filmed in front of a live audience at the Schwetzinger Festival in 1990, and very much attempts to recreate something approaching the live opera-house experience. (For example, at the start, we see the audience gathering in their seats and the arrival of the conductor, and we hear the orchestra tuning up.) Australian director Neil Armfield was in charge of Film 3, recorded at His Majesty's Theatre, Perth, Australia, in 1992. In contrast with many staged performances, the Prologue and Peter Quint are played by two different performers. Luc Bondy directed Film 4, produced at Aix-en-Provence in 2001.This production, like Armfield's Opera Australia version, departed from the usual convention of having the same singer playing Peter Quint and the Prologue. Film 5 was directed by Katie Mitchell, and made on location. It was first shown on BBC television. Although never intended for cinema release, this is (along with Weigl) the most traditionally cinematic in visual style and production values, reflecting the trend for such directorial approaches in television drama during the present century, and perhaps influenced by the tendency towards home cinema with bigger screens, hi-fi sound and widescreen format in ever-increasing levels of high definition picture. It may be noted that Mitchell has included three characters who do not appear in the score: non-singing roles for 'Old Governess', 'Mother of Miles and Flora', and 'Maid'. Finally, Jonathan Kent has directed many operas and musicals, including *Tosca, Katya Kabanova, Sweeney Todd* and *Gypsy*, as well as many conventional plays, but his 2006 production of *The Turn of the Screw* for Glyndebourne, our Film 6, was his first (and, at the time of writing, his only) Britten opera.

Non-operatic Films based on *The Turn of the Screw*

Henry James's powerful ghost story has inspired a number of film and television adaptations since Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* in 1961. These include adaptations which are relatively faithful to the original story (for example, Dan Curtis's TV adaptation from 1974 starring Lynn Redgrave), foreign-language adaptions (Marco Serafini's 2009 Italian production *Il Mistero del Lago*) and a version in which names and settings have been changed (*The Haunting of Helen Walker*, dir. Tom McLaughlin, 1995). An adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw* directed by Alex Galvin was in production in 2019.

[4] Philips, Catalogue no: 410 426-1 (2-disc set, released 1985).

Furthermore, the atmosphere built up in Alejandro Amendabar's film *The Others* (2001), starring Nicole Kidman, is also said to have been inspired by the story. [5]

The films do not have any clear connection with Britten's work, but parallels can be seen in some of the filmed versions of the opera. Clayton's *The Innocents* provides a rich source of images and soundscapes which have correspondences in many of the opera films, and the influence of Michael Winner's film *The Nightcomers* (1971), a prequel to the story rather than an adaptation of James, can be seen in both Weigl and Mitchell. The Curtis TV adaptation, although not the only one that could have had an influence on the opera films, is also considered in this section. Being made in 1974, it pre-dates the earliest of the filmed operas (apart from Morley) and therefore may have resonances in the two most cinematic versions of the opera (Weigl and Mitchell).

Clayton's *The Innocents* follows the original core story closely (there is no attempt to render the outer narratives from James), and benefitted from an erudite screenplay credited to William Archibald and Truman Capote, with some additional scenes and dialogue by John Mortimer. Archibald had already scripted the stage adaptation of the same name (seen by a somewhat unimpressed Myfanwy Piper),[6] and the literary credentials of both Capote and Mortimer were already well established. Characters from the story were retained, although the Governess was given a name 'Miss Giddens', and an additional character, 'Anna', a maid, was added. The film was made on location at Sheffield Park, Uckfield in East Sussex, and at Shepperton Studios, shot in black-and-white. Music was by veteran film composer Georges Auric, and this bears no discernible resemblance to Britten's operatic score. Additionally, it is not known how much familiarity Clayton had with the opera; it is possible that he may have seen it staged, or seen Morley's televised version in 1959. The fact that he commissioned John Piper to do some preliminary production designs (Figs. 6.1a and 6.1b) may be an indication that he had a greater acquaintance with the opera than we have evidence for. Elements from Piper's designs found their way into the finished film; for example, the curiously shaped folly by the lake makes an early appearance when the Governess first encounters Flora (Fig. 6.2).

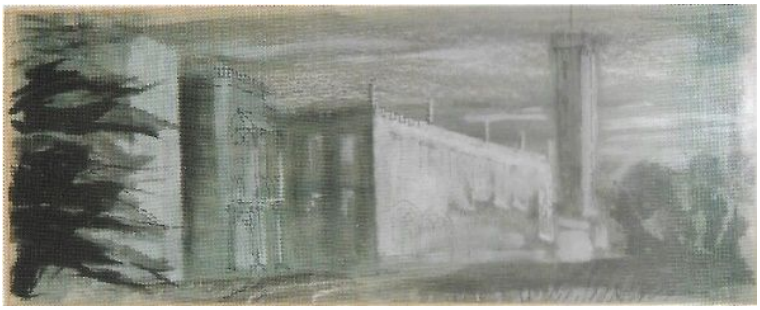


Fig. 6.1a John Piper production design sketch for *The Innocents*, showing Bly (source: *The Innocents* DVD notes, BFI, 2010)

[5] Article in *Daily Telegraph*, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturepicturegalleries/9071849/The-Woman-In-Black-top-10-ghost-films.html?image=3 (accessed 25 November 2019).
[6] Piper, 'Writing for Britten', in Herbert, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, p. 8.



Fig. 6.1b: John Piper production design sketch for *The Innocents*, showing the lake and folly (source: *The Innocents* DVD notes, BFI, 2010)



Fig. 6.2: The Governess meets Flora by the lake and folly

The ambiguity of James's story is well represented in the film, a quality which did not pass unnoticed in a contemporaneous article by Penelope Houston, who was given access to some of the filming process: 'spectres […] reappear as neurotic symptoms […] Deborah Kerr, who plays the part [of the Governess], insists with Clayton's full agreement on the element of sustained uncertainty: she believes the audience should never be quite sure.'[7] Kerr's character has a line in the film which almost articulates this thought: 'sometimes', she says, 'you just can't help…imagining things'.[8] As if to further underline this point, elsewhere Houston wrote: '[the film] must communicate its theme not through what happens – for what, after all, does happen? – but through intimations of the extraordinary.'[9]

The tone of ambiguity is established right at the start. Over a completely black screen, a child's voice sings a pastiche folk song composed by Auric to words by Paul Dehn; the first few bars are shown in Ex. 6.1 below. Not surprisingly, this theme is adopted as a leitmotif in the score, gradually transforming in increasingly sinister ways as the terror takes hold (not unlike Britten's treatment of his Theme in the opera) at each 'turn of the screw'. The voice sounds innocent, but the message of the song contains a disconcertingly sexual subtext, along with suggestions of death and sadness. There is certainly a similarity with Miles's 'Malo' song in the opera, which, given lack of any evidence to the contrary, is presumably coincidental. Later in the film, the song is described by the Governess as coming 'from the music box', a sonority which is close to the sound of a celesta, the

[7] Penelope Houston, in *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1961, reprinted in *The Innocents* DVD notes (BFI, 2010).
[8] William Archibald and Truman Capote, screenplay for *The Innocents* (1961).
[9] Houston, in *Sight and Sound*, reprinted in *The Innocents* DVD notes

instrument Britten frequently associates with the supernatural, especially in *The Turn of the Screw*. It is only at the end of the song (at the words 'for willow I die') that the 20th Century-Fox ident appears on screen and gives way to the main titles, which are plain white superimposed on a dark background, gradually lightening to reveal (still in semi-darkness) the clasped hands of a woman. This continues the ambiguity; we cannot be sure whether the hands are clasped in desperation or prayer, and at times they even resemble the fragile wings of a bird or butterfly (foreshadowing details which will be seen later in the film). The accompanying sounds are of the orchestral title music (lightly scored for flutes, and close-miked), combined with the sound of birdsong and a weeping woman.



Ex. 6.1: First bars of the pastiche folk song (Auric/Dehn) which opens *The Innocents*

Dan Curtis's 1974 television adaptation of the story retained James's title, and starred Lynn Redgrave as the Governess (named in this production as 'Jane Cubberley'). Although made for TV, it has a more cinematic appearance and does not appear particularly studio-bound in the manner of many BBC period dramas of the 1970s, making use of extensive location shooting. This is established in the opening title sequence. Less foreboding than Clayton's, Curtis simply has white titles superimposed on exterior shots of the Governess's coach journey to Bly, accompanied by somewhat insipid music composed by Robert Cobert. A point of interest here, however, is that before the titles have finished flashing up on screen, there is a voiceover of the Governess herself introducing some of the backstory, a device not used in Clayton's version, but which has parallels with both James's book and Britten's opera Prologue. The Governess's voiceovers are used later in the film to punctuate some of the key points in the drama, using a style of language which mimics James, without using any direct quotations from the book. It might be said that these spoken punctuations perform a similar function in Curtis's film to Britten's orchestral variations between each scene in the opera. The introductory voiceover is immediately followed by a full dramatization, in flashback, of the Governess's interview with the children's uncle, who, in this production, is given a name, Mr Fredericks. Some brief scenes of the interview (imagined and extrapolated from James) also appear in Weigl, although none of the other opera films have this detail. Another feature of Curtis that is not explored in the opera films in anything other than a perfunctory way (such as the inclusion of a solitary maid in Mitchell) is the addition of extra characters, such as the coach driver who has quite a lengthy conversation with the Governess during her journey. This allows Curtis to establish more of the backstory and also set the scene in varied ways.

The Innocents continues to establish the story in a generally conventional way, but with small hints at first of the themes of corruption which intensify as the tale unfolds. For example, when the

Governess first meets Flora, she is startled by the child's question, 'Are you afraid of reptiles?' Reptiles are typically a symbol of corruption and insidious evil. One immediately thinks of snakes, but Clayton is more subtle than that, providing Flora with a pet tortoise (Fig. 6.3), a benign form of reptile certainly, but nevertheless the connection is made. Flora could have referred to her pet as the less threatening 'tortoise', but chooses the word 'reptile' instead; she may, of course, have gleaned the word from a biology textbook, or this may be an early sign that this young lady is perhaps not as innocent as she appears. Moments later, the Governess is greeted by Mrs Grose in the entrance hall of Bly, where there are flowers, recently fresh, but just on the point of dying. Clayton thus presents at the outset an environment where things are already beginning to rot and break down even at this early stage in the film. Even if this is too strong an interpretation for the inclusion of the tortoise, there remains Clayton's disruption of expected gender expectations of the period, in which it was usually boys who played with reptiles as pets.



Fig. 6.3: 'Are you afraid of reptiles?' Flora with pet tortoise

Still later in the film (but before the appearance of Miles, who, at this stage is still at school), Flora announces with a touch too much glee: 'Oh look, this spider is eating a butterfly.'[10] The camera shows the hapless butterfly struggling, alongside Flora's face showing an expression not of shock and upset, or concern for the pitiful creature, but one of delight, fascination with death, and enjoyment of witnessing suffering. A number of the opera films present Flora, similarly, as a greater agent of corruption and evil than is perhaps implied in Britten's score, for example, Armfield, Bondy, and Mitchell all find increasingly sinister undercurrents in their portrayals of her character. Furthermore, much later in the film, in the schoolroom (the children's 'domain' and, later, Miss Jessel's ghostly domain; a space that really should be the present Governess's territory, although she has no control over it), a small detail which relies principally on sound to make its effect underlines the spreading corruption. Clayton uses the insistent sound of a buzzing fly here, a creature which started life as a maggot (growing amongst rotting flesh and literally feeding on death) before spreading its wings to carry its corruption throughout its world. The unsettling effect this has on the viewer is akin to some of

[10] Archibald and Capote, *The Innocents*.

the sonic effects Britten uses in his score to announce supernatural events (e.g. celesta), and at a more sophisticated level, the whole sequence of changing, turning tonality that disturbs the opera audience's sense of equilibrium through a shifting key structure that operates for most listeners on a subconscious level. Similar to the opening singing to a black screen, disembodied sounds are also used by Clayton ambiguously during a sequence late on in the film in which the Governess is seen wandering through the corridors of Bly by night, lit only by candles she takes with her. We hear numerous sounds (snatches of conversation, a ticking clock, creepy laughter, footsteps) which could either be diegetic or metadiegetic (i.e. solely in the mind of the Governess). Some of the sounds have been electronically modified, with added echo and reverb, or otherwise distorted, to enhance the effect of disorientation. This sequence has similarities with Mitchell's treatment of the children's responding to Quint and Jessel's summoning, corresponding to the final scene of Act I ('At Night') in Britten's opera, as can be seen in Fig. 6.4, where candles and staircases are likewise juxtaposed though in this instance the Governess is not involved. It is not clear whether Mitchell is merely following a well-worn path trodden by many horror-film directors, or if she has been influenced by Clayton.[11]



Fig. 6.4: Visual similarities: Clayton (top) and Mitchell (bottom)

[11] A request, via her agent, to interview Katie Mitchell or otherwise correspond with her in connection with this thesis was declined, and I have been unable to find any references to *The Innocents* in published literature on Mitchell's work.

Curtis's adaptation has a scene which is also very similar, and even includes some comparable sound tapestry; the same footsteps, the same ticking clock and creaking doors create an unnerving atmosphere. The scene shows the Governess exploring the dark staircase, at the command of Miles, who in the preceding scene involved her in a game (with clear sadistic overtones) in which he enacted master to her slave. The staircase leads to the tower, at the top of which the Governess discovers Flora's doll and a chest labelled 'Peter Quint'.

Another useful scene for comparison is the part of the story represented in the opera as Act II Scene 7 ('Flora'). During this scene Flora has run off and is discovered at the side of the lake by the Governess and Mrs Grose. Angry at Flora, the Governess asks her why she ran off, but at this point the apparition of Miss Jessel appears. Jessel can be seen by the Governess, but is invisible to Mrs Grose. The Governess is convinced that Flora can see the ghost, but the child denies this, and even expresses hatred towards the Governess, as the following extract from the original story shows:

> [Flora's] incomparable childish beauty had suddenly failed, had quite vanished. I've said it already – she was literally, she was hideously hard: she had turned common and almost ugly. 'I don't know what you mean. I see nobody. I see nothing. I never have. I think you're cruel. I don't like you!'[12]

In Clayton's film, the Governess finds Flora dancing to the music- box tune (Ex. 6.1) which the girl has set up in the folly by the lake. In addition to the music of the song, an eerie electronic sound (somewhat like gently howling wind) is introduced before the camera reveals Jessel on the opposite bank of the lake. Thus, the viewer anticipates that something supernatural is about to happen. At first, it is clear that Jessel is indeed not visible to Flora. There is a sudden downpour of rain (providing the possibility that Jessel is not real but possibly a result of shadows and unclear vision through heavy rain), and the Governess quizzes Flora about who gave her the music box, suggesting that it was Jessel who did this. As the scene becomes more intense emotionally, there is a shot in which the Governess, Flora and Jessel are all clearly visible even though Flora continues vehemently to deny being able to see the ghost. Heavy rain also features in the equivalent scene in Curtis's adaptation, and the Governess and Mrs Grose are given umbrellas, as they are in Weigl (see below). A long shot is used by Curtis to give Jessel a context within the mise-en-scène; a device used by all the other directors (Fig. 6.5). It appears that Curtis chooses to allow Flora to see Jessel, as she is lured right into the lake from which the Governess and Mrs Grose have to rescue her. Nonetheless, as in the book, opera, and other adaptations, Flora denies that she can see the ghost. In response to the Governess's assertion 'You saw her, didn't you?', she replies 'I saw nothing, Miss.'

[12] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 132.



Fig. 6.5: Miss Jessel by the lake (Curtis)

In Mitchell, there is little doubt that Flora does see Jessel because she is shown being lured into the lake by the ghost, in a sequence which dovetails with shots of Miles still playing the piano from earlier, providing a connective link between the involvement of the two children. Ironically, although there is a shot which is strongly reminiscent and possibly influenced by Clayton (Fig. 6.6), Flora and Jessel are not actually seen in the same shot, continuing the mysterious visual appearance (although without the rain that is present in Clayton's version) and therefore linking with the uncertainties in the original story.



Fig. 6.6: Miss Jessel by the lake (Mitchell)

As in *The Innocents*, and Curtis's television version, Weigl sets this scene amid heavy rain, with the Governess and Mrs Grose running around somewhat comically holding umbrellas, a tiny humorous detail amongst the terror. Also, in common with Clayton's film, Flora is found standing in a folly by the lake. There is no mention of either heavy rain or a folly in James (Flora's location is described as simply 'stood before us on the grass').[13] When Jessel appears, she is not amongst reeds, as in Clayton and Mitchell, but on what seems to be a wooden bridge. The physical height given by this

[13] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 127.

location creates a parallel with Quint's appearances on the tower, and also acts as a reminder that, in Weigl's film, Quint is frequently associated with man-made constructions (often ornate ones, such as an Islamic-style tower), whereas Jessel is more often located amongst more natural ones (woods, trees, flowers and the lake).

Clayton's treatment of the character of Miles also has parallels with some of the opera films. As with the opera (and James's story) he is initially presented as an attractive young boy, with a mischievous, but not malicious, streak. That being said, the viewer is made aware early on that he has been expelled from school for an unnamed wickedness, the precise nature of which is not made clear, allowing the viewer's imagination to infer the reason. Indeed, as the story progresses, disturbing details emerge about Miles: for example, he keeps a dead bird with a broken neck under his pillow, and, soon after we have been shown this, kisses the Governess passionately upon the lips in a brazenly inappropriate and sexually precocious manner.[14] Also, in a rather more subtle detail, when Miles does his piano practice, he is playing a variation on the folk song which opened the film, 'We Lay, My Love and I, Beneath a Weeping Willow', recalling the song's sinister undertone. In this and other ways, Clayton slowly but surely builds up, in both children, an undeniable atmosphere of corruption and malice.

In Weigl the corrupting behaviour of Quint and Jessel towards the two children is made explicit in the pre-prologue, and is hinted at in *The Innocents* when Mrs Grose talks of 'rooms used in daylight as if they were dark woods' (i.e. for sexual purposes that may or may not have been witnessed by Miles and Flora). Winner's *The Nightcomers* expands the backstory into a fully worked-out prequel in which the events preceding the Governess's narrative in James's novel are invented by screenwriter Michael Hastings. *The Nightcomers* was not received favourably by the critics upon its release. The *New York Times*'s reviewer, for example, described it as a 'particularly listless and greedy parody, the sort that makes no coherent comment on the work it so freely exploits and insists on telling us everything we never wanted to know about the events that occurred before those in *The Turn of The Screw*.'[15] A more recent commentator, Laurence Raw, has argued that the film should be reappraised, stating that one of its 'principal attractions' is its 'portrayal of a dysfunctional family. Miles and Flora's parents have died; their legal guardian is not really concerned for their welfare' and Quint and Jessel 'assume a paternal role'.[16] Raw goes on to argue that the film needed to be made in Winner's typical style (i.e. overplaying the sex and violence) in order to be situated within the marketplace in the early 1970s:

> Such material was essential to the box-office potential of an upmarket horror production, conceived at a time when censorship laws in the U.S. and Great Britain were more relaxed than ever before. A film could no

[14] These kind of behaviours by children are commonly regarded by safeguarding experts as indicators of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. See https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/warning-signs-in-children-and-adults.htm (accessed 7 October 2019).
[15] Vincent Canby, 'Brando Stars in The Nightcomers On Baronet Screen' in *New York Times* (February 1972), https://www.nytimes.com/1972/02/16/archives/brando-stars-in-nightcomers-on-baronet-screen.html (accessed 4 August 2019).
[16] Laurence Raw, 'Horrific Henry James: Michael Winner's *The Nightcomers* (1971)' in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 31 no. 3, (2003), p. 193.

> longer sell itself on nudity alone: more explicit material had to be shown.[17]

As Raw implies, Winner's film focuses luridly on the sexual elements of the corruption, with explicit sequences of sado-masochism between Quint and Jessel which are subsequently re-enacted by the children. Also, the deaths of Quint and Jessel are revealed to be at the hands of the children: Jessel is drowned because her boat on the lake sinks due to the hole Flora has made in its hull, and Miles shoots an arrow into Quint's head.

Despite the over-the-top sex scenes and general liberties taken with anything that could be inferred from James's book, the most significant aberration is that it forces the viewer to accept the 'first story' interpretation of the subsequent *Turn of the Screw* narrative: that the ghosts are real, and outside the imaginations of the Governess, children and Mrs Grose. Also, since the whole point of the story and the way it is told by James is ambiguity (and the possibility that the Governess is paranoid and delusional), it is a major weakness that the sexual dimension is made so explicit rather than being hinted at. However, of interest to us is the extent to which *The Nightcomers* demonstrates the influence of Clayton's film, and also how some of its tropes can be discovered especially in two opera films, Weigl and Mitchell.

There are numerous instances where Winner references Clayton. Some references seem almost accidental (although this is unlikely), such as the flowers in the entrance hall at Bly (Fig. 6.7), but many are too blatant to be a result of chance. Early on in both films, reptiles are used to indicate the onset of evil and corruption. As has been noted above, Clayton uses the docile tortoise as his reptile of choice. Although there is indeed a tortoise in *The Nightcomers* (which Miles, in bed, produces guiltily from under the sheets in much the same manner as a teenage boy might with a pornographic magazine), Winner's preference is to feature a somewhat more sinister toad, which is, of course, an amphibian rather than a reptile, and already has connotations of witchcraft and the occult, but the principle is the same. Winner, sadistically, takes this one step further by having Quint force the hapless, abused toad to smoke a cigar until the poor animal literally and messily explodes. Later on, Winner takes up Clayton's buzzing-fly cue by incorporating the fly's former existence as a maggot and including a number of shots of maggots infesting the food Mrs Grose is preparing in the kitchen (Fig. 6.8).

In addition to similarities caused by the setting itself (for example, the folly by the lake), there are other, more cinematic, areas in which *The Nightcomers* references *The Innocents*, for example in certain aspects of the sound design, indicating perhaps a subtler approach than one might expect given Marlon Brando's uncomplimentary judgement of Winner's ability as a director. (Brando, who played Quint, reported that Winner 'told me I was a great actor and he wasn't a great director. So I could do what I liked.'[18] There is a sequence about halfway through Winner's film which illustrates the sonic parallels between the two films very well. The sequence is structured in two parts. In part one, it is night time, and Quint enters the house with the intention of a clandestine meeting with Miles

[17] Raw, 'Horrific Henry James' in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, p. 193.
[18] Quoted in Raw, 'Horrific Henry James' in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, pp. 193.

(although Jessel is under the impression that Quint is on his way to her bed). On the staircase he encounters a furious Mrs Grose, brandishing a shotgun, who forbids him to ever enter the house again. Quint retreats, leading us to the second part of the sequence, in which Miss Jessel, naked in bed, expects Quint to arrive for a sexual encounter, only to find that her nocturnal visitor is Mrs Grose intent upon castigating Jessel over her loose morals. Of course, Clayton has no sequence in *The Innocents* which resembles this one visually, but in part one of Winner's sequence a loudly ticking clock and, in part two, creaks and footsteps, have exact counterparts in the sound design of *The Innocents* (discussed above).



Fig. 6.7: Flowers in Bly's entrance hall - *The Innocents* (top) and *The Nightcomers* (bottom)



Fig. 6.8: Maggot in the food as a symbol of corruption in *The Nightcomers*

One visual image which Winner uses in his film, that of Flora's doll, has a counterpart in Mitchell, indicating a sphere of influence. Of course, the doll also features in Act I Scene 7 of the opera, during Flora's discussion with the Governess about the Dead Sea, and in which Flora sings a song (ostensibly a lullaby, but with a strong subtext of death) to the doll:

> Dolly must sleep wherever I choose.
> Today by the dead salt sea,
> Tomorrow her waxen lids may close
> On the plains of Muscovy.[19]

Taking up the theme of the 'death' of the doll, combined with the general tone of corruption of the innocents (there are few more innocent images than a simple child's doll), Winner presents a disturbing visual image of the doll suffering an infestation of flies, echoing the maggot images earlier in the film (Fig. 6.9).



Fig. 6.9: Flora's doll with flies

Images of dolls are often found in horror films or films about the supernatural. There may be a psychological reason why viewers find dolls so disturbing in this context. Research by cognitive neuroscientist Thalia Wheatley suggests that this is related to how the human brain detects faces. Shayla Love, reporting on Wheatley's studies, wrote:

> Wheatley […] found that the way the brain perceives faces has two stages. The first we already knew: that a face is rapidly detected. But there's another, longer process where our brains try to determine if a face has a mind […] If you deem something not to have a mind, then your attention wanes. Wheatley thinks the first part is very primitive, which is why even newborns show the ability to do it […] But the second stage moves beyond survival. "You're basically looking to see whether this person has a mind you can connect with. Is somebody home?" And that's where the creepiness can come in. With dolls, or other human-like objects that do a better job at mimicking what real faces look like, your brain is searching for a mind and not finding one. But it's getting a lot of

[19] Britten would undoubtedly have known that 'death lullabies' are a strong part of Russian culture, which makes the libretto reference to 'Muscovy' particularly apposite. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, Kalle Achte et al's paper (see Achté, Kalle, Ritva Fagerström, Juha Pentikäinen, and Norman L. Farberow. "Themes of Death and Violence in Lullabies of Different Countries." OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying 20, no. 3 (May 1990): 193–204. doi:10.2190/A7YP-TJ3C-M9C1-JY45) explores death lullabies in detail.

> the same cues (eyes, mouth, expressions) that it would receive in faces with minds. “There are these signals that are telling our brain this thing is alive,” she says. “But we know it’s not alive. And that juxtaposition is really creepy.”[20]

The image of the drowned doll which Mitchell uses in her opera film appears to be based more directly on Winner’s depiction of the drowning of Miss Jessel, but nevertheless the connection between the two films is observable; the precise camera angle, positioning of the body, and the colouration are all closely matched, as shown in Fig. 6.10, to such an extent that it is difficult to see how this can be an accidental reference.



Fig. 6.10: Comparison of Winner (top) with Mitchell (bottom)

Very little of Weigl’s pre-prologue appears to demonstrate any direct influence of *The Nightcomers*, but there are two key areas which indicate either that Weigl has consciously or unconsciously acknowledged Winner’s film or has come upon similar ideas accidentally. First, there is a scene in Weigl in which Miles witnesses Quint and Jessel’s lovemaking through a window (the

[20] Shayla Love, ‘There’s a Psychological Reason Dolls Are So Spooky’ in Vice.Com website (2018), https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/wj4ngb/this-is-why-we-think-dolls-are-creepyutm_sourcetonicfbus (accessed 26 November 2019).

children's witnessing and later copying the adults' sexual behaviour is a key plot point in Winner), and second, Weigl uses the sound effect of the buzzing fly at two points: the first during an intimate scene in which Jessel gives her necklace to Flora, and the second during the lovemaking witnessed by Miles. It should be borne in mind that the buzzing fly features in Clayton, and so there is a possibility that it is Clayton's film, not Winner's, that is the source of this effect. In James's story, there is no mention of a fly.

The Nightcomers was scored by Jerry Fielding, who also scored *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Straw Dogs* (1971), both films (directed by Sam Peckinpah) also notorious for their violent and/or sexual content. There are a number of oblique musical similarities between Fielding's score and Britten's opera. Most of Quint's appearances in the film are accompanied by him whistling to himself. The high-pitched sonority of his whistle is reminiscent of the tinkling of Britten's celesta in the orchestration of the opera. When Quint appears on the tower, there are increasing dissonances in Fielding's score, which do not simply sound dissonant per se, but have a discernably Brittenesque quality in their choice of pitch centres and melodic angularity, attributes which recall harmonies and melodic profiles in *The Turn of the Screw*. Fielding's music frequently features a solo piano, recalling Miles's piano practice in the opera. At the end of the film, when Flora sabotages the boat, there is a Brittenesque 12-tone piano gesture. And finally, when Jessel, earlier in the film, calls 'Flora', the vocal phrasing and pitch contour, whilst not in any way a musical declamation (not even *sprechstimme*) are similar to Jessel's 'Flora' call in the opera. Although Fielding, who died in 1980, was primarily a jazz musician, he had some classical training at the Carnegie Institute for Instrumentalists in Pittsburgh, and thus it is likely that he would have been familiar with Britten's compositional style and the score of *The Turn of the Screw*.

The Passages

In order to facilitate comparison between the six opera films, I have selected two key passages from Act I and one from Act II, as follows:

Passage 1: Prologue, Theme and Journey (from the opening until one bar before Variation I).

Passage 2: Act I, Scene 8, At Night.

Passage 3: Act II, Variation IX, and Act II, Scene 2, The Bells.

The rationale for selecting these passages was explained in Chapter 5, and the musical and dramatic context of each is explored below.

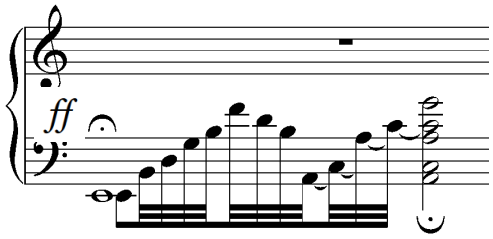
Passage 1. Act I Prologue, Theme and Scene 1 Journey.

This passage contains the initial narration, delivered by the character identified in the score simply as 'Prologue', but played in the original 1954 production by Peter Pears, who also played

Quint. The convention of having the same singer play the Prologue and Quint is often retained in theatrical performances, although, as will be seen from the films, not universally so. During the Prologue the scene is set, beginning with the words 'It is a curious story'. The Prologue character describes the basic backstory: who owns the house at Bly, the need for a Governess to look after two orphaned children, and the rather unusual request by the house's owner ('the children's only relative') for there to be no communication with him from the Governess following her appointment to the post. During the Journey, the Governess reflects upon her forthcoming task as she travels towards Bly, and has a brief moment of panic before resolving to do her best:

> If things go wrong, what shall I do?
> Who can I ask, with none of my kind to talk to?
> […] I must not write to their guardian, that is the hardest part of all.
> Whatever happens it is I, I who must decide.
> […] O why, why did I come?
> No! I've said I will do it, and for him I will. There is nothing to fear.
> What could go wrong? Be brave, be brave.
> We're nearly there. Very soon I shall know. Very soon I shall know.

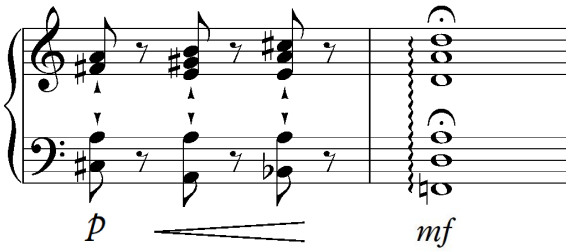
Musically, the Prologue is essentially set as a slow recitative, accompanied by piano, configured gesturally in three ways: a) rapid demisemiquaver arpeggios (Ex. 6.2), used to punctuate the vocal passages; b) arpeggiated triadic chords, normally semibreves, which are held underneath vocal phrases (Ex. 6.3); and c) dry, staccato chords, often used as an anacrusis to the arpeggiated triads (Ex. 6.4).



Ex. 6.2: Prologue piano gesture (a)

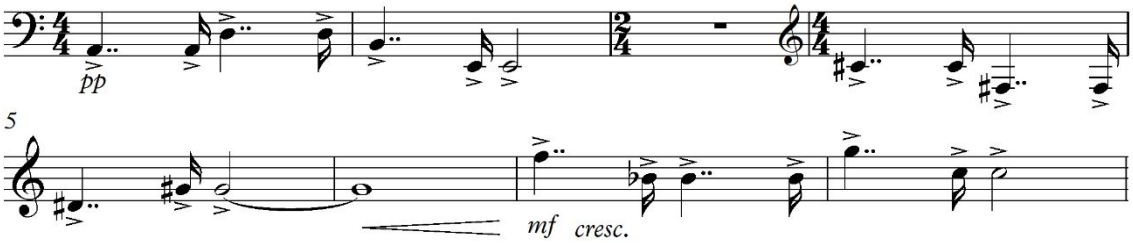


Ex. 6.3 : Prologue piano gesture (b)



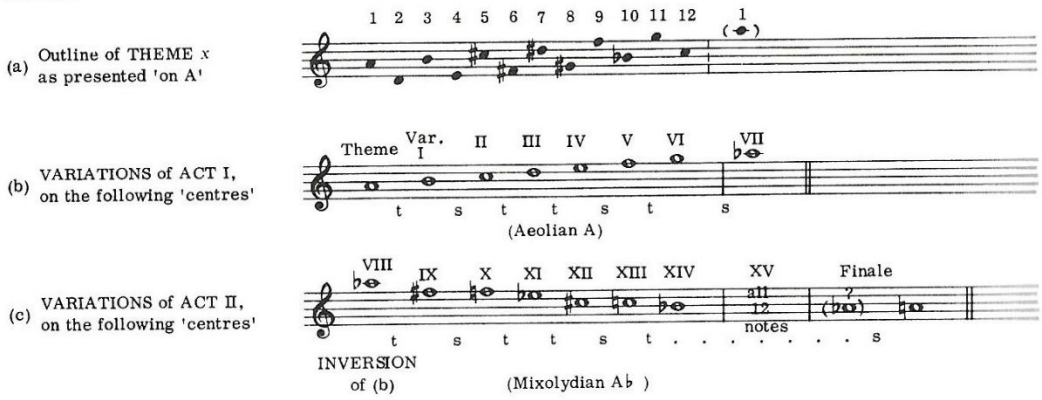
Ex. 6.4 : Prologue piano gesture (c)

The Theme is then played (Ex. 6.5), segueing into a ten-bar instrumental interlude (marked 'Quick' in the score) which forms an introduction to the Journey (Ex. 6.7).



Ex. 6.5: Theme

Peter Evans has shown the Theme, followed by the tonal centres for the instrumental variations used between each scene (Ex. 6.6). [21]



Ex. 6.6: Theme and variations tonal centres according to Evans

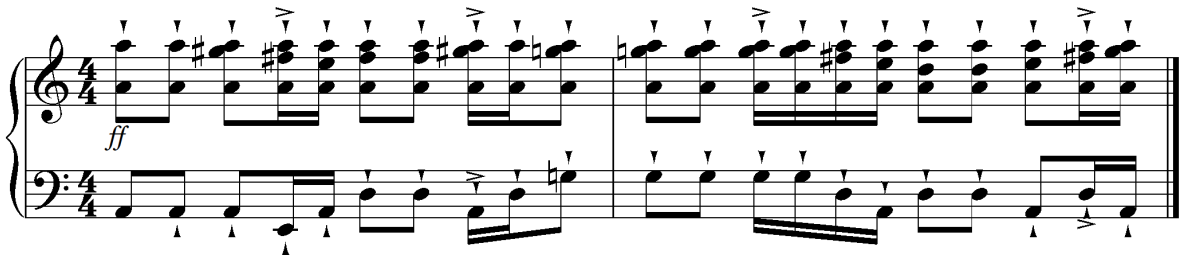
[21] Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, p.205 – 206.

Cooke considerably developed Evans's analysis, demonstrating how 'Britten's compositional techniques in his operas embraced an idiosyncratic adaptation of both serial and free twelve-note ideas to his own dramatic ends.'[22] Cooke went on to illustrate in detail how the *Screw* theme, although sometimes treated in a quasi-serial manner, also includes strong diatonic elements within its twelve-note set, and pointed out that, for Britten, 'the idea of basing an entire piece on an atonal note-row was anathema.'[23] These built-in tonal elements are important, and suggest Berg as a possible model. For instance, every pair of notes can be harmonised as a perfect cadence, the first six notes belong to a diatonic D major scale, and the six notes from note 3 onwards give the diatonic E major scale. Indeed, there are no fewer than six different major scales available according to which pitch groupings are emphasised. The pattern also consists of one whole-tone scale interleaved with the other (compare the odd-numbered notes with the even ones). This combination of simplicity and cleverness is typical of Britten, and perhaps an example of what Christopher Chowrimootoo calls 'middlebrow modernism' when describing how 'Britten was lauded for renovating traditional musical language instead of inventing it anew'.[24]

Taking a dramatic or cinematic perspective alongside the musicological one, John Evans, citing *Billy Budd*, *Nocturne* and *War Requiem* alongside *The Turn of the Screw*, has observed that the 'juxtaposition of tonal centres at the semitone or tritone is […] a favourite Britten device'.[25] Evans identifies the Theme in *The Turn of the Screw* as akin to a Schoenbergian note-row, although, he writes, 'no attempt is made to adopt Schoenberg's *method* of composition in the exploitation of this twelve-note series.'[26] He goes on to write 'in *The Turn of the Screw* the central conflict inherent in the series can be interpreted as between A (perhaps representing the Natural world, inexperience and innocence) and A flat (the Supernatural world, experience and corruption)'.[27] Evans's location of A flat as amongst the world of corruption makes perfect sense symbolically. There is a generally symbolic feel to the way Britten pits black notes against white notes in this opera (and black-note keys and white-note keys). The symbolism extends to the fact that the piano, with its clearly set out geography of white and black notes, is the instrument Miles plays, an example of how compositional ideas may be triggered by details from the original James text:

> (Miles) sat down at the old piano and played as he had never played; […] Where, all this time, was Flora? When I put the question to Miles, he played on a minute before answering and then could only say: "Why, my dear, how do I know?"--breaking moreover into a happy laugh which, immediately after, as if it were a vocal accompaniment, he prolonged into incoherent, extravagant song.[28]

[22] Mervyn Cooke, 'Turning the Tonal Screw: Britten and Serialism', in *Studies in Music 1750 – 2000* (2002), p. 163.
[23] Cooke, 'Turning the Tonal Screw', p. 166.
[24] Christopher Chowrimootoo, *Middlebrow Modernism – Britten's Operas and the Great Divide* (California: University of California Press 2018), p. 18.
[25] Evans, 'Benjamin Britten 'Death in Venice', PhD Thesis, p. 17.
[26] *Ibid*., p. 16.
[27] I*bid*., p. 17.
[28] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, pp. 120 – 121.



Ex. 6.7: Journey music

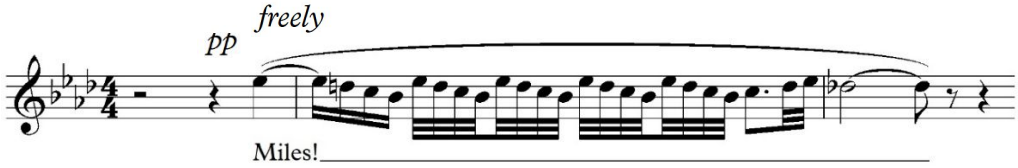
Passage 2. Act I, Scene 8 – *At Night*

This is the crucial final scene of Act I, in which Miles and Flora are lured by Quint and Jessel. The two ghosts appear to be gaining the upper hand, but their efforts are interrupted by the arrival of the Governess and Mrs Grose just in the nick of time. The ghosts disappear and Flora goes off with Mrs Grose, leaving the Governess to comfort Miles. However, the Governess's attempt at a motherly bond with Miles is thwarted by the boy, who scornfully throws her affection back at her, by singing 'You see – I am bad, I am bad, aren't I?' This idea came from Britten, not Piper, who at the composer's suggestion incorporated it into the libretto. In his letter to Piper (31 January 1954), Britten proposed the line should be adopted into the libretto, adding the comment 'I like Miles' last remark because it is clear, bright, and in short phrases, which I think is right for the boy's character and his manner of singing'.[29]

This scene is rich in imagery and symbolism, providing many different routes for interpretation by directors and filmmakers. The roots of many of the interpretive clues can be found in the music as much as the story and libretto. Although there are many important musical leitmotifs at play here, I would like to focus on six which seem to carry the bulk of the dramatic meaning within them. Two are sung by Quint, two by Jessel, one by Quint and Jessel together, and one by Miles. I will refer back to these leitmotifs during the analysis of each film.

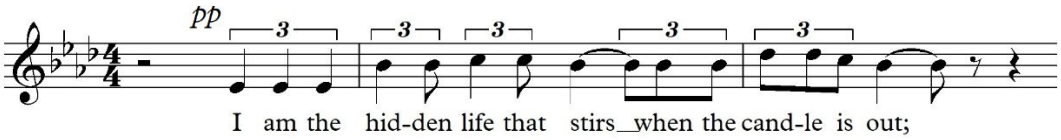
The first is Quint's seductive call to Miles (Ex. 6.8) heard right at the beginning of the scene: the boy's name is sung to a long melisma which, according to Lord Harewood, was inspired by Britten hearing Pears performing a motet by Pérotin.[30] The melisma could also be suggestive of a Muslim call to prayer; there is a high likelihood that this was the inspiration behind Weigl's minaret-style tower setting, as we shall see later in the chapter.

[29] Philip Reed, Mervyn Cooke and Donald Mitchell (eds), *Letters from a Life,* vol. 4, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), p. 217.
[30] Howard (ed.), *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 46.



Ex.6.8 Quint's 'Miles' leitmotif.

The second, also sung by Quint, is as follows (Ex. 6.9):



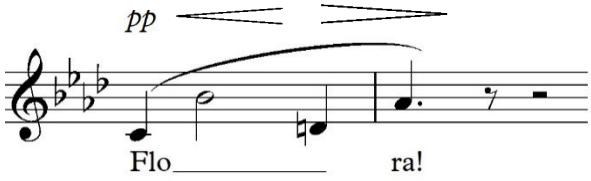
Ex. 6.9 Quint: 'I am the hidden life that stirs'.

This leitmotif is amongst the music described by Peter Evans thus:

> The ecstatic elaboration of the call [i.e. Ex. 6.8] is inevitably [Quint's] most haunting moment, but the flow of imagery that follows, 'the riderless horse […] King Midas with gold' and so on, is rapid and fantastic enough, verbally and musically, to suspend disbelief in so eloquent a spirit. Its effect on Miles is that of a drug, and the soft dragging motion of 'I am the hidden life that stirs' puts Britten's typical tonal ambiguity[31] to a new use in its suave innuendo.[32]

The third leitmotif is sung by Miss Jessel, and represents her own seductive call, aimed at Flora. It is slightly melismatic, but much less so than Quint's call, and is also considerably more angular, almost masculine in nature and made up from two somewhat unsettling intervals: a minor seventh and diminished fifth (Ex. 6.10). Gender stereotypes are also disconcertingly subverted by Jessel's constant association with low pitches (gong, double bass) and Quint's with high pitches (celeste).

[31] Although difficult to judge what Evans calls 'tonal ambiguity' from the vocal line alone, the key signature of four flats which hints at A flat major is disrupted in the accompaniment by the intrusion of a flattened sixth pulling against a natural sixth and flattened seventh.
[32] Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, pp. 220– 21.



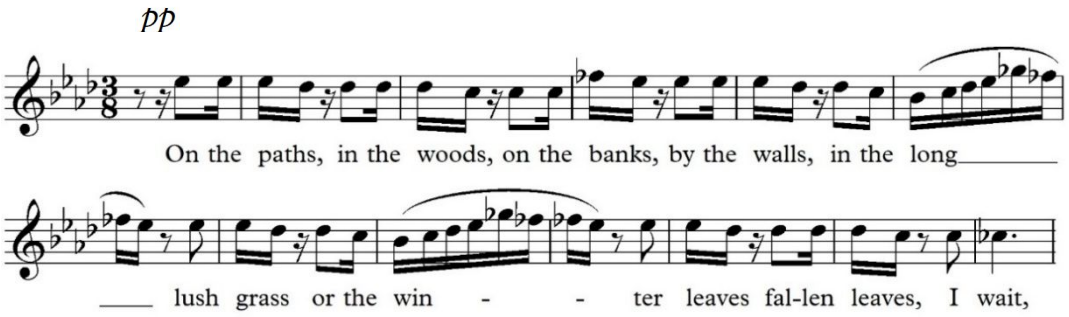
Ex. 6.10 Miss Jessel's 'Flora' call.

The fourth leitmotif, also sung by Jessel, is her attempt to forge a kind of sisterhood with Flora in competition with the males, Quint and Miles (Ex. 6.11). There is a hint of conventional tonality in this phrase, which suggests A minor (although this is negated by the dissonances present in the accompaniment in the same way as in Ex. 6.8: see note 27 below). This phrase, of course, contains the words which provide the title of this thesis.



Ex. 6.11 Miss **Jessel: 'Their dreams and ours…'**

The fifth leitmotif is started off by Quint (Ex. 6.12), but becomes a duet with Jessel. It expresses a growing excitement that the enticement of Miles and Flora is beginning to take effect. As the duet reaches its conclusion, they are indeed joined by the two excited children and the music drives towards a climax which is then interrupted by the intervention of the Governess and Mrs Grose.



Ex. 6.12 'On the paths'.

The sixth leitmotif (Ex. 6.13) represents Miles's admission at the end of the act that all the suspicions about his expulsion from school and other undesirable aspects of his personality and behaviour are true ('You see, I *am* bad'). There is a neat musical irony in that Britten uses perfect

fourths for this melody instead of perhaps the more clichéd dissonant intervals that many composers may have selected here. This is not the first time Britten encodes this most innocuous of concordant musical sounds with an association with evil,[33] since just a few years before, in 1951, he had used the same interval as a symbol for the evil depths of Claggart's character in *Billy Budd*. Even the dissonances in the accompaniment (accompaniments often carry a hidden psychological message in musical form) are generally mild, and the act concludes with the perfect-fourth interval sounded out repeatedly in the timpani part. A valid reading of this is that it is a variant on the Governess's 'Who is it, who?' motif. Miles's 'I am bad' version of the motif is a simple yet compelling way of suggesting the Governess's paranoia about Quint. It can further be observed that the pervasive presence of fourths has its origins in the *Screw* theme (Ex. 6.5), the twelve pitches of which can be interpreted as a sequence of rising fourths rather than falling fifths, as, for instance, Howard does in her analysis of the opera's structures.[34]



Ex. 6.13 Miles: 'I am bad'.

Passage 3. Act II, Scene 2 – *The Bells*

The *Benedicite* is a canticle used during Christian worship, and could be described as a song in praise of the wonders of creation. The words of the canticle come from the Old Testament (Book of Daniel, chapter 3, verses 57–88, and Psalm 148). During this scene, set mostly in the graveyard surrounding the church at Bly, the Governess, Mrs Grose and the children set off for a church service and the *Benedicite* plays a significant role. For this reason it is important to begin this section by looking at how it is adapted here for dramatic purposes, especially as there is an impact on how directors have incorporated its implications into their interpretations. In the opera it is the children's own version of the words that we hear, not the prayer book version. Many of the changed words recall earlier scenes of the opera, interspersed with parts of the canticle which are genuine.

The text of the canticle, according to the *Book of Common Prayer*, sets up a series of antiphonal calls and responses, adopting the following pattern:

[33] It should, however, be said that, notwithstanding its effect melodically, harmonically at least the fourth was considered to be a dissonance in Palestrina's time, and this view persisted long afterwards. A fourth above the bass had to be treated as a dissonance and then resolved to the third degree of the scale.
[34] Howard, 'Structures: an overall view' in Howard (ed.), *The Turn of the Screw* Cambridge Opera Handbook, p. 89.

O all ye Works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.
O ye Angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever (etc).

After the heavenly bodies, which include sun, moon, stars and 'powers', the canticle goes on to bless the weather, fire and cold, days, nights, and seasons. Following this, features of the earth are praised: mountains, hills, seas and floods. In the next part of the canticle, living creatures, starting with whales, and including 'fowls of the air' and 'beasts and cattle', are praised. Finally, the focus becomes specifically centred around human beings, at first generic, and then to identifiable, named people:

O ye Children of Men, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.
O let Israel bless the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.
O ye Priests of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.
O ye Servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.
O ye Spirits and Souls of the Righteous, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.
O ye holy and humble Men of heart, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.
O Ananias, Azarias and Misael, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.[35]

In Flora and Miles's parody of the canticle, the 'magnify him for ever' response is only made at the end; most of the responses only contain the words 'bless ye the Lord'. The children's version dispenses with any mention of heaven and skies, but does include the moon and stars together with 'rivers and seas and lakes', which itself is a quotation from earlier in the opera. They are the first words sung in Act I Scene 7 ('The Lake') by Flora. We should also remember that the lake at Bly is crucial to the plot. The other components of the parody become somewhat sinister in mood, recalling, foreshadowing, and echoing numerous elements from the opera (including items incorporated into some of the filmed versions of both the opera and the story: 'dragons and snakes' recalling reptiles, and 'worms' recalling maggots):

O ye tombstones and trees: praise him.
O ye bells and towers: praise him.
O ye paths and woods: praise him.
O ye frosts and fallen leaves: praise him.
O ye dragons and snakes, worms and feathered fowl: rejoice in the Lord.

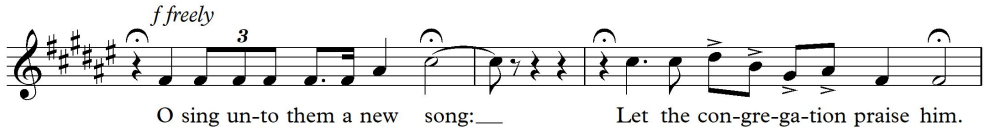
Mrs Grose is mentioned by name, in the same manner as the holy priests Ananias, Azarias and Misael in the original, and the children end by referencing words of Quint and Jessel ('On the paths, in the woods', etc.):

O Mrs Grose, bless ye the Lord: may she never be confounded.
O ye paths and woods: bless ye the Lord.
O ye walls and towers: bless ye the Lord.
O ye moon and stars, windows and lakes:
Praise him and magnify him for ever and ever.

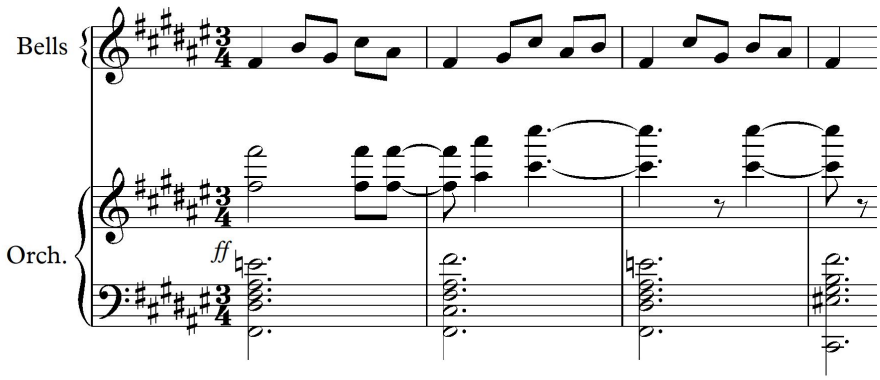
[35] 'Benedicite', in *Book of Common Prayer* (1662) http://www.ccepiscopal.org/handouts/bcp-1662.pdf, p.56. (accessed 3 July 2019).

It can therefore be seen that the use of the parodied *Benedicite* underlines the Governess's assertion that the children 'are not playing, they are talking horrors.'

Britten's setting of the *Benedicite* parody, itself something of a parody of Anglican chant, with its antiphonal pairings (Ex. 6.14), is not the first time he has incorporated a reference to this prayer-book text in one of his operas. He had previously used it in the opening of Act II ('Sunday Morning') in *Peter Grimes*. In the *Turn of the Screw* setting, alongside the chanting is the 'mechanical chanting' of the bell-ringing (Ex. 6.15) and smooth and lyrical conversational phrases between Mrs Grose and the Governess (we are not very far from the same soundworld as the opening of Act II of *Peter Grimes*, recalling Ellen Orford's 'Glitter of waves…' sung outside the Borough church service) which get more angular as the menacing atmosphere of the scene takes hold (Ex. 6.16 and Ex. 6.17).



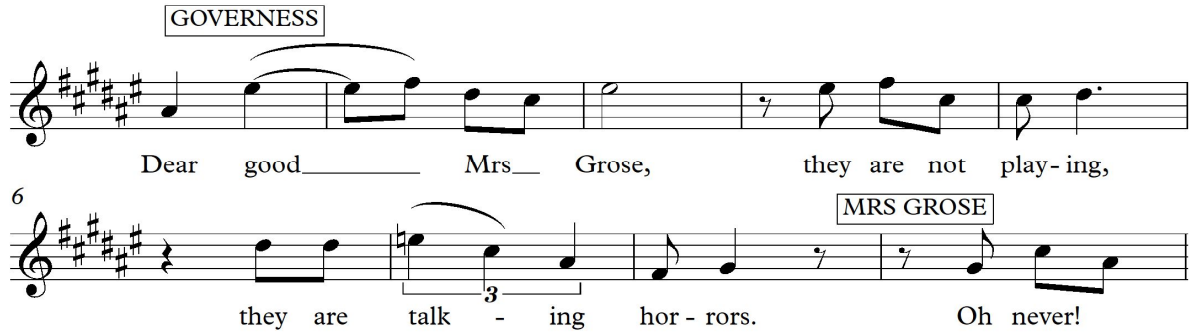
Ex. 6.14: Anglican chant parody



Ex. 6.15: Bell-ringing – a mechanical 'chant'

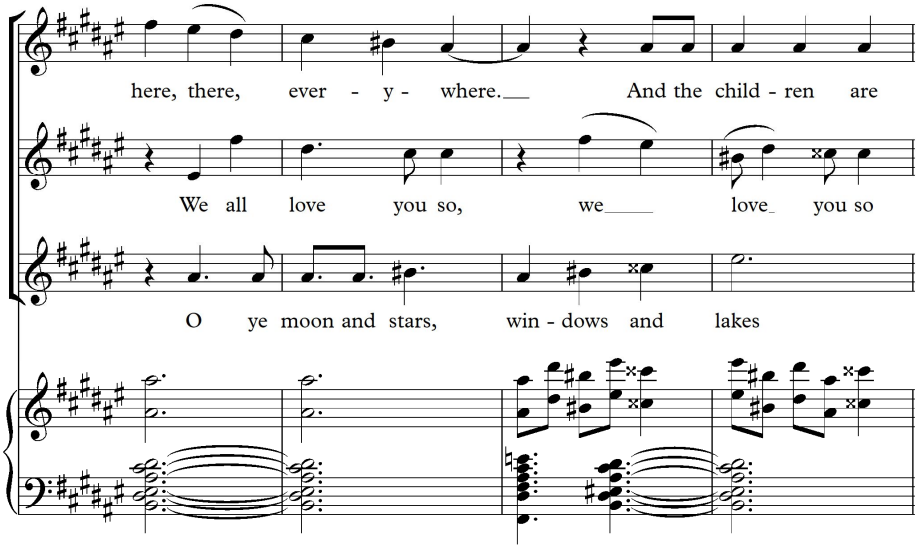


Ex. 6.16: Lyrical and carefree conversation



Ex. 6.17: Angular phrases reflecting growing anxiety

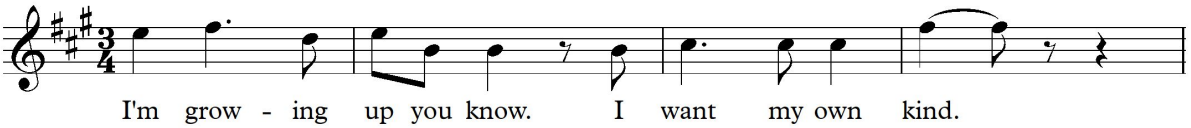
The musical texture becomes more complex as the two women's conversation becomes entangled with Miles and Flora's *Benedicite*, and with the complexity comes a mood which is more and more frenetic and intense (Ex. 6.18), until the point at which Mrs Grose takes Flora into the church, against the sonority of the bells dying away, leaving Miles and the Governess on their own together, just as they were at the end of Act I when Miles sung 'I am bad, aren't I?'. Their ensuing conversation becomes somewhat uncomfortable, with Miles gradually gaining the upper hand in an insidious manner. Musically, Britten treats much of this vocally as an alternation between free recitative and a more lyrical approach (Ex. 6.19 and Ex. 6.20), accompanied by three distinct orchestral gestures. These are: a) quick, bold, accented notes in which the fourth is the dominating interval (Ex. 6.21), b) mildly dissonant bell tremolandos, and c) staccato, accented triadic chords against a legato bass line (Ex. 6.22).



Ex. 6.18: Ever increasing complexity and intensity



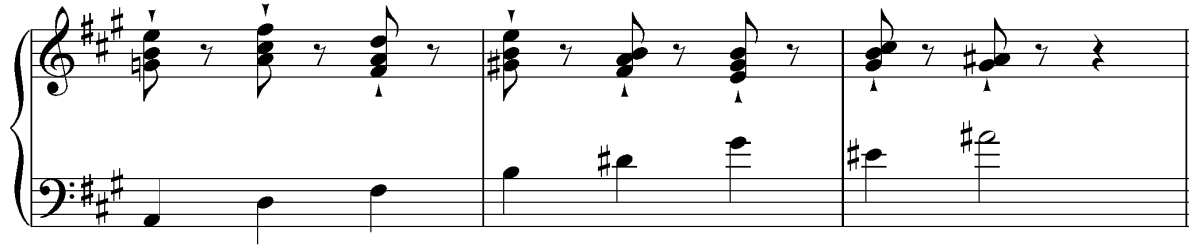
Ex. 6.19: Recitative



Ex. 6.20: Increasing level of lyricism



Ex. 6.21: Bold, accented notes, emphasising fourths



Ex. 6.22: Staccato chords against legato bass line

Case-Study Analyses

The following analyses of the selected passages from the six opera films have been categorised under topical subheadings as follows: a) treatment of narration and voiceover, b) treatment of instrumental variations, c) mise-en-scène, d) theatrical and/or cinematic directorial styles, and e) treatment of narrative interpretations. As a result of the analysis method, it should be borne in mind that there is no attempt to present the passages in chronological order in which they appear in the opera.

The fluidity of the art of filmmaking makes it impossible for there not to be overlaps between emphases on the various parameters. For example, in discussing mise-en-scène, it is inevitable that this will also involve to some extent a discussion of elements of directorial style. The grouping of passages under these subheadings is necessarily a little arbitrary, but I have attempted to place each passage into the category it would appear to fit most suitably.

Narration and Voiceover

Britten's use of the Prologue is a simplification of the structure of James's story (see Chapter 3, above), but the device of having a narrator, or something like it, was used several times by Britten in his operas. In *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946), Britten uses a 'Male and Female Chorus' to partially narrate the story and to comment on the action, *Billy Budd* (1951) features a framing device in which Captain Vere recalls the entire story in flashback, there are 'ballad singers' in both *Gloriana* (1953) and *Owen Wingrave* (1971) who fill in parts of the story, and even *Death in Venice* (1973) contains elements of narration in the sense that Aschenbach himself provides passages of self-reflection which are stylistically similar to how he might tell the story to a third party. In the three Church Parables, which are closely related to opera, the chorus provides the function of narrator at several points, a device Britten appropriated from the Noh theatre origins of the works.

Hampe begins with the stage lights fading up to reveal the Prologue sitting on a chair with a book on his lap, similar to Morley's approach, as seen in chapter 6. The set is indeterminate with regard to location; all we can see in the background is darkness. Hampe increases the sense of displacement from the original Victorian setting even further by dressing his Prologue in a modern suit, putting him outside the temporal setting of the story (Fig. 6.11). Hampe's Prologue does not physically appear to read from the book and most lines are delivered directly to the audience, breaking the 'fourth wall'. This provides a theatrical equivalent to Morley's Prologue singing directly to camera, and also references visually the first-person address to the reader in the original novella.



Fig. 6.11 The Prologue with book on his lap (Hampe)

The other films demonstrate alternative approaches. In Bondy's version, the Prologue cannot be seen at all at first, which recalls Michel Chion's concept of the 'disembodied voice'. This thereby introduces a new element: a kind of hybrid form whereby the starting point is a straightforward filming of a theatrical performance, but more televisual effects are added in post-production. All we see initially are vertical abstract lines (actually close-ups of part of the theatrical set) and words from James's novel are superimposed on this. We do not see who is singing at this point, but although the words from the libretto are, naturally, sung in English, the superimposed text from James is in French (Fig. 6.12). This conceit is rather different from the regular surtitles used to provide a translation of a libretto text, because it is in essence a cinematic rather than theatrical device. It may be that the use of these captions are an allusion to the original story's framing (and therefore, distancing) device in which the main narrative is enclosed within several external narrative layers.



Fig. 6.12 'I have it written in faded ink…' (Bondy)

When the Prologue reaches the middle of his fifth phrase, '[the Governess] had gone first to see their guardian in London', we can see that the stage is bare apart from the positioning of a simple chair at the front. Part of the auditorium can also be seen, but the seats are unoccupied, leading to the conclusion that this was filmed in an empty theatre (a conclusion further confirmed by the absence of any audience reaction, applause, etc.). The concept of a 'live' performance in which, for aesthetic reasons, the only audience are the film cameras has been used successfully in rock films such as Pink Floyd's *Live At Pompeii* (dir. Adrian Maben, 1972), but is unusual in filmed opera. At the conclusion, the Prologue places the book he has been carrying (but not reading from) on the chair and walks off. This book is to become the Governess's diary in the subsequent Journey scene, or perhaps the viewer is invited to speculate that the Prologue is reading directly from the Governess's recovered diary, linking him diegetically to the core narrative.

In Armfield, as the music begins, the Prologue addresses the camera directly (not the theatre audience), and, judging from the trajectory of his eyes, appears to be using an autocue (Fig. 6.13). In this way, the viewer has several conflicting messages about what is going on. There is a four-way collision between the formality of the Prologue's attire, the rough backstage environment, a rather disconcerting door sign saying 'No Escape' and an uncertainty over whether or not this is filmed in front of a live audience. These juxtapositions mirror the central ambiguity of the story going back to its James source: are the ghosts real, or are they figments of an imagination? John Gilks, a Canadian

blogger, reviewing the 1992 DVD, did not accept the interpretation was an intentional attempt to reflect the novel's ambiguity, describing it as a 'train wreck', and demolishing the film thus:

> I'm not sure how much of the problem is due to the stage production and how much to the treatment for DVD but the end result is horrible. It's almost impossible to comment on Neil Armfield's production because one can't tell when one is seeing it and when it's being overlaid or perhaps even replaced by some conceit of the video director. The overall effect is completely incoherent.[36]

Gilks acknowledged that he was reviewing a screen version by mentioning that it had undergone a 'treatment' for DVD, but fell into a common trap of automatically assuming the film's entire *raison d'être* to be a mere record of a stage work rather than a film in its own right that simply happens to take as its starting point the opera-house experience.



Fig. 6.13 The Prologue (Armfield)

Of the theatrical films, the 2011 Glyndebourne version directed by Jonathan Kent demonstrates yet another alternative treatment of the Prologue. At the beginning, it is clearly filmed in front of an audience in the opera house; we see the auditorium and the gathering audience waiting for the performance to begin, although we do not see the orchestra in the pit. We become aware of the Prologue (in twenty-first century clothes) seated on stage in front of an open trunk. The Prologue is surrounded by items from the trunk (children's playthings such as a cricket bat and a kite) and is reading a letter to himself which was presumably found amongst the items in the trunk. At this point the house lights are still on, a directorial decision which blurs the precise moment at which the drama begins. The impression is that the audience have arrived in the middle of something that has already started, effectively emphasising the 'timelessness' of the presentation of the story.

As the house lights dim, the piano introduction starts. The Prologue finds a reel of film in the trunk and unspools a short length to examine. Immediately, the blank cyclorama behind him begins to function as a screen, and we are able to see the home movie from the trunk playing in real time. It

[36] John Gilks, 'The Turn of the Screw' in *Opera Ramblings* (blog, 1991), https://operaramblings.blog/2012/01/13/the-turn-of-the-screw-perth-1991/ (accessed 13 June 2019).

shows two children, Miles and Flora, playing with the toys from the trunk in the grounds of Bly. From their mode of dress, we can deduce that the home movie was made in the 1950s at the time when Britten composed the opera, and the antics of the children form a visual backdrop to the narration (Fig. 6.14).



Fig. 6.14 The 'home movie' from the trunk (Kent)

Towards the end, the Prologue replaces the items into the trunk. The camera used for this shot gives the appearance that we are seeing this from a few rows back in the stalls. The action overlaps with the end of the Prologue and the beginning of the Theme.

Each one of these versions of the opera deal with the Prologue as a physical presence in front of the audience. We see, and hear, a real person singing. Weigl's and Mitchell's versions, both of which were specifically filmed for television, take a different approach, presenting the Prologue's narration as voiceovers which, as we saw earlier, are a specifically cinematic device.

To summarise, the Prologue's role essentially represents a simplification of the structure of James's novel, and provides opportunities for directors to at least hint at the narrative distancing James employs. In some of the films (for example, Hampe and Morley) the Prologue is outside the diegesis of the work altogether, and in others (Mitchell and Weigl) is not shown at all, being simply presented as a voiceover. In Bondy, the narration begins as a voiceover, but during the course of the music appears physically on screen. Also in Bondy, the book from which the Prologue reads is revealed to be the Governess's actual diary that contains the story.

There is an attempt to reflect an atmosphere of ambiguity (which surely has its roots in the ambiguity of James's story) in most of the films right from the outset, but this is particularly evident in Armfield, which imaginatively uses stylistic ambiguity. The setting appears to be backstage at the theatre, the Prologue never actually reads from the book he is carrying but clearly uses an autocue, and his attire and manner suggest this is going to be a film of an oratorio, not an opera.

Kent expands the concept by presenting the character of the Prologue as a contemporary person who has discovered artefacts in the attic at Bly many years after the events of the story. Kent

supports this visually by representing some of the setting of the opera (which he sets during the 1950s) in the form of a home movie of the children playing, from the box of artefacts projected on the cyclorama at the rear of the stage.

Treatment of Instrumental Variations

As we have seen, Britten's use of the Theme and ensuing orchestral variations act structurally as divisions between scenes. A full discussion of each of the fifteen variations is beyond the scope of this thesis, but some general principles can be traced in the small number I will be considering here. Weigl and Mitchell deal with the music in different, but equally cinematic, ways. In Weigl's version, the announcement of the Theme is accompanied firstly by a close-up of the Governess with black headdress (a clothing detail which assumes considerable symbolic importance as the film progresses, and is therefore justifiably signposted during the introductory Theme: see Fig. 6.15) and then mostly by long shots of the grounds at Bly from a high angle. The juxtaposition of these details serve to underline both the psychological and physical boundaries of the drama from the outset.



Fig. 6.15 The Theme: Governess in black headdress (Weigl)

In her interpretation of the Prologue, Mitchell has already laid the foundations for her multi-layered, montage style of filmmaking, and this continues into the imagery for the Theme. As the music for the Theme builds, an angel statue in a graveyard is seen, immediately followed by cutting to a horizontal graveyard monument which will feature in a later scene, an example of foreshadowing in a similar manner to Bondy's use of the cat's cradle, seen during the Prologue. Finally, there is a somewhat disturbing quick glimpse of the severed head of Flora's doll on the ground adorned with daffodils (Fig. 6.16), an echo of an earlier shot of Quint's dead body lying amongst daffodils.



Fig. 6.16 The doll's head and daffodils (Mitchell)

Amongst the versions filmed in theatres, Hampe makes no attempt to illustrate any of the drama during the Theme. It is treated purely and simply (along with the filming of all the subsequent variations) as a musical interlude to be listened to, with nothing happening on stage whatsoever. In the film, views of the conductor and orchestra are provided. There is a slightly uncomfortable impression that the film director here, Claus Viller, cannot quite decide if he is filming a concert (with its essentially static and non-dramatic ambience) or an opera with its inherently dynamic and action-focussed atmosphere. Another possibility is that he is deliberately disrupting and blurring the stylistic frame to create something like a hybrid opera-oratorio genre. In any case, as a result there is a jarring moment each time one of the variations begins and the camera swings into the orchestra pit. It is unfortunate that this convention has such a disrupting effect on the sense of drama, but it is likely that Villier is following conventional directorial procedure in theatrical opera films generally, where the orchestra and its conductor are frequently displayed during overtures and interludes. Some films destroy the dramatic context even further by including such things as curtain calls, as Marcia Citron bemoans:

> [The televised relay] typically includes a curtain call and this breaks the illusion of merged character-singer such as is found in film-opera. Suddenly it is Dame Kiri Te Kanawa who is taking a bow, and not Desdemona.[37]

In the theatre the audience are happy to accept this breakdown of the illusion to which Citron refers, and indeed, the ovation and applause at the end of the performance is an essential part of the ritual of theatre-going. However, a filmed or recorded performance (or even a live-relay transmission) does not allow the artists to accept the viewer's appreciation directly, meaning that applause offered towards such a performance is rare. When it does occur (as, very occasionally, in cinemas at the end of a film, especially if it is something like a gala premiere showing when members of the cast may be present), it still seems somewhat odd and out of place.

[37] Citron, *Opera on Screen*, p. 97.

In Armfield, there is a slow transition from Prologue to Theme, but it is nonetheless an interesting one. The Prologue has ended with the ‘No Escape’ door opening, revealing the Governess silhouetted against a very bright white light. As the Theme builds in intensity, the Governess comes forward out of the door, the side drapes fall to the floor and what was a bare backstage area in the Prologue now becomes a normal theatrical stage set (Fig. 6.17).



Fig. 6.17 The Governess emerges through the ‘No Escape’ door (Armfield)

Kent makes ingenious use of theatrical technology when presenting the Theme. It will be remembered that the Prologue has been sharing with the audience the contents of a reel of film via projection onto a blank white cyclorama. As the Theme begins, the projected movie changes to a bright white rectangle of light, with the Prologue silhouetted in front as he finishes re-packing the trunk with most of the toys, and goes off, carrying a toy boat. The Theme crescendos and the rectangle of projected light diminishes in size until it is the size of a window in a train carriage. The window moves to the side and is joined by two more projected ‘windows’, and the illusion that we are now inside a train is complete (Fig. 6.18).



Fig. 6.18 Projections become train windows (Kent)

We now turn attention briefly to Passage 3 (The Bells / Churchyard). In Weigl's film, throughout the previous Variation, there are a number of external shots of the church building on a bright sunny day, with a cloudless blue sky. Interspersed with this are views of the four characters walking along a country track towards the church. In common with the rest of this film, Weigl uses the colour of the characters' costume creatively; both children are dressed in white, the Governess is in white but with a black trim along the bottom of the skirt, and Mrs Grose is dressed in darker colours (but not black). As the Variation segues into Scene 2, the church tower is seen, and a visual connection is made with Quint's tower, in that it is framed by having the camera tilt down from the top, therefore recalling how Quint was presented in the *At Night* scene at the end of Act I. Kent also utilises the preceding variation to prepare some of the elements for this scene. During the music, a static shot of the stage is shown but musical momentum is represented visually by having a large stained glass window flown in to form a backdrop, together with an enormous tree branch extending across laterally**.** The physical movement continues into the beginning of Scene 2, at once implying a dissolve, and by bringing the children into the centre of the stage using a revolve. To an audience seated in the opera house, the effect of the stage rotation is similar to cinematic panning. This is a good example of how theatrical imagery can sometimes be influenced by the cinema (and, in the current filmed version, has in turn found its way back on to the screen).

Although the opening of Act II is not within the scope of the case studies, the visual treatment of this in Bondy is worth noting as a postscript to this section. Bondy here features a close-up of conductor Daniel Harding (the rest of the orchestra is not shown), conjuring up slow-motion images of Miles and Flora, which fade in and out of the frame. The effect is striking, and appears at times almost to be a somewhat eccentric homage to the animated classic *Fantasia*'s conducting sorcerer, Mickey Mouse.

To summarise, there are a range of approaches to how the instrumental variations are presented (including the initial statement of the Theme) within the different films, but these can be broadly categorised into three groups: a) abstract, b) presentation of visual narrative and setting, and c) representation of the live opera-house context.

The first group includes Morley's abstract paintings, generated from John Piper's originals. Despite their abstract, non-pictorial design, Morley is able to prevent these from being merely a static art gallery by moving the camera in front of them, thus creating an impression of motion which responds to the rhythmic motion of the music. Armfield uses the backstage theatrical environment in order to detach the viewer from the immediate narrative, giving an almost Brechtian effect.

In the second group, not surprisingly we have Weigl and Mitchell, both of whom use the opportunity of extended musical interludes to expand their narrative detail visually. Although based on a stage production, Kent's treatment of the Theme and Journey Music involves video projection which puts this section into this group.

Hampe is perhaps most clearly in the third group. The Theme and Variations are simply presented as opportunities to give views of the orchestra and conductor in the pit along with shots of members of the audience. Some films are not quite so unequivocal, such as Bondy and Kent, who give glimpses of the set changing process, supported by lighting changes.

Mise-en-scène

Although the term 'mise-en-scène' is not generally used by filmmakers during the practical process of creating a film, it has become common for academics to use the term when describing what the viewer sees on screen. The literal French translation is 'placing on a stage', but in reality this really means 'placing on the screen'. Thus, everything that is seen by the viewer (set design, placement of actors, costumes, props, location (if appropriate), and lighting design) is considered part of the mise-en-scène. Mise-en-scène may also extend to framing and camerawork, although David Cook cautions that this needs to be regarded on a shot-by-shot basis, as he suggests the mise-en-scène is the formation 'within the shot itself, as opposed to the effects created by the cutting.'[38]

The seven-minute prequel with which Weigl begins his film presents his vision for what happened before the main story, bringing a somewhat surreal aesthetic into play, and recalling, a little, the work of Ken Russell. This affects the director's treatment of mise-en-scène significantly. Lewis Segal, writing in the *LA Times* in 1988 had a number of misgivings, stating:

> Weigl's direction soon descends to a matter of showcasing oppressively lush decor and decorative photographic effects. The spectral Quint (Juraj Kukura) poses like a male hustler against every balustrade in the Balkans. His co-conspirator, Jessel (Emilia Vasaryova) trails gauze and dry-ice smoke as if auditioning to replace Elvira, mistress of the dark. The governess (Magdalena Vasaryova) is properly anguished and sympathetic but, as black brambles begin to creep up her white gowns, she too becomes a couturier cliché.[39]

Segal continues to berate Weigl for adding his prequel: 'Here we see Quint and Jessel hard at work seducing the children of Bly and their guardian as well. Corruption doesn't just run in this family--it gallops.'[40] As Segal somewhat pithily implies, this prequel sequence contains many erotic overtones, but it is also important in establishing the location filming. Although there is no dialogue or narration, the soundtrack, which Segal wrongly describes as silent, contains instead numerous sounds of nature (particularly birdsong, foreshadowing the orchestral birdsong in Variation 3).

Weigl sets up seven short vignettes; the first five are structured in a non-linear way (in the form of fairly conventional cinematic flashbacks), and are revisited a number of times. However, the last two are only seen once and appear to lead chronologically into the opening of the opera itself.

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[38] David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (New York: Norton 2016) p. 968.
[39] Lewis Segal, 'The Turn of the Screw: Review' in *LA Times*, 22 January 1988, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-01-22-ca-25072-story.html (accessed 4 June 2019).
[40] Segal, 'The Turn of the Screw: Review'

The surreal and dreamlike quality of the sequence gives rise to a possible interpretation that it is occurring within the imagination of one of the protagonists. Anne Midgette responded positively not only to Weigl's approach generally, but particularly to the prequel:

> Mr. Weigl […] creates a powerfully magnetic, seductive figure (the actor Juraj Kukura, lip-synching to the voice of Robert Tear), underlining the homoeroticism central to both the story and the opera. Indeed, in a silent [*sic*] prologue nearly 10 minutes long[41], before the music even starts, Mr. Weigl spells out Quint and Miles's sexual relationship.[42]

Each of the seven vignettes presents a different episode in the backstory but it is sufficient to note here that Weigl's backstory primarily deals with the corruption of the children by Quint and Jessel before their deaths. Weigl clearly regarded this section as an important artistic statement at the start of the film. Weigl uses costume style and colour as symbols throughout this film and some of this symbolism is established during the Prologue, where we can note the Governess's style of dress as almost bridal (bringing out her underlying romantic fantasies about the guardian). The guardian is in matching white clothes, but this possibly reflects how he appears through the eyes of the Governess (i.e. as a possible romantic match for her, see Fig. 6.19), since it is probably unlikely that a gentleman of the period would dress all in white. In some of the shots during the Prologue, the Governess is seen wearing a black headdress, as previously noted. This is the first indication that as the film progresses, the Governess' white clothing becomes increasingly 'corrupted' (dirtied, if you will) by black colouration.



Fig. 6.19 Matching in white, the Governess' romantic fantasy (Weigl)

Weigl has set his film in Victorian times, as prescribed in the score and in James's original story. Although the locations have an English appearance at first (the production was, in fact, filmed primarily at Lednicko-Valticky Castle[43] in the Czech Republic), it is not long before we become aware that Bly has an unexpected ambience (the Islamic style of the tower is particularly striking), leading to

[41] MIdgette appears to somewhat overestimate the duration here. The seven minutes this sequence takes to screen can hardly be described as 'nearly ten minutes'.
[42] Anne Midgette, 'In This Version, The Britten Opera Dons A Dress', in *New York Times* (22 May 2005). https://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/arts/music/in-this-version-the-britten-opera-dons-a-dress.html (accessed 16 June 2019).
[43] The Valtice Castle website https://www.zamek-valtice.cz/en (accessed 25 November 2019).

a somewhat unsettling visual context. It might be expected that the industrial grubbiness and grime of the Victorian era might colour the visual style in some way, but most of the film is bright and well-lit, even sunny, and there is generally very little of the 'haunted house' about it. This cheerful style is established right from the beginning (during the 'backstory' section) and during the Prologue, an incongruity which gives added impact to the horror of the story as it unwinds.

Mitchell's 2005 version for BBC Wales contrasts greatly with Weigl's, and does, indeed, contain many traditional 'haunted house' clichés, almost to the point of parody at times, and, unlike Weigl, is unequivocally 'English' in its setting. Initial images during the Prologue include views of the forest-like landscape which make up the grounds at Bly. To add to the atmosphere of mystery and general eerieness, the conditions are misty and appear to be filmed during the autumn or winter months; there are brown, fallen leaves on the ground, and everything seems drab and grey. In discussing the mise-en-scène, Leonard Orr gave a considered, film-studies style of assessment, mentioning the 'golden, orange, and mellow brown autumnal colours […] the interior light, from candles or entering through the windows, is cold, blue (like the repeated image of the corpse of drowned Miss Jessel).'[44] The voiceover presentation of the opening narration allows Mitchell to use the Prologue as a method of introducing some of the main characters in the story. She uses aspects of mise-en-scène to emphasise the feeling of mystery by slightly hiding the characters as they are encountered, so that the viewer does not see their full bodies or faces at first. For example, earlier Quint's legs only are seen at first, and, likewise, it is Flora's legs and feet we see walking along a tree trunk (Fig. 6.20) until her face comes fully into view via an upward-tilting camera movement.



Fig. 6.20 Flora's feet (Mitchell)

As the Prologue continues and overlaps into the Theme, two disturbing and visually complementary images are presented. First of all, there is a view of a doll floating abandoned and 'drowned', dead in the water of the lake (and maybe an oblique reference to Flora's mentioning of the Dead Sea later in the opera), somewhat reminiscent of John Everett Millais' painting of Ophelia, and,

[44] Leonard Orr, *James's The Turn of the Screw* (London: A&C Black, 2009), p. 88.

as mentioned earlier in the chapter, directly comparable to an image in Winner's *The Nightcomers* (Fig. 6.21). Secondly there is a view of Quint's dead body lying face down in fallen leaves by the lakeside, with a bunch of yellow daffodils by his head (Fig. 6.22).



Fig. 6.21 The 'drowned' doll (Mitchell)



Fig. 6.22 Quint's dead body (Mitchell)

Looking at the Journey sequence, if we include Morley, four of our seven films feature a traditional horse-drawn coach with varying degrees of realism, two feature a train journey, and one makes no attempt to represent a physical mode of transport at all.

In the Hampe production there is an almost entirely monochromatic colour scheme for set designs and costumes. The backcloth with stylised black-and-white scenery is painted in the manner of block-printed book illustrations of the Victorian era, and in front of this is a carriage in which the Governess is seated. There is no horse to pull the carriage (it is clearly not intended to be an early car), and in fact no attempt to give any sense of travel or movement at all (Fig. 6.23). A similar image is used on the front cover of Patricia Howard's Cambridge Opera Handbook dealing with *The Turn of the Screw.*



Fig. 6.23 The journey (Hampe)

To summarise, the exclusive use of location shooting in Weigl and Mitchell gives both directors a greater range of mise-en-scène possibilities than the theatre-bound films, or even Morley's television studio version (which was limited by its camera setup). In these versions, the availability of both exterior and interior settings provides a rich canvas on which they can present their interpretations.

In some of the films, notably Bondy and Armfield, there is a blurring of the divide between theatrical and cinematic, with certain effects being added in post-production which could not have possibly been viewable by a theatre audience.

Hampe's version is particularly notable in its use of colour, which naturally affects the mise-en-scène of the image on screen, but which was an important part of his original theatrical concept. Through the monochromatic colour scheme combined with the visual style of the set design, Hampe references a Victorian-style block printed page in an old book, thus neatly allowing the mise-en-scène to emphasise the literary roots of the work. It should be noted that Britten, in the original 1954 stage production in Venice, wanted an actual coach on stage for the Journey sequence even though his collaborators told him that the jerky music gave the audience all they needed in order to imagine the context. There is something of an irony that for operatic tales mired in various degrees of ambiguity the composer always seemed to want concrete set designs and props, almost as if he did not trust the audience to be able to engage their imagination.

Theatrical/cinematic directorial styles

In general there has been an acceptance by critics of cinematic influence in the visual style of productions filmed in an opera house. Sometimes the reference to film is a little oblique, as in this description from a review of Armfield which praises the 'mixture of solidity and evanescence in

Stephen Curtis's set, whose blocks are moved around with such plasticity that the walls of the old country house assemble themselves and break up like a dream.'[45] A mostly glowing review of Bondy's production by Rupert Christiansen also alluded to the cinematic effects accorded by the stage set: 'Richard Peduzzi's sets are starkly grey but surrealistically suggestive. Walls move silently together, turning Miles's bedroom into a prison cell […] simple but stunning visual effects are complemented by the revelatory psychological touches of Bondy's interpretation.'[46] In the booklet which accompanies the DVD of Kent's production, the director describes the opera as an 'almost perfect artefact' with themes which are 'refracted, echoing and endlessly changing throughout its sixteen scenes.'[47] This theme of merging one scene into the next was picked up by Peter Reed, in his review for the *Daily Telegraph*: 'Paul Brown's brilliantly lit set is a huge, swivelling mobile of panes of glass and a dead tree-trunk that seamlessly morph into different alignments'[48] and also by Alexandra Coghlan in *The Spectator*, who expanded on this idea in what could easily be a description of film transition technique itself, and was also an erudite observation of the essential ambiguity within the story:

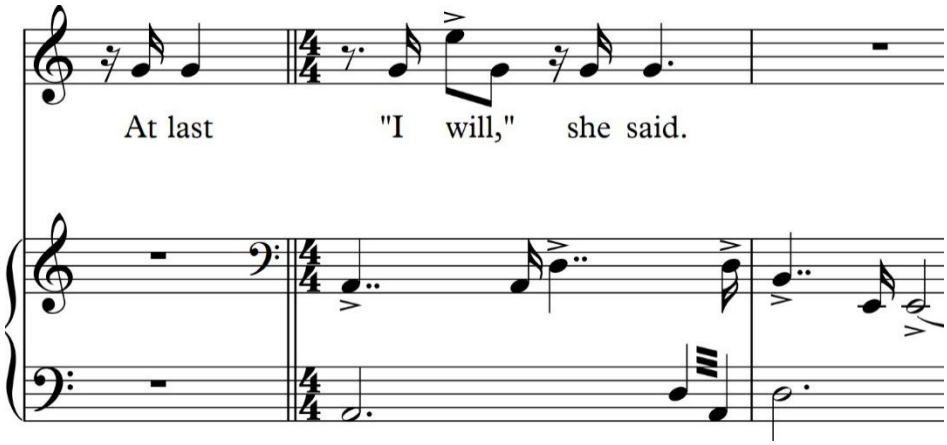
> Paul Brown's set is framed by a double, circular revolve. Almost perpetually in motion, propelling beds and baths, children and their ghostly doubles into and out of view, it suggests unseen agency. At its centre is a giant glass panel which twists and shifts with each changing scene. Endlessly reinventing itself, first greenhouse, now French windows, then frozen lake, it remains always a membrane — increasingly and terrifyingly porous — between two worlds. Whether these are worlds of sanity and madness or safety and danger remains deliberately unclear as they merge and bleed into one another.[49]

However, it will be seen that the cinematic influence goes beyond fluidity of clever set design. Mitchell's production, being conceived cinematically from the outset, makes no attempt to acknowledge the opera-house roots of the work. In a brief article for the Music Library Association, John Holland of Chicago Public Library acknowledged the cinematic virtue of being freed 'from the confines of a stage production', and also recognised the differences in acting style between stage and screen, mentioning 'compelling and natural' performances. He gave due recognition to the use of location shooting as '[the ghosts] lurk in shadowy hallways or stalk the grounds of the country house, spying on the new governess.'[50]

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[45] 'The Turn of the Screw, Opera Australia', uncredited review in *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 September 2002), https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/the-turn-of-the-screw-opera-australia-20020930-gdfoh4.html (accessed 13June 2019).
[46] Andrew Clements, 'The Turn of the Screw', in *The Guardian* (26 August 2002) https://www.theguardian.com/music/2002/aug/26/classicalmusicandopera.artsfeatures1 (accessed 16 June 2019).
[47] Jonathan Kent, 'Director's Note' in the booklet accompanying the DVD of Glyndebourne Opera's *The Turn of the Screw* (2011), p. 6.
[48] Peter Reed, 'The Turn of the Screw, Glyndebourne' in *Telegraph Magazine* (August 2002) (https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/8724799/Turn-of-the-Screw-Glyndebourne-Seven-magazine-review.html (accessed 16 June 2019).
[49] Alexandra Coghlan, 'Glyndebourne's Turn of the Screw: Horrors of the Most Innocent and Creepy Kind' in *The Spectator* (25 October 2014) https://www.spectator.co.uk/2014/10/glyndebournes-turn-of-the-screw-horrors-of-the-sweetest-most-innocent-and-creepy-kind/ (accessed 16 June 2019).
[50] John Holland, 'Turn of the Screw (review)' in *Notes* 62/3 (2006), pp. 784–5.

A number of the films take their cue from the score in the transition from Prologue to Theme, in the sense that the music itself creates a kind of cinematic dissolve effect. Mitchell is a good example. As the Prologue sings his final words the Theme is already starting (Ex. 6.23):



Ex. 6.23 End of the Prologue and beginning of the Theme in Britten's score.

The ensuing Journey scene ostensibly starts at the point in the score where it is designated 'Scene 1', but actually begins ten bars earlier at rehearsal figure 1, immediately following the nine-bar statement of the Theme. There is a ten-bar orchestral prelude at a quick pace which introduces the journey music (Ex. 6.7 above). The placing of this introductory music as if it is a coda to the Theme rather than officially part of the Journey suggests that Britten intended a cinematic-style transition between the Theme and the Journey, once again a kind of dissolve in purely musical terms. The journey music cinematically fades into the background as the Governess, in her coach, sings a recitative beginning 'Nearly there. Very soon I shall I know, I shall know what's in store for me', words which echo the ending of the scene.

Mitchell's treatment of the journey reflects the fully cinematic medium of location shooting for television. Given the historical period in which she sets her interpretation, she places the Governess in a horse-drawn coach for her travel. However, the sequence starts not with the coach itself, or even the Governess, but with a view of Miles and Flora walking through the graveyard, a setting which will assume much greater importance later in the opera.

Due to the camera angle used, it is not immediately apparent that we are in a graveyard, although the children carrying flowers is a clue to this, and quite quickly the camera pulls back to show glimpses of gravestones and monuments. It is revealed shortly that Miles and Flora are taking their own journey to lay flowers on their mother's grave. Like the focussing on Flora's feet earlier, the gradual revealing of detail is a technique Mitchell uses frequently, and is a common trope in the supernatural or horror film genre**.** Fear is often generated in horror movies by similar devices, showing a small part of a character or detail, often accompanied by suitably atmospheric music, and letting the

viewer's imagination supply missing details which may be more lurid than anything rendered on screen. The triggering of the audience imagination is the intention of the work's creative forces (composer, librettist, director, etc.), but what effect this has on each audience member's imagination cannot be precisely known beyond relatively blunt cinematic devices such as jump scares. After a brief exterior view of the coach, there is a close-up of the Governess in travelling clothes (as suggested by the score). Her singing of the soliloquy is presented as a voiceover (Fig. 6.24).



Fig. 6.24 Governess in close-up: singing is presented as voiceover (Mitchell)

As the soliloquy continues, the children lay flowers at the grave. This is a detail which, in addition to giving a hint of their tragic backstory, also suggests the psychological damage they may have suffered during their lives, leading to a dysfunctionality that may therefore not come as too much of a surprise to the viewer. In doing this, Mitchell signposts elements cinematically which could not be presented on stage, and which guide the viewer to an interpretation of events that is the director's choice. These details combine to suggest that the supernatural setting contributes to, or indeed is the result of, a malfunction in the Governess's mind. Mitchell inserts shots of Quint walking through the grounds and Jessel inside the house. There is an implication (albeit somewhat subtle) that not only does the Governess already feel she is being stalked by a supernatural malevolence, but that there is a sexual connotation to it (the shot of Quint, which doesn't show his face, and is framed from the waist down, seems to focus primarily on his genital area, and the view of Jessel is of her in the bedroom).

Two films which depart from the traditional coach-journey setting are Weigl and Kent, both transporting the Governess to Bly by train (a common form of transport in both the Victorian era and Kent's setting of the opera in the 1950s).

The interior shots of the Governess in her compartment are similar to Morley in how they are framed, but under Weigl's direction the Governess does not always remain static in her seat. Another detail worth noting is the white bride-like costume the Governess wears, a visual theme which Weigl returns to many times. In this context, the sequence takes on the appearance of an unwitting sacrificial victim, or at least an innocent virgin who is on her way to her wedding, raising themes of the deflowering of a woman and a corruption of innocence certainly, but also of expectation and excitement. As Weigl revisits this theme in subsequent scenes in the opera, the viewer is invited to

ask the question: who are the ‘innocents’? The Governess or the children? The sequence does conclude with a horse-and-carriage ride, in deference to Britten’s original setting. When the train arrives at Bly we see an exterior shot of the station platform with a waiting carriage, complete with horse, to take the Governess on the final part of her journey to the house.

As has been noted previously, the interior of the train in Kent’s version is suggested by projections of windows on the background surface of the cyclorama. Through the windows we can see passing scenery outside as the train speeds through the countryside. The transition from the Theme to this scene allows stage managers to add the Governess and her seat to the foreground, a piece of stage business which is completed slickly and seamlessly. Most of the scene is filmed as a medium shot of the Governess, and these shots are alternated with some views of the Governess and window tightly framed in sideways view. Being a theatrical presentation, the soliloquy is physically sung (it is not a voiceover) and the director achieves the necessary distancing by having the character singing diagonally across the stage rather than directly at the audience or camera (Fig. 6.25).



Fig. 6.25 The Governess in her train compartment (Kent)

At the end of the sequence, the scenery outside the window appears to slow down and stop to suggest the arrival at the station of the train. There is then a sideways removal of the projected windows (an effect akin to a cinematic wipe), and the Governess stands and exits the stage. Following this there is a blackout; in cinematic terms a fade-to-black. In the churchyard scene, during Act II, there is a point at which the music becomes faster, the stage lights dim and a stained glass window is flown out. A long shot of the stage pulls in to a medium shot of the Governess for her soliloquy and the stage lighting puts her in silhouette, as she stands immobile centre stage. The viewer is aware of a portion of the stage rotating around her like a turning screw, symbolising her turmoil as the world is literally going round in circles. Once again, the theatrical device imitates a cinematic one, recalling a rotating camera-tracking movement. The theatrical device, in turn, is itself captured on film for the DVD, creating a kind of circle: screen has influenced theatre, theatre is then transformed back to screen.

In summary, all versions demonstrated a wide range of shot types and transition styles, and most of the films also used the musical transitions to trigger visual ones. In Kent, theatrical technology

was sometimes used to suggest a cinematic effect which did not rely on the camera to achieve this. For example, Kent's revolving stage imitated a rotating camera motion reminiscent of effects in films such as *The Matrix*. Armfield used placement of characters on stage to establish certain horror film tropes. For example, at one point he arranges them in a rather unsettling Victorian 'family portrait' pose in which they stare unblinkingly and ghost-like towards the camera. In Weigl and Mitchell, there was a greater range of editing styles reflecting their more cinematic styles generally, and providing a spectrum of visual rhythms from slow, gradual dissolves to fast-paced and frenetic shot changes. Also in Weigl and Mitchell, both directors incorporated elements of non-linear narrative presentation. This steered their productions away from a realistic form of expression, but the Bondy production was criticised by Andrew Clements for allowing a sense of reality to extend to the treatment of the ghostly characters:

> teasing ambiguity is thrown out of the window […] The corporeality of the ghosts is imposed from the start: Marlin Miller's Quint lurches around like Frankenstein on day release, Marie McLaughlin's Miss Jessel comes over as a cross between Electra and Cruella DeVil. There is no subtlety, no real menace, just banal caricatures that fatally defuse the tension of every scene.[51]

However, Stephen Eddins review of Bondy's production in its DVD release praised the direction and set implying that a fluidity and ambiguity had been achieved:

> Director Luc Bondy, set designer Richard Peduzzi, and lighting designer Dominique Bruguière have made vivid stage pictures with the simplest of elements, consisting largely of flat white surfaces that somehow create the sense of the outdoors, and both spacious and claustrophobic interiors. These panels are practically characters in themselves, and in some scenes, they move around the stage nearly as constantly as the actors.[52]

A positive aspect of Eddin's review was that he drew attention to the 'natural and spontaneous' facial expressions of the performers (whom he referred to at one point, tellingly, as 'exceptional actors' not singers). Conventional operatic stage acting is rarely one which would elicit a description of 'natural and spontaneous'. However, such a style is absolutely appropriate for performers working in film or television media, where close-ups are frequently used to guide the viewer to an understanding of the character's emotional state.

Treatment of narrative interpretations

The three central dramatic themes that can be identified within the interpretations are the supernatural, the psychological, and the sexual. Although elements of all three themes are present in every film, three (Morley, Armfield, and Mitchell) focus primarily on the supernatural, one (Hampe) on the psychological, and three (Weigl, Bondy, and Kent) on the sexual. I will use Passage 2 (Act I

[51] Clements, 'Turn of the Screw, review' in *The Guardian*.
[52] Stephen Eddins, 'The Turn of the Screw, review in *Allmusic* website, 2007 https://www.allmusic.com/album/release/britten-the-turn-of-the-screw-dvd-video-mr0002718624 (accessed 16 June 2019).

Scene 8, *At Night*) for the analysis of these themes and interpretations. These analyses will also incorporate where appropriate and necessary some commentary on mise-en-scène and directorial style.

a) Supernatural emphasis.

In chapter 5, we saw that Morley uses a number of cinematic devices to bring out the supernatural theme, including superimposed images and abstract non-realistic designs. A composite effect, not unlike the equivalent moment in Morley's production (see Fig. 5.10 in chapter 5), features in Armfield as a further example of how some of the theatrical films include details that can only be seen by the television audience. Quint is seen standing behind Miles, and a ghostly appearance is achieved by having two images of Quint's head superimposed on the main image (Fig. 6.26).



Fig. 6.26 Ghostly superimpositions (Armfield)

The scene continues by implying from Miles's reactions that the boy cannot actually see Quint at all, although he can hear his voice. We have already seen how Mitchell uses a restricted view (just showing the characters' legs) in order to heighten the sense of menace. Quint is standing directly behind Miles, but moves out of the way when Miles turns to face him, revealing Flora behind him. As Flora walks towards the camera we hear Jessel's call. At the beginning of the quartet featuring Jessel, Flora, Miles and Quint, the stage direction reads: 'The lights come up on Flora at the window and Miss Jessel by the lake.' Armfield's production displays a long shot of the stage at this point, showing the arrangement of the characters thus: Quint stage left, Jessel and Flora upstage and downstage centre, and Miles stage right. The background lighting level is generally very low, emphasising the effect of claustrophobic, smothering darkness.

Shot on location, Mitchell's film has more scope for interpretation. Ann Midgette, for the *New York Times*, described this as 'a woman's version, shown from the perspective of a Governess', with

Quint as ‘coarse, dirty and frightening.’[53] This emphasis on the female in Mitchell’s characterisation, complete with supernatural connotations, finds fruition in several places in the film. For example, during Variation VII, there is filmed action showing Jessel retrieving Flora’s doll from its Ophelia-like resting place in the lake and giving it back to Flora. As the variation comes to a close, there is a long shot of Miles in the courtyard seen from the point of view of an upstairs window. Miles gives a little wave, and the sequence cuts to a close-up of Flora washing the doll in a basin. At this point Act I Scene 8 in the score begins, we hear Quint’s distant calls to Miles (Ex. 7.7) and Flora is joined by Miles as she tries to clean the doll. This could be interpreted as an attempt to wash away the corruption that has already been suffered by the two children. Miles walks off disdainfully, and the next shot is of a door opening and dead leaves blowing in, in the style of a clichéd ‘haunted house’ trope.

Although in both Morley and Armfield there is relatively little changing imagery once the basic shots are established, in Mitchell’s film it is a different story. Following the doll-washing episode the remainder of the scene is rich in its variety of shots and settings, creating at times an almost dreamlike, stream-of-consciousness impression, a visual montage inspired by Britten’s musical style.

There are a number of views of Miles in bed, alternating with images from his dreams, recalling elements from earlier in the film, e.g. Miles running through the graveyard (Fig. 6.27).



Fig. 6.27 The dreamlike image of Miles running through the graveyard (Mitchell)

As Quint’s calls continue, Miles awakes. Although we see Quint’s hand reaching out to touch Miles, no other part of his body is shown. The camera follows Miles as he gets out of bed to follow what seems to be the disembodied voice of Quint, taking him out of his bedroom and up a flight of stairs. As can be seen from Fig. 6.28, the combined effect of framing from above (emphasising Miles’s dimunitive size) and a lighting design which allows certain details to be rendered as shadows (ephemeral constructs resulting from the angle of light on real objects which are out of shot) creates a suitably ghostly environment and atmosphere. James writes of ‘empty chambers, dull corridors and crooked staircases’[54] and it is known that overhead staircase shots are a Hitchcock trademark (e.g.

[53] Midgette, ‘Briiten Opera Dons A Dress’, *New York Times* {22 May 2005).
[54] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, p. 18.

Vertigo, 1958). Together with high-contrast lighting effects (ultimately derived from German expressionist cinema in the silent era), these are well-established clichés of horror films.



Fig.6.28 Miles is lured upstairs by Quint (Mitchell)

What follows contains some of the most bizarre supernatural images of the entire film; these are images which leave little doubt that Mitchell is following a conventional ghost-story interpretation. There is a sudden cut to Flora appearing to walk through a pool of water in which hundreds of lit candles are floating (the candles even extend up the stairs) with Flora continuing to look happy and excited, even somewhat manic.



Fig.6.29 Flora walks through candles (Mitchell)

Miles reaches the hatch to the roof, where there are more candles. At this point, Quint and Jessel are singing their duet ('What goes on in your dreams?') but are not in shot. As the musical pace quickens

('On the paths' , Ex. 6.11) there is a long shot of a doll's house in the centre of the outside courtyard, surrounded by a circle of candles, balanced by views of Miles approaching the roof walking barefoot through fallen dead leaves (a recurring theme in the film, possibly inspired by Quint's words 'the winter leaves, fallen leaves…') and more candles which have appeared. There are also more views of Flora's feet walking through the pool of floating candles. The sudden appearance of so many candles certainly brings a supernatural element to the film, even a hint of satanic ritual, although it could be argued that the multiple candles detract from the force of the single candle in Miles's room which is actually specified in the score (and mentioned by Quint in his 'hidden life' line). By now, Mitchell's editing of the scene has become frenetic and rapid. Miles reaches the roof. The Governess, having woken, pursues him up the ladder to the hatch, and Quint himself is briefly seen on the roof. The rapid interchange of shots allows the main characters to assemble for the final moments of Act I with a sense of dramatic inevitability. Flora reaches the doll's house and crouches down by it, framed by an overhead crane shot (Fig. 6.30), and there is a dangerous moment when we see Miles right at the edge of the roof as if he is about to throw himself off. The Governess grabs him just in time and clasps him to her as he sings the 'I am bad' phrases.



Fig. 6.30 Flora crouches by the doll's house (Mitchell)

The final sequence contains the slightly curious image of the outline of Jessel reflected in the lake's waters, surprisingly brightly lit, the view of Flora by the doll's house, and then, just before the 'fade-to-black' which actually ends the act, a last view of Miles and the Governess together on the roof.

b) Psychological emphasis

Of all the films, Hampe is the only one to place more emphasis on the psychological aspects of the story than the supernatural or the sexual, although it must be acknowledged that there are moments in the other films which also bring the psychological to the fore. For example, the final scene

in Weigl deals in some depth with both Miles's and the Governess's psyches because they both go from calm control to near hysteria during the course of the scene, an exploration of the effect on the characters' emotions of their psychological reaction to events. In Hampe, the lights go up on a very brief long shot of the stage, cutting immediately to the Governess sitting in a chair reading a book. The presence of what we might presume to be a fictional book in her hand may be symbolic of a possible fiction that is developing inside the Governess's head, thus already pointing us in the direction of a psychological, rather than literal, meaning behind the story. As if to underline this, the camera pulls in close to the Governess as Quint starts his 'Miles' calls. The effect is almost like a voiceover, except the voice is not the Governess's own, but the ghostly, or perhaps hallucinatory, voice she can hear. The camera follows her as she goes to the French window. There is a momentary blackout here, signalling that we are about to leave a physical world and enter the hallucinatory world inside the Governess's mind, and there is an almost immediate cut to a close-up of Quint. The background is completely black (light is only on Quint's head and shoulders) alternating with a screen-filling close-up of the Governess's head. This short introductory sequence of shots is enough to bring the viewer inside the Governess's psyche, to suggest we are no longer in a physical environment, and the big, claustrophobic close-ups give way to a long shot of the stage, revealing Quint on his tower. Both children are in situ below the tower, in their nightclothes. Visually, a jarring element is Machiko Obata's portrayal of Flora, since Obata really does not physically resemble a young girl at all, and this requires a considerable degree of imagination on the part of the viewer to accept her characterisation. Although operatic Floras have tended to be older than the character age (for valid vocal reasons) it is unusual for a singer with such a mature physical stature to be cast in the role. Raymond Tuttle's review online for Classical.net (2003) agrees: 'The only false note is sounded by Machiko Obata's Flora […] it strains credibility when she is almost as tall as the governess.'[55]

In keeping with the visual style of this production, taking its inspiration from Victorian book illustrations, the lake can be observed as a painted backdrop which is again, a reference to an artificial and fictional framework for the story. It is as if the book in the Governess's hand has come to life, which of course it has, in a sense, a psychological life in the Governess's head.

Although Quint's phrases are typically accompanied by close-up shots, the camera generally pulls back to show the whole tower. Most transitions are dissolves, giving a fluid quality to the editing style. Miles, likewise, is normally shown in close-up. Shortly before Jessel takes up her own call for Flora, there is a brief close-up of the Governess's head superimposed on the general long shot of the stage, before it dissolves away, covering the entry of Jessel. This in itself suggests the entire scene is the Governess's hallucination, a subtlety which naturally is only available for television viewers.

[55] Raymond Tuttle, 'The Turn of the Screw: DVD Review' in *Classical Net* website http://www.classical.net/music/recs/reviews/a/arh00198dvdb.php (accessed 5 June 2019).

c) Sexual emphasis

There is without doubt a clear sexual element to the story, alluded to on a number of occasions in James's original, with one of the most unequivocal featuring almost unchanged in the opera:

> [Mrs Grose] paused a moment; then she added: 'Quint was much too free.'
> This gave me, straight from my vision of his face – *such* a face! – a sudden sickness of disgust. 'Too free with *my* boy?'
> 'Too free with every one!'[56] [Henry James]

> MRS GROSE: But I saw things, elsewhere, I did not like, when Quint was free with everyone, with little Master Miles!
> GOVERNESS: Miles?
> MRS GROSE: Hours they spent together.
> GOVERNESS: Miles!
> MRS GROSE: Yes, Miss. He made free with her, too, with lovely Miss Jessel…[57]
> [Myfanwy Piper]

J.P.E. Harper-Scott has specifically addressed Britten's treatment of this dramatic theme, and has commented generally on the subject of child sexual abuse and its context within the opera. He wrote:

> It is vital not to over-universalise the problem of child abuse and suggest that it is somehow normative for our society. It is not. Child abusers may not be the only people who *perceive* children in a sexualised manner (consciously or not) but they are the only ones who directly *abuse* them; the cuteness of children might be an important constituent of adult sexuality but finding adults cute-sexy is nothing like abusing children […] Britten does not take the question that far: his choice to present Quint in as fully real a sense as he could is a way of reassuring us that the structural monstrosity is typical of a modern *homo sacer* who really exists and is the unique locus of bad sexuality.[58]

Harper-Scott, therefore, asserts that Britten's motivation for providing directors with clues within the music and libretto that they may explore this aspect of the opera's underlying theme of abusive sexuality is based on a positive morality, and not in any sense a glorification of abuse or a gratuitous representation of it.

Weigl had already paved the way for the theme of sexual abuse in the prequel sequence at the beginning of his film, and he continues to develop this throughout the opera. Much use is made of the phallic symbolism of the tower, even beginning this during the variation which precedes Scene 8 (Fig. 6.30). Also during the preceding variation, the view of the tower alternates with a little dumb show in which Miles is seen in bed. The Governess goes to him and watches him sleep for a while

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[56] James, *The Turn of the Screw*, chapter 6.
[57] Britten, *The Turn of the Screw*, vocal score RF40(6) – RF41(1).
[58] J.P.E. Harper-Scott, 'Miles Must Die: Ideological Uses of 'Innocence' in Britten's The Turn of the Screw' in Kennedy, Kate (ed.). *Literary Britten: Words and Music in Benjamin Britten's Vocal Works*. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2018). p. 338.

before going to her own bed. She is dressed in white, but over this is a thin lacy dressing gown in black, providing a hint of sexual undertone to the image. The scene develops, and during Quint's first call of 'Miles…', there is a long shot of the tower. Curiously, the sky is light, even though the scene (as its title defines) is set during the night. Furthermore, Miles's bedroom (shots of which alternate with the exterior) is most certainly representative of the darkness of night.



Fig. 6.30 The Tower: an unequivocal phallic symbol (Weigl)

To add to the suggestiveness, shots of Miles in his room are sometimes of him in bed, and sometimes standing beside the bed. Miles is summoned to the bedroom door by Quint's calls but we do not see Quint singing; the calls are typically accompanied by the view of the tower, or sometimes the tower seen as a reflection in the (correspondingly feminine) lake. At the end of the longest melisma, the camera tilts to the top of the tower, where Quint can be seen. The architecture of the tower itself, which strongly resembles a typical minaret, such as the one at Nizwa, Oman (Fig. 6.31), and, as mentioned earlier, prompts the viewer to hear a similarity between Quint's calls and the Islamic Call to Prayer, a striking association which suggests the allure of what Philip Brett calls the exotic East. Brett has written of Eastern elements in Britten's music, and has suggested they represent a darkly sexualised 'Other' in works such as *The Turn of the Screw* and *Death in Venice*. [59]

[59] See Philip Brett, 'Eros and Orientalism in Britten's Operas' in George E. Haggerty (ed.), *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays* (California: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 129 – 153.



Fig. 6.31 The Islamic minaret at Nizwa, Oman.

At the point where Jessel makes her first call to Flora (Ex. 6.9), she is introduced by the camera tracking in a downwards direction from the top of a tree to ground level, revealing Jessel, in black gown and swathed in smoke. There is an obvious visual link here to Quint, with the tree representing a kind of natural tower, or phallus, in contrast with the man-made tower which is Quint's domain. In the score, the stage direction reads 'Flora at the window and Miss Jessel by the lake', but Weigl has Flora on a balcony, almost a nod towards Shakespeare's Juliet. Subsequently, all views of Jessel show her surrounded by smoke and amongst trees.

There are a number of visual themes running through Weigl's interpretation of this scene apart from the phallic symbolism of the tower. The lake is used as a visual representation of femininity (similar to many stage productions), alongside images used to represent Jessel, such as trees and smoke. Clothes (style and colour) are used to represent stages of sexual intimacy, ranging from virginal white, via bridal-style attire, through to black and lacy, the latter becoming not only an image of sexual activity but that of sexual abuse also. All of these visual symbols are used constantly throughout this production, but their meanings are particularly laid bare during this scene. Finally, there is the issue of the juxtaposition of daylight with night-time in a scene which is set 'At Night'. One possible explanation for this may be that the scene is a montage of seduction events, some of which take place during the day in and around the grounds at Bly and its tower, lake and wood, and others which take place at night in people's bedrooms. This may imply that abuse is taking place repeatedly during an extended period of time (a typical pattern which almost defines child sexual abuse by an ostensibly trusted adult) rather than a single abusive event in which things suddenly come to a head with Miles' 'you see – I am bad, aren't I?' utterances at the end of the scene. This montage approach that appears to telescope physical time and place into a short dramatic sequence works particularly well on screen, and so it is no surprise that this may well be what we are seeing here. Another possible explanation crosses over into the psychological approach to the story; in other words, perhaps we are glimpsing dreams or hallucinations within the mind of the Governess.

In Bondy, the lights come up, albeit rather subdued, on a long shot of the main set. A rocking horse is positioned stage left, and, on stage right, a chair is placed on its side. Just behind this Miles

sits on another chair. As Quint's melismatic calls begin, Miles responds by getting up from his chair and then going over to the horse to set it rocking. Quint is revealed, not at the window as expected, but lying on his back on the floor in front of the window. The subdued half-light accentuates the hazy, seductive atmosphere. In most productions, Quint is clearly identified as the leader and instigator of this encounter, but here Bondy places Miles in control. The boy mounts the rocking horse, having led Quint there. As the horse rocks, the camera pulls in to a close-up; Quint is close behind Miles' body, combing the boy's hair. This intimate act, together with the rocking motion of the horse, strongly suggests a homoerotic encounter; there is an uncomfortable impression that we are witnessing a male rape, but with the even more disturbing feeling that the victim is not completely uncompliant (Fig. 6.32). Following this, and also in close-up, Quint crouches down beside Miles. There is more than a hint of fellatio here, but Quint gets up as if their lovemaking has been interrupted (which indeed it has, by the entry of Flora), accompanied by the initial calls of an unseen Jessel.



Fig 6.32 Quint and Miles (Bondy)

In medium shot, the camera reveals Miss Jessel at the edge of the stage. Although there is a hint of sexual activity here, with Jessel at one point kneeling in front of Flora, this is not so marked as the Miles/Quint interaction. Throughout this scene, much of the framing is in medium shots or close-ups, emphasising the intimate nature of events on stage. (Fig. 6.33)



Fig. 6.33 Seduction of Flora by Miss Jessel (Bondy)

As the music enters the ‘On the paths…’ section, Quint and Jessel appear to regain control over the children, luring and seducing them as the music becomes more excitable. Just at the moment of climax, the ‘ghosts’ disappear from view (almost literally a kind of coitus interruptus) a long shot of the whole stage is presented, as if blowing away the claustrophobic and oppressive intimacy represented by the medium and close-up shots of the previous few minutes. There is no attempt to make the disappearance of Quint and Jessel appear supernatural; they simply walk off stage. This emphasises the true physical and human characteristic of their seduction of the children (and, as has been noted, their own seduction by the children, who are not seen as entirely innocent and unwilling partners).

Kent also uses this scene to emphasise a theme of sexual abuse and seduction. As Quint’s ‘Miles’ melismas begin, there is a long shot of the set, with the elements clearly in view. Quint is in silhouette at the window, and stage right is set up as a 1950s style bathroom; a radiator has a towel placed on it, and there is a bath and a basin. We can see Flora leaning over the basin washing her hair, but she is completely motionless, frozen in time. Stage left is totally bare, appearing to represent a kind of ‘limbo’ area, perhaps an area between life and death. (Fig. 6.34)



Fig.6.34 The stage set at the opening of the scene (Kent)

As Quint continues with his ‘Miles’ calls, there is a cut to medium shot with the bath in the foreground and Quint’s silhouette behind it. Miles (hitherto unseen because he is lying in the bath with even his head below the edge) slowly appears, rising naked from the bath, somewhat resembling a zombie-like character from a horror movie rising from the grave.

Tim Ashley, using language which referenced horror-movie tropes, was critical both of Kent’s corporeal treatment of the ghosts and of his dramatic placement (although it is not entirely clear whether Ashley was criticising the work itself or Kent’s direction):

> The physicality of the ghosts, however, together with the odd disparity between Quint as insidious charmer and Miss Jessel as Hammer-horror wraith, isn't ideally successful, and the most disturbing scene in the entire staging – Quint's frightful incursion into the children's bathroom – takes place too early on.[60]

There are a number of close-ups and medium shots here; some show just Miles and others show all three characters. Cutting between shots is generally slow, allowing the build-up of a disturbing atmosphere. Suddenly, at RF 73 +1 ('I am all things strange and bold'), Quint opens the translucent door and enters the main stage, arms outstretched. Wearing a modern suit, he looks respectable and professional (recalling what is often said about contemporary abusers of children; they are rarely grubby men in scruffy raincoats), and sings directly and seductively at Miles. When Quint reaches the lines 'I am King Midas' (RF 75 +1), he grasps the towel from the radiator and holds it up so that Miles can get out of the bath shielded by it, a brief moment of protection before being literally enveloped by it (and, therefore, by Quint). It is significant that Miles gives a little smirk and appears comfortable, and even complicit, as Quint lifts him out of the bath. Hence once again, as in Bondy, the child is not portrayed as being fully innocent or unknowing, or even reluctant to take part in the seduction. During Quint's lines 'I am the hidden life that stirs when the candle is out' (RF 77 +1), he moves around the set and into the limbo area, with the camera following him. Snow begins to fall in the limbo area, the camera pulling back to a long shot as a door in the translucent back wall opens and Miss Jessel walks through it to begin her calls to Flora. Jessel is dressed all in black, and has wild, wet hair.[61] At RF 80 -1 there is a close-up of Flora as she lifts her head out of the basin. As she has been washing her hair, this, too, is of a wild appearance. Although she is dressed in a floral (a pun on her name perhaps?[62]) nightdress, she is strikingly similar in appearance to Jessel (Fig. 6.35).

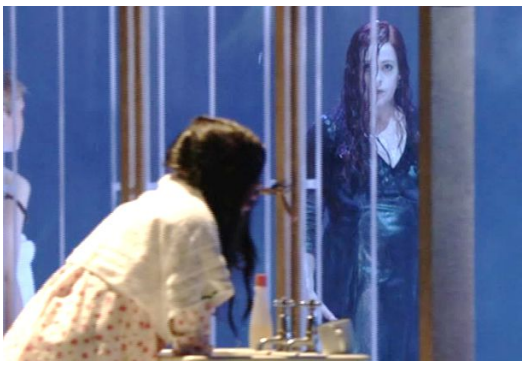


Fig.6.35 Wild and wet hair provide a clue that Flora is under the influence of Miss Jessel (Kent)

[60] Tim Ashley, 'The Turn of the Screw', review in *The Guardian* (22 October 2014).
[61] Wild loose hair (particularly in women who normally have it tied up) is a symbol of madness in Shakespeare which persisted into the work of romantic writers.
[62] Both children's names might be significant: Flora because of her in-nature encounters with Miss Jessel, and Miles's battle against demonic forces (i.e. as his name implies, a kind of 'soldier').

There is a moment here where the audience is perhaps intended to realise the possibility that both children are now firmly under the influence of their respective ghost partners, Miles with Quint and Flora with Jessel. All four characters are part of a recurring cycle of abuse, acknowledging that it is common for an abused child to become an abuser when they reach adulthood. Also, given the frozen state Flora has been in up until now, with head literally buried in the basin, her emergence from the basin is as if Jessel has called her to life, much in the same way as Quint called Miles to life in rising from the bathtub earlier in the scene. At the lines 'what goes on in your dreams'(RF 82) there is an unmistakeably homoerotic embrace between Quint and Miles (Fig. 6.36), leading to Jessel and Quint singing their songs of promised excitement ('On the paths', etc.) to their prospective doubles.



Fig. 6.36 A striking portrayal of homoerotic ecstasy (Kent)

It is interesting to note that it is Flora who reaches out to Jessel, and Miles who rushes to be embraced by Quint, not the other way around. As the scene reaches its climax, as in Bondy there is a symbolic coitus interruptus because Quint and Jessel back out of the situation through the rear door in the set. The Governess and Mrs Grose then enter, and the scene (and indeed Act I) ends with the Governess enveloping Miles in her dressing gown, a visual echo of the predatory embraces involving Quint and Miles earlier in the scene.

In summary, James's story, due to its own ambiguousness, gives rise to many possible interpretations, even when filtered through Britten and Piper's own preference for a straightforwardly supernatural interpretation. These interpretations can be grouped into three main categories: supernatural, psychological, and sexual. Although there are elements of all three in every film, one is always emphasised more than the other two. Morley, Armfield and Mitchell all emphasise the supernatural and ghostly aspects of the story, reflected in greater use of superimposed images when representing the 'ghosts' on screen, unsettling eerie lighting effects sometimes using candles and dark backgrounds, and, in the case of Mitchell the use of 'jump scare' editing.

The sole film amongst these case studies which emphasises the psychological drama, leading the viewer to the possibility that the ghosts are within the Governess's mind and mental state is Hampe's, the director underlining the claustrophobic psychological trauma involved by favouring extreme close-ups and closed-in, dark lighting effects.

Weigl, Bondy, and Kent all are films which emphasise the sexual elements of the story. Kent, for example, gives a number of disturbing images of precocious sexual behaviour by the children, plus clear suggestions of grooming and sexual abuse of the children by Quint and Jessel. Weigl adds to these further by also featuring prominently the unequivocally phallic symbolism of Quint's tower.

Notable Unfilmed Stage Productions of the Opera

During the fourteen years between 2004 and 2018 *The Turn of the Screw* was the second most frequently performed of Britten's operas worldwide, with 651 performances (145 productions). *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was the most performed at 697 performances (133 productions), with *Peter Grimes* coming in third at 582 performances (116 productions).[63]

Although this study is concerned with filmed versions of Britten's opera, together with wider issues around cinematic style in stage works and filmed opera in general, since the source material for such films is the original opera itself, as conceived for stage presentation, it is helpful to bring some of the notable unfilmed productions into the discussion. The premiere production of 1954 has already been examined in Chapter 5. To represent the many other unfilmed productions, I have applied the criteria that the production needs to be particularly original, innovative or unusual in some way and/or cinematic in approach even though it has not been filmed. For these reasons, I have selected Jonathan Miller's production for English National Opera (1979), and Timothy Sheader's 2018 production at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, in association with English National Opera.

Jonathan Miller's production for ENO

Miller's production in 1979 demonstrated a directorial approach which brought attention to the cinematic style of the work. It initially appeared to accept the first interpretation of James's story, presenting the ghosts as external entities that were visible to the protagonists, but Patricia Howard saw a greater degree of nuance in it, declaring that it showed 'how the real world can play upon vulnerable imaginations: Miller's production implies that there is enough in the numinous beauty of the English countryside, in the secret life of a large, old house, and in the unbridgeable gulf between childhood and the adult world to raise a ghost or two.'[64] A good deal of the atmosphere of the production which led Howard to notice the 'secret life' was undoubtedly a result of Patrick Robertson's

[63] Operabase website https://www.operabase.com/statistics/en (accessed 27 November 2019). Operabase statistics began in 2004.
[64] Howard, *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, p.148.

set, which gained a mention by John Rockwell when reviewing an American touring version of Miller's production in 1984. Rockwell wrote:

> The unit setting offers a tilted square playing area, one corner thrust out toward the audience, and translucent vertical panels opening up like severe butterfly wings – or a ghost's arms. The panels are projected dimly from the back with slides of indoor and outdoor scenes – nothing is ever quite sunny or clear.[65]

Rockwell was also struck by the influence of the horror-film genre in describing the acting and dramatic style: 'Lois McDonall, directed in horror-film excess by Dr. Miller, was properly lurid as the female ghost.'[66]

Britten's cinematic style was further underlined by Robertson's set, which Howard praised for its 'beauty and fidelity to James's atmosphere.'[67] Robertson was an innovative designer who often incorporated elements of a cinematic approach into his work. He collaborated a number of times with Miller, 'letting complex stories emerge uncluttered, atmosphere often informed by projections […] (and exploiting) clear stages and projections for shifting mood and place.'[68] Fig. 6.37 shows a scene from the opera, in which one of the projections can be seen in the background. The full cinematic influence on these designs can be appreciated in Jarka Burian's article for an industry journal:

> [There were] three stepped panels on each side of the stage […] of expanded aluminium grill [*sic*], which could register both frontal and rear projections in a sharper, harsher manner than fabric or folio screen. Narrow semi-mirrored panels filled the gaps between the large panels. Consequently one could also see through the entire onstage walls and view a set of opaque panels behind them […] Many combinations of projections were possible as a result, including startling and eerie transformations as one shifted from one surface to another, or from frontal to rear projection, all of which was quite appropriate to the ghost story libretto of the opera.[69]

William Mann felt that the size of the set emphasised the psychological effect of scale on a small child, bringing yet another aspect to Miller's interpretation of the opera, in that it was able to 'bring home the apparent physical vastness of a child's surroundings, and thus suggest how hardly children's curious behaviour will be comprehended by elders who have forgotten the relative dimensions of childhood.'[70]

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[65] John Rockwell,'Britten Work' in *LA Times* (9 June 1984) https://www.nytimes.com/1984/06/09/arts/opera-britten-work.html (accessed 15 July 2019).
[66] Rockwell, 'Britten Work' in *LA Times*
[67] Howard, *Benjamin Britten: The Turn of the Screw*, p.148.
[68] David Jays, 'Patrick Robertson Obituary' in *The Guardian*, (22 April 2009) https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/apr/22/obituary-patrick-robertson (accessed 15 July 2019).
[69] Jarka M. Burian, in *Theatre Design and Technology*,(New York: United States Institute of Theatre Technology, Fall 1983), p. 4.
[70] William Mann, 'The Turn of the Screw, review' in *The Times*, 10 November 1979.



Fig. 6.37: A scene from Jonathan Miller's 1979 production

It is to be noted that Miller's production, being one of the first major reinterpretations following the composer's death in 1976, especially emphasised the cinematic qualities of the work.

Timothy Sheader's production for Regent's Park Open Air Theatre

As one of the artistic directors of Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, Timothy Sheader had been responsible for a number of musical theatre productions which made innovative use of the open-air space, including Sondheim's *Into the Woods* and Lloyd Webber/Rice's *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In 2018, collaborating with ENO, he directed *The Turn of the Screw*, putting together a production which abandoned the conventional representation of Bly as a smart country house, and replaced it with an already ruined, decaying, and corrupt physical structure resembling a rotting disused conservatory, designed for the production by Soutra Gilmour (Fig. 6.38).

The production was praised for its use of the outdoor atmosphere, particularly the natural darkening of the sky and the lowering of the air temperature as the opera proceeded towards its denouement, with comments such as Michael Billington's in *The Guardian* declaring that the production 'works superbly well and, in the second half, you even feel a chill to the spine as you watch a battle for possession of children's souls in the gathering dusk.'[71]

[71] Michael Billington, 'The Turn of the Screw, review' in *The Guardian*, 26 June 2018 https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jun/26/the-turn-of-the-screw-review-britten-opera-eno-regents-park-open-air (accessed 4 September 2019).



Fig. 6.38: On the set of Sheader's Open Air Theatre production

Yehuda Shapiro, writing in *The Stage*, commended the 'creative use of the wide open spaces', and the fact that the 'design places a dilapidated glasshouse amidst an overgrown garden'[72], which added the image of weeds choking the life out of more orderly growth to the atmosphere of ghostly claustrophobia. However, Shapiro was not fully convinced by the representation of Quint and Jessel: 'Sheader renders the ghosts too robust and corporeal. There is even the suggestion of an ectoplasmic threesome with the Governess.'[73] In his *Financial Times* review, George Hall agreed, in part, that the ghosts were 'undoubtedly real, though director Timothy Sheader allows just a hint of ambiguity to remain by staging the scene where Elgan Llŷr Thomas's flamboyantly sinister Quint converses with Elin Pritchard's gothic, mud-stained Miss Jessel as if Anita Watson's increasingly self-tormented Governess were simply dreaming it.'[74]

Sometimes, technology helped to give a more intimate and natural feel to an acting style which was quite cinematic overall. Anita Watson, who played the Governess, described how 'with this production we've got microphones, so we don't always have to be facing out […] so it sort of gives you a little bit more flexibility than a normal theatre.'[75] The flexibility of using microphones also allowed Sheader to place his Prologue within the audience in order to begin the opera as a kind of one-man flashmob, surprising the unsuspecting audience members sitting around him. And as a fortuitous, but apposite accidental atmospheric detail, on the evening I attended, the performance featured a flock of birds flying over the stage and auditorium exactly at the moment of the woodwind birdcalls in Variation III (as discussed earlier, in Chapter 4).

Dominic Lowe, reviewing online for Bachtrack.com, discerned in Sheader's interpretation the three essential themes of the story: supernatural, psychological, and sexual:

> There's a powerful feeling of desolation, a suggestion that the household is just hanging on after events of catastrophic impact. Director Timothy

[72] Yehuda Shapiro, 'The Turn of the Screw, review' in *The Stage*, (June 2018) https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2018/turn-screw-review-opera-open-air-theatre-london/ (accessed 4 September 2019).
[73] Shapiro, 'The Turn of the Screw, review'
[74] George Hall, 'The Turn of the Screw, review', in *Financial Times* (June 2018) https://www.ft.com/content/ab701da2-7934-11e8-af48-190d103e32a4 (accessed 5 September 2019).
[75] Anita Watson, interviewed for *Whats on Stage* website, https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/turn-of-the-screw-regents-park-rehearsal-video_46889.html (accessed 4 September 2019).

> Sheader's grip on Britten's opera is extremely strong, bringing a sensitivity that embraced the ghoulish supernatural element of the piece, the deep, flawed humanity of the Governess and the sinister sexual insinuations of Quint's relationship with Miles.[76]

The staging of the opera in such a unique space as Regent's Park precludes its revival in a more traditional setting such as a theatre or ENO's own opera house at the Coliseum, as shown by the revival of Sheader's production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* at the Barbican in 2019, which completely changed character by being restaged indoors.[77] It is therefore unfortunate that this production, given its uniqueness, remained unfilmed.

[76] Dominic Lowe, 'The Turn of the Screw, review' in Bachtrack website (June 2018) https://bachtrack.com/review-turn-screw-sheader-watson-thomas-english-national-opera-regents-park-london-june-2018 (accessed 5 September 2019).
[77] Alex Wood, whilst generally praising the revival in his *What's On Stage* review, put it thus: 'If the Open Air run was a Glastonbury set, then the Barbican transfer is a flashy gig at the O2.' https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/jesus-christ-superstar-barbican-matt-cardle_49428.html (accessed 5 September 2019).

Chapter 7. Britten and TV Opera after *The Turn of the Screw*

In this chapter we will look at two other Britten operas which were filmed for television by the BBC during the 1960s: *Billy Budd* (1966), and *Peter Grimes* (1969), and consider how these may have come about partly because of the success of Morley's 1959 production of *The Turn of the Screw* and how they may relate to this production in terms of both technical and artistic approach. Next there will be a section dealing with Britten's television opera, *Owen Wingrave*, and examining whether this can be considered a culmination of the earlier films and indeed, looking at whether it is likely Britten learned lessons from these which affected the nature of *Owen Wingrave*. As an essential part of this investigation, the roles of Britten's various collaborators will be explored, supported by original information supplied from interviews with Colin Matthews and the director of the 2001 Channel 4 version, Margaret Williams.

After Morley: Britten operas filmed for TV during the composer's lifetime

There is some evidence that the success of Morley's film encouraged Britten to explore further the possibilities that could be offered by engaging with the medium of television. This resulted in two important productions, *Billy Budd* (1966), and *Peter Grimes* (1969), both of which demonstrated, in different ways, that they stand upon Morley's pioneering shoulders. As we saw in Chapter 5, Britten's reaction to Morley's work was enthusiastic. It is likely that seven years later when the possibility of televising *Billy Budd* arose, he remembered that television could indeed, as he put it in 1959, 'do an enormous amount to popularise opera in this country, especially if it avoids the spectacular Grand Opera so beloved by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and concentrates on the intimate and concise'.[1] At first sight, it may seem that *Billy Budd*, with its enormous orchestral forces and large male chorus, is the polar opposite of something 'intimate and concise', but there is little more intimate than several hundred sailors crammed into the confined spaces of a relatively small battleship in the Napoleonic wars. This was an existence which must have been almost the definition of claustrophobic. Britten captures these aspects vividly in both the officers' private meetings scenes and the 'below-decks' scenes, a marked contrast to his use of full performing forces in the climaxes. Indeed, most of the opera is scored for much smaller instrumental combinations and solo voices, often recalling the work of Mahler in this regard. A case can be made for the view that film or television is an even better medium to explore this oppressive atmosphere than an opera house, where performers are distant, and such devices as close-ups are not possible. Deborah Bull alluded to this in a 2013 television interview: 'There were limitations to the number of cameras and therefore

[1] Benjamin Britten, in *The Turn of the Screw publicity brochure*, (Associated Rediffusion)

the number of angles you could get […] but I felt that that released a sort of intensity. It reminded me how much you unleash creativity when you set limits.'[2]

In some ways it is surprising that the proposal to televise *Billy Budd* came to fruition at all. It had been filmed for television on a previous occasion, and transmitted on 19 October 1952 by American television company NBC, who had built up a reputation for televised opera based on productions such as Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (1951). However, this version of *Billy Budd* was severely abridged, cut down from its original four-act, three-hour length to 90 minutes. Britten had been persuaded that this could work by NBC and the conductor Peter Adler, but later, according to Jennifer Barnes, 'it was a decision [the composer] came to regret'.[3] Philip Reed noted that possibly the one saving grace of the NBC transmission was that it 'affords us a unique opportunity to witness Theodor Uppman's noble and touching assumption of the title role, which he had created at Covent Garden'.[4] Uppman was reportedly disappointed that he had not been invited to reprise the role in the later BBC film (a role which went to Peter Glossop, as it did in Britten's Decca recording of the work), but it was felt that he was too old for the part. (Ironically, the same objection was not raised about Peter Pears when reprising his 1945 role of Peter Grimes in the BBC film of 1969, 24 years later.) In view of Britten's reaction reported by Culshaw, it is all the more remarkable that Britten allowed Morley to televise *The Turn of the Screw*, and it underlines Morley's wisdom in insisting that the opera be televised in its entirety. As a result, there were never any doubts that the *Billy Budd* film would feature the entire score. Britten was already favourably predisposed towards the production (possibly because the producer, Basil Coleman, was a member of his established circle), even as early as the rehearsal phase, writing to his friend Princess Margaret of Hesse and the Rhine (29 August 1966): 'pretty exciting it is – a wonderful cast, & fine production by our dear Basil Coleman'.[5]

During the filming, the studio set featured a detailed mock-up of HMS *Indomitable* (designed by John Piper and roughly based on HMS *Victory*, and similar to the design concept for the original stage production), utilising five cameras, including one mounted on a crane to capture the maintop. Charles Mackerras, situated along with the orchestra in a separate studio as he had been for Morley's *Screw*, was the conductor. Similar to Morley's *Screw* production, an assistant conductor was used to relay the beat (David Lloyd-Jones, fulfilling the same function as Paul Hamburger in Morley's production), described by Jennifer Barnes thus:

> there were several monitors on the set, however these were no longer for the singers, but for the assistant conductor […] to rush from monitor to monitor, depending on which camera was in use, [relaying the] beat in such a way that the singers could both act and keep him in their line of vision […] The 1966 *Billy Budd* is convincing evidence of the quality of the two-studio method, yet both Britten and Pears abhorred it […]

[2] Deborah Bull, Interviewed in the 2013 BBC documentary, *Britten on Camera*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LElGk-y2s8Y (accessed 24 September 2019).
[3] Jennifer Barnes, *The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), p. 44.
[4] Philip Reed, writing in the brochure accompanying the DVD release of the BBC production (Decca/BBC, 2008).
[5] Reed and Cooke (eds), *Letters from a Life vol. 6*, p. 61.

> [Britten] found the exercise profoundly unmusical, and vowed that he himself would never conduct in a two-studio production.[6]

Britten was true to his word. During the subsequent filming of both *Peter Grimes* and *Owen Wingrave*, which he conducted, the main auditorium of Snape Maltings was turned into a television studio, with the orchestra and the singers situated in the same space as the set. After the filming had taken place (but before the transmission on 11 December 1966) Britten wrote to Coleman in warm tones, and hinted that he would be interested in doing more television work, although one may detect a note of caution:

> I saw enough to judge how imaginative, understanding & dramatic you had made the whole thing – & against such obstacles too! My – it is a medium to cope with & I was full of admiration about your handling of those legions of people & those very intractable machines! […] I was certainly made to think furiously about the medium, as it stands now. If we ever do a piece together (& I much hope we do) we must certainly have a long talk about the whole matter well in advance of any actual planning.[7]

Critical reaction to *Billy Budd* was overwhelmingly positive, with reviewers such as Anthony Payne highlighting that the use of television enhanced the drama in a way that could not be possible in the theatre: 'What the camera did do was to evoke more powerfully than is ever the case in the opera house the confining world of the ship. It played freely on the men and the inside of the craft, but never allowed one to see it in detached perspective with a long shot, never wandered outside the ship's aura'.[8] It can be argued that the original Covent Garden production, with its stage set of the white ship against a jet-black background, created the same effect, albeit in a different way. Payne is discussing camera point-of-view in his review, and does not consider that the theatricality of the opera house might have its own equally powerful methods of producing drama.

In 1968, it was decided, partly on the strength of the success of *Billy Budd*, to film Britten's 1945 opera *Peter Grimes*. A meeting between the composer, Basil Coleman and John Culshaw took place on 5 August in Aldeburgh, to consolidate the proposal that the opera should be filmed at Snape Maltings rather than at the BBC's own studio facilities in London. Britten had developed a mistrust of the twin studio method of working (as used for both Morley's *The Turn of the Screw* and Coleman's *Billy Budd*), and neither did he favour the use of a pre-recorded vocal track to which the singers would mime whilst being filmed. At Snape, the opera could be filmed and recorded for sound simultaneously in the same space, and Britten got his way. The BBC's agreement to this is an indication of the high regard they had for the composer, and resulted in Coleman leaving the project. Britten wrote to Coleman on 11 August:

> The fact that the camera & lighting directors are now so keen to go ahead with the Snape experiment makes me feel it would have been exciting if you could come in […] Of course I respect your judgement, but it is distressing that in my first big TV

[6] Barnes, *The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television*, p. 54.
[7] Reed and Cooke (eds), *Letters from a Life vol. 6*, p. 68.
[8] Anthony Payne, 'Review of *Billy Budd*' in *Tempo* (Spring 1967), pp. 19−21.

> active participation I shan't be working with you […] I hope & expect that we shall work together on other occasions; it is sad that it won't be on *Peter Grimes*.[9]

In place of Coleman, Brian Large was taken on as director, with Culshaw as producer. Large, although musically trained and respected as a television director, had no experience of directing opera, and so Joan Cross was appointed to direct the singers (Cross had originated the role of Ellen Orford in the original 1945 production). The filming took place between 24 and 28 February 1969.

Although the seafront at Aldeburgh (the 'Borough' of Crabbe's original poem and therefore the real setting for the opera) was only a few miles away, the need for singers and orchestra to be recorded at the same time as filming the action precluded the possibility for any location filming. Large's solution, in collaboration with his production designer David Myerscough-Jones (who was later to work on *Owen Wingrave*), was to create a non-representational visual setting which in some ways reflected the unsettled and troubled nature of Grimes's personality. This abstract imagery is not triggered until the end of the opening scene in the Moot Hall courthouse, as if Grimes's personality, previously the rough, tough but ultimately well-meaning fisherman, undergoes a shift to the psychologically damaged visionary as a result of the court's open verdict on the suspected murder of his young apprentice; the verdict also sets off the potential for the group of fundamentally peace-loving villagers to become a hounding mob as rumours of Grimes's 'crime' gather momentum. The first of the 'Sea Interludes' provides Large with the opportunity to deploy the fog-like, swirling, abstract background image which may well have been inspired by real weather conditions prevalent in the Aldeburgh area. Large's use of the swirling fog abstract visual motif for the 'Sea Interludes' recalls Morley's use of similar (but more static) abstract paintings to accompany the Interludes in *The Turn of the Screw* in 1959. Even if Large had not seen Morley's production, it is striking that he would have taken a similar approach when filming the *Peter Grimes* interludes nearly ten years later. What, in an opera house, still tends to be music to cover a scene change, becomes on screen a reflection of, and comment on, the underlying drama of the opera (Fig. 7.1).



Fig. 7.1. Abstract background 'swirling fog' image

[9] Reed and Cooke (eds), *Letters from a Life vol. 6*, p. 241.

As the interlude nears its end, the abstract begins to give way to a more realistic image, as if the fog is clearing a little, with views of individual villagers gradually appearing (Fig. 7.2).



Fig. 7.2. The 'fog' begins to clear.

Large returns to this idea later on, following the Act III pursuit of Grimes by the crowd. The pursuit is precipitated by their growing suspicion that Grimes has inflicted violence on John, the boy apprentice assigned to him following the open verdict on the suspected murder of his previous apprentice. The reality of filming this scene in Snape Maltings, where space was quite limited (especially as it had to accommodate a full orchestra, all the singers, the set, the cameras and the other technical equipment), meant that Large had to use televisual means in order to create the impression of a pursuit that was full of movement. In actuality the villagers are quite static most of the time but cuts between different camera angles, increasing in speed, accentuate the mob's mounting anger and give the effect of movement that is not possible on stage or in a studio. To show the movement of the crowd realistically would require a location shoot. Large arranges the villagers in a variety of groups to create each camera angle, two examples of which are given below as Figs. 7.3 and 7.4. At the climax where they shout Grimes's name, they form the shape of a semicircle when viewed from the front, underlining that the process of assembling from a disparate gathering of individual people and personalities into a single mob entity capable of violence is complete (Fig. 7.5).



Fig. 7.3. The villagers gather to pursue Grimes: example of camera angle (1)



Fig. 7.4. The villagers gather to pursue Grimes: example of camera angle (2)



Fig. 7.5. The pursuit climax: 'Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!'

After the pursuit's climax, the music descends into 'Sea Interlude VI', which is constructed upon a Passacaglia theme. This is taken from earlier thematic material, first heard at Grimes's line 'So be it, and God have mercy upon me'. This is the point at which Large returns to the 'swirling fog' abstract image (Fig. 7.1 above). As in its first iteration in Act I, the abstract slowly gives way to a concrete, representational image. At first, images of Grimes and the boy are superimposed upon the abstract background. The image of John is the first to be seen, followed by a solitary Grimes (Fig. 7.6) and then both fisherman and his apprentice (Fig. 7.7). As the passacaglia works towards its climax, the abstract continues to become more concrete until the point at which Grimes and the boy arrive at Grimes's hut (Fig. 7.8). Large times his changing imagery to coincide with the underlying repetitions of the passacaglia bass line, a subtlety which perhaps reveals Large's background as a musician trained at the Royal Academy of Music.



Fig. 7.6. Passacaglia: Grimes superimposed on abstract background



Fig. 7.7. Passacaglia: Grimes and John superimposed on abstract background



Fig. 7.8. Passacaglia: abstract becomes reality: Grimes and John reach the hut

Peter Grimes was first shown on BBC 2 on 2 November 1969. Britten was very pleased with the result. In an interview with Donald Mitchell, he said

> I think what I have learnt from the television of *Peter Grimes* is that the drive forward of the music […] must never be forgotten. If you do, you get a sort of misfire, which is neither straight drama nor good opera. And that is the sort of thing I have learnt and I'm trying to put into practice in this opera I'm now writing for television.[10]

Britten is referring in the last sentence of this quotation, of course, to *Owen Wingrave*, an opera which could be seen as the pinnacle of Britten's engagement with screen media, although, ironically, the work has only been filmed twice (the opera has, however, been staged multiple times in the theatre. This may be more to do with the subject matter and general appeal of the opera than its cinematic or televisual qualities. According to Colin Matthews, 'he found [television] a rather frustrating and slightly limiting medium'[11] so it is especially remarkable that he chose to use television for the dissemination of his penultimate opera. The negativity Britten expressed towards the medium at this stage, when he was still close to the work, may have been intensified by its lukewarm critical reception. It is entirely possible, given the composer's insecurities about his own abilities which manifested towards the end of his career, that he projected any blame for the opera's shortcomings onto the medium itself.

It is the intention here to: a) briefly contextualise the composition and filming of *Owen Wingrave*; b) consider Britten's approach to composing a work specifically for television; c) incorporate original oral-history research, complementing the treatment of existing sources; d) explore a number of analytical, interpretive and critical issues in relation to the work; and e) provide a comparative analysis of the visual treatment of the opening Prelude in the two versions of the opera:

[10] Donald Mitchell, 'Mapreading' in Christopher Palmer (ed.), *The Britten Companion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 87.
[11] Colin Matthews, Interviewed in the 2013 BBC documentary, *Britten on Camera*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEIGk-y2s8Y (accessed 24 September 2019).

the original BBC production first broadcast in 1971,[12] and a later production filmed under the auspices of Channel 4 in 2001.

Context

Although, as we have seen, Britten's enthusiastic, if somewhat guarded, letter to Coleman from September 1966 quoted above was spurred by the experience of filming *Billy Budd* for the BBC that year, work on an opera which was wholly conceived for television from the outset (the opera which became *Owen Wingrave*) did not begin until 1969. According to John Evans, reporting information from Eric Crozier, Britten 'had been approached by the BBC with a similar commission many years earlier. But the subject Britten had proposed, Merimee's *Matteo Falcone*, in which a father kills his own son for betraying him, was considered unacceptable by the BBC'.[13] In the event, Coleman was dropped from the *Owen Wingrave* project, and two directors, Colin Graham (who was to have responsibility for directing the singers) and Brian Large (who was to be in charge of directing the cameras), were hired. Humphrey Carpenter's interpretation of correspondence between Britten and Coleman implies that this is a classic example of the composer's reluctance to confront difficult issues where a friendship with an established colleague was involved:

> Basil Coleman was still led to believe that, despite his disagreement with Britten over the TV *Peter Grimes* he would be in charge of the production. 'I was going to write to you about O. Wingrave,' Britten told him in a letter during the summer, 'but now is not the moment – but we won't & mustn't let an artistic difference of opinion break an old & valuable friendship, will we? Must we?' However, when discussions about the production began during the autumn, Coleman was not invited to take part.[14]

The 'disagreement' to which Carpenter's biography refers concerned the use of the twin-studio system for filming opera. Although Coleman was an enthusiastic advocate of the twin-studio system, Britten was adamant that the filming of *Peter Grimes* in 1969 should be done on a single soundstage, temporarily set up in the Maltings concert hall at Snape, and refused to be persuaded otherwise. As a result of this disagreement, Coleman left the *Peter Grimes* project.

Owen Wingrave had been formally commissioned for the BBC by David Attenborough, then Head of BBC 2, who recounted the moment of its commissioning, somewhat amusingly, in a short 2013 Aldeburgh Festival video clip:

> [Britten] had agreed to write a special opera for television which would exploit television in all kinds of ways [...] The subject was *Owen Wingrave* with supernatural overtones in which he hoped we might be able to use television to produce supernatural effects as it were. That was already in hand when I was appointed to BBC 2, but it fell to me to do the official thing and invite the composer to have a lunch and talk about the whole thing, which we duly did. I was much in awe of course,

[12] It should be noted that when referring to the opera's date, it is generally the date of first broadcast that is given, i.e. 1971, even though the video recording was made in 1970.
[13] Evans, 'Benjamin Britten 'Death in Venice': Perspectives on an Opera', PhD thesis, p. 56.
[14] Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten – A Biography*, p. 494.

> so, treading very delicately, because I'm not a musician. In the course of the lunch, Britten said to me 'how many French horns can I have?' Well of course I had no idea – no idea at all, so I said 'well, any number you like Mr Britten', and he said 'That is NOT the answer I require!' and I felt frightfully put down. But he was absolutely right, he wanted to know the financial scale, the costs and so on."[15]

Attenborough tells the story slightly differently in the account he gives in his memoirs, *Life On Air*, in which he quotes Britten's response as 'I would far rather be told' (i.e. how many French horns he could have)[16] but the overall sense of what he says remains; the eminent producer was clearly somewhat overawed by the eminent composer. Allthough Attenborough completed the formalities, the project was nonetheless a by-product of Britten's professional relationship with John Culshaw. Culshaw, during his time as a classical record producer at Decca, won Britten's trust and oversaw the canon of definitive recordings of many of the composer's works during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1967 he became head of music programmes for BBC TV, and, as such, was responsible for commissioning *Owen Wingrave*.

The BBC committed a considerable budget to the idea of securing Britten's agreement to compose an opera for television, and negotiated a £10,000 fee. The fee was originally approved as early as 1966 by Gerald Savory, Head of Plays and Drama at the BBC, as payment for what turned out to be an abortive project, a television opera based on the Wakefield Mystery Plays.[17] Although the work did not materialise, the financial terms were retained for *Owen Wingrave* three years later. This substantial amount would entitle the BBC to television rights for a period of five years. Britten would remain in control of all other rights, although a request was made that he not exercise control of dramatic rights until a period of two years from the first broadcast date had elapsed, which still allowed him to conduct the Decca audio recording in December 1970.

After Britten had finished composing *Owen Wingrave*, the BBC Outside Broadcast Unit descended upon Snape Maltings in 1970 and turned Britten's concert hall into a television studio. An examination of the plans for the layout by the BBC's designer, David Myerscough-Jones, reveals exactly how detailed the preparation was; each orchestra member's seat is precisely positioned on the plan (see Fig. 7.9, below).

[15] David Attenborough, interviewed for Britten at 100 (2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBKrayzHilg, (accessed 15 February 2016).
[16] David Attenborough, *Life on Air – Memoirs of a Broadcaster* (London: BBC Books, 2002, p. 207.
[17] Gerald Savory, letter to Benjamin Britten, 8 December 1966, Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh.

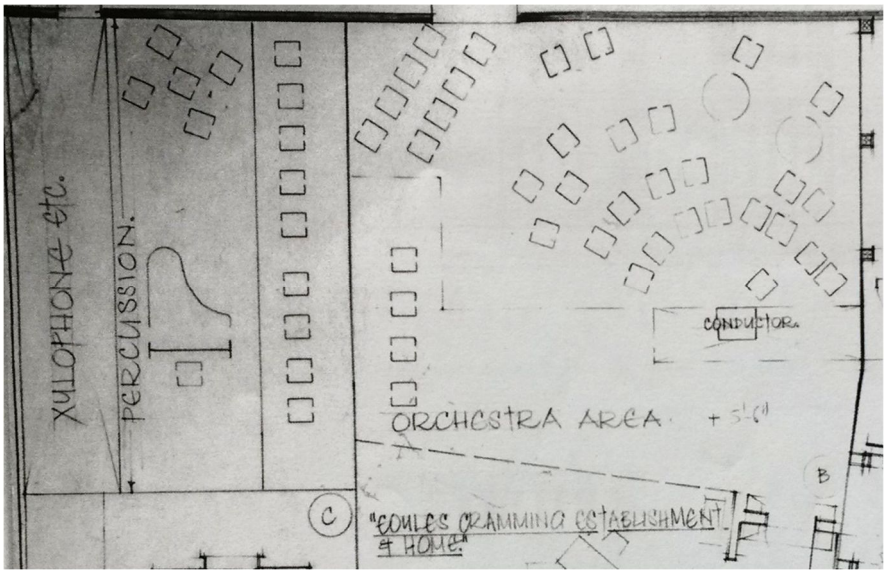


Fig 7.9: section of David Myerscough-Jones' original designs for the temporary soundstage for the filming of *Owen Wingrave* at Snape Maltings (source: Britten - Pears Library)

Filming began at Snape Maltings on Britten's 57th birthday, 22 November 1970, and lasted until 1 December. Memos, schedules and camera scripts from the production, now lodged at the Britten-Pears Library, provide fascinating detail about the filming process, which was completed during the evenings (sessions started at 7.00pm and were scheduled to last until 9.00pm, although frequently did not finish until 10.30pm).[18] Barnes expands upon this:

> Once the filming started, each evening session was recorded live. Six cameras were used […] Brian Large could videotape a shot from up to six angles and decide during post-editing which take to use. There was no miming to a pre-recorded soundtrack and the singers and orchestra performed in the same space […] Britten was the only composer in the country who had a concert hall that could be transformed into a television studio. [19]

It is noteworthy that the BBC took as many as six cameras to make the film at Snape Maltings; more cameras, indeed, than were used in their own permanent studio facility when filming *Billy Budd*. This may be taken as an indication of how important they thought the project was because they could easily have opted for fewer cameras for what was essentially an 'outside broadcast' set-up, citing practicality and expense.

By the end of the 1960s the BBC had already established a firm reputation for high-quality costume dramas. These included adaptations of Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* (1967), Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1967) and Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1968). Studio technology and procedures had undergone considerable development and were becoming increasingly standardised across the industry, leading to an artistic quality which was to become the benchmark against which production values in television drama were measured, at least by the viewing public. This was in

[18] Source: Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh.
[19] Barnes, *Television Opera, The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television*, p. 64.

contrast with American TV industry practice, which filmed drama productions using essentially the same procedure as a Hollywood movie: single-camera technique, filming onto 35mm stock. The BBC method (and this included *Owen Wingrave*) involved recording onto videotape using a multiple cameras simultaneously, just, in fact, as Morley had done in 1959.[20] Therefore, it can be assumed that the filming process used for *Owen Wingrave* was not particularly innovative or unusual in itself compared to non-operatic dramas, apart from the fact that the vocal and orchestral sound was recorded simultaneously during the filming, and that Snape Maltings was used instead of the BBC Television Centre in London. Large felt that the relatively new technical opportunities provided by the advent of colour TV contributed to the atmosphere of the piece:

> We filmed *Owen Wingrave* in the early 1970s and it had to have *mood*. I mean, today in high definition and 4K and all that it would have been totally different. It would have had a different lighting plot, let's put it like that.[21]

Owen Wingrave was first broadcast on BBC 2 on 16 May 1971. Barnes reports that the broadcast achieved viewing figures of 257,400. She explains that this was only 0.9 % of the potential BBC 2 audience.[22] However, it could be argued that compared to the number of people who would be expected to attend the premiere of a contemporary work in a traditional opera house, this is a massive audience. This is not dissimilar to the conclusions drawn by Morley when reviewing the seemingly low audience figures for the 1959 *The Turn of the Screw*.

Composing for TV

Following the success of *The Turn of The Screw* in 1954, and Morley's 1959 televised version, a Henry James story once again provided the source material for a Britten opera, and this time the composer chose *Owen Wingrave*, a story he had known for many years. *Owen Wingrave* is the tale of a young man rebelling against the path of military service his family, stretching back many generations, has set out for him. Owen, like Britten himself, is a pacifist, and cannot pursue a life as a soldier. The message of the opera is essentially encapsulated in Owen's so-called 'Peace Aria' from Act II:

> In peace I have found my image, I have found myself.
> […] peace is not weak but strong, strong like a bird's wing bearing its weight in the dazzling air.
> Peace is not silent, it is the voice of love…
> peace is not won by your wars…

[20] External scenes, if any, were generally filmed on 16mm stock and spliced in to the final edit using a telecine machine during post-production.
[21] Brian Large, interview with Peter Auker, 10 February 2015. Hannah Khalil, writing in the BBC blog *About the BBC* notes: 'On 15 November, 1969, BBC One began transmitting in colour. Britain was the first country in Europe at the time to offer regular colour television. BBC One in colour followed hot on the heels of BBC Two which had started broadcasting four hours of colour programmes a week in 1966 under controller David Attenborough'. See https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/aboutthebbc/entries/1546d154-dd8a-4e2b-bbb3-45d395445596 (accessed 7 April 2020).
[22] Barnes, *Television Opera, The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television*, p. 77.

> Peace is positive, is passionate, committing more than war itself.
> Only in peace can I be free [23]

It appears that Donald Mitchell may have been among the first to refer to this passage as the 'Peace Aria'. Certainly in his article 'Owen Wingrave and the Sense of the Past', which began life as the sleeve note for the Decca recording of the work in 1971, he writes of 'the music that is really the climax of the opera, Owen's "peace" aria in Act II'.[24] However, an early entry in one of Myfanwy Piper's first *Wingrave* notebooks mentions 'Owen soliloquizing and 2nd apparition…Ode to Peace'[25] and she has circled the words 'Ode to Peace', as if to highlight the importance of this. Britten's compulsion to spread his own pacifist agenda, especially against the background of the Vietnam war, was one of the reasons he accepted the BBC commission. He had a clear political message to get across which went beyond his ambitions for audience size.

There remains a widely held view that Britten was in some way pathologically opposed to the idea of music, especially opera, on television. This view, in part, is reflected in comments such as the one made by Colin Graham in 1997: 'Britten disliked and despised the medium of television and was most suspicious of people who worked in it or who regularly watched it.'[26] Interestingly, much earlier, Graham wrote:

> Britten cannot have been entirely disillusioned with the medium of television as, in his last months, he was discussing the possibility of setting the Chester Christmas Plays for live performance by Pimlico School with a later performance by them on television.[27]

The televisual possibilities of the medieval mystery plays were clearly something that had been in Britten's mind since his very first idea for a TV project based on the Wakefield Plays in 1966. It seems possible that he considered television a modern equivalent, with its opportunities to combine popular appeal and ritualistic presentation. Barnes also challenges Britten's antipathy towards television by drawing attention to his familiarity with its technical vocabulary:

> Britten was conversant with the language of film and, for this opera, expressed himself in those terms. The synopsis for The Ballad at the beginning of Act II (written in Britten's hand) indicates this, as do his notes added to Myfanwy Piper's typed draft of The Ballad, which specify instructions for the microphone. The completion [*sic*] sketch dated 'Feb 1970' frequently employs the language of the camera generally in references to a 'fade' or 'cross fade'. These terms were subsequently omitted from the published score. [28]

John Evans praised Piper's libretto as 'brilliantly suited to the complicated technical demands of the television medium in its clarity and flexibility of form'[29], and going on to remark that 'Britten found televisual techniques to be a considerable inspiration'.[30]

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[23] Britten, *Owen Wingrave*, vocal score, 1970 rehearsal figure 246-256.
[24] Donald Mitchell, '*Owen Wingrave* and the Sense of the Past', in *Cradles of the New*, p. 429.
[25] Myfanwy Piper, Unpublished and undated notebook, c.1969. Source: Britten-Pears Library.
[26] Graham '*Owen Wingrave'* – article in *Glyndebourne Festival Handbook*, 1997.
[27] Colin Graham 'Staging First Productions', in Herbert (ed.) *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*.
[28] Barnes *Television Opera, The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television*, p. 61.
[29] Evans, 'Benjamin Britten 'Death in Venice': Perspectives on an Opera', PhD thesis, p. 62.

Even the earliest composition sketches display a number of instances where the composer refers to such cinematic devices as 'fade', as below, in Fig. 7.10, where the words 'Fade to a sequence of' can clearly be seen (the omitted word is 'flags'). When Britten wrote stage directions in his composition drafts, they were usually copied from a working libretto document. However, this does not appear to be the case here. An inspection of the typed libretto the composer worked from reveals no such direction. The only reference in Britten's working libretto merely states 'Interlude, a sequence of brilliant flags'.[31] One may speculate that the sequence of flags may have been inspired by Morley's use of static paintings to accompany *The Turn of the Screw*'s Variations in 1959.

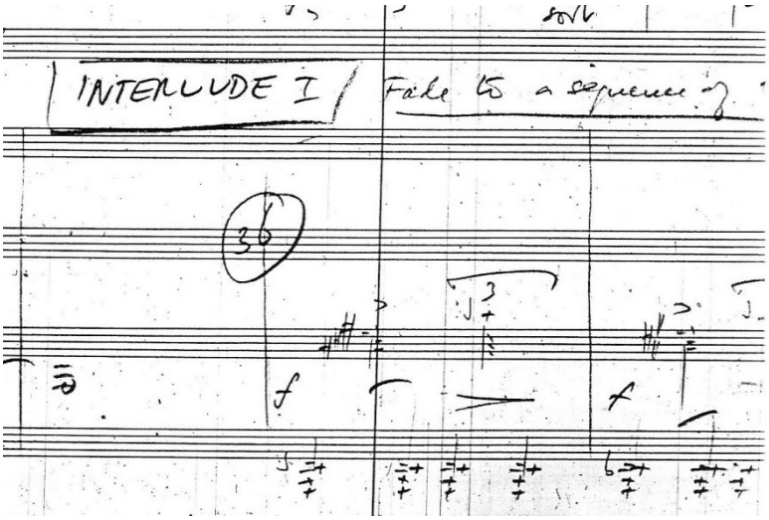


Fig 7.10: Detail from one of Britten's early composition sketches for *Owen Wingrave* (source: Britten-Pears Library)

There is no doubt that Britten had strong opinions about television, and recorded music in general, but it would certainly appear that he was not as averse to engaging with the medium of TV as might be implied by Graham's damning words. Large believes that Britten was not being entirely transparent, and suspects that the composer did not necessarily articulate his true feelings on the subject.

> He used to say 'I don't have a television, I don't like television and I don't really know anything about television', all of which was a bit of a smokescreen because, as you know, and we all knew, he had spent a lot of time working with film in the early days. He knew exactly what film could do, he knew exactly how to write soundtrack, so all of this was a bit

[30] Evans, *Benjamin Britten 'Death in Venice': Perspectives on an Opera*, PhD thesis, p. 62.
[31] Myfanwy Piper, unpublished libretto for *Owen Wingrave*, 1970. Britten-Pears Library.

> of a smokescreen, saying 'I don't know, I don't know'. He *did* know, and he did have ideas. [32]

Naturally, there is a difference between 'knowing how' to do something and 'liking' what you are doing, but there is an implication that Britten's dislike of television has been somewhat over-stated. Colin Matthews has a slightly different perspective, although Britten's desire to disseminate a pacifist message argues against his conclusion that the composer regarded the medium with suspicion:

> Well it's not so much a question of not liking television, more the fact that he never owned a television. Or at least not until the BBC gave him one to watch *Owen Wingrave* on […] I've no idea what his experience of television was, but he would have been suspicious of it as a sort of popular medium. [33]

The gift to Britten of a television set was, in fact, by the composer's record company (Decca) not the BBC, and was given to him for his sixtieth birthday. This echoes a similar situation over ten years earlier, when Decca gave him a stereo record player to listen to Culshaw's recordings of his works as and when they were released. Neil Powell described how Britten's attitude of mistrust towards record players may have been influenced by his father:

> As late as November 1959, he was still 'rather anxiously awaiting news about our proposed stereophonic machine' at The Red House, having apparently inherited his father's suspicion of all such gadgets.[34]

It is certainly true that the tone of Britten's Aspen Award speech reinforced what some may see as prejudice against recorded music:

> Anyone, anywhere, at any time, can listen to the *B Minor Mass* upon one condition only – that they possess a machine […] If I say the loudspeaker is the principal enemy of music, I don't mean that I am not grateful to it as a means of education or study, or as an evoker of memories. But it is not part of true musical experience […] Music demands more from a listener than simply the possession of a tape machine or transistor radio.[35]

However, Powell, with more than a touch of hyperbole, suggested that the record player, and in particular the 1958 Decca recording of *Grimes*, may have won over Britten's heart simply by the unprecedented powerful technical quality of the recording:

> It would have been worth the wait; *Peter Grimes* may be described without exaggeration as a landmark in the history of the gramophone, a recording which remains artistically and technically unsurpassed over half a century later and has never been out of the catalogue.[36]

There is no doubt that, during the filming process, Britten took a keen interest in how the work would appear on screen, clearly an extension of his preoccupation with visual appearance when working on stage pieces. He would feed his opinions back to the team via Culshaw, who would collate the composer's views into a series of memos. The following extracts from one such memo demonstrate just what a keen eye for detail Britten had:

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[32] Brian Large, interview with Peter Auker, 10 February 2015
[33] Colin Matthews, interview with Peter Auker, 15 October 2015
[34] Powell *Britten – A Life for Music*, p. 353.
[35] Benjamin Britten 'On Receiving the First Aspen Award' , reprinted in *Britten on Music*, p. 261.
[36] Powell *Britten – A Life for Music*, p. 353.

> Mr Britten thinks that the cameras should remain still during the music written for each portrait until the interrupting drum pulls the camera on to the music for the next portrait […] It is suggested that if it is technically possible we should mix through into the new flag sequence as John Shirley Quirk [Coyle] walks out of the frame […] which would put the new mix either immediately before or just at the beginning of the existing zoom in to the flag emblem on the wall of his hallway.[37]

Britten's instinct for the visual aspects of operatic writing assumes particular importance when writing for television, where the visual language, with its camera shots and cinematic editing techniques, would become a fixed part of the first performance in a way that is not the case in a staged opera. Large is confident that his 1971 interpretation, despite the numerous problems and obstacles along the way, did come up to Britten's expectations in terms of the visual world which was generated. 'The mood that Britten wanted is I think the mood that we tried to create, and we did create. And it needed to be low key as part of the secret of the piece.'[38]

Collaboration and Trust

Composing an opera, by its very nature, involves working with librettists, directors, designers and many other creative people. Composing an opera for television involves an even larger army of potential collaborators. Cooke has shown how one might support the point of view that the cinematic concept of the director as 'auteur', with its demonstration of a 'stylistic individuality','might be likened to the ever-present musical aura applied to a drama by an opera composer.'[39] Cooke argues convincingly that the composer did indeed adopt a singularly commanding role in the development of the opera, noting that this was perfectly understandable as he was able to deploy 'brilliant dramatic insights founded on an innate understanding of how music, text, acting and production function symbiotically on stage.' [40] Cooke went on to demonstrate that '*Billy Budd* marked a turning point in Britten's operatic collaborations'[41] in that his work with post-*Budd* librettists William Plomer and Myfanwy Piper involved a more collegiate pattern of working in which ideas could flow both ways. Ironically perhaps, this style of approach was made possible because both of these librettists were not precious about their libretti, and were perfectly happy for Britten to make changes and amendments as he felt necessary. Cooke characterises Plomer and Piper as 'highly skilful yet almost completely compliant writers who would give him exactly what he wanted in his libretti'.[42]

Britten had already begun work on the opera, along with his librettist Myfanwy Piper, prior to the formal moment of commissioning. Myfanwy Piper's notebooks, none of which are dated, and which are now housed at the Britten Archive in Aldeburgh, make fascinating reading, just as the earlier ones for *The Turn of the Screw* do (see chapter 3). Her handwriting, often in felt-tip pen and

[37] Source: Britten-Pears Library.
[38] Brian Large, interview with Peter Auker, 10 February 2015.
[39] Mervyn Cooke, 'Britten and His Librettists: The Composer as Auteur' in Kate Kennedy (ed.), *Literary Britten*, p. 13.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[42] *Ibid*, p. 22.

occasionally completely illegible (denoted in the extracts below by {???}) repays the effort of deciphering it, because it is illuminating to see her level of attention to detail, even at an early stage in the project. In this extract from her first notebook, Piper lists some of the research she feels she must complete in order to achieve the desired amount of background accuracy:

> Look up Shaw's letter of rejection of 'The Saloon' for the Stage Society about Dec 1908 or Jan 1909. […] Description of the saloon. Katie red dress good for Colour TV. {???}.[43]

The reference to 'The Saloon' is to James' own stage version of *Owen Wingrave*, which he completed in 1907. Piper expands upon her intended survey of military history:

> Napoleons Campaign of 1796 'Which we all read so attentively ' Wolseley [i.e. Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington]
> Strategy Theoretically known – written about by French probably written before applied. Nap. First to apply it.
> Wellington to Lady Shelley
> I hope to God I have fought my last battle. It is a bad thing to be always fighting. While in the thick of it I am too much occupied to feel anything; but it is wretched just after. It is quite impossible to think of glory . . . I am wretched even in the moment of victory and I always say that next to a battle lost the greatest misery is a battle gained.
> Old Custom legal crime and bloody {???} the foulest {???} of time.[44]

Some of these notes eventually found their way into the libretto, for example the quotation from Wellington ('next to a battle lost the greatest misery is a battle gained') can be heard quite early in Act One:

> OWEN. Duty! Ruffians all: Hannibal, Caesar, Marlborough, Napoleon – I'd hang the lot.
> COYLE. And Wellington?
> OWEN. Wellington, for all his warlike glory, remember what he said: 'Next to a battle lost the greatest misery is a battle gained.'
> LECHMERE. It didn't stop him winning all the same.[45]

A feature of Piper's earliest ideas for the libretto is that they occasionally demonstrate a developing regard for the medium for which she and Britten were writing. Piper remembers:

> When we were planning the work our first discussions dwelt upon the visual, rather than verbal presentation of dramatic points. Scenes were conceived with the encouragement and technical knowledge of everyone concerned to make the full use of the resources of the medium.[46]

Britten and his librettist continued to collaborate during the composing process itself, most often at a distance, with conferences being held by telephone, and supported by occasional face-to-face meetings. Letters were another method of communication, as was common amongst Britten's other collaborators. Sometimes these letters hint at a slight uneasiness on both Britten's and Piper's parts with the medium of television, due to its unfamiliarity when compared to the process of writing a piece for stage, but nonetheless there is a determination to do as good a job as possible. Although Piper

[43] Myfanwy Piper, unpublished and undated notebook, c. 1969. Source: Britten-Pears Library.
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] Benjamin Britten, *Owen Wingrave*, vocal score, , rehearsal figures 21−2.
[46] Piper, 'Writing for Britten', in Herbert (ed.), *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, p. 13.

kept in mind the demands and opportunities of writing for television, she generally maintained a strategy of avoiding references to the technical aspects of the medium in the early phases of development. For example, in the first notebook, in which she begins to formulate ideas and libretto drafts, there are many attempts at dialogue, but almost no indications that she is considering how things will look on screen. A rare exception is this passage, which refers to an idea of using a black and white image to support the drama:

> 4. Arrival of Coyles. Chat between them – appearance. Owen questions interview – Situation. (S for 637) to them. Lechmere slightly jollier. Questions and answer.
>
> 5. Preparation for Dinner interlude.
>
> 6. Dinner.
> Set pieces.
> O's offered arm is refused by old.
> Row. C
>
> 1. {???} pictures as before stop a legend.
> 2. Tale told in black & white at a distance. (Possibly curtailed)
>
> Owen & so you see it has happened tells of the death to Coyle. Coyle & Owen.[47]

In the event, the sequence referred to was rendered in Large's production in sepia, not black and white, which had the effect of distancing the sequence even further from the contemporary time frame. Colour TV was relatively new, and the temptation to exploit the full range of colours at every opportunity must have been great.

Colin Matthews recalls that his first batch of work for Britten was as part of the team entrusted with the task of working on *Owen Wingrave*.[48] He had originally become involved through his brother, David Matthews, who had already been working for the composer. Colin Matthews was recruited to help out with the full score of *Wingrave*. As a result of being part of Britten's team of collaborators, Matthews was able to describe some of the practical aspects of Britten's way of working, mentioning that he was now using sketchbooks in a way that he had rarely done in the past, and outlining how the composer's failing health and attendant loss of confidence led not only to the increased use of sketchbooks, but a greater reliance on his musical assistants:

> There was a pretty comprehensive *Wingrave* sketch book [….] But I didn't realise that he was working in that way, which he hadn't done at all frequently in the past – I mean there are earlier sketch books but they tend to be much more sort of 'drafty'.[49]

Sometimes, according to Large, Britten would pull him, as TV director, into the very centre of his composing world: 'He'd play something for me and discuss something – "could we do this, could we do that" – it was really a wonderful period of seeing how his mind would work, how he would put it together.'[50] Large expands on this, giving an even more vivid impression of Britten sharing his internal composing processes: 'he would sit down at the piano and say "what do you think of this, how can I do this?" So it really was a wonderful experience to just sit at his elbow and see how his mind was

[47] Myfanwy Piper, unpublished and undated notebook, c.1969. Source: Britten-Pears Library.
[48] Colin Matthews, interview with Peter Auker, 15 October 2015.
[49] Colin Matthews, interview with Peter Auker, 15 October 2015.
[50] Brian Large, interview with Peter Auker, 10 February 2015.

thinking and working.'[51] It is not unheard of (although rare) for Britten to occasionally play work-in-progress to a third party. For example, when he was working on *Curlew River* in Venice, he played the music he had written each day to Colin Graham so they could discuss the stagecraft involved in the relevant passage. Given that the stylised approach in *Curlew River* also demanded careful planning of the visual and acting elements, this is comparable to working with television techniques. With a more conventional opera, he tended to play through the whole piece on the piano to his friends and collaborators once it was finished. Large's memory is of something that hints of going beyond this kind of final play-through, and is more akin to Britten's method with *Curlew River*. Large quotes Britten as using words and phrases such as 'could we do this, could we do that', and 'what do you think of this, how can I do this?' Later on in the interview, Large reiterates his memory of this experience, and Britten's readiness not to think of his work as set in stone: 'there were discussions, and "can we change this, and can we think about that?" That was the very real point of it, you know, something that Ben was very open to.' Large concludes: 'It was true collaboration, there's no question about that.' [52]

Britten's insecurities and his almost pathological need to feel he could trust those he worked with has already been mentioned. It is well documented that the trust he put in people could at times be fragile. Large, despite his reputation as a TV director rather than a musician (although he had initially trained as a musician at the Royal Academy of Music), felt that the key to his being accepted by Britten was the musical expertise he could bring to the filming process: 'He was very guarded until he felt he could trust you, and the fact that he did spend a lot of time and entrusted me with a lot of wonderful projects, it was simply because he recognised in me the musician. If it hadn't been for the musical foundation it would not have worked'.[53] A gradual build-up of a history of successful work together oiled the wheels for future projects and closer collaborations such as *The Burning Fiery Furnace* and *Peter Grimes*. Large explained that the success of these projects led to the commission to write Owen Wingrave: 'so there was a progress […] we did various concerts and various other things and recitals together. So there was a history of building up a working relationship based on trust and musicianship.' [54]

Once the musical preparation was at an appropriate stage of completion, Matthews's involvement in the project continued for a while, although he did not have the opportunity to attend much of the filming at Snape Maltings, he nevertheless noticed a certain abrasiveness between directors Graham and Large. He feels this contributed to a somewhat strained atmosphere within the Britten circle:

> I think it's understandable because in a sense I think Colin Graham was imposed on the BBC because Britten wouldn't work without him there.[55] He needed an ally because he was very wary of the whole television process. This had kind of happened before with, I think, the filming of

[51] Brian Large, interview with Peter Auker, 10 February 2015.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Perhaps because of Britten's experience of working with Graham on the church parables.

> *Grimes* involving Eric Crozier in part of the process of this was very difficult for people who worked in television or film. You know, they felt these people were outsiders and they knew better. Possibly in some cases they did, but then Colin Graham had huge experience, and Britten would not have felt comfortable without him being part of it.[56]

However, it is clear that Large was generally satisfied with what he and the rest of the team had created, and that it was in accord with what Britten had in mind. Large said 'I was in the privileged position to listen to "his master's voice", you know, I was able to talk to him and say "what do you want?" '[57] Having spoken with Large directly, hearing his emphatic tone of voice in this conversation, I am satisfied this provides further evidence that the composer was rather more collaborative in his approach, more open to accepting that '*his* dreams' could be merged with '*their* dreams' than is often supposed.

Criticism, Analysis and Interpretation

Owen Wingrave is sometimes thought of as the 'Cinderella' amongst Britten's operas. Dominic McHugh's opinion has been quite typical:

> […*Owen Wingrave*] is devoid of sympathetic characters: the Wingrave family's monolithic dismissal of Owen makes them thoroughly repulsive […] the music is far from top-drawer Britten. There's none of the lucidity or lyrical beauty of *Turn of the Screw*; nor is it so neatly constructed, though *Wingrave* is obviously an attempt to emulate the earlier piece's success.[58]

Jack Westrup's review of the work, early on in the opera's life, is possibly even more scathing:

> There is plenty of continuous music, in the sense that the orchestra keeps going; but its material consists mainly of patterns - there is little sense of direction and hardly any feeling for climax […] there is very little sign of the capacity for an extended vocal line which distinguishes the composer's shorter lyrical works. It is in fact a play with music and would be almost equally effective if the actors had nothing to sing.[59]

Other critics have not generally been so dismissive, with Martin Cooper declaring it in the *Daily Telegraph* 'unmistakably one of the composer's most powerful utterances'.[60] Stanley Sadie's measured but nonetheless appreciative review in the *Musical Times* talks of 'a work of some power and much immediacy of emotional appeal',[61] and also contains an acknowledgement of the handling of the television medium: 'the camera work is clever but never draws attention to itself; Colin Graham and Brian Large's direction always serves the music'.[62]

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[56] Colin Matthews, interview with Peter Auker, 15 October 2015.
[57] Brian Large, interview with Peter Auker, 10 February 2015.
[58] Dominic McHugh 'Britten's *Owen Wingrave*', CD review in *Musical Criticism* website, 2008. http://www.musicalcriticism.com/recordings/cd-owen-0608.shtml (accessed 15 April 2016).
[59] Jack Westrup, '*Owen Wingrave*' review' in *Music & Letters*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Oct., 1973), p. 511.
[60] Martin Cooper, 'Powerful Utterance of *Owen Wingrave'*, in *The Daily Telegraph*, (17 May 1971).
[61] Stanley Sadie, 'Owen Wingrave',in *Musical Times*. (July 1971), p. 663.
[62] Sadie, 'Owen Wingrave', p. 665.

Related to the question of whether or not Britten 'disliked' the medium of television is the commonly held view that he always intended the work to have a life on the stage, and that he regarded a stage production to ultimately be the more definitive version of the opera. Large implies that a future stage production was in the back of Britten's mind when he reports that, following what he described as 'endless meetings', Britten wanted to ensure 'what was written and conceived for television might have a life hereafter in the theatre'.[63] From this it can be inferred that the first priority was to create something custom-made for television, but to do so in such a way that it could be presented on stage with the minimum of adaptation. Matthews confirms this, by saying that Britten would never have written a work which could not be transferred to the stage, in the same way that we can surmise he only took on the film of *The Instruments of the Orchestra* in 1946 because he knew there would also be a concert version of the music. Matthews confesses he was underwhelmed by the television version. He believed there were problems with the libretto which resulted in a weak justification for Owen's actions ('he just sort of says at some point "I don't like war");[64] but, in viewing the Covent Garden production (1973), he was 'impressed actually how well it immediately translated'.[65] On stage, although the libretto remained unchanged, it appears, to Matthews at least, that the drama of the opera unfolded in a more effective way than on screen.

Comparison of the 1971 BBC version and the 2001 Channel 4 version

Margaret Williams is an award-winning film director who has worked on a variety of operatic projects, including working with Judith Weir and George Benjamin. In 2001 she directed a new television version of *Owen Wingrave* for Channel 4 which interpreted the work in ways which were different from the original production (including setting the opera in the 1950s instead of the Victorian age).

The original version from 1971 is set in the same historical period as James's story, i.e. the Victorian era. This is clear from the outset by such details as costume design, set design, and the historically ambiguous style of the paintings used in the Prelude's survey of the portraits hanging on the walls of Paramore. However, in Williams's 2001 version, the setting is brought into the twentieth century. An exact year, 1958, is revealed on one of the title cards she uses at the beginning of Act I, Scene 1. It seems likely that the bringing of the action across a century into 1958 was done to make the story more relevant to our own times. The year was also around the time when Britten was on the verge of making his own great pacifist statement in *War Requiem*; there is perhaps a likelihood that the setting is a reference to that, as well as a recognition of this being the Cold War era. However, Williams's response when asked why she moved the action to a different time frame is somewhat less than helpful:

> It was my decision, actually, just because it's a period I'm quite close to, and the idea of it being at a time […] shortly after the Second World War I

[63] Brian Large, interview with Peter Auker, 10 February 2015.
[64] Colin Matthews, interview with Peter Auker, 15 October 2015.
[65] *Ibid.*

> felt happier doing it in that period than the period in which it's set and I thought we could make more of it.[66]

Williams's visual world is more spacious than the older version, and in this way it contrasts with the studio-bound theatricality of the videotaped BBC costume drama described by Cooke as an image 'well-suited to intimate scenes'.[67] In general, Williams adopts a cinematic approach, opening up the mise-en-scène through location filming and framing shots in a dynamic, less static manner. A detailed comparison of the differences in approach between the original BBC version and Williams's version is not within the remit of this thesis. However, it is illuminating to examine in general terms some aspects of the opera in which these differences can be seen particularly clearly and briefly comment primarily from a visual, cinematic standpoint.

For example, during the Prelude, the BBC version features views of portraits of the Wingrave (male) ancestors, revealing their military history. The portraits, although inanimate, played an important role in Britten's vision for the piece, and musically the entire Prelude is built around them. When Britten was invited to a preview of the opera on 15 March 1971,[68] he became somewhat irritated that the portraits contained no clear indication of the people they represented. There is a memo at the Britten-Pears Library, authored by Culshaw, in which he reports Britten's wishes as follows:

> He feels, and I agree with him, that each portrait should be identified, and Mrs Piper is currently researching appropriate names and dates for the Wingrave family. It was agreed that identification panels should not be fixed to the portraits themselves since they are clearly not present when we see the portraits in position on the set. Plain white sub-titles would be obtrusive and unattractive so we seem to need some sort of identification panel which might run across the bottom quarter of the frame and change according to the picture. [69]

In the event, no such identification panels were incorporated in the original video recording. However, for the 2009 commercial DVD release of the programme, captions were added, although it is debatable whether these add anything of value to the audience's experience. Large's visual interpretation of the Prelude is to throw the emphasis firmly on the music (possibly influenced by discussions with Britten himself, as referred to above), as very little actually happens from a visual or dramatic point of view. We are offered rather static views of portraits of Owen's ancestors, which serve to accentuate the importance of his family background in the story we are about to see. Thus the significance of Owen's military roots, and how deep these go, is brought quite literally into the foreground. The visual style of the paintings themselves (the product of the imagination of designer Myerscough-Jones) is quite unusual but entirely appropriate and, in their own way, rather striking. They are clearly not in the correct style for the periods they are depicting, but in a twentieth-century

[66] Margaret Williams, interview with Peter Auker, 12 March 2015.
[67] Mervyn Cooke, 'Opera and Film' in Mervyn Cooke (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 286.
[68] Barnes *Television Opera,* p. 76.
[69] John Culshaw, unpublished memo, 1970, Britten-Pears Library.

expressionist style. This deliberate anachronism creates a very unsettling and 'creepy' look. In Fig. 7.11, below, the first portrait can be seen (Owain Wynegrave, c.1536), which gives a good illustration of the style. It will be noted that there is only the slightest hint of colour in the painting, it is almost monochromatic. Also, the artwork is the result of placing many layers of oil paint onto the canvas (a technique known as impasto), giving a relief effect, seeming to accentuate the idea that these were once living, breathing people. They seem to be straining to escape from their canvas prisons, but their lack of colour gives them a corpse-like appearance. Finally, all of the portraits have a family resemblance within their facial features: see Fig. 7.12, which shows the final portrait (Col. Oliver Wingrave, 1875).



Fig. 7.11. Portrait of "Owain Wynegrave", from the 1971 BBC TV production of *Owen Wingrave*. Design by David Myerscough-Jones





Fig. 7.12. (Left) Portrait of "Col. Oliver Wingrave", from the 1971 BBC TV production of *Owen Wingrave*, design by David Myerscough-Jones. (Right) Benjamin Luxon in the role of Owen, showing his resemblance to the character in the painting

An especially noticeable quality of this particular painting is its facial resemblance to the singer Benjamin Luxon (see Fig. 7.12 above) who played the part of Owen. The resemblance is partially explained by the fact that it is a portrait of Owen's father who was killed in battle (hence Owen's grandfather is now his guardian and subsequently disowns him). There is another reason for making Colonel Wingrave's portrait closely resemble Luxon, a televisual artifice. It provides an opportunity for Large to seamlessly dissolve the image of the painting directly into a medium close shot of Luxon, a correspondence which, as a production detail, is specified in the score. Although this production predates by many years the kind of visual 'morphing' technology we are familiar with nowadays, the effect is not dissimilar, and is used in order to accentuate the fact that Owen is the most recent member of the family lineage. This is one way in which Large does demonstrate an understanding of the danger of creating an opening sequence which is too visually static, and therefore uses as many styles of transition from one portrait to the next as he can. Thus we see a panoply of dissolves, pans and zooms in an attempt (which some might argue is only partially successful) to introduce some movement into what is happening on the screen. These transitions are timed to coincide broadly with the percussion ritornelli in the instrumental Prelude: further evidence of Large's musicality, and its effect on his editing style, which responds to Britten's own ideas on how the camera should behave, defining in the score that they should move from one picture to the next, following the drum rhythm.

Williams features a light and airy Paramore more out of the pages of *Country Life* than those of a haunted house story. The Victorian claustrophobia is completely absent, but perhaps this is a deliberate strategy on the part of the director to let the music do the work. Although it is helpful to our understanding of her interpretation to have the exact year stated, it is also clear from a number of visual cues within the Prelude that the setting is twentieth-century, indeed post-Second World War. Williams's underlining of the importance of Owen's heritage is presented in a slightly different way from the BBC version, in that she interprets the military portraits more freely, by using the image and shapes of many kinds of frames and pictures (not all of them formal portraits hanging in a gallery). Her style is more cinematic, and not so obviously televisual as Large's (even down to the widescreen aspect ratio), and she exploits the image of the frame in virtually every shot. Williams's use of visual rhythm in the cutting of the scene is more frenetic than the original. This is in direct contradiction to the musical structure, in which each clearly defined section coincides with a shot of a specific painting. The 12-note construction of the music is directly related to certain details in the portraits, especially the shift from 12-note to diatonic when Owen appears and the chromaticism abruptly disappears. The way Britten explodes the 11-note chord for Owen's father is a graphic illustration of the violence of his death giving way to the placid but visually similar Owen. The intricate musical structure of the Prelude was a major factor in Britten's taking a keen interest in how that would relate to the visuals, an aspect which Williams does not show an awareness of. There are a few shots which are relatively lengthy, but most are very short, with a greater reliance on panning and tracking than the 1971 version. The importance of frames as symbol (doors, portraits, mirrors, windows) is fundamental to Williams's reading of the opera, and the viewer is made aware of this from the outset.

We should perhaps bear in mind the whole concept of something on screen, mindful that *Owen Wingrave* was commissioned for screen, involves working within a frame, i.e. the confines of the edges of a television screen. For Britten, this may not have been fundamentally different from the convention he was perhaps more comfortable with (the stage, with a traditional proscenium arch) but one may perhaps speculate that he at least understood the difference in scale, and the effect of this on his audience, whether it be opera-house auditorium or personal, private space.

It is also worth noting that in the BBC production, Large only gives one appearance of the ghosts, apart from the Ballad montage. In Henry James's original story, the ghosts never appear at all, they are merely referred to, as in this exchange between Mr and Mrs Coyle:

> Spencer Coyle told his wife that Owen was afraid of the portrait of his great-great-grandfather. […]
> 'Why of his great-great-grandfather more than of any of the others?'
> 'Oh, because he's the most formidable. He's the one who's sometimes seen.'
> 'Seen where?' Mrs Coyle had turned round with a jerk.
> 'In the room he was found dead in – the White Room they've always called it.'
> 'Do you mean to say the house has a *ghost*?' Mrs Coyle almost shrieked.
> 'You brought me here without telling me?'[70]

In Britten's score, just after Owen's Peace Aria, there is the stage direction: 'The apparitions of the old man and the boy slowly walk across the hall, and up the stairs.'[71] Naturally, this is the point in the BBC direction where the ghosts make their appearance. However, Williams adds three extra appearances. During the Prelude, two boys appear in the courtyard outside Owen's window. Unless Owen is hallucinating or perhaps remembering or imagining, this establishes the ghost-story genre right from the beginning in a very unambiguous way, unlike the original production which uses a general atmosphere of claustrophobia and oppressiveness to achieve the same effect during the Prelude. Later, in Williams, as Owen approaches Paramore in a taxi, the ghost of the same boy is seen in the road outside the estate. Musically this is during Interlude 3, where there is subtle thematic foreshadowing of the Ballad, which tells the story of the boy's fate.[72] The third vision occurs immediately after the Ballad at the start of Act II during a conversation between Owen and Coyle. The stage direction reads 'OWEN and COYLE move along the gallery to the door of the haunted room', and at this point the ghosts of the Old Man and the Boy literally walk out of their painting and resume a dumb show of their story as told in the Ballad, as Owen sings 'I can't forget them, the bully and the boy stalking their way to the room'.[73] There are also, in Williams's version, two quasi-supernatural events which stop short of full appearances of ghosts. During Owen's Peace Aria, the ambient light

[70] Henry James, 'Owen Wingrave' in Schofield, Martin (ed.) *Ghost Stories*. (London: Wordsworth, 2001), p. 122.
[71] Benjamin Britten, *Owen Wingrave*, vocal score. (London :Faber, 1971). Rehearsal figure 257.
[72] Britten, *Owen Wingrave*, 4 bars after rehearsal figure 99.
[73] Britten, *Owen Wingrave*. Rehearsal figure 205.

changes character and colour from a yellowish hue to a bright white. Also, immediately after the aria, the ancestors' portraits disappear from their frames and are replaced by white backgrounds.[74]

If Large's approach is somewhat directorially minimalistic, which many would say with some justification lends an appropriately oppressive and claustrophobic atmosphere to the mise-en-scène which continues beyond the Prelude, Willams's is contrastingly rich in terms of range of shots, action, involvement of character, hinting at back-stories, etc. She uses her visual vocabulary to set the scene in a far more proactive way than Large. It could be argued that this is an aspect that reveals her understanding of TV and cinema audiences of the early 2000s. One only needs to consider how the visual style of a popular series such as *Dr Who* has changed from its mostly studio-bound days of the 1960s and 1970s with its more recent incarnations in the 2000s, where watching the series feels much more like viewing a cinema film with its attendant high-definition location shooting and impressive special effects. The view many people hold is that TV audiences of 2000 and beyond (the so-called MTV generation, or perhaps now, the YouTube or Netflix generation) have a shorter attention span than their 1970s ancestors, and that images need to be more rapidly and frenetically presented on screen (a phenomenon perhaps echoed in writing when comparing the short, pithy and snappy sentences of contemporary literature with the lengthy descriptive prose of Dickens, George Eliot or, indeed, Henry James himself: a writer who is notorious for writing some of the longest sentences in English literature). In *A History of Film Music*, Mervyn Cooke wrote:

> MTV's Executive Vice-President, Robert Pittman, stressed the novelty of the audio-visual experience the channel offered, with its emphasis on mood and emotion, and a distinctive style of 'quick-edit communication' deliberately aimed at limited attention spans.[75]

Certainly in Williams's take on the *Owen Wingrave* Prelude the cuts come quite quickly. There is little time for a viewer to lose attention during this 'music only' section because there is always something new to witness: a new bit of detail almost in every shot which carries clues about what will be happening later in the story, details which raise questions and mysteries in the mind of the viewer, keeping them immersed.

The ending of the opera has particularly been criticised as weak. Of course, although Britten was merely following the plot line of the original James story, the crucial thing was that, in the opera, his intention was for the music, not the story, to carry the message of the drama. In 1907, James, having made his own theatrical adaptation of *Owen Wingrave*, renamed *The Saloon*, attempted to get it staged. He was not successful, criticism of the ending coming from Bernard Shaw. Shaw's opinion was that Owen's death in the haunted room left the character's stand on pacifism unresolved; in effect, Shaw felt that Owen was being punished, not rewarded, for his strength of will, thus leading to a dramatically weak denouement. The counter argument to Shaw's criticism could be that perhaps Owen has to die in the haunted room simply because of the ghost-story genre, in the same way that the plot of *The Turn of the Screw* requires Miles to die at the end. Furthermore, a pacifist slant may be

[74] Britten, *Owen Wingrave*, Rehearsal figure 246 et seq.
[75] Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, p. 416.

that Owen ends up as a martyr to the cause. Consequently it may be argued that Britten and his librettist went some way towards solving the problem with Owen's 'Peace Aria', the climactic moment relatively early on in Act II, providing enough hopefulness to counteract the hero's death, but the proportions of the work hardly support this view because the aria is too far away from the opera's final scene. Too much has happened in between for it to really have enough of a dramatic effect. Furthermore, there is an uneasiness generated by its orchestration, being predominantly gamelan-influenced tuned percussion, which does not fully correspond with the pacifist sentiment due to its previous association in the opera with military matters. As Cooke puts it, Owen thus appears 'trapped by his heritage and there is a strong suggestion that his ideal is, in fact, unattainable. This interpretation is immediately confirmed by the appearance of the two ghosts who bring Owen's soliloquy to an abrupt conclusion on his ironic words "And I am finished with you all."'[76] Britten often used tuned percussion timbres, with their superficial attractiveness and childlike characteristics, in contexts that represented conflicts between adult and child leading ultimately to death (for example, Quint and Miles, and Aschenbach and Tadzio), and they are (as previously noted) a cliché of scores for horror and ghost-story films. There is a further dimension to the Aschenbach-Tadzio relationship that Britten explores, that of a conflict between beauty/corruption and innocence/experience which is entirely within Aschenbach's mind. The attraction leads to destruction; it is enticing yet fatal, and is all related to the whole 'Otherness' concept in orientalism as postulated by Brett. This interpretation is another possible explanation for the gamelan connection within the sound-worlds of these operas because it lures the protagonists then destroys them.

Large remembers that the ending had indeed proved somewhat problematic, and that Pears had been involved in trying to persuade Britten to re-think it.[77] Matthews agrees that the ending of the opera could have been improved: 'The ending is weak, and I know they worked a lot on trying to change it but it's far too abrupt.'[78] In 2001, the ending of the opera again proved a challenge, this time for Margaret Williams, who admitted she may have been able to do a better job ('I should have filmed it in a different way […] I should have really pushed myself and come up with something else').[79] Williams's ending simply shows Owen pacing around in the haunted room, intercut with views of the other characters, before cutting to a horrified Kate discovering his dead body and being joined in the room by everyone else. The view then dissolves to a long shot of the house, Paramore. Although, as we have seen, Matthews was less than enthusiastic about the original *Owen Wingrave*, Williams's interpretation seems to have gone a long way towards winning him over: 'it's much more sophisticated – not everything works but it seemed to me to make a very convincing case for the opera. For the first time, I felt that perhaps I actually can believe in it after all.'[80]

[76] Cooke, *Britten and the Far East*, pp. 227–8.
[77] Brian Large, interview with Peter Auker, 10 February 2015.
[78] Colin Matthews, interview with Peter Auker, 15 October 2015.
[79] Margaret Williams, interview with Peter Auker, 12 March 2015.
[80] Colin Matthews, interview with Peter Auker, 15 October 2015.

It can be seen from the evidence of the numerous sources quoted above that Britten fully embraced the challenges and opportunities presented by the demands of *Owen Wingrave* as a work for the medium of television, not of the stage. He was able to rise to that challenge chiefly due to lessons he learnt from observing how opera on television worked, ranging from his experiences with Morley's *The Turn of the Screw*, Coleman's *Billy Budd*, and Large's *Peter Grimes*. Elements such as dramatic pacing, musical equivalences of cinematic devices such as montage and transitions, and the handling of character from a different perspective (the enlarged viewpoint of a screen rather than the more distant viewpoint of a singer on a stage), were all items that could be traced through from the earlier works into the fabric of *Owen Wingrave*.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

Summarising the salient arguments and findings from the thesis as a whole, I am drawn to return to the initial area for investigation: what leads critics and other commentators to describe *The Turn of the Screw* as a cinematic opera, when it was originally intended for the stage? During the course of the thesis I have examined Britten's approach to composing opera in general, and *The Turn of the Screw* in particular, in the light of what can be learned from his experiences as a cinemagoer and practitioner as a composer of music for documentary films. I have shown that these early encounters with screen media intersected significantly with his output as an operatic composer, and often led to the emulation of cinematic devices (for example, fade-ins and fade-outs) within the musical language itself, as well as cinematic elements that have influenced the dramaturgy (for instance, opportunities for creating quasi-cinematic effects such as montage within a stage production). The number of filmed versions of *The Turn of the Screw* is unusually high for a twentieth-century opera, and is therefore significant enough, and varied enough, to allow analysis demonstrating the effect of the work's cinematic attributes on both stage and film directors. I have covered this aspect via a number of case studies of selected scenes from the opera, and comparing the work of different directors. The case studies have allowed the thesis to consider the broader issues around stage and screen, directorial control and auteur theory, alongside theories of adaptation, demonstrating how all of these concepts can be observed in Britten's work. My investigation has included an evaluation of the composer's working practices, using a combination of archival materials, published sources, and my own interviews with those who had worked with him, leading to the conclusion that he collaborated with creative colleagues to a greater extent than might be assumed at first, although there was nonetheless still a strong and understandable element of wanting to retain ultimate control over the development of the opera.

The thesis has reviewed some established methods of analysing film, together with ideological, philosophical and critical theories of how the language of film works, and how that language can be described and evaluated. I questioned how some elements of standard practices in the analysis of film might be applied specifically to analysing filmed opera, and continued by evaluating some of the methodologies previous scholars and practitioners such as Eisenstein, Huntley, Manvell, Brownrigg and Ford had used. Ultimately I concluded that Audissino's use of a modified type of neoformalism seemed to offer the most appropriate solution for my purpose in analysing films of *The Turn of the Screw*, but also drew freely upon previous methods where these could provide possibilities for deeper illumination of the examples chosen.

In general terms, creating an opera requires something concrete to emerge from an imagination. The idea which is initially formed (sometimes only partially) undergoes a process of sketching, rough work, conceptual development and experimentation. Opera composers vary in their methods of shaping their preliminary material into a finished product, and Britten is known to have conceived a good deal of his material during his so-called 'thinking walks' round and about

Aldeburgh.[1] Britten's fascination with dreams (outlined in the Introduction to this thesis) and his own admission that he 'must have a very clever subconscious' [2] leads us to speculate that these disembodied thoughts and mental images (perhaps the nearest thing in real life to ghosts in the supernatural sense) played an especially significant part in the development of *The Turn of the Screw*.

We have seen that Britten was an avid cinemagoer, and this experience resonated throughout his composing life. We have seen that his early obsession with the film *Emil und die Detektive* (Lamprecht, 1931) occurred at around the same time that he first encountered James's *The Turn of the Screw* in the form of a radio broadcast. The film, which had a number of dark, adult themes underlying its ostensibly child-oriented adventure story, had clear roots in German expressionist cinema. Furthermore, it is noticeable that, from the surviving evidence, the period during which Britten was most active as a film-goer was during the 1930s coincided not only with his employment as a composer for the GPO Film Unit, but also (more broadly) with an era of filmmaking in which early experimentation with synchronized sound offered exciting artistic possibilities to both directors and composers. Britten's engagement by John Grierson as a composer and sound technician allowed the composer to experiment with a variety of new techniques, not least innovative methods of writing for small ensembles in such a way as to ensure they sounded effective when recorded for film. There are clear parallels here with the principles of film music composition contained within Sabaneev's 1935 book *Music For The Films* (see Chapter 1 above), and these principles inevitably influenced Britten's handling of instrumental forces, both in his film music and, later, in his opera scores. Indeed, there are a number of instances where, for example, the interludes in *The Turn of the Screw* contain resonances of the composer's work in documentary film, especially with regard to orchestration. A typical example is Variation IV, which immediately precedes Act I Scene 5 in which the sparse instrumentation, relying on strings, percussion and the lower register of the piano has much similarity with correspondingly thin orchestration in some of the documentary films. Even when using large orchestras in operas such as *Billy Budd*, Britten tends to subdivide them into smaller groups; these are signs of Mahler's influence, certainly, but also reminders of the soundworlds he was able to create for film. We noted that Philip Reed found a connection between the scoring style of one of the GPO film scores (*Negroes*, 1939) and recitative passages in the later chamber operas *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946) and *Albert Herring* (1947).

During the course of the thesis, we continued to examine the overall concept of cinematic opera and how this manifests itself in Britten's scores. Various cinematic elements appear in operas which were, with one exception, originally intended for stage presentation. Elements which have their origins in visual design, such as montages and transitions such as fade-ins, fade-outs and dissolves have musical equivalences which Britten exploited in most of his operas, including *Peter Grimes*, *Billy*

[1] According to Carpenter, as early as 1934 'Britten took to going for "long thinking walks" with the family dog, Caesar. In the past, he and his father had done most of their talking when out for walks together […] from now on he made a "thinking walk" part of his routine when composing'. See Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p. 58.
[2] Imogen Holst, 'Working for Britten', reprinted in Christopher Palmer (ed.) *The Britten Companion* (London: Faber & Fabler, 1984), p.50.

Budd, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Owen Wingrave*, and *Death in Venice*. I also comment on the quiet endings of many of Britten's operas as a musical equivalent of the cinematic fade-to-black, as well as its dramatic function as an indeterminate 'question mark', especially in his final opera, *Death in Venice*.

Peter Morley, when planning his pioneering 1959 televised production of *The Turn of the Screw*, was adamant from the beginning that the production should be of the complete work, with not a single bar cut from it. This respect for Britten's creation went a long way towards the composer being able to appreciate subsequently that TV could be a viable medium for the presentation of opera, and even a medium that might support the creation of original operatic works. Morley's intellectual approach to the project from the outset was therefore televisual: he always imagined how it would look within a television frame and planned accordingly. There are many instances in Morley's version (for example, a composite of three superimposed images resulting in a collage effect) which provide a visual equivalent of Britten's musico-dramatic narrative.

The thesis discusses Britten's use of diegetic and nondiegetic music in *Gloriana* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, finding similarities to treatment of such effects in film music. In considering Abbate's preferred use of the terms 'phenomenal' and 'nuomenal' to describe essentially the same thing, the thesis continues to explore narrative theory and montage and argues that narrative layers (described by Crilly as 'stratified layers of meaning') are often an important structural concept in the operas, with examples given from *Peter Grimes* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This discussion leads to a consideration of simultaneous soliloquising of more than one character, sometimes, but not necessarily, temporally separated, as a cinematic device. Examples of this, together with other dramatic constructs such framing devices are given from *Billy Budd* and *The Rape of Lucretia*.

Another important thread of discussion running through the thesis concerns the fundamental issue of adaptation and how this impacts upon, firstly, Britten's and Piper's approach to adapting James's novella for the operatic stage, and secondly, the process taken by numerous directors in further adapting the opera for the screen. Part of this discussion also involves a consideration of audience expectation and perception of an adapted work. In tracing the adaptation process for *The Turn of the Screw* we found that much of what existed in the original text was altered, simplified, or removed. We can see from Piper's preparatory notes that she and Britten recognised the elements of stage drama latent in James's prose. There is much evidence for this in not only the general thrust of the story itself (which retains the salient parts of James's narrative, even if there are a few departures from it) but also that some of James's actual words are retained in the libretto, as is characteristic of all Britten's operas based on works of English literature. Piper's preliminary notes are indeed a rich source of information about the process of adaptation, revealing much about her method of working, and placing as much emphasis on the development of the characters and their portrayal on stage as the structuring (or restructuring) of the plot. Examining the progress of the preparation of the libretto following the preliminary notes, we saw that Piper used a five-stage process in which some phases involved an iterative approach resulting in multiple drafts. Each stage represented a step in crafting

the final libretto, always involving input and comment from Britten, until a final typed libretto could be used as the basis for the composition of the music . Even this final working libretto was subject to further change and amendment before the definitive version, enshrined in the score, was reached. There is a parallel process of adaptation in which the composer converts the literary text into musical form. Tracing a line of succession back to the literary text is less straightforward than making comparisons between the novella and libretto, taking us from literary adaptation into the realm of intermediality. We discussed how, although it is possible to search within the text for sound cues (such as birdsong) in a simplistic and literal sense, it is the musical communication of dramatic elements such as atmosphere, psychology, character and setting that reveals the most about Britten's cinematic style. For example, James frequently creates an atmosphere of ghostly ambiguity in his text, an atmosphere finding its way into the opera, and which Nicholas Clark references when discussing Britten's use of timbre in the orchestral accompaniment during the churchgoing scene:

> The overall atmosphere of the scene is far from ecclesiastical. Variation IX begins with a brief orchestral introduction centred on the key of F sharp. Tubular bells echo and alternate between rapid quaver movement and a repeated F sharp, a pattern that recurs throughout the scene. The rest of the orchestra provides a sinister, drone-like accompaniment […] strings and woodwind play chords that indicate an all-embracing menace. The bells' reverberant peal is supposed to suggest a call to worship, but it steadily symbolises something much darker: Quint's encroaching grasp over the children.[3]

Elsewhere in the opera we are able to see how Britten achieves a similar ambiguity musically through such devices as dramatic changes of timbre in the orchestral accompaniment. In this way, Britten's musical language suggests a quasi-cinematic effect (that of a rapid cut from one shot to another; a so-called 'jump scare') whilst simultaneously interpreting musically something which can be found in literary text.

The writing of this thesis has involved much archival research, covering materials which have not previously been examined from this angle, including Myfanwy Piper's notebooks and draft libretti, Britten's memos, letters and composition sketches, and other supporting items such as film or TV directors' memos, cue sheets and camera scripts. The discovery of the recording of Morley's 1959 production of *The Turn of the Screw*, a production which I have analysed in detail, prompted me to conclude that this played a much larger part than hitherto understood in providing Britten with enough confidence in the medium to allow his sanctioning (and involvement in) TV performances of *Billy Budd* and *Peter Grimes*, and ultimately the composition of the television opera, *Owen Wingrave*.

The overriding conclusion that can be drawn is that Britten's opera is certainly conducive to screen adaptation (even when the film's origin lies within a staged performance), and that, for the most part, the reason for this is that the work is inherently cinematic in its underlying aesthetic. An important aspect to consider here is the relationship in filmed opera between the two essentially distinct directorial approaches of theatricality and (pseudo-)realism. The former seeks to draw upon conventions which are inherent in stage performances and incorporate these into a filmed context.

[3] Nicholas Clark, 'James, Britten, Piper and the Literary Supernatural: The Changing 'vision of evil' in *The Turn of the Screw* and *Owen Wingrave*' in Kate Kennedy (ed.), *Literary Britten* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2018), p. 62.

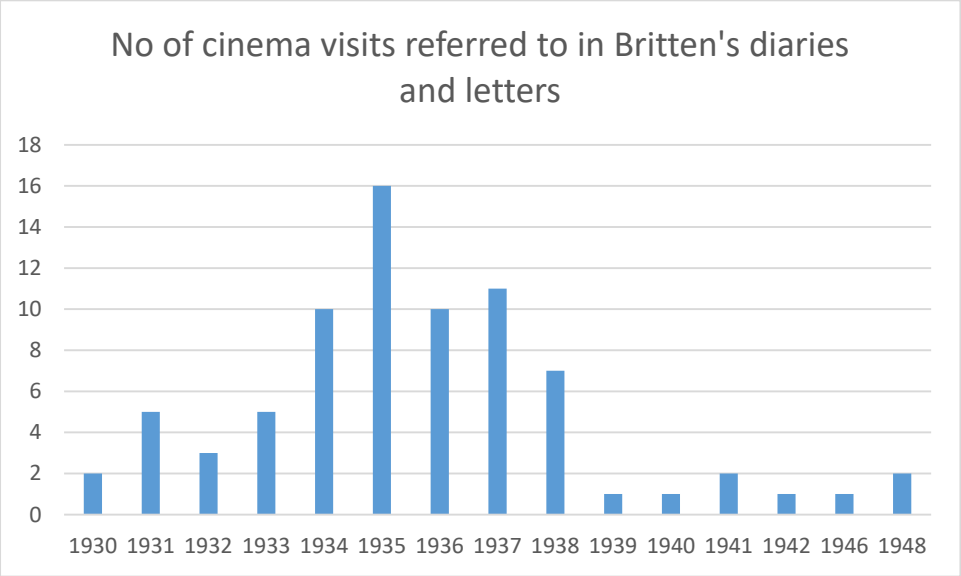
This may appear more naturally as a part of an opera-house production that has been filmed, but may also extend into a location-based production such as Petr Weigl's version in which the theatricality of symbolic choice of costume colours is a noteworthy feature. A stage performance is, by definition, live, and each performance is unique, but is also bound by the physical limitations of the stage (limitations which, in the hands of a skilled and creative director can yield much dramatic power that is able to supplant pseudo-realistic settings of a location-shot cinematic production). In Morley's production, working within the confines of a television studio that emulates to a certain extent the limitations of a stage setting, a mock-up of the interior of a coach is used during the Governess's journey. There is a juxtaposition here of the artificial (through the window of the coach we do not see a naturalistic landscape but a blurred abstract moving pattern giving an impression of travel) with the realistic (the interior of the coach). This feature parallels the discussion between Britten and his associates during preparations for the 1954 premiere performance of the opera, during which the composer insisted on having a 'realistic' coach, even though others told him the onomatopoeic music was more than suggestive enough of the setting. We may speculate that Britten's own preference for encouraging pseudo-realism in stage productions of his operas may be a sign that he visualised something akin to a cinematic aesthetic in his mind (perhaps subconsciously) at the time of the creative act of composition. The roots of Britten's sense of drama went very deep, and can probably be found in his early childhood. For example, in 1919, at the age of six, Britten appeared with his mother on the stage of the Sparrow's Nest Theatre in his home town of Lowestoft as a member of the cast in a production of *The Water Babies* (one of the composer's earliest experiences of theatre and drama). We have also explored in Chapter 1 his first interactions with the medium of cinema. These experiences were clearly significant formative events in the development of his creative life.

Britten's was a highly complex musical mind, with an innate understanding of how powerful music, literary text and drama could be when unleashed on an audience, either in a stage or screen context. Bringing his dramatic and musical instincts, and his creative practical skills to bear on the retelling in a new form of *The Turn of the Screw*, arguably amongst the most enigmatic and disturbing of all of Henry James's tales, illustrates for us vividly how 'their dreams' can become 'our dreams' when mediated by a cinematically minded opera composer, thereby illuminating our understanding of both Britten and James.

APPENDIX ONE

BRITTEN AS CINEMAGOER

The graph below demonstrates Britten's frequency of attendance at the cinema, as referred to in his published diaries and letters. These are, of course, a small minority of the surviving letters, but nevertheless give a good indication of the composer's interest in the cinema.



Graph showing frequency of Britten's visits to the cinema between 1930 and 1948, according to published diaries and letters

The graph shows a spike during the years Britten was also active as a film composer, a time when, it can be argued, were his most formative years as a composer generally.

The table below contains the data on which the graph is based.

Date of viewing	Title of Film	Director / Other information
7 April 1930	*The Four Feathers*	Merian C. Cooper (silent film)
5 September 1930	*Mickey Mouse*	Walt Disney
30 March 1931	*Tell England*	Anthony Asquith and Gerald Barkas
11 April 1931	*Paramount on Parade* (and others not identified)	Various
5 August 1931	*Charlie's Aunt*	Al Christie
13 August 1931	*City Lights*	Charlie Chaplin
3 September 1931	*Plunder*	Tom Walls
11 May 1932	*Strictly Dishonourable*	John M. Stahl
24 June 1932	Various (including news programme – titles not identified)	Various
19 August 1932	*Mata Hari*	George Fitzmaurice (starred Greta Garbo)
27 January 1933	*Grand Hotel* (Mickey Mouse)	Walt Disney
28 March 1933	*Emil and the Detectives*	Gerhard Lamprecht (German film)
14 September 1933	*The Sign of the Cross*	Cecil B. De Mille
16 November 1933	(News Theatre)	Various
29 November 1933	*Poil de Carrotte*	Julien Duvivier (French film)
10 January 1934	*Emil and the Detectives*	Gerhard Lamprecht (German film)
1 February 1934	*Hell's Divers*	George W. Hill. Starred Wallace Beery and

		Clark Gable
16 February 1934	*Liebelei*	Max Ophuls (German film)
31 March 1934	*1860*	Alessandro Blasetti (Italian film) Britten saw this whilst in Florence
1 April 1934	*The Way to* Love (Britten noted the title incorrectly in his diary as *Learn to Love*)	Norman Taurog. Britten saw this whilst in Florence
6 April 1934	*Fra Diavolo* (English title: *The Devil's Brother*)	Laurel and Hardy. Britten saw this whilst in Florence
23 May 1934	*Prenez Garde a la Peinture*	Henri Chomette (French film)
28 June 1934	(News Theatre)	Various
25 August 1934	*Catherine the Great*	Paul Czinner. Starred Flora Robson and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. Britten described it as a 'film of high artistic merit'
18 December 1934	*Le Million*	René Clair (French film)
11 January 1935	*The Lost Patrol*	John Ford
12 February 1935	*The Man Who Knew Too Much*	Alfred Hitchcock
8 April 1935	*Silly Symphony (Clock Shop)* *Two Guns Mickey (Mickey Mouse)*	Walt Disney Walt Disney
27 April 1935	Unidentified ('a good Mickey Mouse')	Walt Disney
29 April 1935	*The Man Who Knew Too Much* *Son autre amour*	Alfred Hitchcock Alfred Machard and Constant Remy (French film)
2 May 1935	Various – '2 Mickey Mouses – 2 Silly Symphonies & Life of a Gannet by Julian Huxley'	Walt Disney Julian Huxley
10 May 1935	*The Brothers Karamazov*	Erich Engels and Fyodor Otsep (German film)
25 May 1935	*Silly Symphony – Bird Store (Mickey Mouse)*	Walt Disney
27 May 1935	*Sanders of the River*	Zoltan Korda
31 May 1935	*Joyless Street*	G.W. Pabst
6 June 1935	*Captain Hates the Sea*	Lewis Milestone
26 August 1935	*Lady of Boulevards*	Dorothy Arzner
31 August 1935	*Little Minister*	Richard Wallace
3 September 1935	*Becky Sharp*	Rouben Mamoulian. First full length feature film to be released in colour
26 October 1935	*Goin' To Town*	Alexander Hall
2 December 1935	*Turn of the Tide* (incorrectly titled in Britten's diary as *Call of the Tide*)	Norman Walker
11 January 1936	*Ghost Goes West* *Music Land* *Keystone Hotel*	René Clair Walt Disney Ralph Staub
16 January 1936	Unidentified film (possibly *Foreign Affairs*) *Pluto's Judgement Day* *Music Land*	Tom Walls and Ralph Lynn Walt Disney Walt Disney
7 March 1936	*Milky Way*	Harold Lloyd
23 March 1936	*Lemon Drop Kid*	Marshall Neilan
15 April 1936	*'Disney season'*	Walt Disney
27 April 1936	Unidentified film	No details of film – Britten went to the cinema with Lennox Berkeley whilst in Spain
8 September 1936	Unidentified film	No details of film – Britten went to the Tatler cinema in London after a meeting

		with William Coldstream
11 September 1936	*As You Like It* *A Night at the Opera*	Paul Czinner – this is the film that Walton composed the score for, and which prompted a review by Britten in October 1936's *World Film News* Marx Bros.
10 October 1936	*Unfinished Symphony* *Bed and Sofa*	Willi Forst Alexander Room (Russian silent film)
5 December 1936	*Green Pastures*	Mark Connelly and William Keighley
7 January 1937	*Love From A Stranger* *Country Cousin*	Rowland V. Lee. Britten composed the music for this film, and this was the gala showing of the movie. Walt Disney
8 January 1937	*Love From A Stranger*	Rowland V. Lee.
11 January 1937	*Green Pastures*	Mark Connelly and William Keighley
1 March 1937	*Sabotage*	Alfred Hitchcock
27 April 1937	*Elephant Boy*	Robert Flaherty
24 May 1937	*Ammer Konig* *Loyalties*	Unidentified Basil Dean
9 July 1937	*Der Herrscher*	Veit Harlan. Britten described this film as 'Nazi propoganda'.
30 July 1937	*A Day At The Races*	Marx Bros.
11 September 1937	*Winterset*	Alfred Santell
24 September 1937	*Episode* *Roman d'un tricheur*	Walter Reisch Sacha Guitry
12 October 1937	Unidentified documentary films from the Gas Light and Coke Company.	Basil Wright et al.
29 January 1938	*One Hundred Men and a Girl*	Henry Costa
25 February 1938	*Snow White*	Walt Disney. The first full length animated feature film.
26 February 1938	*Captains Courageous*	Victor Fleming
2 March 1938	*Dead End*	William Wyler
12 May 1938	*Boys Will Be Boys*	William Beaudine. Starred Will Hay.
23 May 1938	*Snow White* *Break the News*	Walt Disney René Clair
10 June 1938	*Horse Feathers*	Marx Bros.
18 July 1939	Unidentified	Various trips to the cinema in America are described in general terms by Britten in a letter to his sister, Beth.
31 March 1940	Unidentified	An allusion to MGM cinema advertising can be seen in a letter to violinist Antonio Brosa
28 July 1941	*The Big Store*	Marx Bros.
9 September 1941	Unidentified	Britten refers to seeing American films in a letter to Wulff Scherchen
1 June 1942	*How Green Was My Valley*	John Ford
? 1946	*The Virtuous Isadore*	Bernard Deschamps
3 February 1948	*St Vincent de Paul*	Pierre Fresnay
December 1948	Unidentified	Lotte Reiniger

APPENDIX TWO [1]

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF BRITTEN'S FILM MUSIC

Title	Unit	Director/Producer	Date
The King's Stamp	GPO Film Unit/EMPO	William Coldstream	April−May 1935
Coal Face	GPO Film Unit/EMPO	Alberto Cavalcanti	May-June 1935
Telegrams	GPO Film Unit	Unknown	July 1935
The Tocher	GPO Film Unit	Alberto Cavalcanti	July 1935
CTO – The Story of the Central Telegraph Office	GPO Film Unit	Stuart Legg	July 1935
Gas Abstract	British Commercial Gas Association / Gas Light and Coke Co.	Unknown	August-September 1935
God's Chillun	GPO Film Unit	William Coldstream	September-November 1935
Men Behind The Meters	British Commercial Gas Association	Arthur Elton	September 1935
Dinner Hour	British Commercial Gas Association	Edgar Anstey	September 1935
How The Dial Works	GPO Film Unit	Ralph Elton / Rona Morrison	September 1935
Conquering Space – The Story of Modern Communications	GPO Film Unit	Stuart Legg	September 1935
Sorting Office	GPO Film Unit	Harry Watt	September 1935
The Savings Bank	GPO Film Unit	Stuart Legg	September 1935
The New Operator	EMB / GPO Film Unit	John Grierson / Stuart Legg	September 1935
Night Mail	GPO Film Unit	John Grierson / Harry Watt / Basil Wright	November 1935 – January 1936
Calendar of the Year	GPO Film Unit	Alberto Cavalcanti / Evelyn Spice	March, September – October 1936
Peace of Britain	Strand Films	Paul Rotha	March 1936
Around the Village Green	Travel and Industrial Development Association	Marion Grierson / Evelyn Spice	April, September – October 1936
Men of the Alps	GPO Film Unit	Harry Watt / Alberto Cavalcanti	September – October 1936
Line to the Tschierva Hut	GPO Film Unit	John Grierson / Alberto Cavalcanti	September – November 1936
Message from Geneva	GPO Film Unit	Alberto Cavalcanti	September – November 1936
Four Barriers	GPO Film Unit	Harry Watt	September – November 1936
The Saving of Bill Blewitt	GPO Film Unit	John Grierson / Alberto Cavalcanti	October 1936
Love From A Stranger	Trafalgar Films	Max Schach / Rowland V. Lee	November 1936
The Way To The Sea	Strand Films	Paul Rotha / John B. Holmes	December 1936
Book Bargain	GPO Film Unit	Norman McLaren	1937
Mony a Pickle	GPO Film Unit	Alberto Cavalcanti /	1938

[1] John Evans, Philip Reed, Paul Wilson (eds), *A Britten Source Book* (Aldeburgh: Britten-Pears Library, 1987), pp. 131-144.

		Richard Massingham	
Advance Democracy	Realistic Film Unit	Ralph Bond	1938
The Instruments of the Orchestra	Crown Film Unit	Alexander Shaw / Muir Mathieson	1946

APPENDIX THREE

PRODUCTION DETAILS OF FILMS OF *THE TURN OF THE SCREW* DISCUSSED IN CHAPTERS 6 and 7

Film 1:

Year: 1959
Production Company: Associated-Rediffusion for ITV
Director: Peter Morley
Television original or theatrical: Television (Studio)
Technical / Release Details: Ampex 2" videotape original (monochrome), later transferred to 16mm film stock via Telecine process. Original viewable by arrangement with the British Film Institute, copy (VHS) viewable at the Britten Archive by arrangement with the librarian. No release is currently available commercially.

Cast:

Prologue/Quint: Raymond Nilsson
Governess: Jennifer Vyvyan
Miles: Tom Bevan
Flora: Janette Miller
Mrs Grose: Judith Pearce
Miss Jessel: Arda Mandikian

Conductor: Charles Mackerras

Film 2:

Year: 1982
Production Company: Unitel (Yugoslavia)
Director: Petr Weigl
Television original or theatrical: Television (Location)
Technical / Release details: not currently commercially available

Cast:

Prologue: Philip Langridge (singer)
Governess: Magda Vasaryova (actor), Helen Donath (singer)
Miles: Michal Gulyas (actor), Michael Ginn (singer)
Flora: Beata Blazickova (actor), Lilian Watson (singer)
Mrs Grose: Dana Medricka (actor), Ava June (singer)
Quint: Juraj Kukura (actor), Robert Tear (singer)
Miss Jessel: Emilia Vasaryova (actor), Heather Harper (singer)

Conductor: Colin Davies

Film 3:

Year: 1990
Production Company: Schwetzinger Festival Opera
Director: Michael Hampe
TV Director: Claus Viller
Television original or theatrical: Theatrical

Technical / Release details: DVD released by Art Haus Musik of Leipzig. It has an aspect ratio of 4:3, and PCM Stereo sound format

Cast:

Prologue/Quint: Richard Greagor
Governess: Helen Field
Miles: Samuel Linay
Flora: Machiko Obata
Mrs Grose: Menai Davies
Miss Jessel: Phyllis Cannan

Conductor: Steuart Bedford

Film 4:

Year: 1992
Production Company: Opera Australia
Director: Neil Armfield
TV Director: Greg Shears
Television original or theatrical: Theatrical
Technical / Release details: Currently available on DVD, published by Opus Arte, with an aspect ratio of 4:3 and what appears to be a basic stereo mix.

Cast:

Prologue: Robert Gard
Governess: Eilene Hannan
Miles: Patrick Littlemore
Flora: Lanneke Jones
Mrs Grose: Margaret Haggart
Quint: Anson Austin
Miss Jessel: Wendy Dixon

Conductor: David Stanhope

Film 5:

Year: 2001
Production Company: Festival d'Aix-en-Provence.
Director: Luc Bondy
TV Director: Vincent Bataillon
Television original or theatrical: Theatrical
Technical / Release details: The currently available DVD edition was released by Bel Air Classiques in 2007, using a 16:9 aspect ratio and a Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound mix.

Cast:

Prologue: Olivier Dumait
Governess: Mireille Delunsch
Miles: Gregory Monk
Flora: Nazan Fikret
Mrs Grose: Hannah Schaer

Quint: Martin Miller
Miss Jessel: Marie McLaughlin

Conductor: Daniel Harding

Film 6:

Year: 2005
Production Company: BBC TV Wales
Director: Katie Mitchell
Television original or theatrical: Television (Location)
Technical / Release details: The DVD edition was released by Opus Arte, and has an aspect ratio of 16:9, with a Dolby 5.1 surround sound mix.

Cast:

Prologue/Quint: Mark Padmore
Governess: Lisa Milne
Miles: Nicholas Kirby Johnson
Flora: Caroline Wise
Mrs Grose: Diana Montague
Miss Jessel: Catrin Wyn Davies
Old Governess: Keturah Day (non-singing)
Mother of Miles and Flora: Liz Kettle (non-singing)
Maid: Felicity Cutting (non-singing)

Conductor: Richard Hickox

Film 7:

Year: 2011
Production Company: Glyndebourne
Director: Jonathan Kent
TV Director: Francois Roussillon
Television original or theatrical: Theatrical
Technical / Release details: Glyndebourne / FRA Musica DVD. Aspect ratio 16:9. Dolby 2.0 surround sound.

Cast:

Prologue/Quint: Toby Spence
Governess: Miah Persson
Miles: Thomas Parfitt
Flora: Joanna Songi
Mrs Grose: Susan Bickley
Miss Jessel: Giselle Allen

Conductor: Jakub Hrusa

APPENDIX FOUR

EXTRACT FROM *THE TURN OF THE SCREW* CHAPTERS IV, V and VI BY HENRY JAMES

There was a Sunday—to get on—when it rained with such force and for so many hours that there could be no procession to church; in consequence of which, as the day declined, I had arranged with Mrs. Grose that, should the evening show improvement, we would attend together the late service. The rain happily stopped, and I prepared for our walk, which, through the park and by the good road to the village, would be a matter of twenty minutes. Coming downstairs to meet my colleague in the hall, I remembered a pair of gloves that had required three stitches and that had received them—with a publicity perhaps not edifying—while I sat with the children at their tea, served on Sundays, by exception, in that cold, clean temple of mahogany and brass, the "grown-up" dining room. The gloves had been dropped there, and I turned in to recover them. The day was gray enough, but the afternoon light still lingered, and it enabled me, on crossing the threshold, not only to recognize, on a chair near the wide window, then closed, the articles I wanted, but to become aware of a person on the other side of the window and looking straight in. One step into the room had sufficed; my vision was instantaneous; it was all there. The person looking straight in was the person who had already appeared to me. He appeared thus again with I won't say greater distinctness, for that was impossible, but with a nearness that represented a forward stride in our intercourse and made me, as I met him, catch my breath and turn cold. He was the same—he was the same, and seen, this time, as he had been seen before, from the waist up, the window, though the dining room was on the ground floor, not going down to the terrace on which he stood. His face was close to the glass, yet the effect of this better view was, strangely, only to show me how intense the former had been. He remained but a few seconds—long enough to convince me he also saw and recognized; but it was as if I had been looking at him for years and had known him always. Something, however, happened this time that had not happened before; his stare into my face, through the glass and across the room, was as deep and hard as then, but it quitted me for a moment during which I could still watch it, see it fix successively several other things. On the spot there came to me the added shock of a certitude that it was not for me he had come there. He had come for someone else.

The flash of this knowledge—for it was knowledge in the midst of dread—produced in me the most extraordinary effect, started as I stood there, a sudden vibration of duty and courage. I say courage because I was beyond all doubt already far gone. I bounded straight out of the door again, reached that of the house, got, in an instant, upon the drive, and, passing along the terrace as fast as I could rush, turned a corner and came full in sight. But it was in sight of nothing now—my visitor had vanished. I stopped, I almost dropped, with the real relief of this; but I took in the whole scene—I gave him time to reappear. I call it time, but how long was it? I can't speak to the purpose today of the duration of these things. That kind of measure must have left me: they couldn't have lasted as they actually appeared to me to last. The terrace and the whole place, the lawn and the garden beyond it, all I could see of the park, were empty with a great emptiness. There were shrubberies and big trees, but I remember the clear assurance I felt that none of them concealed him. He was there or was not there: not there if I didn't see him. I got hold of this; then, instinctively, instead of returning as I had come, went to the window. It was confusedly present to me that I ought to place myself where he had stood. I did so; I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he had looked, into the room. As if, at this moment, to show me exactly what his range had been, Mrs. Grose, as I had done for himself just before, came in from the hall. With this I had the full image of a repetition of what had already occurred. She saw me as I had seen my own visitant; she pulled up short as I had done; I gave her something of the shock that I had received. She turned white, and this made me ask myself if I had blanched as much. She stared, in short, and retreated on just *my* lines, and I knew she had then passed out and come round to me and that I should presently meet her. I remained where I was, and while I waited I thought of more things than one. But there's only one I take space to mention. I wondered why *she* should be scared.

V

Oh, she let me know as soon as, round the corner of the house, she loomed again into view. “What in the name of goodness is the matter—?” She was now flushed and out of breath.

I said nothing till she came quite near. “With me?” I must have made a wonderful face. “Do I show it?”

“You’re as white as a sheet. You look awful.”

I considered; I could meet on this, without scruple, any innocence. My need to respect the bloom of Mrs. Grose’s had dropped, without a rustle, from my shoulders, and if I wavered for the instant it was not with what I kept back. I put out my hand to her and she took it; I held her hard a little, liking to feel her close to me. There was a kind of support in the shy heave of her surprise. “You came for me for church, of course, but I can’t go.”

“Has anything happened?”

“Yes. You must know now. Did I look very queer?”

“Through this window? Dreadful!”

“Well,” I said, “I’ve been frightened.” Mrs. Grose’s eyes expressed plainly that *she* had no wish to be, yet also that she knew too well her place not to be ready to share with me any marked inconvenience. Oh, it was quite settled that she *must* share! “Just what you saw from the dining room a minute ago was the effect of that. What *I* saw—just before—was much worse.”

Her hand tightened. “What was it?”

“An extraordinary man. Looking in.”

“What extraordinary man?”

“I haven’t the least idea.”

Mrs. Grose gazed round us in vain. “Then where is he gone?”

“I know still less.”

“Have you seen him before?”

“Yes—once. On the old tower.”

She could only look at me harder. “Do you mean he’s a stranger?”

“Oh, very much!”

“Yet you didn’t tell me?”

“No—for reasons. But now that you’ve guessed—”

Mrs. Grose’s round eyes encountered this charge. “Ah, I haven’t guessed!” she said very simply. “How can I if *you* don’t imagine?”

“I don’t in the very least.”

“You’ve seen him nowhere but on the tower?”

“And on this spot just now.”

Mrs. Grose looked round again. “What was he doing on the tower?”

“Only standing there and looking down at me.”

She thought a minute. “Was he a gentleman?”

I found I had no need to think. “No.” She gazed in deeper wonder. “No.”

“Then nobody about the place? Nobody from the village?”

“Nobody—nobody. I didn’t tell you, but I made sure.”

She breathed a vague relief: this was, oddly, so much to the good. It only went indeed a little way. “But if he isn’t a gentleman—”

“What *is* he? He’s a horror.”

“A horror?”

“He’s—God help me if I know *what* he is!”

Mrs. Grose looked round once more; she fixed her eyes on the duskier distance, then, pulling herself together, turned to me with abrupt inconsequence. “It’s time we should be at church.”

“Oh, I’m not fit for church!”

“Won’t it do you good?”

“It won’t do *them!*— I nodded at the house.

“The children?”

“I can’t leave them now.”

“You’re afraid—?”

I spoke boldly. “I’m afraid of *him*.”

Mrs. Grose’s large face showed me, at this, for the first time, the faraway faint glimmer of a consciousness more acute: I somehow made out in it the delayed dawn of an idea I myself had not given her and that was as yet quite obscure to me. It comes back to me that I thought instantly of this as something I could get from her; and I felt it to be connected with the desire she presently showed to know more. “When was it—on the tower?”

“About the middle of the month. At this same hour.”

“Almost at dark,” said Mrs. Grose.

“Oh, no, not nearly. I saw him as I see you.”

“Then how did he get in?”

“And how did he get out?” I laughed. “I had no opportunity to ask him! This evening, you see,” I pursued, “he has not been able to get in.”

“He only peeps?”

“I hope it will be confined to that!” She had now let go my hand; she turned away a little. I waited an instant; then I brought out: “Go to church. Goodbye. I must watch.”

Slowly she faced me again. “Do you fear for them?”

We met in another long look. “Don’t *you?*” Instead of answering she came nearer to the window and, for a minute, applied her face to the glass. “You see how he could see,” I meanwhile went on.

She didn’t move. “How long was he here?”

“Till I came out. I came to meet him.”

Mrs. Grose at last turned round, and there was still more in her face. “*I* couldn’t have come out.”

“Neither could I!” I laughed again. “But I did come. I have my duty.”

“So have I mine,” she replied; after which she added: “What is he like?”

“I’ve been dying to tell you. But he’s like nobody.”

“Nobody?” she echoed.

“He has no hat.” 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. “He 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 good deal. His eyes are sharp, strange—awfully; but I only know clearly that they’re rather small and very fixed. His mouth’s wide, and his lips are thin, and except for his little whiskers he’s quite clean-shaven. He gives me a sort of sense of looking like an actor.”

“An actor!” It was impossible to resemble one less, at least, than Mrs. Grose at that moment.

“I’ve never seen one, but so I suppose them. He’s tall, active, erect,” I continued, “but never—no, never!—a gentleman.”

My companion’s face had blanched as I went on; her round eyes started and her mild mouth gaped. “A gentleman?” she gasped, confounded, stupefied: “a gentleman *he?*”

“You know him then?”

She visibly tried to hold herself. “But he *is* handsome?”

I saw the way to help her. “Remarkably!”

“And dressed—?”

“In somebody’s clothes.” “They’re smart, but they’re not his own.”

She broke into a breathless affirmative groan: “They’re the master’s!”

I caught it up. “You *do* know him?”

She faltered but a second. “Quint!” she cried.

“Quint?”

“Peter Quint—his own man, his valet, when he was here!”

“When the master was?”

Gaping still, but meeting me, she pieced it all together. “He never wore his hat, but he did wear—well, there were waistcoats missed. They were both here—last year. Then the master went, and Quint was alone.”

I followed, but halting a little. “Alone?”

“Alone with *us*.” Then, as from a deeper depth, “In charge,” she added.

“And what became of him?”

She hung fire so long that I was still more mystified. “He went, too,” she brought out at last.

“Went where?”

Her expression, at this, became extraordinary. “God knows where! He died.”

“Died?” I almost shrieked.

She seemed fairly to square herself, plant herself more firmly to utter the wonder of it. “Yes. Mr. Quint is dead.”

VI

It took of course more than that particular passage to place us together in presence of what we had now to live with as we could—my dreadful liability to impressions of the order so vividly exemplified, and my companion’s knowledge, henceforth—a knowledge half consternation and half compassion—of that liability. There had been, this evening, after the revelation left me, for an hour, so prostrate—there had been, for either of us, no attendance on any service but a little service of tears and vows, of prayers and promises, a climax to the series of mutual challenges and pledges that had straightway ensued on our retreating together to the schoolroom and shutting ourselves up there to have everything out. The result of our having everything out was simply to reduce our situation to the last rigor of its elements. She herself had seen nothing, not the shadow of a shadow, and nobody in the house but the governess was in the governess’s plight; yet she accepted without directly impugning my sanity the truth as I gave it to her, and ended by showing me, on this ground, an awestricken tenderness, an expression of the sense of my more than questionable privilege, of which the very breath has remained with me as that of the sweetest of human charities.

What was settled between us, accordingly, that night, was that we thought we might bear things together; and I was not even sure that, in spite of her exemption, it was she who had the best of the burden. I knew at this hour, I think, as well as I knew later, what I was capable of meeting to shelter my pupils; but it took me some time to be wholly sure of what my honest ally was prepared for to keep terms with so compromising a contract. I was queer company enough—quite as queer as the company I received; but as I trace over what we went through I see how much common ground we must have found in the one idea that, by good fortune, *could* steady us. It was the idea, the second movement, that led me straight out, as I may say, of the inner chamber of my dread. I could take the air in the court, at least, and there Mrs. Grose could join me. Perfectly can I recall now the particular way strength came to me before we separated for the night. We had gone over and over every feature of what I had seen.

“He was looking for someone else, you say—someone who was not you?”

“He was looking for little Miles.” A portentous clearness now possessed me. “*That’s* whom he was looking for.”

“But how do you know?”

“I know, I know, I know!” My exaltation grew. “And *you* know, my dear!”

She didn’t deny this, but I required, I felt, not even so much telling as that. She resumed in a moment, at any rate: “What if *he* should see him?”

“Little Miles? That’s what he wants!”

She looked immensely scared again. “The child?”

“Heaven forbid! The man. He wants to appear to *them*.” That he might was an awful conception, and yet, somehow, I could keep it at bay; which, moreover, as we lingered there, was what I succeeded in practically proving. I had an absolute certainty that I should see again what I had already seen, but something within me said that by offering myself bravely as the sole subject of such

experience, by accepting, by inviting, by surmounting it all, I should serve as an expiatory victim and guard the tranquility of my companions. The children, in especial, I should thus fence about and absolutely save. I recall one of the last things I said that night to Mrs. Grose.

"It does strike me that my pupils have never mentioned—"

She looked at me hard as I musingly pulled up. "His having been here and the time they were with him?"

"The time they were with him, and his name, his presence, his history, in any way."

"Oh, the little lady doesn't remember. She never heard or knew."

"The circumstances of his death?" I thought with some intensity. "Perhaps not. But Miles would remember—Miles would know."

"Ah, don't try him!" broke from Mrs. Grose.

I returned her the look she had given me. "Don't be afraid." I continued to think. "It *is* rather odd."

"That he has never spoken of him?"

"Never by the least allusion. And you tell me they were 'great friends'?"

"Oh, it wasn't *him!*" Mrs. Grose with emphasis declared. "It was Quint's own fancy. To play with him, I mean—to spoil him." She paused a moment; then she added: "Quint was much too free."

This gave me, straight from my vision of his face—*such* a face!—a sudden sickness of disgust. "Too free with *my* boy?"

"Too free with everyone!"

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