

HENRY JAMES, "THE MASTER"

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

“Who was she in love with?”

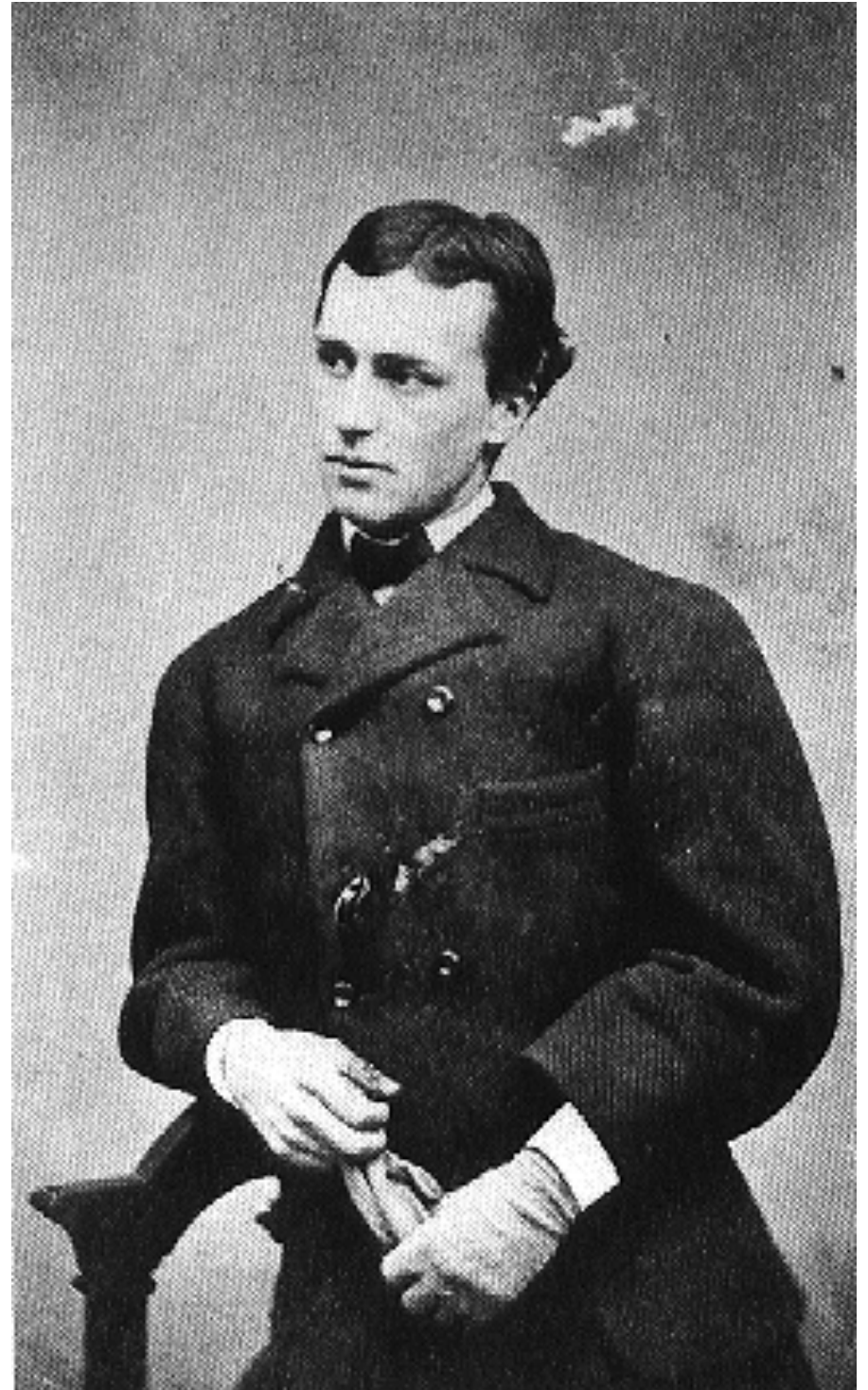
“The story will tell,” I took upon myself to reply.

“The story *won't* tell,” said Douglas; “not in any literal, vulgar way.”

“More's the pity, then. That's the only way I ever understand.”

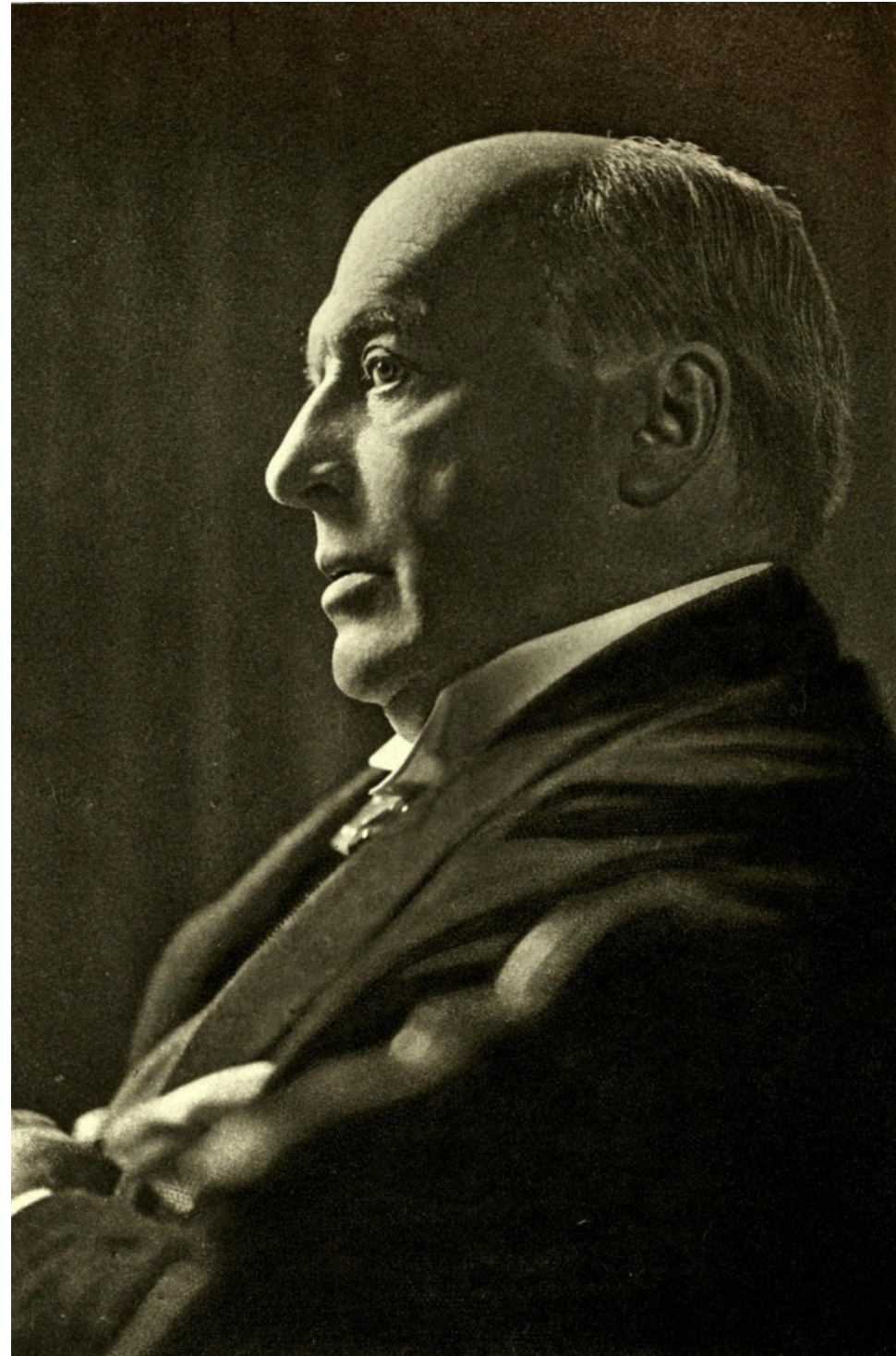
HENRY JAMES: LIFE

- ▶ 1843-1916
- ▶ Well-educated, cosmopolitan (private tutoring in Geneva, London, Paris, Bonn; knew English, French, Italian and German; Harvard Law)
- ▶ Wealthy, intellectual family, brother William James very famous
- ▶ Moves to Europe in 1876; British citizen in 1915
- ▶ Unclear sexuality, often described as celibate and asexual; Novick (1996) et al. say "actively gay"; Stevens (1999) et al. say not (Proust) Does anyone care? Why or why not?



HENRY JAMES: WRITING

- ▶ Initial novels autobiographical, realistic; “innocent” Americans amid sophisticated, decadent Europeans
- ▶ Writing turns increasingly psychological, focusing on the problem of consciousness
- ▶ Increasingly dense, difficult style
 - ▶ Multiple, nested subordinate clauses (34); multiple, nested narrators
 - ▶ Missing antecedents (6); in medias res (1, 6, 87)
 - ▶ Elliptical (11, 85-86)
 - ▶ Vocabulary (*prevaricate, machiolated, abjure, asseverate*): “lexicon”
- ▶ Despite style, often popular (*Portrait of a Lady, Turn of the Screw*); *Turn of the Screw* adapted for radio, play, ballet, opera (quite famous), and at least *twenty* films around the world



NESTED SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

It was a pity to be obliged to reinvestigate the certitude of the moment itself and repeat how it had come to me as a revelation that the inconceivable communion I then surprised was a matter, for either party, of habit. It was a pity that I should have had to quaver out again the reasons for my not having, in my delusion, so much as questioned that the little girl saw our visitant even as I actually saw Mrs. Grose herself, and that she wanted, by just so much as she did thus see, to make me suppose she didn't, and at the same time, without showing anything, arrive at a guess as to whether I myself did!

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NESTED SUBORDINATE NARRATIVES

...in his preoccupied way, he explained. "The story's written. It's in a locked drawer—it has not been out for years."

"Then your manuscript—?"

"Is in old, faded ink, and in the most beautiful hand." He hung fire again. "A woman's. She has been dead these twenty years. She sent me the pages in question before she died."

...

It appeared that the narrative he had promised to read us really required for a proper intelligence a few words of prologue. Let me say here distinctly, to have done with it, that this narrative, from an exact transcript of my own made much later, is what I shall presently give. Poor Douglas, before his death—when it was in sight—committed to me the manuscript that reached him on the third of these days.

NESTED SUBORDINATE NARRATIVES

So, we have a nameless narrator (N) who tells us a story partially based on a transcript (made many years later) of a conversation about ghosts, in which Douglas (D) recounts a story based on a 40 year-old manuscript written by his former governess (G). The original events become more and more distant, more and more blurred, as this becomes a story told by N about a story told by D about a story written down by G.

MISSING ANTECEDENTS; IN MEDIA RES

The story had 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 say that it was the only case he had met in which such a visitation had fallen on a child.

what story?
obvious to whom?

who are you?

what kind of visitation?

MISSING ANTECEDENTS; IN MEDIA RES

I remember the whole beginning as a succession of flights and drops, a little seesaw of the right throbs and the wrong.

After rising, in town, to meet his appeal, I had at all events a couple of very bad days—found myself doubtful again, felt

indeed sure I had made a mistake. In this state of mind I

spent the long hours of bumping, swinging coach that carried me to the stopping place at which I was to be met by

a vehicle from the house. This convenience, I was told, had been ordered, and I found, toward the close of the June

afternoon, a commodious fly in waiting for me.

→ of what?

?
WTF?

whose?

in what way?

where are we? where were we? where are we going?

what house?

by whom?

ELLIPTICAL LANGUAGE...

"I take what you said to me at noon as a declaration that *you've* never known him to be bad."

She threw back her head; she had clearly, by this time, and very honestly, adopted an attitude. "Oh, never known him—I don't pretend *that!*"

I was upset again. "Then you *have* known him—?"

"Yes indeed, miss, thank God!"

On reflection I accepted this. "You mean that a boy who never is—?"

"Is no boy for *me!*"

I held her tighter. "You like them with the spirit to be naughty?" Then, keeping pace with her answer, "So do I!" I eagerly brought out. "But not to the degree to contaminate—"

"To contaminate?"—my big word left her at a loss. I explained it. "To corrupt."

ELLIPTICAL LANGUAGE...

“What then did you do?”

“Well—I said things.”

“But to whom did you say them? Was it to everyone?” I asked.

“No; it was only to—” But he gave a sick little headshake. “I don’t remember their names. Only a few. Those I liked. They must have repeated them. To those *they* liked,” he added.

“And these things came round—?”

“To the masters? Oh, yes!” he answered very simply. “But I didn’t know they’d tell.”

“The masters? They didn’t—they’ve never told. That’s why I ask you.”

He turned to me again his little beautiful fevered face. “Yes, it was too bad. What I suppose I sometimes said. To write home.”

I can’t name the exquisite pathos of the contradiction given to such a speech by such a speaker; but the next after that I must have sounded stern enough.

“What were these things?”

UNDECIDABILITY

- ▶ The “30 years war”: is this a ghost story or not?
- ▶ A ghost story, a gothic potboiler; James wants money
- ▶ Wilson (1934): governess is prey to a “psychosexual delusion”
 - ▶ Excess affection (master, children, Mrs. Grose) (8-9, 14)
 - ▶ Matched by excess revulsion and disgust later
 - ▶ Governess puts desire to be believed ahead of children (75, 86)
 - ▶ Hence, no ghosts – only obsession, madness (70-71)







EXCESS AFFECTION

“And the little boy—does he look like her? Is he too so very remarkable?”

One wouldn't flatter a child. “Oh, miss, *most* remarkable. If you think well of this one!”—and she stood there with a plate in her hand, beaming at our companion, who looked from one of us to the other with placid heavenly eyes that contained nothing to check us.

“Yes; if I do—?”

“You *will* be carried away by the little gentleman!”

“Well, that, I think, is what I came for—to be carried away. I'm afraid, however,” I remember feeling the impulse to add, “I'm rather easily carried away. I was carried away in London!”

I can still see Mrs. Grose's broad face as she took this in. “In Harley Street?”

“In Harley Street.”

“Well, miss, you're not the first—and you won't be the last.”

IT SO JUSTIFIES ME

“You mean that, since yesterday, you *have* seen—?”

She shook her head with dignity. “I’ve *heard*—!”

“Heard?”

“From that child—horrors! There!” she sighed with tragic relief.

“On my honor, miss, she says things—!” But at this evocation she broke down; she dropped, with a sudden sob, upon my sofa and, as I had seen her do before, gave way to all the grief of it.

It was quite in another manner that I, for my part, let myself go.

“Oh, thank God!”

She sprang up again at this, drying her eyes with a groan.

“‘Thank God’?”

“It so justifies me!”

THE UNCANNY

- ▶ But modernism is inherently not about the true or the false; it's about capturing the totality of the world as it's experienced
- ▶ It is a ghost story *and* a psychosexual delusion; ghosts are real (for the mind that believes in them), but also represent an unspeakable, uncanny truth
- ▶ In this case, the repressed truth is that of infantile sexuality and childhood seduction (1, 2-3, 4, 6, 11, 12, 16, 18, 26, 29...)
- ▶ Manifests as an uncanny repetition



INFANTILE SEXUALITY | CHILDHOOD SEDUCTION

- ▶ “She was the most agreeable woman I’ve ever known in her position... she struck me as awfully clever and nice. Oh yes; don’t grin: I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she liked me, too.”
- ▶ “Well, if I don’t know who she was in love with, I know who *he* was.”
“She was ten years older,” said her husband. “*Raison de plus*—at that age!”
- ▶ “Why, he’s scarce ten years old. See him, miss, first. *Then* believe it!” I felt forthwith a new impatience to see him; it was the beginning of a curiosity that, for all the next hours, was to deepen almost to pain.
- ▶ The attraction of my small charges was a constant joy, leading me to wonder afresh at the vanity of my original fears. It was all the romance of the nursery and the poetry of the schoolroom. I don’t mean by this, of course, that we studied only fiction and verse; I mean I can express no otherwise the sort of interest my companions inspired.

INFANTILE SEXUALITY | CHILDHOOD SEDUCTION

- ▶ “He was looking for little Miles.” A portentous clearness now possessed me. “*That’s* whom he was looking for. 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.”
- ▶ She had picked up a small flat piece of wood, which happened to have in it a little hole that had evidently suggested to her the idea of sticking in another fragment that might figure as a mast and make the thing a boat. This second morsel, as I watched her, she was very markedly and intently attempting to tighten in its place. My apprehension of what she was doing sustained me so that after some seconds I felt I was ready for more.

INFANTILE SEXUALITY | CHILDHOOD SEDUCTION

“Are you afraid he’ll corrupt *you*?” She put the question with such a fine bold humor that, with a laugh, a little silly doubtless, to match her own, I gave way for the time to the apprehension of ridicule.

But the next day, as the hour for my drive approached, I cropped up in another place. “What was the lady who was here before?”

“The last governess? She was also young and pretty—almost as young and almost as pretty, miss, even as you.”

“Ah, then, I hope her youth and her beauty helped her!” I recollect throwing off. “He seems to like us young and pretty!”

“Oh, he *did*,” Mrs. Grose assented: “it was the way he liked everyone!” She had no sooner spoken indeed than she caught herself up. “I mean that’s *his* way—the master’s.”

I was struck. “But of whom did you speak first?”

She looked blank, but she colored. “Why, of *him*.”

“Of the master?”

“Of who else?”

“He presently produced something that made me drop straight down on the stone slab.”

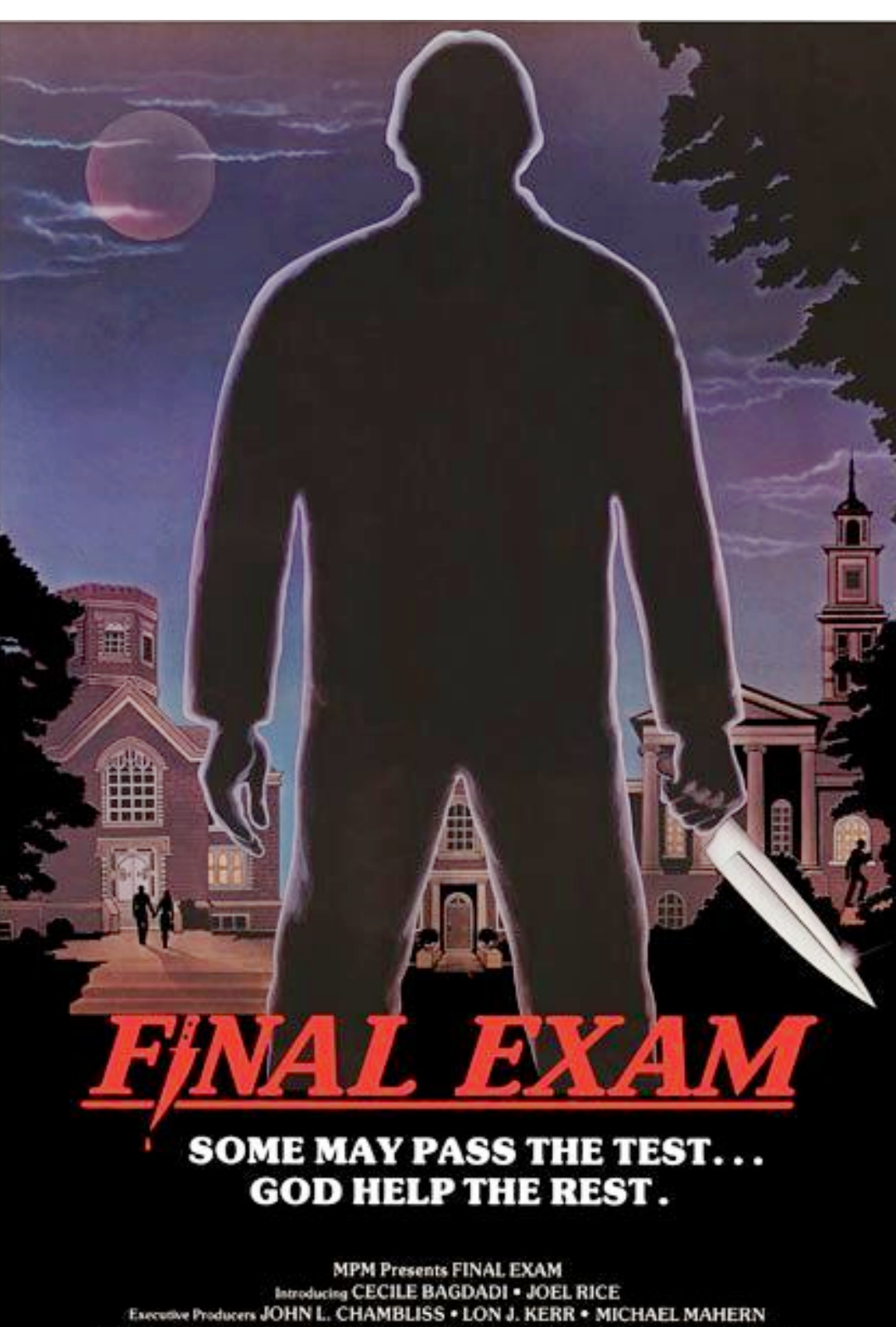




REPETITION

- ▶ Is Douglas actually Miles?
- ▶ The same governess as Miles, like Miles, 10 years younger (2-3)
- ▶ Impossible! Miles is really dead! Isn't he? (87)
- ▶ We must move beyond the question of establishing reality, and turn instead to the problem of *consciousness*. Within our minds, there is a whole series of repeated characters and scenarios (principally seductions); *for us*, they are the same:
 - ▶ Quint and Miss Jessel
 - ▶ The master and the governess
 - ▶ Miles and Flora
 - ▶ Miles and Douglas





FINAL EXAM

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- Monday, May 6
- 7-10 PM
- Right in this room!
- 3 sections
 - Short answers to big questions
 - Short answers to small(er) questions
 - Identifications (sounds hard, but they are not)
- All material will be drawn from the readings (of course) and the PowerPoints that are on the course website

Section I: Answer with 4-5 sentences (refer to several important ideas, authors and texts). Answer all 4 questions (6 pts. each; 24 pts. total).

1. What vision of society does the “Enlightenment Project” promote?

2-3 Keywords
3-4 Texts (authors or titles) } a good answer (5-6 pts.)

less quantity or quality means a lower score

Know the 4 sections, main authors and 4-5 keywords for each section

Section I: Answer with 4-5 sentences (refer to several important ideas, authors and texts). Answer all 4 questions (6 pts. each; 24 pts. total).

1. What vision of society does the "Enlightenment Project" promote?

The Enlightenment Project promoted a utopian vision of society; government could be rational and fair (as in Jefferson), and people would be free to critique and correct irrationality, tradition and injustice (Swift, Voltaire, perhaps Austen)

Section II: Answer with 4-5 sentences. Answer all 10 questions (5 pts. each; 50 pts. total).

1. Briefly describe some of Whitman's principal poetic themes and techniques.

Not all questions in this section will have this form, but here, 2-3 themes, 2-3 techniques, well-written, will get you 4-5 points.

Better answers are fuller, more detailed, show connections

less good answers just list things, or are wrong or too brief

Section II: Answer with 4-5 sentences. Answer all 10 questions (5 pts. each; 50 pts. total).

1. Briefly describe some of Whitman's principal poetic themes and techniques.

Whitman repeatedly addresses the themes of ordinary life (work, sex, nature), the body, American optimism and especially himself. His poems make extensive use of lists (gesturing at everything), free verse (ordinary life), and repetition (chant).

Section III: Identifications. Give author and title, if any. What features are typical of the author's style? Comment briefly on importance of passage. Answer 5 out of the 8 possible questions (5 pts. each; 25 pts. total).

1. I lost a world the other day.
Has anybody found?
You'll know it by the row of stars
Around its forehead bound.

author +1
title +1
style (themes, techniques) +2
comment +1

I do not choose weird
or obscure passages,
or anything deceptive
(one author who
sounds like another)

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If you have regularly done the reading and come to class, this section is easy. If you have extra time, do all 8.

Emily Dickinson, Untitled (like all her poems).
This passage uses her signature poetic meter (ballad meter) as well as one of her frequent themes, a mental or conceptual loss. It uses a childlike language to talk about the loss of a whole world.

Srslly, there is no way to study for this, so don't worry about it!

Final question: A completely trivial question drawn from the lectures, possibly not from the PowerPoints (1 pt. each; 1 pt. total).

1. What tie did Prof. Rushing wear on the day of the second Frankenstein lecture, the one about Frankenstein movies?

The blue tie with white daisies