

Search for love



In "The Turn of the Screw" by Henry James, the central character, the governess, feels so isolated that she will do anything necessary to quench the feeling. She decides that the way to do so is to be in love. Unfortunately, because she is located in Bly, such a desire is not possible to actualize. When the governess realizes this she begins to manifest her unrequited feelings in the shape of ghostly apparitions. Her point of view also plays an important role in how the reader observes the ghosts. Subconsciously, the governess has chosen to be an unreliable narrator, seeing fantastical phantoms which participate in an enamored relationship allows her to feel as though she herself was a part of it. When the governess becomes tired with these ghosts, however, she turns to other characters to fulfill her aspiration. The governess sees ghosts in order to satisfy her yearning desire to be in love. The young governess is instantly attracted to the "handsome, bold and pleasant" (p. 7) bachelor uncle of the orphaned children by whom she is hired. This overwhelming feeling was the original motivation for her accepting the job as governess. The reader's introduction to the governess' most basic feelings shows the reader that this is one of her primary concerns at the point in her life that the novella begins. The governess' craving to be cherished by a man is induced by the uncle's "charming ways with women" (p. 7). His graciousness gives her a taste of how she would like to be treated in life. When the governess leaves to accept the position she is at an undeveloped age, with a background consisting of country poverty and only one position related to children (as a schoolteacher) prior to the event at hand. This results in a lack of knowledge as to what she wants from life. The gentlemanly uncle gives her an 'ideal' to aspire towards. The governess is an unreliable narrator; her dreams to be in love become so realistic to her

that she actually begins to see apparitions. Her first sighting occurs only a moment after she is dreaming about how it would be “ as charming as a charming story suddenly to meet someone” (p. 19). The word ‘ story’ implies an innocent, child-like, fairytale view of the emotion she experiences, this diction choice demonstrates her inability to deal with the emotion maturely. When Peter Quint appears on the tower at that point her imagination is taking over and giving her the ‘ love’ that she has been dreaming about since she arrived at Bly. The governess’ mind shows her Quint as a ghost because subconsciously she knows it’s unreal and therefore unattainable, that he is a ghost is her rationalization of the situation — mental self-preservation. The governess’ initial sighting of the second ghost, Miss Jessel, is of the same nature as her original sighting of Quint; our narrator wishes for, or in the second case, “ becomes aware that (the governess) has an interested spectator” (p. 35), before seeing it, leading the reader to conclude that the ghosts are manifestations of her thoughts. She sees the ghost in her mind’s eye and because of her imagination is then able to transfer the image to visual. For her to be able to have a relationship with ‘ Peter’, the above describes the next logical step in her dream: to again allow her mind to take over and invent a ‘ Miss Jessel’. Miss Jessel and Peter Quint had “ everything between them” (p. 39) according to Mrs. Grose, this supports the romantic relationship the governess conceives Quint to be involved in. Miss Jessel represents what the governess wants to be, a woman who is in love with someone (Quint) who feels mutually towards her. The reader is forced to question the governess’ narrative reliability, and because it is written in first person it difficult for the reader to accurately assess the feelings and opinions of other characters. The governess’ arrival to the setting in Bly is a

logical place for her unrequited feelings of love to emerge. Her arrival in Bly at the start of the narrative is accomplished only after “ long hours in a bumpy, swinging coach” (p. 9). This carriage ride is the physical process that brings her away from civilization and to a place (Bly) that allows her imagination to run wild. On a psychological level the journey can be interpreted as a journey of her mind; it takes her away from her ‘ ego’ and ‘ super ego’ and into the deeper realms of ‘ id’ (which covers such primal, instinctual feelings as the need to have sex, coming only as a result of having a male character with whom to interact). Her first impressions describe Bly as having “ open windows, fresh curtains, bright flowers, a golden sky, and impressive rooms with great beds, full draperies and long glasses” (p. 10). The place is in such a state of perfection that the reader gets the feeling it is covering up abominable secrets of the past including taboo deaths (the parents) and Miles’ ambiguous expulsion. During her first night in Bly the governess considers with “ uneasy suspicion” (p. 10) the “ guarded” (p. 10) way that Mrs. Grose treats her. Such negative underlying emotions could result in an even stronger need on her part to escape to such a positive emotion as love. The narrator looks for love in Bly, as her necessity becomes more and more frantic she looks to different, and all, male characters to satisfy it. It begins with a reasonable attraction towards the uncle, then her displaced emotion moves to the fictitious Peter Quint for the most part of the novella. In the last chapter she even looks to the boy, Miles, for a reciprocating feeling, this is shown in his adult diction and actions in her narrative of him, in her struggle to attain love she actually smothers Miles to the point of death. Finally, it is implied in the preface that after our account of the story ends, she turns the demand on Douglas.