

= The Turn of the Screw (2009 film) =

The Turn of the Screw (also known as Ghost Story : The Turn of the Screw) is a British television film based on Henry James 's 1898 ghost story of the same name . Commissioned and produced by the BBC , it was first broadcast on 30 December 2009 , on BBC One . The novella was adapted for the screen by Sandy Welch , and the film was directed by Tim Fywell . Although generally true to the tone and story of James 's work , the film is set in the 1920s ? in contrast to the original 1840s setting ? and accentuates sexual elements that some theorists have identified in the novella . The film 's story is told in flashbacks during consultations between the institutionalised Ann (Michelle Dockery) and Dr Fisher (Dan Stevens) . Ann tells how she was hired by an aristocrat (Mark Umbers) to care for the orphans Miles (Josef Lindsay) and Flora (Eva Sayer) . She is met at the children 's home , Bly , by Mrs Grose (Sue Johnston) , the housekeeper . Ann soon begins to see unknown figures around the manor , and seeks an explanation .

Critics were divided in their reviews of The Turn of the Screw . The acting and tone of the production were generally praised , but the plot 's divergences from the original story were less well received . A particular disagreement concerned the film 's horrific elements ; some critics considered it to be genuinely scary , while others suggested that the horror was not fully effective . The original story has been much analysed owing to its ambiguity , and critics disagreed about the extent to which the film succeeded in portraying this trait . Academic analyses found the film considerably less ambiguous than the novella . The Turn of the Screw was released on DVD on 1 March 2010 in the UK and on 28 April 2015 in North America .

= = Production = =

The BBC had previously adapted several horror stories as Christmas films , with their series A Ghost Story for Christmas including adaptations of the M. R. James stories " The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral " (filmed as The Stalls of Barchester) , " A Warning to the Curious " , " Lost Hearts " , " The Treasure of Abbot Thomas " and " The Ash Tree " . The Turn of the Screw fits into this " mini @-@ genre " of the Christmas horror film . The BBC executive and drama commissioner Ben Stephenson , discussing The Turn of the Screw , said that " Christmas wouldn 't be Christmas without a ghost story for the adults to watch in front of the fire when the children are in bed , and they don 't get more chilling than this bold reimagining of the classic Henry James tale . " The film was commissioned by Stephenson and Jay Hunt , then controller of BBC One . It was directed by Tim Fywell , and produced by Colin Wratten ; the executive producer was Jessica Pope .

The film is an adaptation of Henry James 's 1898 novella The Turn of the Screw . As one of his more popular stories it had already been adapted for films and television many times , although not previously by the BBC . The adaptation was screenwritten by Sandy Welch , who set the film in the early 1920s , in contrast to the novella 's 1840s setting . This allowed the introduction of the Freudian psychiatrist interviewing the main character ; this framing device is not used by James , but both the novella and the film share a first @-@ person narrator . The updated setting also allowed the First World War to account for the lack of male staff at the house . The Freudian and libidinous elements some literary theorists have seen in James 's story are particularly prevalent in the film , with Ann 's repressed sexual feelings for the Master resulting in a number of highly sexual sequences . Further , Welch added a theological element not present in James 's story ; Ann 's father is a preacher , although Ann herself is unsure of her faith . The psychiatrist , by contrast , is an atheist . When he asks Ann about her faith , she replies that she believes in the Devil .

The changes to the story were mostly superficial , and the adaptation generally mirrors the novella 's tone . The television critic Matthew Baylis observed that the film creates unease and horror through distortions of reality , and that The Turn of the Screw is not a " screaming @-@ banshees @-@ and @-@ horrible @-@ corpses style of ghost story " . The film utilises subtle horror , including details such as a broken doll on a window ledge , and the fact that viewers never discover certain elements of the story (for example , it is never revealed why the character Miles has been suspended from his boarding school) . This , for Baylis , ties to the title of the film : " it 's the writer

who puts the screw in the hole and the best ones ask the audience to turn it themselves " .

The Turn of the Screw was filmed on location in the West Country of England , beginning in August 2009 . The scenes at Bly were filmed at Brympton d 'Evercy , a manor house near Yeovil , Somerset . Brympton was chosen because of its similarity to Bly House , as described by James , including its extensive grounds and large lake . The railway scenes were filmed at the East Somerset Railway .

The Turn of the Screw starred Michelle Dockery as Ann , Sue Johnston as Mrs Sarah Grose , Dan Stevens as Dr Fisher , Mark Umbers as the Master , Nicola Walker as Carla , Edward MacLiam as Peter Quint and Katie Lightfoot as Emily Jessel . Corin Redgrave , who played the professor , was the son of Michael Redgrave , who starred in The Innocents , a 1961 adaption of The Turn of the Screw . The children , Flora and Miles , were played respectively by Eva Sayer and Josef Lindsay . However , due to the sexual content of the film , the child actors did not attend the preview screenings .

= = Broadcast and release = = =

The Turn of the Screw was first shown at 9 pm on BBC One on 30 December 2009 , as part of the BBC 's Christmas 2009 season . It has since been broadcast on other BBC channels and on Drama . In the UK , the film was released on DVD on 1 March 2010 , and distributed by Acorn Media UK . The DVD was rated " 15 " by the British Board of Film Classification for " infrequent scenes of strong sex " . The film was released on DVD for the North American market as Ghost Story : The Turn of the Screw on 28 April 2015 . The DVD was unrated and had no extra features . Foreign language versions of the film include television screenings or DVD releases of the film in German (Schloss des Schreckens) , Finnish (Ruuvikierre) and Polish (W kleszczach I?ku) .

= = Plot = =

The film 's story is told in a series of flashbacks interspersed with discussions between Ann (Dockery) , a patient in a sanatorium , and Dr Fisher (Stevens) , a sceptical and atheistic psychiatrist . Despite the suggestion of his superior (Redgrave) that he focus upon soldiers who have returned from the First World War , Fisher wishes to help Ann if he can .

In flashbacks , Ann is hired by a wealthy and sophisticated aristocrat (Umbers) to act as a governess for his orphaned nephew and niece who live at Bly . He tells her that he is not to be bothered in London , and that Ann is to deal with any problems that may arise . Ann travels to Bly , where she meets the all @-@ female household staff ? led by Mrs Sarah Grose (Johnston) , the housekeeper ? and then the young Flora (Sayer) , one of Ann 's new pupils . Ann finds the house somewhat unnerving , and the staff standoffish and unwilling to talk . Ann subsequently receives a letter informing her that Miles (Lindsay) , her other pupil , has been expelled from his boarding school , but is assured by Mrs Grose that Miles is well behaved . When he arrives at Bly , Ann finds Miles to be charming , and although he does not explain what happened at school , she does not push him . Her interactions with the children are idyllic , and they sail on Bly 's lake and enjoy picnics together . Meanwhile , Ann fantasises about the Master , futilely hoping that he will visit .

Ann discovers that her predecessor , Emily Jessel (Lightfoot) , is buried in Bly 's church , and is told that Jessel killed herself . She also begins to see the figures of a young man and a young woman around Bly . Mrs Grose dismisses Ann 's stories , but one maid , Carla (Walker) , tells Ann of the sexually abusive former valet Peter Quint (MacLiam) . Mrs Grose reveals that Carla had been badly affected by the War , and is prone to flights of fancy . Later , Ann is woken at night by the figure of the woman , and follows her to find Flora standing next to an open window . The pair see Carla fall from the roof , landing near Miles , who is in the garden . Ann rushes outside , and sees the male figure on the roof . Inside again , Mrs Grose assures Ann that she must be confused .

Ann believes the figures to be the ghosts of Quint and Jessel , seeking to continue their passionate and violent sexual encounters through Miles and Flora . However , she is concerned to find that others apparently cannot see the ghosts . She then begins to suspect that Miles and Flora , having

been groomed by and involved in the activities of Quint and Jessel , may be deliberately seeking to bring the pair back . She resolves to leave Bly , but , when saying goodbye to Miles , learns that he , too , sees the figures . Minutes after leaving , she asks to be taken back . Later , Ann panics , believing Miles and Flora to have left the house . She finds them by the lake , but they are playing roughly ; when Miles pushes Flora 's head under the water , Ann sees the pair as Quint and Jessel . She rushes to intervene , and grapples with the figure which alternates between Quint and Miles . When Ann repeatedly strikes Miles , Mrs Grose stops her , and Flora says that she no longer wishes to see Ann . After ordering the staff and Flora away from Bly , Ann waits with Miles to confront Quint . The pair are scared , but when Quint arrives Ann tells Miles to demand that Quint leave him alone . Miles (speaking with Quint 's voice) shouts at Ann , but eventually (in his own voice) tells the ghostly Quint that he wishes him to leave . Ann embraces Miles , whose body goes limp .

Ann is found some time later by the police , clutching Miles 's dead body , but she refuses to speak of what happened until meeting Dr Fisher . He seems to accept Ann 's story , unconvinced by his own psychosexual explanations of her visions . Fisher is dismayed to see Ann led away by the police , accused of Miles 's murder , and he sees Quint 's face on one of the officers . The film closes with a new governess arriving at Bly .

= = Cast = =

= = Critical reception = =

The critical response to *The Turn of the Screw* was mixed . The film was praised by Matt Baylis , writing in *The Express* , as one of the better adaptations of James 's story . The *Times* 's David Chater , although he did not consider the film " terrifying " or " suppurate [d] in evil " , found it " never less than absorbing " , suspecting this would be particularly so for viewers unfamiliar with the story . The *Daily Telegraph* 's Simon Horsford felt that *The Turn of the Screw* " might not work on all levels but it is an unsettling interpretation nonetheless " . By contrast , Tom Sutcliffe , writing in *The Independent* , was unimpressed with the film , considering James 's novel to have been " comprehensively vandalised " , while Richard Whittaker , writing in *The Austin Chronicle* , felt that the film was " a particular and peculiar misfire " from Welch . *The Turn of the Screw* was chosen as " pick of the day " in *The Sunday Times* , despite the reviewer , Victoria Segal , expressing her view that the film was " far from perfect " . But she added that the flaws could be overlooked , and although there are times " when it grinds through the gears with a clunk and clatter " , the " spirit " of James 's story is retained .

Several other critics praised the way that the film had kept the tone of James 's story and the subtle approach to horror . This subtlety , according to a review in the *Western Morning News* , hit " exactly the right note of terror " , and the film was praised as genuinely scary by some critics . Whittaker , though generally critical of the film , felt it strongest when focussed on the house , children and ghosts . Paul Whitelaw , writing in *The Scotsman* , commended Welch and Fywell for sustaining a horrific atmosphere , and noted that the soundtrack added to the horror . For him , even the use of horror clichés was effective , contributing to the film 's atmosphere . The *Guardian* 's Phil Hogan expressed a contrary opinion : while he thought *The Turn of the Screw* " exquisitely turned out " , he felt the film 's use of clichés limited the extent to which it was actually scary . In a review for *The Leader @-@ Post* , Andy Cooper praised the " creepy atmosphere " and tension , but said that the film " [fell] short in the chills department " and " could have done with a few jolts of terror to breathe more life into it " .

The divergences from the original novella 's plot were generally not well received . Tim Teeman , reviewing *The Turn of the Screw* for *The Times* , felt the 1920s setting did not contribute to the story , as it was not properly developed . He compared the film to Sarah Waters 's novel *The Little Stranger* , a ghost story set in the 1920s in which the social upheavals of the decade are explored . Gerard Gilbert , writing both for *The Independent* and *The Arts Desk* , felt that Ann 's relationship to the Master was " unnecessarily sexed up " , and that this element added nothing to the story , and ,

in fact , detracted from it . In his review of the American DVD release for the Deseret Morning News , Chris Hicks said that he could not see why the changes had been made , and that the literalisation of the sex and violence detracted from the film . Whittaker suggested that *The Turn of the Screw* was " oddly sexually explicit " , and that the changes were unnecessary for the plot . The biggest problem , he suggested , was the introduction of the psychiatrist ; his discussions with Ann , which could easily be removed , served to remove the mystery from the plot , in Whittaker 's eyes . Sutcliffe was critical of the reframing of the story as a stereotypical account of how " a cocky young man of science has his certainties upturned " , and said the film took " the terrifying indeterminacies of the original " , turning them " into a slightly shabby ghost @-@ train ride " .

Critics disagreed about how successful the film was in capturing the novel 's ambiguity , which is part of the enduring appeal of James 's story . For Tim Dowling , a columnist for *The Guardian* , the film failed in this regard . The novella , Dowling explained , can be understood as a straightforward ghost story , but it can also be understood as a story about Ann 's madness , and there is further ambiguity concerning whether the children are being controlled by Quint and Jessel , or whether the children are controlling Ann . He suggested that " there 's probably a subtlety to all this ambiguity on the page which , when translated to the screen , just looks like having it both ways . " As a result , " the narrative was at times more evasive than ambiguous " . Whittaker felt that the film failed to appropriately present the novella 's ambiguity and implicit themes , saying that the adaptation " feels oddly obligated to fill in all those blanks , and it 's really the script 's fault " . Sutcliffe expressed a similar view ; for example , he noted that " when the governess sees Quint on the tower for the first time so do we , and the thing that really haunts us as we read the story ? uncertainty ? vanishes to be replaced by a much duller kind of fretfulness , about when something is next going to pop out at us . " By contrast , Chater and Teeman (both writing for *The Times*) felt the ambiguity of the film was praiseworthy , with Chater asking whether the ghosts truly exist or are just a manifestation of " hysterical imagination " , and Teeman suggesting that viewers will be more likely to believe (with Dr Fisher) that Ann 's retelling is accurate . The Scotsman 's Whitelaw praised Welch 's ability to balance the various subtexts of the film while still delivering an effective narrative .

The cast of the film were praised , with Dowling considering *The Turn of the Screw* " a slick production with strong performances " , and Cooper saying that the film features " a great supporting cast " . Critics particularly commended the performances of Dockery and Johnston . Dowling also picked out the performances of Lindsay and Sayer as worthy of note , while Whitelaw praised MacLiam , who was able " to personify pure evil with scarcely a line of dialogue " . Segal , by contrast , felt MacLiam was badly cast , which resulted in " one of the story 's primary dark forces [looking] more like a member of Elbow than the very essence of evil " .

= = Literary analysis = =

James 's novella *The Turn of the Screw* has been much analysed in academic literature , and , given that it has been frequently reinterpreted in the arts , discussion of many of the adaptations has found a place in the academic literature on Henry James and neo @-@ Victorian culture . Considering the frame narrative of the film , Anna Viola Sborgi , a literary theorist , argues that the fact that Ann begins the film in a sanatorium conveys the impression that the character is mad , resulting in a loss of ambiguity . Consequently , the film is left less a horror story and more a psychological thriller . Sborgi argues that the film is explicitly made psychological through particular narrative and visual choices ; for example , Miles appears at the train station in a ghost @-@ like way through a cloud of steam . The fact that the film is a thriller , she argues , is further expressed through the use of a collage of images before the opening scene . However , the use of horrific imagery (including an open grave) in the collage " highlight [s] the contradiction inherent in this rendering of the novella " : while the story is presented as psychological , the viewer is nonetheless drawn into the film as a horror story . Other than the atypical frame narrative , Sborgi considers the adaptation fairly conventional with regard to both setting and costume .

For the literary theorist Thomas S. Hischak , *The Turn of the Screw* is a weak adaptation of the novella , with poor acting which can be " ascribed to the trite , anachronistic dialogue and leaden

direction ". He likens the film to *In a Dark Place* (2006) , another film adaptation of James 's novella , which focuses upon the supposed sexual aspects of the story . For Hirschack , the 2009 film presents a governess who is not successful in repressing her sexuality . Ann 's fantasies of her own sexual encounters with the Master , as well as her visions of the sexual encounters between Quint and Jessel , " are among the many obvious and clumsy aspects of this adaptation " . Like Sborgi , Hirschak sees little ambiguity in the film , calling it a " misguided adaptation that likes to spell things out for the viewer " .