

Depiction of victorian era in turn of the screw

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Inequalities in the Victorian Era

To understand the uncles and the governess's motivations in Henry James' Novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, the reader must recognize the social, class, and gender inequalities between men and women during the Victorian era.

During the time the Victorian era, women and men were not equal, but women began to gain more rights than they had before. A new class of women called the "working woman" was born during this time. James uses the main protagonist, the governess, to portray the working woman. Even though the position of a governess was a more common job for women, she still strove to make money for herself. This was one of the most important qualities of the "working woman" as the drive to work often accompanied the drive to earn more rights. In the novella, the governess accepted the job because of its pay, which demonstrates her dedication to make a name for herself as a working woman. The governess chose to support herself as an independent woman, instead of choosing the more common Victorian roll of a woman and settling down with a husband. This dedication is shown in the governess's interview. While towards the beginning of the interview the governess had doubts about accepting the position, when she realized that "the salary offered much exceeded her modest measure" (James 1) she took the job. This choice shows the governess's drive as a "working woman" due to the fact that it was the salary that made her decision. After obtaining the position, the governess and worked hard to perform the job to the best of their abilities.

Men during this time period didn't have the same problems as women. Men had better schooling, better jobs, better pay and all rights. The Victorian era was the age of chivalrous men, especially upper-classmen were expected to act with honor and not scoundrels. That being said, in his novella, James, portrays his male characters in a bad light. For example The Uncle, ignored his responsibilities to the children, even though they were his own niece and nephew. Instead of trying to raise the children, the Uncle put all charges onto the governess, playing little to no role in the children's upbringing. James shows that the uncle opposed what men were supposed to be like in the Victorian Era. James used the children's uncle to portray a mistake of men in the Victorian era the same way he used the governess to portray a proper "working woman." "Working-class women, many of whom were not connected to prostitution, were labeled as "decadent" whore figures while men seeking prostitutes were given a pass. Men were not held responsible for their sexual dalliances until the end of the century, when stories spread about virginal brides being infected with sexually transmitted diseases from their husbands." (Tomyn 3)

All in all, men and women were not equal during the Victorian era. They had different rights, jobs, pay, and schooling. Even though, women still strived to be a working woman and make their own wage. Henry James, the Turn of the Screw, portrays these inequalities between men and women through the uncle's unchivalrous attitude and the governess's striving to become the working woman of that era. Today, the working woman is not new to this era. There are many women who have led the country into what it is today.